Three Rivers District Council

# Watersmeet Business Plan 2024 - 2027



## Contents



	i age
Foreword	3
Introduction	3
Background & context	4 - 6
Visions & Values	7
Strategic Objectives & Priorities	8 - 11
Staffing & Resources	12
Programming	13 - 17
Private Hire	18
Artistsmeet	19
Marketing & Sales	20 - 28
Equality & Diversity	29
Financial Planning & Targets	30 - 32
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats	33
Building & Facility Improvements	34
Sustainability and Route to Net Carbon Zero	35
Monitoring, Reviewing & Measuring	36

## Charting a course for the future of Watersmeet

This business plan sets out the strategic direction for Watersmeet Theatre, a local arts and entertainment venue owned and operated by Three Rivers District Council, located in Rickmansworth town centre.

The plan encompasses various elements, including the venue's historical background, overarching vision, core values, strategic objectives and priorities, human resources, financial projections and performance monitoring.

Its overall aim is to support and contribute towards Three Rivers District Council's Corporate Framework objectives which outlines its aim for the district to be a great place to live, work and visit. This vision is underpinned by a set of core objectives that align with the council's Values & Behaviours, ensuring a consistent and transparent approach to operations.

By aligning its vision with these core values, Watersmeet not only aims to be a cultural hub, but also seeks to positively impact the community's health and wellbeing through the arts. This holistic approach reflects its dedication to being proud, respectful and passionate, creating an inclusive environment for both artists and audiences alike.



## **Foreword**

I was still at school in 1975 when ground was broken to build Watersmeet and in 2025 we commemorate its 50th anniversary, which is in itself a cause to celebrate this unique venue and how it has become a cornerstone of the local community. I am excited to see the direction the venue will take as it stages more elaborate performances, a more diverse film programme and a wide selection of event cinema to appeal to our ever-increasing audience.

Today, as the Lead Member for Leisure, I understand the important role that a high-quality local theatre facility can play in terms of the wellbeing of our residents.

This business plan sets out the direction for the venue over the next three years supporting the wider aims of the council. By creating a vibrant and inclusive programme that appeals to a broad demographic, the theatre can develop a well-rounded programme that not only entertains, but also reflects and celebrates the diversity of the community of Three Rivers.

I would like to thank the staff for their dedication, inspiration and leadership in developing the venue.

I would also like to thank the many people who have volunteered at Watersmeet over the years and we always welcome new volunteers.

It is with great enthusiasm and excitement that I present this business plan, a testament to our shared commitment to fostering economic growth and community wellbeing.

Councillor Chris Lloyd
Lead member for Leisure

# Background & context

Watersmeet situated within a vibrant part of the community



Watersmeet serves as a cultural hub for all our communities through its programme of live theatre, music, comedy, children's performances, films and events. The programme is designed to reflect the broad range of tastes and interests of local people. The theatre's unique hydraulic floor system allows flexible use of space to accommodate diverse events. With a main auditorium seating capacity of 515, it is classified as a mid-size theatre, (defined by the Theatre Management Association) and able to accommodate both small regional touring shows as well as prominent acts with a national profile. Evolving over the past decade, Watersmeet has transformed from a rental space into a dynamic arts and entertainment centre, expanding its popularity and offering to the local community.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Watersmeet had been on a trajectory of significant growth; increasing attendance and income year on year generated a small net direct surplus in both the 2017-18 and 2018 -19 financial years. The theatre was on course for a further net direct surplus in 2019-20 before it had to close in March 2020, with the closure tipping the balance into a small net direct cost.

The following two years proved challenging as the theatre opened and closed several times in response to Covid restrictions with a resultant and significant, drop in sales and attendance. The theatre was successful in all three rounds of the Culture Recovery
Fund securing grants
totalling £326,000 which
helped off-set the fixed running costs
of the theatre for these years.

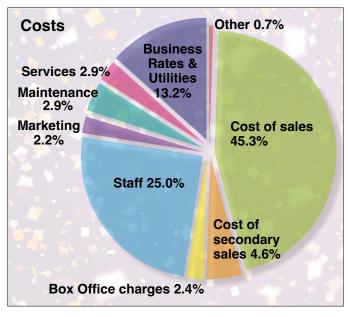
The financial year 2022-2023, saw a notable return in audience confidence and Watersmeet sold 9,802 tickets across 34 co-promoted shows. In addition, there were 6,198 film tickets sold across 36 titles (including 12 event cinema screenings). The annual pantomime had an audience of 14,075 and the venue hosted 63 unique hire events six of which were new hirers of the venue. Other hires included eight school award/production nights, nine dance school shows, three professional theatre productions, and 22 religious organisations with charity status. The venue also hosted the election count.

# Background & context

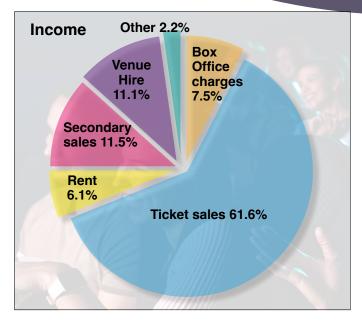
Setting the scene
- audience trends
income and expenditure
for 2024



The charts below show a breakdown of the different sources of income and expenditure as percentages.



The 2023-24 financial year has been focused on consolidating the return to business as usual with some notable key shifts in audience trends and habits becoming clear. Audience appreciation of high-quality shows that command a higher ticket price has increased, and the theatre has seen a return of audiences to the established tribute acts performing covers of 50s-80s artists. When compared to sales for equivalent genres before the pandemic more affordable live theatre shows (excluding children's theatre) have been slower to sell indicating that audiences are more inclined to spend money on quality. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis and higher inflation is yet to be felt



on ticket sales, but it is anticipated this will have a negative impact on live theatre ticket sales in the coming months.

Cost of living challenges will likely have an impact on our patrons' ability to buy tickets. In a survey conducted on behalf of The Stage in October 2022, nearly three quarters of people surveyed about the impact of the cost of living crisis on their cultural habits have said they will do fewer paid-for entertainment activities, including theatre, according to the latest data from the Audience Agency.

# Background & context



Watersmeet
a versatile venue for film,
theatre and entertainment

The landscape of cinema and film has changed significantly in the last three years due to the launch and popularity of movie studio streaming services such as Disney+ which have negatively impacted ticket sales, this has been particularly hard for small independent cinemas. Watersmeet as a single plex cinema, screening films once or twice a week, with films only becoming available to screen six weeks after general release often coincides with streaming service release, and the impact has been a drop of nearly 50% in sales. As the cost of living crisis continues, we may see an uplift in audiences attendance as people look to spend less on cinema, but still want to have the 'big screen' experience. Seeing a film at Watersmeet is approximately half the price of the cost of going to one of the larger cinema complexes. Proactively responding to booking trends and promoting the great value offered at Watersmeet will help entice people to consider Watersmeet as a good option.

Event cinema\* continues to be popular and attract a different demographic of audience than other aspects of the programme and represents further growth opportunity in this genre.

Watersmeet is now out of its Covid recovery phase and is in a solid position to take advantage of growth opportunities. It has demonstrated its ability to adapt and survive in challenging times and its continued importance in the cultural life of the district. The pace and scope of future growth will be largely dictated by the council's appetite for risk and its ability and willingness to front load costs to generate future sales.

<sup>\*</sup> Event Cinema is where theatre shows are live streamed to cinemas via satellite (or prerecorded and played on cinema screens)

## Vision & values

MISSION VISION VALUES

A vibrant entertainment hub for the local community

Watersmeet's vision is to be recognised as 'A vibrant entertainment hub for the local community'. Guided by a set of core values, adopted from the council's Values & Behaviours, the venue prioritises its people as its driving force, ensuring trust, respect, honesty, inclusivity and excellence in customer experience.

#### **Our Values are:**

#### We Are Proud

We are proud of who we are and the services we provide, proud to be here, proud to make a difference each and every day.



## We are Respectful

We are all unique, we recognise and celebrate difference. We are open, approachable, we treat each and every person we meet with respect.



#### We are Passionate

We want the very best for our place and our people. We work together, tirelessly with care and attention to get the job done. Passionate for our people, passionate for our place, passionate for a job well done.



# Strategic objectives & priorities



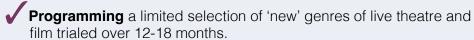
Our strategic policies support the delivery of the council's Corporate Framework

Watersmeet's strategic objectives and priorities support the delivery of the council's Corporate Framework and draw on principles of the Customer Experience Strategy. They encompass all areas of business operation; sales, marketing, programming, audience development, hires, equality and diversity, building maintenance, sustainability (targeting net carbon zero), and other areas for growth and innovation.

#### **CORPORATE OBJECTIVE:**

Responsive, Responsible Local Leadership
Watersmeet will provide a financially sustainable arts and
entertainment hub for the community by:





- **Developing** a clear pricing strategy and marketing plan to promote Watersmeet as a venue for hire.
- Understanding the existing and potential audiences and targeting venue marketing accordingly.
- **Expanding,** developing, and promoting its membership scheme.
- ✓ Managing a balanced budget, meeting income targets and expenditure budgets.
- ✓ Growing our audience figures.



## Strategic objectives & priorities

solution which solutions supported by services and supported by services and supported by suppor

Our strategic policies support the delivery of the council's Corporate Framework.

#### **CORPORATE OBJECTIVE:**

Responsive, Responsible Local Leadership
Watersmeet will deliver outstanding customer experience by:

- ✓ **Developing** and enhancing customer touchpoints.
- **Expanding** package offers that turn a night out into an occasion.
- **Achieving** consistently high customer satisfaction results.
- Responding promptly to customer feedback.
- ✓ Continuing to invest in staff development and training
- **✓ Delivering** against the Customer Experience Strategy action plan objectives.





# Strategic objectives & priorities

Corporate
objectives and
outstanding customer
experience

#### **CORPORATE OBJECTIVE**

#### A great place to do business

Watersmeet will develop relationships with external and internal partners and businesses in order to reach more people, support our community, and raise the profile of the theatre by:



- ✓ Providing attractive packages to host local business events.
- **Developing** relationships with closed user groups such as the MOD to increase sales on those shows that are not performing as well as others. We can provide their employees exclusive access to special offers and discounts that are not generally available to the public who may have paid a higher price for their ticket.
- **Working** with other council services to expand audience reach.
- Supporting local community and amateur theatre groups by offering affordable rates for multiday hires.
- **Nurturing** the relationship with the Friends of Watersmeet to extend volunteering.
- **Exploring** opportunities for developing further working relationships with Watersmeet tenants G2Film and Daybreak Nurseries.

# Strategic objective & priorities



Delivering our customer experience and objectives

## **CORPORATE OBJECTIVE**Sustainable communities

Watersmeet will provide an inclusive and accessible theatre experience by:

- ✓ **Expanding** the film programme to include more frequent relaxed performances targeting neurodiverse customers, those with additional needs or with disabilities, and those with daytime childcare responsibilities.
- ✓ **Delivering** a programme that caters for the minority and underrepresented communities in the district.
- ✓ Maintaining and developing the accessibility provision including, infrared hearing loop system, signed performances, relaxed performances, touch tours, and accessible lift and toilet.
- ✓ Providing local students with work experience opportunities allowing them to develop their knowledge of the industry.
- ✓ **Encouraging** schools to utilise the venue for their productions or to attend film screening day trips in order to provide a real-life theatre experience to their pupils.
- Inspiring local community groups to take advantage of the lower higher rates for charity organisations in order to increase their engagement with the community.

#### **CORPORATE OBJECTIVE**

Net carbon zero & climate resilience

Watersmeet will work towards net carbon zero 2030 by:

- Implementing the venue's sustainability delivery and route to net carbon zero plan.
- **Continuing** to invest in sustainable technologies, replacing end of life equipment and infrastructure with energy efficient alternatives.
- ✓ **Giving** emphasis to procuring sustainable products and sourcing from local suppliers.



## Staffing & resources



Our dedicated team who provide the service at Watersmeet

Watersmeet operates as part of the council's Customer Experience Service with strategic planning and programme oversight provided by the Head of Customer Experience.

In addition to the staff cohort, Watersmeet is supported by a dedicated team of volunteers who in 2022-23 contributed a combined total of 2,629 hours at a value of over £30,000. Volunteers perform a variety of roles from ushering, to working on the bar, all of which helps to provide a facility that represents excellent value for money for local residents.

The current staff structure supports service delivery at existing levels with little capacity remaining for expansion or development of new initiatives. To deliver its ambitious plans and exercise its full potential, the Watersmeet permanent staff team will need to expand. The council will need to consider this within the context of a challenging financial climate for local government. Staff expansion proposals will be put forward for consideration via the council's outline business case and growth bid process, with any proposals including clear targets and supporting financial forecasts.

The programming ambitions set out in this plan identify those where additional staff resources would be required and are therefore subject to successful outline business case approval.

#### The current staff team includes:

**General Manager (1 FTE)** Overall responsibility for all aspects of the venue.

**Operations & Events Manager (1 FTE)** Responsible for hall hire, administration, venue finance and box office operations.

**Front of House Manager (1 FTE)** Responsible for duty management of events, customer care, and all front of house areas.

**Technician (0.5 FTE)** Responsible for technical and building maintenance.

**Sales & Marketing Officer (0.86 FTE)** Responsible for the marketing of all live theatre, film and events.

Box office facilities, duty front of house management, bar and technical support are provided by a team of over 45 casual staff.

#### Potential roles for expansion include:

#### **Programming and Development Officer**

to give capacity to expand the live theatre and film programme, explore funding options, write bids to bring in external funding and develop new business streams including co-producing shows and developing new works.

**Full Time Venue Technician** to support the current part-time Technician to provide greater resilience to service delivery to the technical team and building maintenance.

**Box Office Supervisor** to provide greater resource to proactively drive sales and data analysis.

**Assistant Front of House Manager** to provide greater resilience and consistent customer experience for visiting companies and hirers..

Developing a successful programme that meets audience needs

## The programming is based around the following guiding principles:

- ✓ Prioritise the annual pantomime, commercially successful music acts and children's theatre to ensure consistent revenue generation and multigenerational offering.
- **Explore** the development of new shows through co-production to create a revenue stream beyond the physical walls of Watersmeet.
- ✓ **Develop** a well-rounded programme that appeals to a broad demographic by incorporating diverse genres of dance, plays, musicals, and thought-provoking theatre that is relevant to local communities.
- ✓ **Establish** a consistent and regular programme of films that incorporates a wide range of genres from the latest blockbusters and family films to renowned classics and devise an annual programme of event cinema that includes world renowned operas, plays, musicals and ballets produced by nationally recognised institutions.
- ✓ **Embrace** flexibility and a dynamic approach to adapt the programme to respond to audience demand and feedback.



Live theatre and events programme - embracing diversity

The live theatre programme aims to strike a balance between commercially successful music acts and children's theatre, while also embracing a diverse range of offerings including dance, plays, musicals, comedy and community relevant, thought-provoking, theatre. The programme goal is to attract, engage, develop and grow a diverse audience base that spans various age groups, identities, and interests.

#### To shape the artistic programme a set of four themes will be used

### **Commercial Success and Family Appeal**

- ✓ Co-produce a high quality, family friendly pantomime.
- Secure popular music acts with a proven track record of drawing audiences.
- Collaborate with agents and promoters to bring in well-known comedians including those trialling new material together with a smaller, less formal Colne Room open mic night.
- ✓ **Establish** a consistent and regular programme of films that incorporates a wide range of genres from the latest blockbusters and family films to renowned classics and devise an annual programme of event cinema that includes world renowned operas, plays, musicals and ballets produced by nationally recognised institutions.
- ✔ Programme engaging children's theatre that includes adaptations of popular stories, interactive performances, and educational shows.

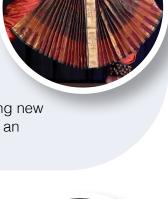
Live theatre programme - audience development

### **Artistic Diversity and Audience Development**

- ✓ Programme local and international dance companies to bring captivating dance performances to the venue.
- ✔ Programme films that appeal to the Asian community i.e. Bollywood and work in collaboration with Strategy & Partnerships to host awareness events to promote focus weeks and months such as Black History Month.
- ★Collaborate with producers and explore co-producing opportunities to bring new plays and musicals to life that resonate with different age groups, providing an income stream beyond the physical limitations of the theatre.

#### **Experimental Theatre and Nurturing New Audiences**

- ▼ \*Dedicate a portion of the programme to experimental theatre that challenges conventional norms, attracting adventurous theatregoers.
- \*Seek to programme one or two pieces a year from emerging playwrights, directors, and performers to present cutting-edge productions that spark conversation.
- \*Offer post-show discussions and workshops to engage audiences in thoughtprovoking conversations and foster a sense of cultural community.



Live theatre programme - special events

## **Seasonal Themes and Special Events**

- Introduce seasonal themes, such as holiday performances and summer festivals, to cater to changing audience preferences.
- ✓ Organise special events like 'Family Fridays' and Sunday morning family film clubs with discounted rates for families.
- \*Collaborating with the local community and businesses to host seasonal events to showcase the venue and their goods and products.





<sup>\*</sup> Identifies ambitions that will require the additional post of a Programme and Development Officer as referred to in the Staffing & Resources section on page 12..



Film and Event
Cinema tailored to
specific audiences

The film and event cinema programme is tailored to specific audiences' tastes and with much shorter lead times allows greater ability to adapt and respond to changing trends and circumstances.

Film is generally broader in its appeal as a medium and therefore will attract a wider demographic of customer.

#### **Films**

- ✓ Programme a mix of film genres focusing on films that appeal to older audiences who may wish to attend local venues and family films during the school holidays.
- ✓ **Establish** a regular weekday for films to provide consistency including matinee and evening screenings.
- ✓ **Develop** the diversity of screenings by programming dedicated films that appeal to under-represented groups including those with special accessibility requirements.



#### **Event Cinema**

- ✔ Present a core programme of event cinema based on content from the Royal Opera House, National Theatre, National Gallery and popular musicals.
- ✓ Explore less mainstream options three to four times a year to challenge audiences, supported by targeted promotional activity.
- Launch a new brand of 'Red Carpet Events', which encompass Watersmeet's cultural offering of Art on Screen, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House and NT Live screenings.



## Private hire

A flexible commuity space available to hire for any occasion

Watersmeet has a well-established and loyal customer base of regular hirers made up of religious celebrations, many individuals and groups from Asian communities, local schools, dance schools, youth theatre and amateur dramatic groups. The majority of weekend use is dedicated to private hirers with the venue acting as a well-used community space for local people and through this a consistent and reliable income stream is maintained for the theatre.

Colne Room hires tend to be occasional and whilst this facility continues to be available to hire for the benefit of the local community, is not an area of



focus for future development due to the limited potential financial benefits of hiring a small space.

Whilst single day main auditorium hires are strong with bookings confirmed up to 18 months in advance, multiday and full week hires are more limited and represent a good opportunity for future growth.



## **Artistsmeet**

Contemporary gallery space for year-round exhibitions



Artistsmeet is a contemporary gallery space within Watersmeet.

The gallery curates up to five exhibitions annually, working with artists, local schools and community groups to host a variety of shows including painting, photography, textiles and mixed media.

Complementing solo artist exhibitions in 2022/2023, the gallery hosted 'Journey into our Imagination, Bringing our Minds to Life!' which was an exhibition for home educated children and told their story through art and photography. Croxley Camera Club also exhibited their photographic work, which represented a snapshot of the local creative community and enabled them to drive membership and grow their presence.

Artistsmeet celebrates working in partnership and is proud to participate in many other local activity campaigns, including Herts Open Studios.

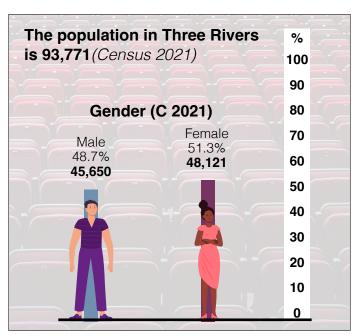
As part of the ongoing exhibition programme, the gallery will host artist talks and demonstrations, taster sessions and community engagement events. And, through the 'Red Carpet' screened events programme, the space will align its receptions with this programme enabling customers to enjoy an enriched experience during their time at the venue. This is a starting point for future collaborations of exhibitions and the sharing of wider themes including theatre and dance.

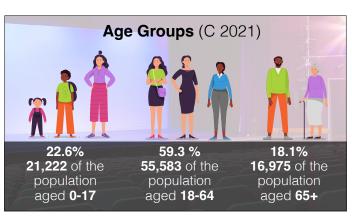


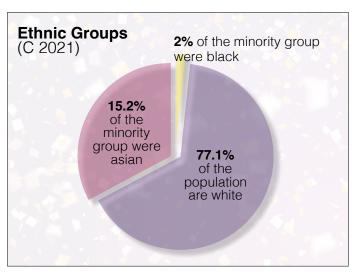
A breakdown of the Three Rivers community

Marketing Watersmeet effectively involves an understanding of the audience demographic with a combination of traditional and digital strategies.

Creating tailored marketing campaigns in collaboration with producers and promoters for each show, film and event, highlighting the unique attributes of each performance type maximises the potential for success of the programme as a whole.





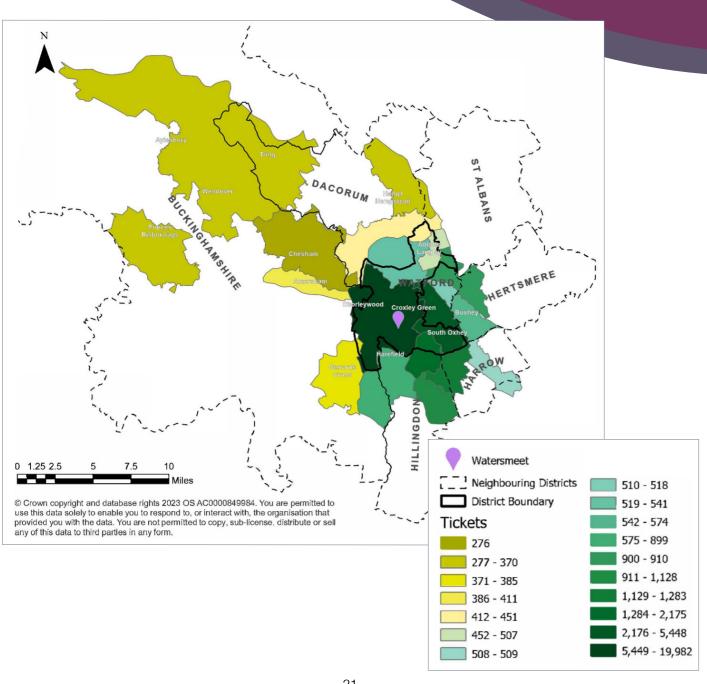


### **Understanding Watersmeet Audiences**

At the heart of successful marketing is understanding its audience, both existing and potential. Watersmeet utilises local population demographics, combined with its own audience and sales data gathered over previous years including a customer database of 30,000 people.

Where audiences come from
What they come and see
How they hear about shows and book tickets
Why they come to Watersmeet are all
important factors when promoting the theatre.

Audience demographics in Three Rivers and beyond

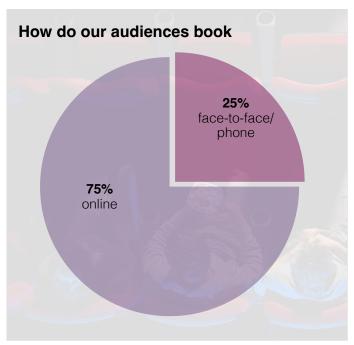


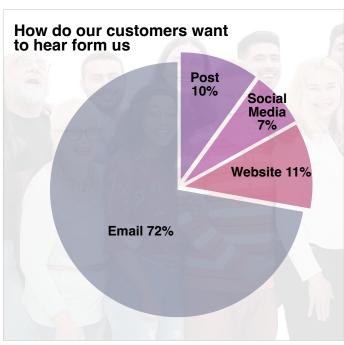
How our customers hear about us and how they book

Breakdown of Watersmeet audience booking trend over a 12-month period is illustrated below.

Using information from the pie charts below to inform our marketing strategy, the primary marketing focus is on eshots to our customers. These emails take the form of dedicated show promotion (with video previews), film listings, coming soon by month(s) and promotional links to the digital version of the 'What's on' brochure.

The platform used for this email communication is GovDelivery which holds data not only for Watersmeet, but for other service areas who communicate to residents of Three Rivers.





The image below illustrates the number of visits to the website from 1 August 2022 - 31 July 2023. The purple bar indicates that the majority of customers use a phone to view the site.

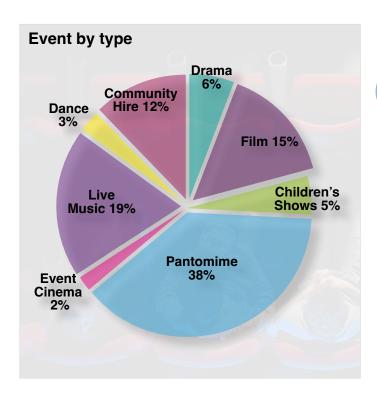
Desktop 52,021 (21%)

**Tablet** 8,503 (3%)

Mobile phone 177,999 (76%)

What our audiences come to see and what they say about us





"I feel very lucky
to have such a lovely venue on our
doorstep and I am pleased to support you.
I am looking forward to joining you this
year for more shows
and films"

"Everyone
was very friendly
which is why we
come back to
panto every
year"

"The website is really good for booking"

Watersmeet
delivers information to
customers so they can see
what is on offer

## **Building the brand**

Communicating its purpose, what Watersmeet is and does is important for defining the venue's brand. Watersmeet has an established logo and consistent colour pallette that is utilised across all channels.



## **Developing Watersmeet's online presence**

Watersmeet has a simple but smart, clean website that links directly to the online box office system allowing customers to easily navigate and book tickets online. The website utilises vibrant show imagery and videos with key booking information to help customers see what is on offer. Continuous development of the website to improve the customer experience is an ongoing process.

Social media is a primary marketing tool and Watersmeet is active on Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn with particular focus on Facebook. Events, stories and competitions are all used to engage potential customers and drive traffic to the website.

The table below shows the growth in Watersmeet's digital marketing channels from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

Social media						
	2018-19	2022-2023	Growth (=/-%)			
Instagram followers	301	1,372	+356%			
Web hits	111,547	234,605	+110.3%			
Followers on X	1,022	1,172	+14.7%			
Followers on Facebook	930	1,702	+83%			

## **Marketing and Sales**



Watersmeet has a strong and well established customer database

## **Email marketing**

Watersmeet has a strong direct to customer email marketing database with 29,000+ customers opting-in to receive emails from Watersmeet and this figure is growing year on year. Email marketing is effectively employed to target specific shows, films and events based on audiences previous booking trends, as well as provide regular customers with information on all up-coming shows.



## **Display advertising**

Although print marketing is slowly being replaced with digital methods, traditional marketing methods continue to add value, tailoring to the needs of Three Rivers' diverse demographic.



A printed What's On brochure is popular among many audiences and survey responses suggest this channel is still a valuable and valued marketing method. Bright colourful posters around the venue continue to inform customers what is on both now and in the future, and these are able to capitalise on positive audience mood and eagerness to book another show when enjoying a night out in the theatre.

Watersmeet has significantly reduced its print and post over the past five years helping to reduce its carbon emissions, and the What's On brochure is printed on FSC paper to help reduce its environmental impact.

Flyers and posters are displayed across the district in local leisure centres, libraries and district notice boards.

Local press, partnership working and word of mouth

## **Paid Advertising**

Adverts are placed in local publications with the agreement and funding from the promoter. During pantomime season a proportion of the total marketing spend is allocated to a selection of magazines including Primary Times, Raring2Go and the Get Smart Panto Guide.



## Local media coverage

Press releases are distributed throughout the year and focus on touring shows, pantomime and special awareness events, such as Black History Month. Down the line radio interviews are conducted with local radio, usually with members of the pantomime cast when they arrive at the venue.



#### Word of mouth

Word of mouth is the single most effective marketing approach, and it is the overall experience that customers receive that impact this. All theatre departments have a role to play in generating positive word of mouth by maintaining high standards throughout the venue.



## Partnerships & engagement

Watersmeet develops partnerships with the show promoters to ensure that every event has a tailored and specific marketing plan. The venue works with schools, community groups, amateur theatre groups and local businesses to promote family-oriented shows and educational opportunities.

PRICE
FRECE
FRECE

G-31 DECEMBER

Adventure | hat P

Early booking offers, promotions and membership

### Offers & promotions

Watersmeet's approach to offers and promotions is to focus on rewarding early booking as this build's sales momentum and confidence in the show or event.

Early bird offers and 'on sale now' promotions are utilised. Last minute discounts are generally avoided to discourage a late booking trend and avoid the risk of upsetting customers who book early.

Special campaigns throughout the year include: Black Friday/Cyber Monday, Christmas present ideas, Mother's Day, Father's day and Pantomime day.

## **Box Office & points of sale**

In 2022 Watersmeet updated its box office system and now uses the Ticketsolve box office software to manage ticket sales. This system provides a good customer facing point of sale easy to use back office system for staff.

The in-person box office at the theatre is open Tuesday- Friday 10am-2pm and one hour before the start of shows, films or events. The telephone booking system is also open during these times. In 2023 a digital box office system was installed in the venue foyer - 'Booking Buddy' or 'BB' for short to allow customers to book tickets anytime the theatre building is open to the public even when the in-person box office is closed.

## Membership scheme

To build brand loyalty and reward regular customers, the Watersmeet Membership Scheme was launched on 1 May 2023 with a target of 50 memberships in the first year. Benefits of joining the scheme include free films, show and bar discounts and birthday acknowledgement reward. Initial response has been positive and the theatre has met its target signup. Going forward, Watersmeet have a target to achieve 100 members by 1 April 2025 with an increase of 10% thereafter year on year.

Watersmeet
has taken on a more
commercial approach to
merchandise

## Secondary sales & packages

Bar and merchandise sales have continued to grow as the bar has taken on a more commercial approach. Further expansion is planned through the launching of bar package deals and special offers to encourage sales and to create a more appealing customer experience.



The diagram below illustrates secondary sales for 2022-23 giving a baseline to build from.



Teas & coffees 2,517



Cans of water 2,593



Units of wine 5,241



Popcorn 1,731



Ice cream 4,710

## Audience engagement & feedback

Encouraging audience engagement through interactive pre-show activities, behind-the-scenes tours, and meet-and-greets, adds to the positive audience experience as a whole and provides valuable opportunity for on the ground feedback from customers. Coupled with audience surveys and analysis of booking data this allows Watersmeet to anticipate and respond to changes in customer behaviour and preferences, tailoring the programme and venue offering to suit shifting demands.



## **Equality & Diversity**



Equality and diversity practices provide accessibility to everyone

Three Rivers District Council have reviewed the Equality & Inclusion policy which describes how we promote, facilitate and deliver equality within the council. Once finalised Watersmeet will adopt and deliver this policy and approach.

Good equality and diversity practices make sure that the services provided to people are fair and accessible to everyone. Through regular staff training, Watersmeet ensures that its patrons, hirers, visitors and staff are treated fairly, that people are provided dignity and respect and that their differences are valued and celebrated.



# Financial Planning & Targets



Our financial plan from April 2024 - March 2027

The medium-term financial plan (MTFP) spans the next three-year period April 2024 - March 2027, outlining income targets and identifying growth opportunities. The strategy recognises income streams from ticket sales, venue hire, bar sales, and several other sources. A key focus is on maintaining financial sustainability while considering competitive pricing structures.

Utilities and rates are flatlined over the MTFP following the council's decision not to adjust utilities year on year whilst there continues to be volatility in energy prices.

It is anticipated that the financial year 2024/25 will see Watersmeet return to pre-Covid attendance figures and earned income. However, due to increased costs from high inflation, it is not expected to return a net direct surplus until after this business plan cycle, unless growth bids are approved to expand the permanent staffing and further increase capacity and scope for income generation.

This financial forecast is based on predicted growth with current staffing resources, and includes splitting out agency income (income held on behalf of other organisations) and income retained by the council. In the agency sales table on the next page the zero income target in the budget columns is due to the split out of agency income from theatre income for accounting purposes.

This has no impact on the net outturn position.

To achieve the full potential of the theatre and the ambitious goals of this business plan Watersmeet will need to submit growth bids as part of the council's budget setting process over the next few years.

These growth bids will outline the benefits the increased investment in the short term could deliver for the longer-term financial growth and sustainability of the theatre. Any revenue growth bids will demonstrate improved long-term net outturn position.

Council budget setting needs to be considered within the wider context of council services which is why this business plan does not specify or propose budget changes at this stage.

# Financial Planning & Targets

TOPES

TO

Our financial plan from April 2024 - March 2027

Agency Sales	2022/23 Actual Outturn	2023/24 Budget	2023/24 Predicted Outturn	2024/25 Budget	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Forecast	2026/27 Forecast
Promoter share of co-promoted shows ticket income	(£144,538)	£0	(150,000)	£0	(154,000)	(162,000)	(170,000)
Distributor share of film ticket income	(£12,000)	£0	(12,000)	£0	(13,000)	(14,500)	(15,000)
Hirers ticket Sales	(£200,000)	£0	(£210,000)	£0	(£220,000)	(£230,000)	(£240,000)
Total agency sales	(£356,538)	£0	(372,000)	£0	(387,000)	(406,500)	(425,000)

Theatre Income	2022/23 Actual Outturn	2023/24 Budget	2023/24 Predicted Outturn	2024/25 Budget	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Forecast	2026/27 Forecast
Theatre share of co-promoted shows ticket income	(£58,619)	(£105,000)	(£60,000)	(£105,000)	(£61,000)	(£63,000)	(£65,000)
Theatre share of film ticket income	(£18,000)	(£51,000)	(£19,000)	(£51,000)	(£20,000)	(£21,500)	(£24,000)
Pantomime ticket income	(£179,484)	(£194,000)	(£194,000)	(£194,000)	(£205,000)	(£215,000)	(£225,000)
Box office commission	(£75,255)	(£39,450)	(£81,000)	(£39,450)	(£85,500)	(£91,000)	(£96,500)
Venue Hire	(£111,637)	(£153,111)	(£111,221)	(£153,111)	(£123,000)	(£126,000)	(£129,000)
Bar & Merchandise	(£115,050)	(£109,820)	(£121,800)	(£109,820)	(£124,800)	(£128,800)	(£132,800)
Rent	(£61,500)	(£62,670)	(£61,500)	(£62,670)	(£61,500)	(£61,500)	(£61,500)
Other	(£26,495)	(£16,220)	(£31,000)	(£15,800)	(£32,500)	(£33,000)	(£33,500)
Total theatre income	(£646,040)	(£731,271)	(£679,521)	(£730,851)	(£713,300)	(£739,800)	(£767,300)

# Financial Planning & Targets

CKEL

Financial plan expenditure 2022 - 2027

Theatre Expenditure	2022/23 Actual Outturn	2023/24 Budget	2023/24 Predicted Outturn	2024/25 Budget	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Forecast	2026/27 Forecast
Cost of co-promoted shows	£10,000	£90,000	£10,000	£90,000	£15,000	£15,000	£15,000
Cost of film	£3,000	£27,000	£3,000	£27,000	£3,500	£4,000	£4,500
Cost of pantomime	£113,009	£147,450	£133,400	£147,450	£140,000	£146,000	£153,000
Bar & Merchandise	£48,674	£45,100	£48,900	£45,100	£50,900	£52,900	£54,900
Staff	£266,840	£272,834	£290,834	£274,836	£303,836	£313,240	£322,951
Marketing	£23,456	£20,000	£25,000	£20,000	£26,000	£27,000	£28,000
Box Office Charges and Licensing	£25,506	£13,000	£27,000	£13,000	£29,000	£32,000	£34,500
Repairs & Maintenance	£41,378	£40,500	£46,500	£40,500	£48,500	£51,500	£54,500
Services – Cleaning, Refuse Internet, and Phones	£28,614	£22,100	£40,600	£22,100	£41,700	£45,200	£47,200
Utilities & Rates	£140,675	£70,506	£70,506	£70,506	£70,506	£70,506	£70,506
Other	£11,076	£12,550	£13,550	£12,550	£15,050	£15,050	£15,050
Total	£712,228	£761,040	£709,290	£763,042	£743,992	£772,396	£800,107
Net cost (surplus)	£66,189	£29,769	£29,769	£32,191	£30,692	£29,096	£26,807
Net turnover (incl.agency sales)	(£1,002,578)	(£731,271)	(£1,051,521)	(£730,851)	(£1,100,300)	(£1,146,300)	(£1,192,300)

<sup>\*2023-24</sup> forecast outturn is expected to be higher than the original budget due to significantly increased utility costs and staff pay awards.

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats



Building on our resources for future development

#### **Strengths**

- Versatile venue suitable for a variety of events
- Successful family pantomime
- Regular hirers and busy weekend bookings.
- Strong audience database
- High level of modern technical film, sound and lighting equipment
- Well trained and experienced box office staff
- Attractive offering for those with a disability as a carers tickets is provided at no extra charge
- Our commercial rates are less than/ competitive to The Beck, the Harrow Arts Centre and the Radlett Centre

## Weaknesses

- Small staff team with limited time capacity to develop new initiatives
- Commercial hire prices are high compared to competitors that include: Wyllotts and Winston Churchill
- Limited daytime car parking availability
- Location proximity to London where patrons can travel a short distancenand have an all round variety theatre experience
- Venue capacity medium size venue but too small for large touring shows

#### **Opportunities**

- Potential partnership with a resident theatre company
- Development of building usage from current tenants to use the venue as additional space to meet needs
- Development and expansion of staff team
- Development of own pantomime programme
- Immersive theatre using dressing rooms and available spaces
- Use/expansion of less used space i.e. the Colne Room, to increase daytime capacity

#### **Threats**

- Competitors from local theatres and community halls and the possibility of the new community hall in Rickmansworth
- Reduction in tickets sales from some amateur dramatic groups could impact hires
- Re-opening of the Watford Colosseum
- Cost of living crisis
- Pressure on council's budgets could impact negatively on Watersmeet's allocation of resources and capital investment

# Building & Facility Improvements

Building on our resources for future development

The medium-to-long-term capital projects plan for maintaining and improving the venue is outlined below. Past projects have included cinema screen and projector server replacement, theatrical lighting refurbishments, and accessibility improvements. Future projects are proposed to address the need to replace and update end of life electrical equipment, sound enhancements, roofing, solar panels, and other essential aspects of the facility in order to ensure the physical building and infrastructure is fit for purpose and capable of meeting the needs of customers.

General replacement & maintenance programme						
Equipment	Year	Estimated Budget	Notes			
Replacement and upgrade of the electrical intake equipment	2024-2025	£140,000	Outline Business Case submitted			
Replacement fire doors	2024-2025	TBQ	A fire safety requirement			
Fire dampers	2024-2025	£15,000-£20,000	A fire safety requirement			
Replacement powered access equipment	2024-2025	£8,000-£10,000	Equipment to allow staff and vising companies to rig lighting and scenery on stage. Current equipment is reaching end of life.			
Replacement Public Address (PA) (sound) system	2025-2026	£85,000-£110,000	Current sound desk, speakers and amplifiers are reaching end of life and will need replacing to continue to play back music and amplify musical sound			
Replacement surround sound system	2025-2026	TBQ	Current cinema sound system is reaching end of life and will need replacing within the next 5 years			
Colne Room floor restoration	2025-2026	TBQ	Floor is showing signs of wear and will need replacing in the next 5 years			

# Sustainability & Carbon Net Zero



We contiunue to work towards Carbon Net Zero

Watersmeet will continue to take steps to build on the improved energy efficiency and environmental impact of the facility contributing towards the council's Carbon Net Zero 2030 target and Corporate Framework objective.

A summary of major works identified within the net carbonzero action plan are listed below.

Equipment	Year	Estimated Budget	Notes
Air source heat pump	June 2026	Circa. £500,000	Pending sustainability survey results
Cavity wall insulation	August 2024	Circa. £12,000	Pending sustainability survey results
Expansion of PV solar panels	April 2025	Circa. £22,000	Pending sustainability survey results
Double glazing	August 2024	Circa. £16,000	Pending sustainability survey results

As of October 2022, Watersmeet has an energy efficiency rating of '27' which is a category 'B' and emits between 110-140 tonnes of CO<sup>2</sup> each year.

Monitoring, Reviewing & Measuring



We contiunue monitoring, reviewing and measuring success against our objectives

To ensure this strategy is realised and objectives are achieved, monitoring and reviewing progress of actions will be carried out quarterly during Watersmeet team meetings. This will also facilitate the ability to adapt to actual results against predictions and respond to changing external factors in real time.

In addition, attendance at co-promoted shows at Watersmeet are a key performance indicator (KPI) reported to committee as part of performance monitoring.

#### These targets are:

Code	Key Performance Indicator	Projected outturn 2023/24	Target 2024/25	Target 2025/26	Target 2026/27
WM01	Number of tickets sold for				
	co-promoted live shows at	21,500	22,500	23,500	24,500
	Watersmeet (incl. pantomime)	2.,000		20,000	2 .,500

Action plans focusing on key areas will be used to monitor and measure progress against core priorities and strategic objectives.

Bi-annual audience satisfaction surveys, competitor analysis, financial performance metrics, usage and attendance data provide a solid baseline to measure performance against.

Financial performance targets will be reported via the council's Budget Monitoring process and overall performance against objectives will be reported annually as part of the Watersmeet annual review to Climate Change, Leisure & Community committee.

These resources together with the execution of the plan provide a robust framework for delivering and measuring success that will help Watersmeet contribute to the council's vision of making Three Rivers a great place to live, work and visit.

