

Case For Support for a Dance Studio at St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall

THE VISION

To develop a much-needed state-of-the-art Dance Studio in a historic part of central Bristol forging synergies with St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall (SMMPH) and the newly refurbished and nationally recognised facility of the former church, the Mount Without (TMW) - a place of pride for community use and blazing a beacon for the arts.

Three different sized and unique spaces within a stone's throw of each other on a shared footprint bringing to life a vibrant hub with a collective focus on the performing arts and in particular dance.



IMPERMANENCE rehearses 'Venus' April '23 in TMW



St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall has a sprung floor



Architect's impression of proposed state-of-the-art Dance Studio

The dance sector in the South West is at a tipping point. It is at a point where a rigorous look at where it is and where it could go would allow the sector to increase its profile, make new strategic connections, forge new partnerships and build on its core strengths. A failure to do so will see a massive missed opportunity and the potential disintegration of the region's support networks and key development opportunities.'

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- There is a clear and recognised need for more dedicated dance facilities in the South West Region.
- An ambitious and innovative project which has the potential to significantly upgrade the provision for and enjoyment of Dance and the Arts locally, regionally, and nationally.
- A unique opportunity to ensure a sustainable future for the widely used local community-built amenity, SMMPH, with its central charitable aspiration to enable, benefit and support its immediate community.
- The proposal is to develop a dedicated dance studio to work in collaboration with the existing SMMPH and the sensitively re-imagined former church TMW.
- The three spaces combined will offer a unique facility for Bristol and the wider region and be a hub for the development and performance of dance.
- St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall is seeking £750,000 to create a low energy, highly sustainable, environmentally sensitive, state-of-the art facility to serve professional dance and the community in a historic corner of Bristol - forming a key part of a dynamic new collaborative Dance Hub.
- Recent media coverage has increased the public interest in dance as an artform.



Aerial view of St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall's footprint in this historic corner of Bristol.

THE BACKGROUND



The sensitively restored interior, including sprung dance floor, of The Mount Without after the fire which nearly destroyed it.

The Mount Without, formerly St Michael's Church, on St Michael's Hill, Bristol is a mere stone's throw from St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall. The church was sold by the diocese to Norman Routledge, a Bristol property developer, in 2019, twenty years after it was closed and boarded up due to falling attendances. Following years of neglect in October 2016 a major fire, started deliberately by squatters, caused extensive damage to the structure but since taking on the ashes of this iconic building Norman's sheer determination has transformed the old, ruined church into a breath-taking venue mixing 900 years of history with dance, art, music and celebration. It has at its heart under a stunning new roof an impressive floor space with a professionally laid, high quality dance floor. This is because Norman has created a shared/hybrid home for resident dance company IMPERMANENCE alongside his own events company curating art exhibitions, concerts, private hires and weddings. IMPERMANENCE is a cutting-edge Bristol based dance company who perform and curate work by local, national and international artists and companies at The Mount Without throughout the year.

The burgeoning resurgence and purposeful commitment to this neglected corner of Bristol inspired the Trustees of St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall to reflect on the future purpose of its own footprint

and buildings and how we might complement this new life at the foot of St Michael's Hill once the main road and gateway from Gloucester to the city walls of Bristol. First built in 1147 the church was

originally named Saint Michael The Archangel On The Mount Without as it stood just outside the city walls.

The St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall was erected in 1925 as a memorial to those men of the community who fell in the Great War. It was built with funds raised by the local community for the benefit of the local community. A meeting ground. A coming together place. A place of common interest where hearts and minds might be voiced and communities could celebrate.



St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall and TMW share the same skyline.

It was this founding community led ideal which sparked our vision. The hall is currently used by the community every day, every week of the year. Mostly it serves Willow Park Primary School as a place for the children to meet, eat, learn and play during school hours but in the evenings and weekends it is the meeting place for theatre, dance and music rehearsals, presentations, physically focused recreational and educational sessions, well-being groups and professional development classes. What makes it so ideal for these kinds of activity is the volume of the space and its sprung floor - perfect for dance and physical activity.

Late 2022 in conversation with Norman Routledge and IMPERMANCE'S co-artistic directors, Joshua Ben-Tovim and Roseanna Anderson, the Trustees proposed a radical collaboration for our shared historic corner of Bristol.

So what if St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall worked collaboratively with The Mount Without to develop a creative hub centred around dance performance? "Yes!" was Norman Routledge's response keen to see an opportunity for developing a focus for the location. It received an even bigger affirmation from IMPERMANENCE. They were already working regularly with the children at Willow Park School and holding dance sessions with older members of the community and could see the potential in having more space to hold events and in particular to rehearse. They have no 'home', no designated space to rehearse. There is a shortage of such space in Bristol. Nearly every arts organisation is constantly on the lookout for extra rehearsal space – not least Bristol Old Vic and

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School along with many other local artists and companies. The Dance Studio will be a vital new resource for Bristol's artists.

Then the Trustees had something else they wanted to bring to the table.....



Old disused scout hut site for Dance Studio - TMW looking on!

On the Trust's immediate footprint of land there is a dilapidated Scout Hut last functioning as such in 1985. In December of 2022 it was lying festooned in thick undergrowth, brambles and seedling trees. The Trust had for some time been discussing a future potential for this prime piece of land and had turned down interest from property developers when learning their intentions were contradictory to the founding spirit in which the hall had been realised in 1925 – that it should be for community use. This is where the Trust's initiative ramped up.

TMW has a wide programme of events which includes an emphasis on the arts and particularly dance, led by IMPERMANENCE, and we had a vacant site which could compliment that programme? A newly built space, unlike SMMPH, could be in use 24/7 without the time constraints of a school timetable - nor might dance rehearsals in TMW take up days which could be given to potential income streams if there was another space – a Dance Studio nearby in which to rehearse?

A disparity in perception of where dance sits at this moment in time and a fracture between the sector and funding/strategic organisations have put the sector in a weak position.

A large part of this disparity in perception is due to a lack of visibility for dance in the region, both within the arts sector and with a wider community of stakeholders and the public. There is little doubt that the vibrancy and energy within the dance sector itself has not found a way of effectively communicating a broader positive message. This in turn has a negative impact on engaging stakeholders, new partners and the public.

CONSIDERING NEW FUTURES FOR DANCE IN THE SOUTH WEST CONSULTANCY BRIEF by Nick Sweeting

There is a clear and stated argument that there is a need for a purposeful dance facility/hub in this region. Visual arts, music, theatre, design, film have all received major investment over the past 10 years – is this now the moment for Dance?

THE PROJECT

St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall Trust Appeal to raise £750,000 to create a state-of-the-art purpose-built professional Dance Studio demonstrating zero environmental impact and financial sustainability in a historic corner of Bristol and forming a key part of a dynamic new collaborative Dance Hub incorporating three unique rehearsal and performance spaces within a closely aligned footprint for both professional and amateur participants.

IMPERMANENCE and TMW acted as a catalyst and the Trust identified an opportunity to create three interlinked distinct and differing dance facilities unlike any other and the Trustees believe this to be an important next stage in the advancement of the area. A unique opportunity to ensure a sustainable future for the widely used local community-built amenity, SMMPH, with its central charitable aspiration to enable, benefit and support its immediate community, including Willow Park Primary School, as curators of affordable and accessible spaces to house many kinds of social, artistic, well-being, sports and educational activities.

An ambitious and innovative project which has the potential to significantly upgrade the provision for Dance and the Arts locally, regionally, and nationally in line within current Arts Council England ambitions.

To date the Trust has boldly grasped the nettle and kick started their vision by appointing Bristol Architects Askew Cavanna, who have grown a respected reputation for working with community groups and charities with a particular emphasis on sustainable development. They have drawn up outline plans and overseen all preliminary surveys for the Dance Studio in consultation with the Trustees and dance professionals leading to submitting a planning application. Such is their belief in the project the Trust has funded the development to date.

The ambition is to submit a planning application during the summer of 2023 which if granted this year means the building could be completed and an operational asset for the community by 2025.



Geographically and historically Bristol plays a key role within the wider cultural sector in the South West. Much of the debate around support for dance within the city has centred on the call for a dedicated dance space, although the greater issue seems to be the feeling from within the dance community that no one is flying their flag. This has led to a self-perpetuating downward spiral that has deeply affected the moral of the dance community within the city, with the knock on effect of a lack of vibrancy and opportunity.

CONSIDERING NEW FUTURES FOR DANCE IN THE SOUTH WEST CONSULTANCY BRIEF by Nick Sweetin

WHO WE ARE

St Michael's Memorial Parish Hall Trust

Trustees	Diane Aukland Jane Barlow Nick Childs Andy Hay Veronica Lyell Shruti Patel – Chair
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Project Team

Project Manager	Sarah Smith – Elev8 Ltd
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Design Team	Architects	Askew Cavanna – Claire Miller, Lead Architect
	Structural Engineers	Structural Solutions
	Quantity Surveyor	Coreus
	Passivhaus	Mach Group