

The Future of the Armstrong Hall Complex in Thornbury

The trustee of the Armstrong Hall site has verbally confirmed its decision to sell the Armstrong Hall Complex, and to use the proceeds to invest in a new development at the Turnberries Community Centre, owned by South Gloucestershire Council.

No plans have yet been revealed, and neither have timescales for the costly project.

The Armstrong Action Group Alliance (AHAA) is strongly opposed to this move, since the Turnberries site does not encourage footfall to the High Street, to the detriment of the traders in the centre of the town.

The decision also runs counter to the outcome of two public consultations held in 2017 and 2018, which indicated a very clear preference for retaining the Armstrong Hall, whether rebuilding the ageing buildings, or refurbishing them.

Sale of the Complex puts at risk the Cossham Hall, with its good acoustics, appreciated by musicians and cinema-goers. The Cossham Hall failed to be registered as a listed building, due to it not being uncommon of its type, but it has great value to the town for its central position, its seating capacity and its historic charm.

AHAA undertook a viability study in 2021, which demonstrated that the Complex could be taken over by a Community Interest Company which would repair, maintain and develop it as a not-for-profit social enterprise. This could be started very swiftly, bringing back Thornbury's performing groups (Northavon Youth Theatre Company, Thornbury Musical Theatre Group (TMTG), TMTG Juniors, Thornbury Arts Festival) to offer their high-quality productions locally, within months. Our groups will once again be able to meet for their former activities: U3A groups, Severn Valley Flower Club and the Women's Institute can hold their large events in the spacious Armstrong Hall, with Thornbury Picture House reinstated in the Cossham Hall.

But in addition, much more will be happening. AHAA envisage a completely revitalised centre for the community. Children will be provided with magic events, comedy and films. Families will see entertainment which is enjoyable for all, and avoids long and expensive car journeys. Local traders will be invited to promote their services by offering packages to tie in with the events on offer. Teenagers will find in it a place to meet and watch a film, or try out their comedy skills or their new band. There will be exhibitions from the museum archives, from schools, or from local artists. Innovative performance, especially from children and young people, will be encouraged, and a wide range of events on offer, to meet all tastes and interests, with professional artists performing to increase revenue from the wider area, bringing more people into the town. Interest in science and technology can be promoted through talks and working groups.

A vital factor for this hub of activity will be the involvement of the whole community. There will be opportunities to help social mixing amongst those who have suffered during Covid, and for people of all ages and abilities to gain work experience. Fundraising will be extremely important, and everyone's help and ideas will be needed.

The Armstrong Hall Complex, as a community-run enterprise, can become a new driving force for co-operative working, within the very heart of the town, to the great benefit of the nearby businesses. Other beneficiaries will be the many venues, groups and organisations operating locally, since we can promote events and facilities elsewhere, to mutual advantage.

Part of AHAA's viability study involved researching other such venues in different parts of the country, and a clear picture emerges of many similar community-run ventures thriving and flourishing, bringing untold benefits to small and large towns country-wide.

Why not Thornbury?

For more information, please visit <https://ahaathornbury.co.uk>, email info@ahaathornbury.co.uk or call 413850.