



BUSINESS CONTINUITY SCENARIO ANALYSIS FOR CAMBRIDGE GUILDHALL AND CORN EXCHANGE REDEVELOPMENT

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Executive Summary

The redevelopment of Cambridge Corn Exchange and the Guildhall presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance the city's cultural infrastructure.

However, the likely closure of one or both venues during construction creates a significant risk of cultural disengagement, loss of audience, and diminished economic and social impact.

While we recognise the council's default position is to close both venues and implement a community and producer engagement programme during the development, there is an opportunity to mitigate the economic and cultural impact, this report explores four alternative business continuity models to ensure sustained cultural provision, protect Cambridge's creative ecosystem, and retain public visibility throughout the redevelopment period.

The models analysed include:

1. **Low-Cost Temporary Venue** – A minimal capital investment solution designed to retain a baseline cultural presence. While quick to deploy and affordable, its limited technical capacity and audience offer restrict both economic return and programming quality.
2. **High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue** – A strategically ambitious model, offering a fully functional and technically equipped interim venue. Though the most capital-intensive option, it delivers the highest economic impact, programming flexibility, and long-term value, with potential legacy use beyond the redevelopment phase.
3. **Phased Construction Around Programming** – A complex approach involving retention of some operational areas during phased redevelopment. This reduces venue blackout but introduces significant logistical and construction risks. It may compromise audience experience and limit the scale of programming.
4. **Meanwhile Use of Existing Sites** – A flexible and relatively low-cost approach using existing community and civic spaces to decentralise programming. It offers strong public engagement potential and city-wide reach but requires careful coordination and curation to mitigate brand dilution and technical limitations.

5. **Mothball** – Closing both venues without providing a temporary facility would result in significant costs (see **Appendix 6**) while offering no continuation of cultural provision throughout the development programme. However, with an appropriately resourced and skilled audience engagement and mobilisation team in place, this impact can be mitigated. By maintaining visibility, strengthening relationships, and building anticipation, the team can ensure that the venues remain central to the city’s cultural identity and are well-positioned for a successful relaunch at reopening.

Each model has been assessed for its impact on the city economy, operational deliverability, cultural value, and cost to the Council. Additional analysis considers the risks of a two-to-three-year cultural vacuum and the opportunity to mitigate this through interim venue provision.

Two case studies—Orchard West (Dartford) and Troubadour Theatres (London)—illustrate viable delivery models at both low and high levels of investment. Precedents such as Leeds Playhouse and Birmingham REP demonstrate how continuity can be achieved through strategic use of temporary infrastructure or phased site access.

The report concludes that the High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue provides the most compelling value-for-money case when considering economic return, brand retention, and cultural programming continuity.

The Council’s decision must balance short-term affordability with long-term cultural and economic impact. This analysis is intended to inform that decision by clarifying the trade-offs and benefits of each continuity approach, set aside the current plan to implement the mothball plan.

Introduction

The planned redevelopment of the Guildhall and Corn Exchange represents a bold and timely investment in Cambridge’s cultural infrastructure. However, the temporary closure of one or both venues—anticipated to last two to three years—presents clear risks to the city’s cultural continuity, creative economy, and civic identity.

These two venues are vital to the life of the city. They host a diverse programme of events that animate the city centre, attract residents and visitors, and provide

essential platforms for professional artists, community groups, and civic events. A prolonged absence of this cultural provision could lead to audience disengagement, reduced economic activity, and reputational harm.

This report explores four business continuity models, alongside the current plan, designed to sustain cultural activity, protect economic value, and maintain public engagement throughout the redevelopment period. These models are evaluated for their ability to ensure cultural continuity, sustain footfall, retain audiences and workforce, support the visitor economy, and minimise the financial burden to the Council.

The analysis has been developed in alignment with Cambridge City Council's strategic priorities, including its ambition to achieve **net zero carbon by 2030**, promote **inclusive access to culture**, and support **low-carbon, innovation-led economic growth**. These goals are further underpinned by the city's cultural strategy, which seeks to use culture as a driver of community cohesion, opportunity, and wellbeing.

This work also supports the city's wider growth agenda. As Cambridge positions itself at the heart of the Oxford–Cambridge innovation arc, and aims to double its GVA by 2040, maintaining a visible, high-quality cultural offer during redevelopment is essential to sustaining civic confidence, investor appeal, and international standing.

Economic modelling using the Shellard method shows that the Guildhall and Corn Exchange currently generate an estimated **£10.8 million** in annual economic activity, based on 180,000 ticket sales at an average ticket price of £35. This underscores the importance of preserving the momentum and value these venues create.

The four alternative continuity options assessed in this report are:

- A **Low-Cost Temporary Venue**, offering a modest, rapidly deployable solution to retain basic cultural activity.
- A **High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue**, designed to sustain full-scale programming with long-term legacy potential.
- A **Phased Construction Approach**, allowing partial use of the existing venues during redevelopment.
- **Meanwhile Use of Existing Sites**, such as university or civic buildings, repurposed for cultural activity.

Each option has been assessed in terms of its deliverability, cultural impact, and financial implications for the Council. This report is intended to support a well-informed and confident decision that safeguards Cambridge's cultural life, aligns with its long-term strategic goals, and reinforces the city's role as a civic and cultural leader. With bold and imaginative action, Cambridge has the opportunity to set a

national benchmark for sustaining and growing cultural provision in the context of major urban regeneration.

Staff Mobilisation Plan – Summary

The mobilisation of a temporary installation should be led by Cambridge City Council's existing Cultural Services team, who will oversee strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and operational integration as part of their current remit.

To ensure focused delivery, should the council decide to implement a temporary cultural asset, a dedicated **Project Delivery Manager** should be appointed on a fixed-term basis, responsible for coordinating all aspects of mobilisation, including fit-out, procurement, licensing, and readiness planning.

This individual will work alongside internal leads across technical, commercial, marketing, and audience services functions, drawing on existing council expertise to minimise duplication and maximise continuity across the venue portfolio.

In the final month before opening, a cohort of casual staff will be recruited and trained to support the operational set-up and testing of systems, including front of house, technical support, and hospitality services, ensuring the venue is fully prepared for soft-launch and live public operation.

As the operational model for the new venue evolves, the Council will need to consider the potential for internal secondments from the existing cultural services team to staff the venue during the mobilisation phase. These decisions will form part of wider workforce planning in response to the temporary closure of the Guildhall and Corn Exchange.

This report does not address the potential implications relating to secondments or redundancies that may arise during this period. Some of the proposed operating models would require significantly reduced staffing levels, and these matters will need to be considered separately, in accordance with council policies and formal consultation procedures.

Low-Cost Temporary Venue

The Low-Cost Temporary Modular Venue consists of a basic, demountable structure intended to provide rudimentary facilities for cultural activity. It features limited technical infrastructure, minimal front-of-house amenities, and potentially reduced capacity. Its purpose is to deliver an affordable, low-risk environment suitable for

professional and community-focused events, workshops, and smaller-scale productions.

Designed for short-term use, it requires modest investment and can be rapidly deployed, although its limited appeal and functional constraints reduce its impact and flexibility.

Characteristics:

- Basic modular structure with limited technical capability.
- Customer environment considerations such as temperature control, seating, and production value.
- Minimal initial capital investment as it is based on hiring the facility.
- Focused on short-term cultural continuity rather than lasting legacy.

Strengths:

- Economically maintains baseline cultural activity.
- Quick deployment: straightforward operational model which can be staffed by the current operations team.
- Provides essential cultural continuity for community and amateur groups.

Risks:

- Limited economic multiplier due to restricted event programming.
- Operational risks include potential disengagement of skilled staff.
- Cultural risks of diminishing Cambridge's regional reputation.
- Financial risk of poor return on investment if utilisation remains low.
- Producer appetite to programme content in venue with limited production capabilities.
- Conditional on securing planning permission. Likely to be less contentious than the modular model.

Mitigating Actions:

- Robust marketing and targeted programming to maximise attendance.
- Partnerships with local cultural organisations to enrich programming.
- Develop a bespoke programming strategy to play to the strengths of the venue's capability.
- Careful planning of the design and build of the venue to ensure it is fit for purpose and has suitable customer-facing facilities.

Model Assumptions

- 1,000 seat capacity (no standing capability).
- Average of 80 performances a year due to production limitations.
- Reduced staffing contingent as small venue and reduced performances.
- Appropriate bar, foyer, back of house, storage, dressing rooms and toilet facilities.
- Design and construction cost based on Orchard West - £2.6 Million.
- On going £80K per month marquee rent.
- Reduced overheads due to simplicity of the venue.

Case Study: Orchard West (Dartford) – Temporary Modular Venue Installation

Orchard West (OW) is a **modular, demountable venue** installed adjacent to The Orchard Theatre in Dartford in 2023, following the discovery of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in the main theatre building. With the permanent venue closed for safety works, Dartford Borough Council and Trafalgar Theatres (part of Trafalgar Entertainment) acted quickly to commission a temporary replacement to ensure continued cultural activity.

OW Key Characteristics:

- **Structure:** Purpose-built modular venue with steel-framed, fabric-clad construction.
- **Capacity:** Approx. 1,000 seats on a raked base, with accessible viewing platforms and toilets.
- **Stage & Tech:** End-stage layout with truss grid for lighting and sound; basic wing and backstage provisions.
- **Audience Facilities:** Temporary box office, bar, foyer, accessible WCs, and weather-protected entrance.
- **Installation Time:** Rapid deployment—operational within approximately 12 weeks from commissioning.

Orchard West hosted a professional commercial programme including music, comedy, drama, tribute acts, and family shows. The initial programme largely

mirrored that of the original venue, with minor technical adjustments. It also retained in-house team members, box office systems, and branding continuity. However, it became apparent that the venue's technical limitations delivered poor production value and as a result, many of the promoters and producers pulled their shows making the venue's commercial viability unsustainable without ongoing council funding. The venue closed for a period of time as a result but reopened with a limited programme, funded by the council.

OW Strengths:

- Rapid solution that minimised cultural and economic disruption.
- Enabled audience and staff retention, maintaining civic and community confidence.
- Lower capital cost than permanent rebuild; modular elements designed for reuse or relocation.
- Fully operational theatre experience, despite being temporary.

OW Risks & Limitations:

- Significant operational and logistics demands (e.g., power, security, ticketing infrastructure).
- Planning and licensing required fast-track approval.
- Limited technical spec compared to permanent venue—some shows had to adapt, many shows pulled their booking.
- Visual and acoustic limitations (fabric walls, sound bleed), mitigated through design choices.
- Customer experience issues with temperature, comfort, and acoustics.

Relevance to Cambridge:

A similar approach could offer an effective bridge during the Guildhall and Corn Exchange redevelopment — especially if speed, profile, and continuity with existing audiences are key priorities.

However, Cambridge council would need to assess site conditions (e.g. Parker's Piece, Christs Pieces, Midsummer Common), utilities, power and noise management, and integration with its broader cultural strategy. In discussion with the Cultural Services Team, Parker's Piece is the preferred location for a temporary or permanent installation.

Orchard West Venue Cost Summary

Dartford Borough Council originally allocated £1.5 million (ex VAT) from reserve funds to design, procure, and install a temporary venue in conjunction with Trafalgar Theatres, when The Orchard Theatre closed in September 2023.

Final Cost

Total project cost escalated to approximately £2.6 million, nearly £1.1 million above the initial estimate.

Cost Drivers:

- Mains drainage connection: £455,216
- Sound mitigation & contingency: £126,895.
- Fire and health & safety compliance upgrades: £124,602.
- Site security and fencing: £41,657
- Structural upgrades rose from £1.18M to £1.64M
- Additional costs: site setup, planning/licensing, project management

Viability Statement

This model offers a low capital outlay and is relatively quick to deploy, ensuring a basic level of cultural continuity. Planning permission for infrastructure on parks and open spaces typically takes around 8 to 13 weeks, depending on the complexity of the proposal and any associated consultations.

However, it delivers limited economic return and constrains the creative programming offer due to its restricted technical capacity. It is viable for community-based use and as a stopgap solution but may not provide best value when measured against broader cultural and economic impact metrics.

See **Appendix 1. Orchard West**

High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue

This option proposes a higher-specification modular venue designed to support a full spectrum of cultural programming, including commercial touring productions. With potential for long-term or permanent use, this venue could leave a lasting legacy while mitigating the risks associated with closure. Though more capital intensive, it

offers the strongest potential for economic stimulation, audience retention, and continuity of professional operations.

The High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue is a professionally specified structure with a full suite of technical and audience-facing infrastructure. It includes tiered seating, industry-standard lighting and sound rigs, backstage facilities, dressing rooms, foyer space, and accessible amenities. Designed for semi-permanent or long-term use, it offers flexibility and scalability to accommodate touring productions and high-quality cultural programming. This option allows the Council to maintain its civic and cultural presence while creating the potential for legacy use beyond the construction period.

Characteristics:

- High-end modular construction with extensive technical capacities.
- Designed for potential permanent use (25–30-year lifecycles) with comprehensive front- and back-of-house amenities.
- Enhanced flexibility due to the construction strategy.
- High sustainability credentials.

Strengths:

- Significant economic multiplier effect, stimulating hospitality and retail sectors.
- Operationally similar to a permanent venue, retaining skilled staff and professional productions.
- Sustains comprehensive cultural programming and enhances Cambridge's cultural standing.
- The programming strategy, underpinned by innovative design and production capabilities, will introduce a distinctive creative dynamic that enhances and complements Cambridge's wider cultural ecology.
- Modular design allows for maximum flexibility to facilitate dynamic programming such as theatre, Panto, exhibitions, film studios, fashion shows, product launches etc.
- High sustainability credentials.
- Potential to partner with external specialists to joint fund the design and construction of the venue.

Risks:

- High upfront capital expenditure may strain council budgets.
- Operational complexity necessitating advanced logistical planning.
- Cultural and reputational risks from project delays or execution issues.
- Detailed feasibility of the available land required to ensure long-term viability.
- Establishing a suitable location with the appropriate infrastructure.
- Conditional on securing planning permission. Likely to be more contentious than the temporary model.

Mitigating Actions:

- Detailed cost-benefit analysis and robust project management plans.
- Early engagement with cultural operators and stakeholders to ensure programmatic alignment and buy-in.

Modular Venue Design, Capacity and Construction Overview

High-quality modular venues offer a flexible, rapid-delivery alternative to traditional theatre builds, capable of supporting full-scale professional programming. Developed using prefabricated steel-frame modules, these venues can include raked seating, fly towers, production infrastructure, foyer and bar areas, accessible amenities, and backstage facilities. They can be designed for temporary, semi-permanent, or permanent use, with lifespans of 25–30 years.

Theatres of this type are already operational in London and across the UK, including models delivered by Troubadour Theatres and similar cultural infrastructure providers. These venues deliver excellent technical standards and audience experience, often matching or exceeding the expectations of traditional built theatres.

The spatial footprint of a modular venue is typically calculated using an industry benchmark of 1.8–2.2 m² per seat, which includes the auditorium, foyers, bars, toilets, circulation, backstage areas, and essential plant space.

At a construction rate of £5,000 per m² (taken from the Swindon Kimmerfields model), the indicative capital costs for a high-quality modular venue are shown below:

Indicative Capital Cost Estimates for Modular Venues (£5,000/m²)

Venue Capacity	Area per Seat (m ²)	Total Floor Area (m ²)	Estimated Capital Cost
1,000 seats	1.8 – 2.0	1,800 – 2,000	£9.0M – £10.0M
1,200 seats	1.8 – 2.2	2,160 – 2,640	£10.8M – £13.2M
1,500 seats	2.0 – 2.2	3,000 – 3,300	£15.0M – £16.5M
1,800 seats	2.0 – 2.4	3,600 – 4,320	£18.0M – £21.6M

These figures provide a sound basis for early-stage financial planning, business case development, and value-for-money assessment when comparing continuity and legacy venue options. The modular model is especially well-suited to Cambridge's context, offering a sustainable, scalable and technically robust solution that can be delivered with certainty in terms of programme, cost, and quality.

It should be noted that Troubadour Theatre state that their venues can be built for under £3,000 /m² which suggests that a 1,000-capacity venue could be delivered for between £5-£6M. This assertion will require more detailed analysis.

Model Assumptions

- 1,000 – 1,800 seated capacity.
- Comprehensive production & technical capability.
- Average of 200 performances a year due to production capability.
- Retained CX & GH staffing structure.
- Appropriate bar, café/restaurant, foyer, back of house, storage, dressing rooms and toile facilities.
- Circa. £8,000,000 capital investment to design build and acquire the venue.

Case Study: Troubadour Theatres – High-Quality Modular Venue Model

Troubadour Theatres has pioneered the development of high-quality modular theatre venues in London, providing flexible, rapid-deployment solutions that offer permanent venue standards. Venues such as Troubadour Wembley Park Theatre, Canary Wharf and White City Theatre have successfully hosted large-scale commercial productions, demonstrating the viability of this model for cities requiring interim or long-term cultural infrastructures.

TT Key Features

- Capacities range from 800 to 2,000 seats with flexible configurations.
- Modular steel-frame construction with professional architectural design.
- Full production infrastructure: rigging, sound, lighting, fly tower capability.
- Front-of-house amenities: bar, box office, cloakrooms, accessible WCs.
- Backstage: dressing rooms, loading access, scene dock.
- Typical installation timeline: 4–6 months (subject to the condition of the land).
- Venues built to a 30-year life expectancy with proper maintenance protocols in place.

Troubadour Canary Wharf Theatre – Venue Summary

- Capacity & Opening: A 1,200-seat, modular, in-the-round entertainment venue opening in Autumn 2025 at Wood Wharf, Canary Wharf.
- Programming: First production is the world premiere of *The Hunger Games: On Stage*, featuring immersive staging and a circular auditorium format.
- Design & Amenities: Includes foyers and hospitality spaces across three floors, a 100-cover restaurant, two bars, and an outdoor waterside terrace.
- Sustainability: Built using demountable, repurposed materials in line with circular economy principles, designed for relocation or reuse post-production.
- Accessibility & Experience: Full modern access features including step-free seating, accessible WCs, and a premium in-the-round experience tailored for audience immersion.

The Canary Wharf model confirms the feasibility of developing a 1,200-seat modular theatre with full technical, hospitality, and accessibility infrastructure.

Cost Estimate and Delivery Potential for Cambridge

- Indicative capital cost: £5 – £10million for a single, high quality flexible 1,200–1,800 seat entertainment venue
- Alternative ‘tent’ style model delivered by Troubadour Theatres could be delivered for £2-£4million but with reduced production and ancillary space.
- Timescale to operational delivery: 9–12 months from commissioning (subject to availability of land and planning permission)
- Modular structures can be installed on council-owned land or leased sites.
- Commercial operators may fund or co-invest depending on governance preference.

See **Appendix 2**. Troubadour Theatres

Relevance to Cambridge

The Troubadour model provides a scalable, high-quality solution that can match or exceed audience expectations for technical and visitor experience. A Cambridge venue based on this model would allow the city to maintain its status as a cultural destination during redevelopment, deliver continuity for national producers, and leave a potential legacy asset in the form of a semi-permanent or relocatable multipurpose entertainment space with distinctly different and complementary programming dynamic.

Viability Statement

This model provides the most comprehensive cultural, economic, and operational continuity.

Though the most capital-intensive, it enables the full delivery of a high-quality creative content strategy and maintains professional venue standards. It is the most viable option in terms of delivering long-term value and legacy benefits, with the strongest potential for cost recovery through long term commercial programming, complementing the city’s other cultural assets.

We have extensive experience in the contemporary modular venue model, having developed a detailed design and cost plan for Swindon Council in collaboration with [Stufish Entertainment Architects](#). This innovative design and construction approach offers all the functional and experiential benefits of a traditional build, while requiring significantly lower capital investment. See **Appendix 4**. Swindon Projects,

This venue could be procured via a Design, Build, Operate and Maintain (DBOM) model with a commercial or not-for-profit operator, creating a shared-risk investment framework.

Phased Construction

This model leverages phased construction techniques to maintain partial use of the existing venues while works progress. It relies on detailed sequencing and robust health and safety protocols to allow limited programming to continue in unaffected areas. This option maintains the use of familiar facilities with existing infrastructure and staffing, although spatial limitations, noise, and disruption from construction activity will constrain the audience experience and technical capability.

This approach involves scheduling redevelopment works to allow phased, partial use of the existing venues throughout the construction period. While technically and logistically complex, it enables continuity of operations and minimises the disruption to programming and staffing. It provides a steady cultural presence but may impact audience experience and incur higher long-term construction costs.

Characteristics:

- Sequential redevelopment enabling partial venue use during construction.
- Maintains partial programming, reducing total cultural blackout.

Strengths:

- Sustains economic activity and maintains established audience relationships.
- Operationally maintains continuous staffing and regular programming revenue.
- Avoids the need to invest in a secondary site or new installation.
- Retains use of the existing production and auditorium capability.

Risks:

- Potentially higher long-term construction costs due to extended timelines and complexity.
- Safety and logistical challenges of managing concurrent venue operations and construction.

- Cultural risk of compromised audience experience and reduced programming flexibility.
- Conditional on securing planning permission. Likely to be more contentious than the temporary model.

Mitigating Actions:

- Precise construction phasing schedules, detailed risk assessments, and strict safety protocols.
- Transparent communication strategy to manage public expectations.

Impact on Construction Companies from Prolonged Development:

- Extended preliminary costs due to prolonged site management and resource allocation.
- Increased logistical complexities, potentially inflating overall construction budgets.
- Risk of contractor fatigue and reduced productivity over extended timelines.

Case Study: Birmingham Repertory Theatre – Phased Redevelopment with Ongoing Programming

Between 2011 and 2013, Birmingham Rep embarked on a substantial phased refurbishment of its auditorium, stage, foyer, and backstage infrastructure—all while retaining some level of public programming throughout the works.

REP Key Characteristics

- **Phased approach:** Sequential works enabled parts of the building to remain operational during renovation, supporting ongoing productions in available spaces.
- **Scale & scope:** The project focused on the auditorium and stage areas (total area approx. 10,600 m² inferred from £7.1 million over 6,450 m² = £1,100/m²). Current day (2024) costs are circa. £5,000/m² - £7,500/m².
- **Working timeline:** Core works were delivered over a tight 13-week summer window, with intensively resourced teams working extended hours (up to 20-hour days) to maintain schedule. This resulted in a circa 10% increase in prelims.

REP Cost & Preliminary Budget Insights

- Total refurbishment cost: £7.1 million, equating to approximately £1,100/m² a relatively low-rate indicative of targeted and essential works.
- Preliminaries and staging expenses: While not separately published, this type of phased delivery typically includes high prelim rates due to set-up, temporary access arrangements, extended programme, and changes to the tune of 15–20% of total construction costs.
- For a £7.1 million build, estimated preliminaries would therefore be approximately £1–1.4 million.

REP Cost Summary

- Total refurbishment cost: £7.1 million
- Floor area covered: 6,450 m² (£1,100/m² average)
- Estimated preliminaries (15–20%): £1–£1.4 million.
- Industry standard is between 10-15% prelims.

Relevance to Cambridge

Demonstrates that phased refurbishment with partial programming continuation is theoretically operationally possible, even in heritage or city-centre contexts.

Indicates cost profile: publicly reported total build cost (£7M) is a realistic benchmark for partial internal upgrades. Preliminaries in similar phased programmes may form 10 – 15% of budget and need to be carefully planned.

Implies that Cambridge could consider hybrid use of existing venue segments during redevelopment, retaining some functionality, controlling audience desertion, and reducing overall blackout.

Effective phased delivery requires robust logistical planning, client coordination, and a realistic budget buffer for site preliminaries.

Cambridge should consider similar contingency planning if adopting phased construction with simultaneous programming.

Viability Statement

Phased construction allows for retention of audience and operational continuity but introduces construction complexity, risk, and elevated prelim costs.

While attractive in reducing blackouts and the need for an additional venue during the period of closure, it limits scale and flexibility of programming and compromises customer experience.

It is viable if significant areas of the venue remain unaffected, but less suitable for high-impact or touring content delivery.

The Cliffs Pavilion in Southend is currently undergoing a major £8 million-plus refurbishment (approx. £5.5 m from the Levelling Up Fund, with additional funding from the council and Trafalgar Entertainment) via a phased sectional construction strategy enabling the main hall to remain fully operational. Improvements include expanded restaurant, new entrance/lobby, upgraded ventilation, outdoor piazza, bars, toilets, lifts, and access enhancements.

However, while the venue’s location, design, and ancillary spaces make this approach feasible, the Corn Exchange’s setting presents significant logistical challenges that would make adopting a similar strategy far more complex.

Model Assumptions

- Existing CX seated capacity.
- Retained production & technical capability.
- Average of 80 performances a year due to intermittent phased closure.
- Retained CX & GH staffing structure.
- Limited bar and foyer space due to construction interventions.
- No additional capital investment.

Meanwhile Use of Existing Sites (Gala Bingo Site or University Spaces)

The “Meanwhile Use” model presents an agile and adaptable response to the cultural continuity challenge during the Guildhall and Corn Exchange redevelopment. Rather than investing in new infrastructure, this approach leverages existing buildings across the city—such as the former Gala Bingo site or university-owned venues—that can be temporarily repurposed for cultural use.

This model prioritises speed of deployment, cost-efficiency, and flexibility, offering a pragmatic solution that maintains a visible cultural presence in the city centre without requiring significant capital expenditure.

While these sites may not meet the full technical standards of a permanent venue, they can provide adequate infrastructure for a varied programme of performances, talks, exhibitions, and community events.

Critically, the use of familiar or centrally located buildings allows for continued audience engagement, avoids reputational damage from a total programming blackout, and supports local economic activity. It could also enable collaboration with institutions such as the University of Cambridge, encouraging co-investment and shared use models. However, successful implementation depends on space availability, technical fit-out, licensing, and strong operational planning.

In a council-led meanwhile model, where the local authority is both leaseholder and operator (e.g. occupying the former Gala Bingo Hall and a university space), the council assumes full responsibility for all asset management costs and any agreed rent.

This includes:

- Utilities, insurance, business rates (subject to any exemptions), facilities management, and statutory compliance.
- Rent or licence fees, where applicable, negotiated with third-party owners or partners.
- Any shared costs associated with the use of university facilities (e.g. cleaning, security, utilities).

While this model ensures full control over operations and revenue, it also requires the council to allocate sufficient budget to cover all running costs and liabilities for the duration of the meanwhile use.

The assumptions adopted in the model have considered a venue like the Gala Bingo Hall therefore the overheads are higher than if the council 'rented' a space from the university.

The following section outlines the characteristics, strengths, and risks associated with this model, along with potential locations and considerations for implementation.

Characteristics:

- Utilises pre-existing structures/spaces for rapid deployment.
- Potentially minimal fit-out costs, relying heavily on existing infrastructure.

Strengths:

- Rapid activation of events, quickly maintaining city economic vibrancy.
- Operationally flexible, reducing long-term financial commitments.
- Cultural benefits from innovative programming in new spaces.

Risks:

- Venue availability and lease agreements could limit feasibility.
- Operational challenges from inadequate technical capabilities and licensing constraints.
- Economic risks if locations outside the city centre reduce overall visitor footfall.
- Cultural risks of fragmented audience loyalty and diluted branding.

Mitigating Actions:

- Early site assessments and contingency planning for licensing and technical enhancements.
- Strategic partnerships with institutions to ensure programming alignment and operational readiness.

Case Study: Leeds Playhouse – Meanwhile Use During Redevelopment

During its £15.8 million redevelopment (2018–2019), Leeds Playhouse proactively maintained cultural engagement by relocating parts of its programming to temporary city venues and satellite spaces. While the main building underwent phased refurbishment, Leeds Playhouse ensured continued visibility and community access.

LP Key Characteristics:

- Sites Used: Community halls, Leeds City Museum, Millennium Square, libraries, and other civic venues.

- Capacity: Varied across sites — 80 to 400 seats depending on venue scale and format.
- Programming: Local productions, youth theatre, touring work, educational and community events facilitated across decentralised spaces.
- Operational Model: Uses multiple venues in parallel to retain audience engagement and brand presence while the main venue was offline.

LP Strengths:

- Maintained audience engagement and brand recognition across the city.
- Expanded reach by activating neighbourhood and civic venues, drawing in new audiences.
- Flexibility of programming allowed adaptation to diverse site capacities and technical capabilities.

LP Risks & Limitations:

- Lower ticket revenue and reduced production scale compared to the permanent venue.
- Increased logistics and coordination across multiple sites and community partners.
- Maintaining consistent brand identity across varied presentation environments posed challenges.

Costs & Delivery Context:

Main Redevelopment Budget: £15.8 million (including new entrance, technical upgrades, foyer reconfiguration, and a new studio space).

Capital Contract Value: Approximately £13.4 million (some sources state £13.5 million or £16.8 million), with a construction cost of around £2,078/m² across a 6,450 m² footprint.

Relevance to Cambridge:

Demonstrates that meanwhile use across city sites can sustain cultural continuity and reach during major venues' closure.

In Cambridge, using spaces like the Gala Bingo site, university buildings, or community halls could replicate the model: spreading programming, maintaining visibility, and avoiding audience attrition.

Cost planning should include modest capital allocation for fit outs, licensing, and coordination, plus contingency for staff and production overhead.

Viability Statement

This model could, in theory, deliver high flexibility and low capital exposure, with strong potential for innovative, dispersed programming. It could offer good value if space availability aligns and operational standards can be met. Its viability is strongest when paired with effective branding, partnership working, and content curation to mitigate risks of audience fragmentation.

A scoping study could evaluate university venues (ADC Theatre, Newnham College Hall, etc.) for technical suitability and integration into city-wide branding.

The Gala Bingo Hall has been closed since 2009; the building has remained unoccupied for nearly 16 years. It suffers from structural issues: the façade is in poor condition, requiring regular safety inspections and glass block maintenance, and its roof is compromised in multiple areas. The cost of repurposing the venue, even if the current owners provided permission, is likely to render this model unviable.

See **Appendix 3**. Gala Bingo for details about the current condition of Gala Bingo Hall.

Model Assumptions

- Existing CX seated capacity. More detailed analysis of the capacity implications of a phased construction will be required if the council elects to explore this option further.
- Retained production & technical capability.
- Average of 80 performances a year due to intermittent & phased closure.
- Retained staffing structure.
- Limited bar and foyer space due to construction interventions.
- No additional capital investment.

Mothball – Closure without an Alternative Provision.

Although the Council recognises that closing the Guildhall and Corn Exchange during the refurbishment period without an alternative cultural asset would create a

significant gap in the city's cultural life, the cost of implementing an alternative provision, while potentially preferable, may ultimately prove prohibitive.

The absence of performance and event space would disrupt relationships with promoters, producers, and community hirers, risking the loss of established audiences and market share to competing venues in neighbouring areas.

The local economy would feel the impact through reduced visitor footfall, lower secondary spend in hospitality and retail, and diminished evening economy activity. Staff continuity would be difficult to maintain, with the potential loss of skilled and experienced personnel. Retaining the staff in preparation for the reopening comes at a considerable cost to the council without the mitigating impact of a temporary installation. **See Appendix 6.**

The city's profile as a cultural destination would weaken, and rebuilding momentum post-reopening would require substantial marketing investment, discounted hire terms, and a longer recovery period to return to pre-closure activity levels.

The commercial impact of the mobilisation and recovery period is set out in BHV V7 Financial Model June 25 V2. It should be noted that this model is predicated on adoption of the commercial transformation plan outlined in the supporting report to the V7 model.

Retention of key personnel in areas such as marketing, audience engagement, community activation, programming, and business development throughout the redevelopment period will be critical to sustaining momentum and confidence. By maintaining these core capabilities, the Council can ensure that relationships with audiences, communities, promoters, and stakeholders remain strong and active during the temporary closure.

This continuity will allow RAV to keep its cultural presence visible and relevant, creating opportunities for innovative engagement and interim programming that keep audiences connected and excited about the return. It also provides a platform to build anticipation for the reopening, strengthening the brand and positioning the venues for a successful relaunch.

Far from being a period of inactivity, this phase can be used strategically to grow loyalty, test new approaches, and broaden networks. With the right people in place, the redevelopment period becomes an opportunity to deepen community trust and lay the foundations for a vibrant, successful reopening

Cost Summary

The summary below sets out the projected cost to the Council associated with mobilising and operating each of the four business continuity models. This includes the anticipated capital investment required to deliver an alternative venue during the redevelopment period.

The summary covers forecasted income, staffing costs (refer to Page 4: Staffing Mobilisation Plan), overheads, and where applicable, capital investment, over a four-year period: Year 0 (mobilisation) followed by three years of trading. A separate summary of the net revenue impact over the three-year operational period (Years 0 – Y2), excluding capital costs, is also provided.

All financial assumptions are based on the Guildhall and Corn Exchange reopening as planned, and all other venues except the modular venue remaining closed. Full financial models are provided in **Appendix 5**.

CCQ Business Continuity

Cost Implication

Years 0-3 Summary	Meanwhile	Modular Venue	Phased	Temporary Venue	Mothball
Income	£944,369.91	£9,040,375.16	£2,323,905.00	£2,131,595.73	
Labour	£3,265,574.36	£5,729,159.19	£4,609,159.00	£3,809,562.06	
Overheads	£1,262,360.45	£1,294,178.45	£2,342,902.00	£1,294,178.45	
Profit/(Loss)	£3,583,564.89	£2,017,037.52	£4,628,156.00	£2,972,144.78	
Capital Costs	£1,000,000.00	£8,000,000.00	£0.00	£2,500,000.00	
Cashflow Surplus/(Deficit)	£4,583,564.89	£5,982,962.48	£4,628,156.00	£5,472,144.78	£6,240,147.75
0-2 Year Cost (exc. Capital)	£2,450,901.00	£1,777,334.00	£3,970,145.00	£2,032,946.00	£4,160,098.50

The modular venue model has been extended over a 30-year period to enable a full assessment of the long-term return on investment. For illustrative purposes, the £8 million capital investment has been depreciated over a 15-year period, although the realistic asset life span for this type of semi-permanent structure is 25-30 years providing a clearer view of annualised cost implications.

The assumption adopted in the detailed models based on current 24/25 commercial KPIs for the Guildhall and Corn Exchange, BHV's modelling (V7) and available data and industry intelligence.

As previously noted, these figures are high-level estimates. A more detailed analysis of the preferred model will be required to determine accurate cost planning and assess overall feasibility.

Conclusion

This Business Continuity Scenario Analysis sets out a compelling case for Cambridge City Council to act decisively in maintaining cultural provision during the redevelopment of the Corn Exchange and Guildhall. The analysis demonstrates that cultural continuity is not only possible—it is a strategic imperative aligned with Cambridge's broader ambitions for inclusive growth, civic pride, and cultural leadership.

Without intervention, the city faces a prolonged cultural void, risking significant audience disengagement, reduced economic activity, and reputational harm. In contrast, choosing to invest in an interim solution signals confidence, ambition, and a commitment to sustaining community cohesion and the city's cultural identity during a transformative period.

Cambridge is not alone in facing the challenges of major venue redevelopment—but it is uniquely positioned to become a **national exemplar in cultural resilience**. The Council has the opportunity to lead by example, demonstrating how innovation, creativity, and civic commitment can combine to sustain momentum and safeguard long-term value.

Of the four options explored:

- **The Low-Cost Temporary Venue** offers affordability and quick deployment but delivers limited return and cultural ambition.
- **Meanwhile Use of Existing Sites** is flexible and low cost, but heavily dependent on partner cooperation and space availability, with minimal legacy benefit.
- **Phased Construction Around Programming** offers continuity, but increases cost, operational complexity, and compromises the customer experience.

- **The High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue** emerges as the most strategic option. It offers high-quality cultural infrastructure, safeguards economic impact, retains audiences and staff, and creates a long-term legacy asset capable of supporting the city's wider cultural ecosystem.

This model directly supports Cambridge's goals around innovation-led growth, environmental sustainability, cultural inclusivity, and civic reputation. It aligns with national policy direction on place-based cultural investment and demonstrates that Cambridge can lead the way in designing the next generation of cultural infrastructure.

Recommendation

Cambridge City Council should prioritise the **High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue** as the preferred business continuity model. It offers the greatest opportunity to:

- Maintain cultural visibility and momentum during redevelopment.
- Deliver the highest economic impact and audience retention.
- Provide flexible, accessible infrastructure aligned with environmental goals.
- Leave a tangible legacy that enhances and complements the future Corn Exchange and Guildhall offer.

To move forward, further technical feasibility work, cross-departmental coordination, and early engagement with cultural and delivery partners will be essential. This report provides a strong foundation for that next phase.

By embracing bold, future-focused thinking, Cambridge can demonstrate what civic leadership looks like in the cultural sector—securing not only continuity but a platform for continued excellence and innovation.

Progressing the preferred option will require the active involvement of multiple Council departments, including Planning, Property, Legal, and Procurement — as well as input from external specialists such as modular venue designers, construction consultants, and cost managers.

Their expertise will be critical in shaping a deliverable, value-for-money solution aligned with the city's cultural and regeneration objectives.

Comparative Summary of Business Continuity Models

To support decision-making, the following traffic light matrix summarises the performance of each continuity option against key criteria: economic impact, operational feasibility, cultural continuity, and cost to the Council.

This high-level visual overview distills the relative strengths and limitations of each model at a glance.

Model	Economic Impact	Operational Feasibility	Cultural Continuity	Cost to Council
Low-Cost Temporary Venue	●	●	●	●
High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue	●	●	●	●
Phased Construction Model	●	●	●	●
Meanwhile Use of Existing Sites	●	●	●	●

Key:

- Strongly Positive
- Mixed / Moderate
- Weak or High Risk

Interpretation:

- **The High-Quality Legacy Modular Venue** scores highest in terms of economic and cultural impact but requires the greatest capital investment.
- **The Low-Cost Temporary Venue** is operationally simple and affordable but has limited return and cultural ambition.
- **Meanwhile Use** offers agility and low cost but requires a strong partnership working and lacks consistent quality control even if a venue can be secured.
- **The Phased Construction Model** offers balanced trade-offs but introduces complexity, logistical challenges, and long prelim costs.