

The New Victoria



We spoke recently with the Artistic Director of The New Victoria Limited, Helen Raw. Helen is part of a three woman team trying very hard to save the old Odeon building on South Clerk Street from the prospect of demolition or conversion to a hotel. The other two members of the team are Sarah Colquhoun and Vicki Simpson. The core team brings together years of expertise in hospitality, theatre design and restoration. They also have a wider team of volunteers all of whom share the common goal of opening the Odeon as a theatre again, under its old name The New Victoria. Their vision for the building is on their website which you can access [here](#).

At present the building is owned by Duddingston House Properties. On their website they explain that their goal for the property is to renovate it to form a hotel. They wrote in 2008 of their plans:-“The conversion and part demolition of the grade ‘B’ former Odeon Cinema on Clerk Street to create an ‘Arts’ Hotel re-branded ‘ZED’. A design led solution which retains as much of the existing building’s character and historic importance as is possible including the ‘Art Deco’ frontage, foyer and external shell of the auditorium. The result enhances and restores key elements of the building while introducing a commercially viable use in an innovative way.

The proposals envisage the retention of the listed auditorium but removal of internal cinemas to be replaced by bedroom accommodation round a central courtyard linking Clerk Street with Buccleuch Street. Studios, a gallery and a café surround the courtyard at ground level with public access from Buccleuch Street below a new striking infill block.

Work is due to commence on the building in 2009 following

selection of a hotel operator.”

Work has not yet commenced.

In the meantime [The New Victoria](#) has formed to try and buy the building and redevelop as a cinema. Their aim is as follows:-

“A vision of The New Victoria, a proposed multi arts venue for the iconic former Odeon cinema in Edinburgh’s Southside, has been released. The planned project would include space for film, theatre, arts and music, as well as a café and bar.”

When we talked with Helen Raw she explained:-“The project which we have outlined in our info sheet will cost around £6-7m from buying the building to opening it up in about 18 months time. This is a rough estimate at the moment until we can get access for our engineers.

We have different funding options available to us, which may mean changing the structure of the business. We may, for example, look at joining forces with a building preservation trust. The set up of the business depends on the way forward. If you want to get Lottery funding you need to be set up in one way, and for private funding we may need to be a different kind of organisation, whether it be a company or a trust.

But our success will not necessarily all depend on getting grant funding. There is a lot of politics around the fact that the sellers may not actually want to sell the building in the first place. Even if we had loads of money we might not be able to buy the building: it is all to do with planning permission. There is a ‘minded to grant’ in the planning system. If DHP get the planning permission that they want for a hotel then the building might of course be worth a lot more money. Historic Scotland have stepped in as it is a B listed building. They actually think it should be an A listed building but the listing cannot be changed while there is a planning application in the system.

One has to work out whether the owners really want to sell or are they just going through the motions to tick boxes. The marketing period for the possible sale of the building ends on 5th January.”

❌ So what will happen now? We will keep an eye on this story and let you know. In the meantime here is the info sheet referred to above. As always click Full Screen for the best view.

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