

Brunton Theatre will 'rise out the ashes' councillors promise

An East Lothian theatre will 'rise out of the ashes' if plans to demolish it go ahead, councillors today promised campaigners.

The Brunton Theatre, in Musselburgh, is to be formally mothballed more than a year after its doors were closed after the discovery of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in its roof panels.

But while East Lothian councillors agreed to start a public consultation process on a £3.6million demolition proposal after the cost of repairs was described as 'unaffordable', they insisted it was not the end for the site.

Council leader Norman Hampshire told a meeting of elected members "there will be a new theatre on the site some time in the future".

At the time of the meeting this morning more than 1600 people had signed an online petition demanding a new theatre is built in The Brunton's place if it has to be demolished.

Local ward councillors described the loss of The Brunton as 'heartbreaking' for the Musselburgh community and wider East Lothian.

Councillor Andy Forrest said: "For the people of Musselburgh this is a very emotive building and it has been at the heart

of the community since 1971.

“The loss of The Brunton will be devastating for everyone who knows it. We have to make sure a new theatre rises like a phoenix from the ashes.”

Councillors said they had been inundated with emails and calls from constituents across the county who were affected by the potential loss of The Brunton.

Many expressed their sadness at having to approve the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Lyn Jardine said: “For many people there will be a sense of grief at this loss. None of us want to make the decision we are having to make but The Brunton is a building of its era and decision made at the time it was built were also of that era.”

Councillor Lee-Anne Menzies asked for an amendment to be made to the recommendations put forward for approval to emphasise a commitment to bringing an arts venue back to the site as part of its regeneration which was unanimously supported.

And Musselburgh councillor Ruaridh Bennett asked that Scottish and UK Government ministers responsible for arts are written to asking for support in ensuring a theatre returns to Musselburgh, which was also backed by all councillors.

The report to councillors revealed the cost of completely refurbishing The Brunton had been estimated at £42.912m, with demolition and new build costing £50.742m.

They were also told the presence of asbestos in the roof space of the building made it dangerous to continue using the building which has continued to remain partially open with some council service spaces.

The Brunton Theatre Trust has continued to offer its programme of performances and events at other venues across East Lothian

since their main venue closed and this is expected to continue.

Councillors agreed unanimously to mothball the theatre building as soon as possible and launch a public consultation on demolition with a wider engagement to be launched looking at future options for the site.

A report on the outcome of the consultations will be brought back to council before a final decision on its future is made.

A full recording of the debate over The Brunton will be available to watch on eastlothian.public-i.tv following the conclusion of the meeting.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter