

Nearly 700 people sign a petition to save much-loved Brunton theatre

Nearly 700 people have signed a petition to save a town's much-loved theatre within 24 hours of it being launched.

The Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh, is described as the 'beating heart' of its community by campaigners battling to ensure it is not lost.

East Lothian Council meets tomorrow to decide the fate of the venue, which has been closed since March last year after reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) was discovered in its roof.

A report to councillors will warn that repairing the current building is 'unaffordable' and recommend it is demolished at a cost of £3.6million.

But the petition launched on the eve of the decision calls on councillors to promise to replace the theatre, if demolished, with a new venue on the same site.

It says: "The existing Brunton Halls has been the beating heart of arts and theatre in East Lothian for decades. It is where so many actors, dancers and musicians took their first steps on their performing journey. It is where countless children have enjoyed an annual visit to the pantomime.

"The significant economic impact for Musselburgh and the

surrounding area having a thriving theatre and arts centre cannot be underestimated.

“Investment in a new Brunton Theatre and Arts Centre will bring undoubted financial and economic benefit for businesses in Musselburgh and in East Lothian as a whole.”

The Brunton Trust, which runs the theatre, has continued its programme of events at alternative venues including Loretto School theatre, in Musselburgh, and Haddington Corn Exchange, since the closure.

The original theatre was opened by the late Queen Elizabeth in 1971.

The report to councillors says RAAC in the roof panels of the Brunton have been assessed and it is believed the cost of repairs to reopen it are too costly while leaving them are not an option.

It says: “Whilst safety arrangements have been put in place to mitigate the risk associated with these roof panels, there have been cases of sudden failure elsewhere in the UK.

“If the roof panels were to fail, there would be a significant risk of disruption to asbestos-containing materials below, with possible release of asbestos fibres into the air.

“Potential remediation of the RAAC at the Brunton Hall is unaffordable and the preferred option is to demolish the building at a cost of £3.6m.”

Councillor will be asked to decide the future of the theatre and, if demolition, is to be considered, approve a public consultation before a final decision is made.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter