

# **Significant new funding announced for Leith Theatre Trust**

**Leith Theatre Trust has been awarded the sum of £247,947 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund with a promise of more funding of up to £4.5 million to turn the empty theatre into a cultural venue firmly set in its community.**

The initial funding will be used for the theatre's Back to Life: the theatre that isn't just a theatre project to develop capital refurbishment plans – which will unlock the remainder of the funding.



L-R Co-producer of Restless Natives, Andy Paterson, Lynn Morrison, Chief Executive of Leith Theatre Trust, Bob Last, Chair of Leith Theatre Trust and Caroline Clark, Fund Director for Scotland at The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The beauty of the Grade B listed building is evident, even though it is rather decayed. Leith was added to the Theatres Trust register of theatres at risk for the ninth year, but the council has leased it to the Trust for 50 years in a recently announced deal. Based on the security of the lease the Trust can now make plans for the future. The building was saved from commercial development two decades ago by a group of local campaigners and the goal is to place it firmly at the heart of Leith life.

The 1932 theatre is impressive, outside more than inside at present, but it has great potential to be resurrected. In the past it has been an International Festival venue. In 2017 it was used as a venue for the Hidden Door Festival, the first time it had been used in thirty years. Artists such as Kae Tempest, Neneh Cherry, Gerry Cinnamon, Jarvis Cocker, Teenage Fanclub, The Fratellis, The Snuts and Young Fathers have all

appeared at the theatre in the years since – as has Broadway star of stage and screen, Alan Cumming, who used the stage as a launchpad for one of his crowd surfing moments.

During the pandemic Empty Kitchens, Full Hearts ran a kitchen operation from the Theatre and the Thomas Morton Hall producing around 1,000 meals a day for those in need.

And although the supergroup AC/DC is performing at Scottish Gas Murrayfield in summer 2025, they performed at Leith Theatre in the 1970s.

During the Commonwealth Games in 1970 the venue was used as a venue for the weight lifting tournament, and it has also hosted musicians such as Benjamin Britten and the Amadeus Quartet.

After damage during the Second World War, the building was closed. (The main auditorium has been closed for almost longer than it has been open during its lifetime.)

The newly announced funding package will allow plans for a significant refurbishment to proceed and the theatre might then open year-round for the first time since it was first opened in 1932.



Lynn Morrison CEO of Leith Theatre Trust  
Caroline Clark, The National Lottery Heritage Fund Director for Scotland said: "We are thrilled to be able to help make plans for a restored and revitalised Leith Theatre a reality. As a historic theatre with nearly a hundred years of stories, creativity and characters there is so much to celebrate and explore in its heritage. Thanks to National Lottery players, Leith Theatre Trust's plans for the future will be developed with the community ensuring this wonderful theatre has a bright future as a lively venue and as a place for local people to experience and be involved in the arts, culture and creativity."

Dr Lizzie Swarbrick who is a Heritage Fund committee member was very enthusiastic about the theatre and the award of funding. She said: "We have announced two tranches of funding – firstly just under £250,000 to develop the wonderful Leith Theatre. We have also put aside a total sum for the project of £4.5 million for this brilliant building and the wonderful community effort that is going on here."

“It is brilliant to know that we are doing our bit to keep building like this hale and hearty. We are so pleased at the National Lottery Heritage Fund to enable the theatre to come to life again.”

Lynn Morrison, Chief Executive from Leith Theatre Trust said: “We are delighted with this initial support from The National Lottery Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players we can continue to progress our strategic plans to revitalise and reimagine this beautiful heritage building. This is a significant milestone, and I am very proud of the team that has helped realise this ambition, which is one that I have been aiming for since appointment. It will be invigorating working in partnership with the Heritage Fund to develop and bring visibility of such an exciting lottery project to the heart of Leith.”

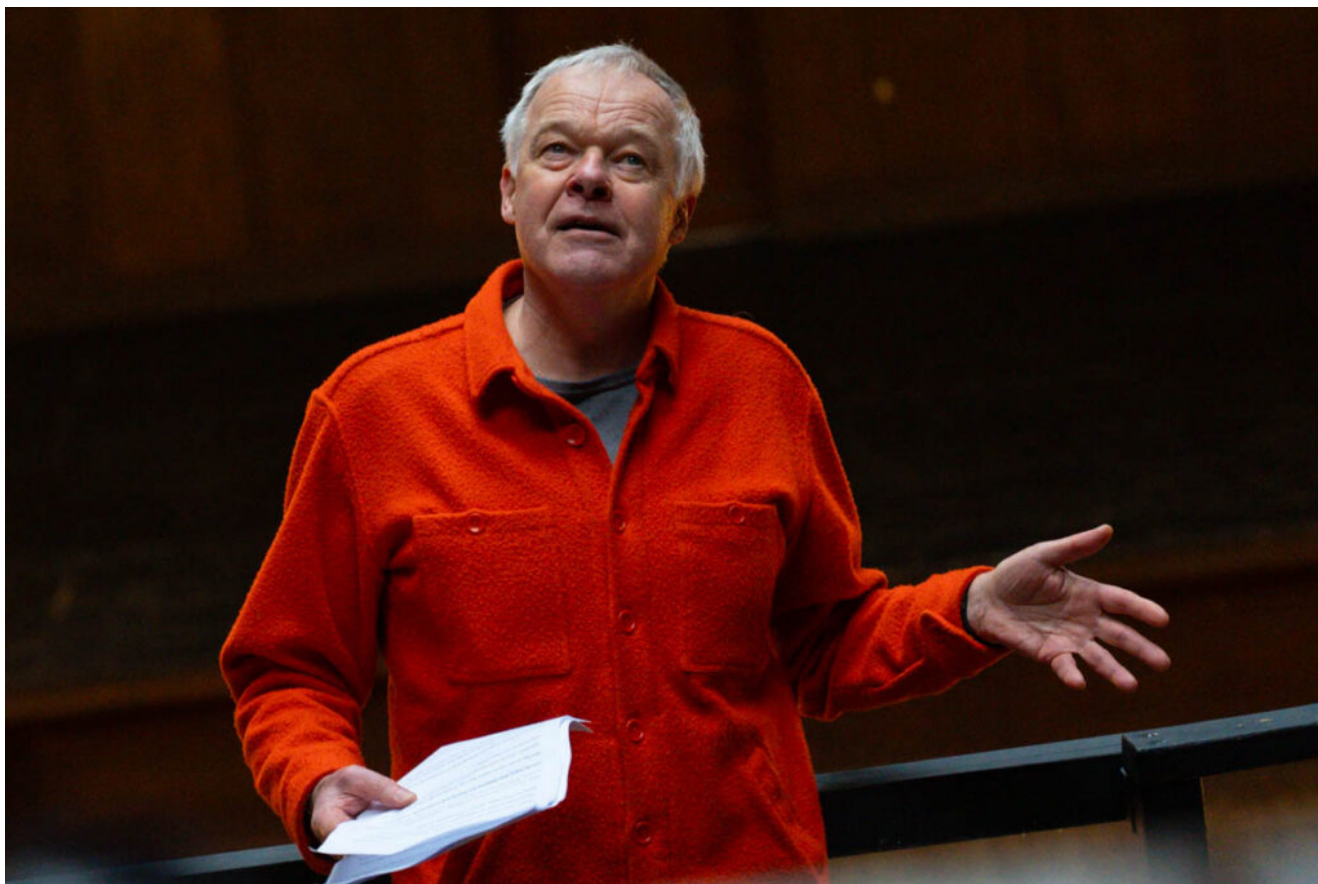
Bob Last, Chair of Leith Theatre Trust said he particularly wanted to thank The City of Edinburgh Council for their cooperation, for being accommodating and “committed to giving us the base on which to really rebuild the theatre”.

He also said that the National Lottery “vote of confidence” in the project played a crucial role in giving the Trust the leverage to get the 50-year lease over the line. Now they can fundraise for the ongoing restoration works and hope to celebrate with the producers of Trainspotting when it celebrates its 30th anniversary next year.

He said: “The award will accelerate our journey and will bring an opportunity for further investment because other investors can be confident of positive outcomes for the theatre in a way that even a year ago was less clear. In celebrating this moment we are not only standing on the shoulders of the original architect’s wonderful vision, and on the shoulders of the skilled labour that went into every detail of the complex but also standing with everyone who has enjoyed events at the theatre for more than 20 years.”



Tracy Gilbert, MP for Edinburgh North and Leith, said: “Having witnessed first hand the hard work and resilience of the team at Leith Theatre I am delighted with the news that they have received National Lottery Heritage Funding. This is an iconic venue in my constituency and I look forward to the upcoming shows in the summer months.”



Bob Last, Chair of Leith Theatre Trust

Leith Theatre recently disclosed that it will be the Edinburgh home of *Restless Natives: The Musical* 7 – 22 June 2025. The new stage version of the classic Scottish film will begin a three-month summer programme of theatre, music and film co-commissioned by Restless Natives’ producers, Andy Paterson and Wild Yak Productions, with the Leith Theatre Trust team. This collaboration will temporarily open the theatre on a pop-up basis between June and August 2025, giving a unique and exciting opportunity for audiences to visit the theatre and support their fundraising with a ticket heritage contribution. Co-producer Andy Paterson and writer Ninian Dunnett both attended the funding announcement in the theatre.



[Read more about Restless Natives here.](#)



Dr Lizzie Swarbrick of National Lottery Heritage Fund



Interior of Leith Theatre



L-R Lynn Morrison, Chief Executive of Leith Theatre Trust and Caroline Clark, Fund Director for Scotland at The National Lottery Heritage Fund.