

## Proposal for Warwick District Council – Motionhouse Creation and Rehearsal Space in Leamington Spa Town Hall

*"A truly exceptional organisation which reaches way beyond Leamington and inspires across the world. This iconic business is a huge asset to the town, and for many years it has added value to the perception of Leamington. Passionate about quality, and world class in its field, it is inspiring, creative, risk-taking and extraordinary."* Sarah Tremellen, Founder of Bravissimo.

There is an opportunity to develop a substantial, innovative partnership between leading UK dance-circus company Motionhouse and Warwick District Council, transforming the Assembly Room in Leamington Spa Town Hall into a creation and rehearsal space for the company and creating an important new creative space for the town.

Motionhouse has been a strategic partner of Warwick District Council for many years, funded as a Key Client. A closer relationship with Warwick District Council has developed more recently, with exciting plans for future collaboration and cooperation in progress. We have recently found out that we are being given notice on our creation space and are looking for a new permanent home. Having been based here for more than 30 years we really want to remain in Leamington, a town we consider our home and where we contribute so much to the cultural life.

This is an opportunity to consolidate and build on the partnership we already enjoy with Warwick District Council. It is extremely timely in light of the development of the creative framework and the creative quarter; animating a central public space, visibly housing a global arts company and celebrating Leamington as a nationally acknowledged creative hub. Placing Motionhouse at the physical and creative heart of the town would make the company's excellent work more visible and accessible, opening access to local residents, instilling pride in the local community, attracting more visitors to the town centre and potentially boosting the hospitality sector.

Our needs are specific: to make our world-class productions that tour the UK and the globe, we need a large space with high ceilings, and the Town Hall would accommodate these requirements perfectly. We frequently work on two or three productions at a time and as the demand for the company continues to grow and the dancer base increases, this full-time requirement for space is central to our capacity to be able to create globally acclaimed performances right here in Leamington Spa, to take to our audiences across the world.

The priorities of Motionhouse are aligned with those of Warwick District Council, and the partnership will enhance Leamington, bringing vibrancy to the Town Hall and transforming this important building into a creative focal point for the town. As a key Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation, Motionhouse has a vital role to play in the success of the new creative framework: the residence of a high profile, well respected, innovative company in a key council building will support the aim to attract other creative companies to the town and the district.

Founded in 1988, Motionhouse has always been based in Leamington Spa, making incredible dance-circus in the town and touring it extensively around the globe, accompanied by a wide-ranging programme of education for our local community. We sit at the heart of the town's cultural life and proudly carry the name of Leamington Spa around the world. Should we be forced to relocate, the town would lose one of its most important, highly visible creative companies, unique in the UK and globally lauded.

## An internationally significant company

*"For almost 30 years, Kevin Finnan has been making bold, highly physical dance theatre for Motionhouse. No one makes work even vaguely similar to Finnan's exciting absorbing blend of dance theatre, circus and technology. We often marvel at circus-based dance brought from far afield: but we have a remarkable company making dance-based circus right here, in Leamington Spa."*

Graham Watts, Dance Tabs, 2017

Motionhouse makes a lasting and important contribution to the UK arts scene, bringing new and exciting work to audiences across the UK, and exporting local work around the world. In addition to extensive touring in the UK, we take our work across the globe, and have performed in the US, China, Japan, Australia and Korea as well as regular touring throughout Europe, helping to put Leamington Spa and Warwick District Council on the international arts map.

We are the UK's 'go to' company for major outdoor commissions, celebrated for our expertise and renowned for our ambitious experimentation with performance environments and for the creation of large-scale celebratory events. Commissions have featured pyrotechnics, flying bicycles, boats suspended from cranes, giant sandcastles, hot air balloons and a life-size ocean liner. Our Artistic Director, Kevin Finnan was Choreographer and Movement Director of the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games and to date has also been commissioned to make three European Capital of Culture celebrations.

We are renowned for the success of our business model, responding to opportunities and always finding new ways to reach new audiences with our work.

- We are a rare example of a non-London based successful and long-lasting arts organisation.
- We take high calibre work made in Leamington Spa to audiences across the globe.
- We offer inspiring opportunities for children and young people in our hometown of Leamington spa and across the district and region.
- We have delivered globally significant events as part of the London 2012 celebrations and have made extraordinary work for 3 European Capital of Culture celebrations to date.
- We act as a 'magnet' for dance talent in the UK, offering full time or long-term contracts to our dancers who then settle in the area.
- We offer employment to 30 people, 18 of whom live in Warwick District, contributing to the local economy.

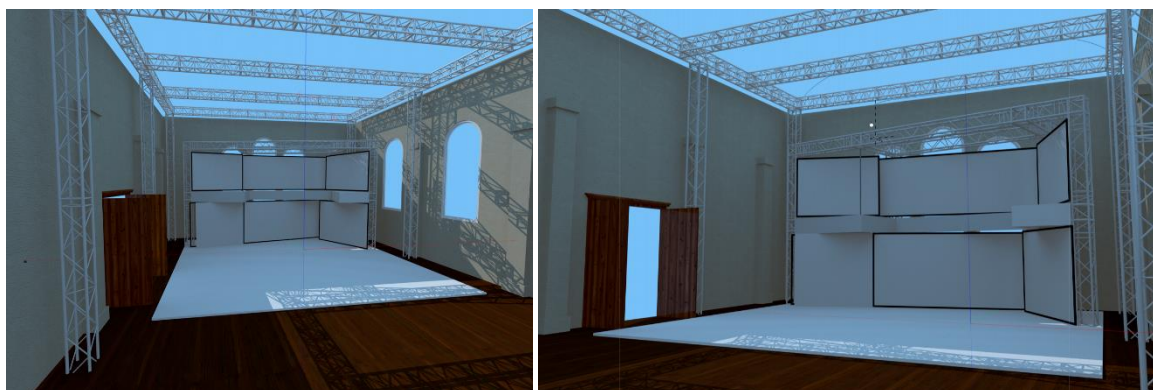
## A new creative home

As a key Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation in the district, in the last two years we have delivered a step change in our operation through increased staffing, volume of touring, audience numbers, profile, new commissions and the reach of our education programme. During this period, our turnover has increased by over 30% and an increase in Arts Council funding has allowed us to lever in significant new investment. We have so far matched the increase in Arts Council funding through increased earned income, made possible through our investment in capacity.

To continue to build on the artistic and business success of Motionhouse, we need to find a new home urgently. Without a rehearsal space, we cannot deliver our programme. The first tour of our next production Nobody has 61 performances booked, with more being added every day. Opening in August but given notice to leave Vitsoe at the end of May, we will be unable to complete rehearsals to prepare for this tour.

Renowned for extraordinary integration of digital and live performance, we secured capital investment from the Arts Council to create a 'black box' space within Vitsoe to develop this strand of our work. We therefore need to replicate this environment in a new home – which we hope we can find without leaving Leamington. This Arts Council investment means we come equipped with much of the infrastructure needed to transform the Assembly Room into a flexible 'black box' for rehearsals,

development of digital integration in live work, technical experimentation and training, sharing of work by ourselves and local community and wider use within the local cultural portfolio. With the benefit of the installation of equipment and a special flooring (all of which is non-permanent and would not have an impact on the fabric of the building), the Assembly Room will make an ideal space for us to work in: it is large, with high ceilings – our two main requirements. But more than its physical characteristics, the space has the major advantage of bringing us into the town. It is a place where we can share our work and our creativity with local residents. A place at the heart of the town.



*Renders of our equipment in the Assembly Room*

Our partnership with Vitsoe has been nationally lauded and we see this as an opportunity for an equally celebrated partnership with our district council. We levered a huge amount of PR around the Vitsoe partnership including a major Arts Council case study and range of other media coverage. This will be another bold and unique partnership and we would anticipate a joint media campaign with Warwick District Council to celebrate it. As other authorities cut their support for the arts, Warwick District Council would be seen to be leading the way.

We also see the partnership as an opportunity to attract inward investment, leveraging national and international support and stimulating our individual giving programme, the majority of which comes from local residents.

Stimulating and supporting creative sector growth, continuing to have a key creative organisation at the heart of the district will have a ripple effect, changing artists' and creatives' perception of the area, attracting people to relocate and helping to establish Leamington as a creative hub. A visible new home in the Town Hall will be a visionary partnership and provide a creative heart to the town, inspiring the development of others.

The jointly branded Warwick District Council and Motionhouse space will offer multiple opportunities to engage with the company's work:

- A visible cultural hub in the heart of the town centre
- A versatile black box creation and performance space
- Creation of all Motionhouse's touring work, with access to our process through open rehearsals for the local community
- Showing of new work to local residents, creating regular events and 'sneak peek' opportunities
- Showcasing the work of our youth and community groups
- Schools experience days – a day in the life of a professional company
- Community classes and workshops – to complement our thriving programme in our Spencer Yard studio
- Professional training for professionals and young dancers from the national dance sector – a national dance-circus training centre in Leamington Spa
- Regular events attended by national and international partners (Arts Council England, universities, businesses, politicians, venue partners from the UK and Europe, international artists, cultural influencers)

- Work placements and trainee opportunities
- Career days
- Teacher training
- Aerial classes and intensives
- University courses – we have partnerships with Coventry and Warwick Universities
- Creating access to the space for other groups, with an agreed amount of days per annum for community use (classes, use of black box, talks and events, etc.)



*Motionhouse creation space in the Vitsoe building*

## Motionhouse and the local community

Our presence in the town creates employment and has an impact on the local economy. We employ 18 people who live in Warwick District, plus 12 other people who live outside the district but within the county, and currently also have 4 apprentices who are resident in Leamington Spa. In the coming year, we will be increasing our dancer base by 6, and we have plans to expand the team further in the long-term.

Motionhouse Gross Added Value is currently £909k net gain for the district, which would mean an equivalent loss if we had to leave the area. (Multiplier and GVA per head used in this calculation are sourced from the Office of National Statistics and are specific to Warwick District and the creative sector.) The economic loss to the town should the company have to leave would therefore be considerable.

In addition to being a good local employer which invests in the skills and development of our staff, we also offer work placements, shadowing opportunities and apprenticeships as well as wide range of skills development and training opportunities for the national dance sector.

We offer a ladder of opportunity for residents through our community programme, with many of our Motionhouse Youth participants going on to undertake professional dance training. Our apprentices (we offer apprenticeships each year) have all gone on to secure paid work in the sector.

Although we could have been tempted to move to London, where there is a concentration of arts organisations and activities, remaining here has always been one of our priorities. We believe that people across all areas of the UK should have access to the arts. We take every possible opportunity to perform our work locally: our tours usually open at Warwick Arts Centre and we have always delivered a range of performances in Leamington and Warwick each year.

Working with young people and local schools has always been an important part of our ethos and we have worked in virtually every school in Leamington and Warwick, offering intensive developmental projects which benefit the children and offer training to staff. Giving young people the opportunity to enjoy and experience dance and movement and to develop their creative potential is at the core of our ethos.

We offer regular term-time classes and holiday intensives for children aged 8-18, with new classes starting in the new year for people over 60 and children from as young as 2 years old with their families. Classes are suitable for all abilities and take place in our studio in Spencer Yard, Leamington Spa. Young people have the chance to explore our style, learn new dance skills and make up their own moves. Classes are informal, energetic and fun and open to anyone with an interest in dance, no matter what level of experience. A new creation space in the Town Hall would enable us to further develop our offer for families and young people from the local area.



*Young dancers attend a training course with Motionhouse dancers at Vitsoe*



*Young people have a Q&A with Motionhouse dancers after watching rehearsals*

Motionhouse is keenly supported by the local business sector. Executive Director of the company Louise Richards was voted Business Person of the year in 2015 and Motionhouse was also selected as the Judges' Choice in the same year as 'Leamington Business of the Year'. In 2017, we were awarded Highly Commended in the Charity of the Year category, and Louise is now a judge for these awards. In 2015, Motionhouse was awarded the Pride of Warwick 2015 award. Louise regularly speaks at business meetings and major national events.

## In conclusion

The development of a creation and rehearsal space for Motionhouse in the Town Hall will provide a central and visible home for Motionhouse, showcasing one of the town's creative success stories and supporting Leamington's role as a creative hub in the region. We see this not only as an incredible opportunity for Motionhouse, but as a ground-breaking partnership with Warwick District Council and an opportunity for residents from the district to benefit through regular access to our programme, insights into the creative process, showings of work, training and education opportunities. The partnership would make excellent use of the Town Hall, benefitting the town's residents by creating a welcoming creative space at the heart of the town. Our presence in the town centre would give local residents ownership of one of the town's most creative companies. It would:

- Enhance the area's image, helping to attract skilled people and business investment.
- Establish Warwick District Council as a creative and cultural centre.
- Offer residents access to a global quality dance-circus company through a participatory programme for all ages and abilities, (supporting enhanced resident health through the recognised effects of dance and benefits for mental and physical health).
- Attract highly skilled artists and performers to relocate.



## Why arts and culture matter

There is growing evidence that art and culture has a positive impact on society: participation in the arts can contribute to social cohesion, reduce social exclusion and isolation, and make communities feel safer and stronger. Children and young people from low-income families who take part in arts activities are three times more likely to get a degree than those who do not<sup>1</sup>, with evidence that 'the arts can improve a young person's cognitive abilities by up to 17%, and contribute to raising young people's attainment in Maths and English – particularly for children from low-income backgrounds.'<sup>2</sup> The All-party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Well-being Inquiry concluded in 2017 that the arts can help keep us well, aid recovery, and support longer lives, better lived.<sup>3</sup> The 2018 Taking Part survey<sup>4</sup> showed that children whose parents were of higher socio-economic status attended arts events when growing up much more than those who were disadvantaged. Those from black and minority ethnic groups were also less likely to have been encouraged to participate in arts events. The survey identified a number of reasons why engaging with the arts as a child has an impact on adult engagement including familiarity with the experience of participating and attending arts events and being comfortable and welcome in arts environments. The importance and benefits of engaging with children and young people with the arts is further supported by the Young People's Cultural Journey's report produced by Arts Connect which found that the development of passions starts early<sup>5</sup>.

We believe that arts engagement is a powerful means of communication as well as self-expression with participation in the arts having a strong capacity for helping build both self-esteem and empathy, as stated by the Arts Council England's Be Creative Be Well report. The arts have a measurable impact on individual health and well-being with dance in particular encouraging young people to be physically active, which is vital in light of the an obesity crisis.



*Motionhouse dancers perform touring production Charge*

<sup>1</sup> *The Value of Arts & Culture to People and Society, Arts Council England 2011*

<sup>2</sup> *Key Research Findings: the case for cultural learning, CLA 2017*

<sup>3</sup> *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Art, Health and Wellbeing, 2017 (National Alliance for Arts, Health & Wellbeing, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Arts& Humanities Research Council, Kings College London Royal Society for Public Health and Guys & St Thomas Charity)*

<sup>4</sup> *Taking Part survey, UK Government 2018*

<sup>5</sup> *Young People's Cultural Journeys, Arts Connect, June 2018*