

## **Report to Leader of the Council**

**Subject:** Reopening of Bonington Theatre

**Date:** 1 July 2020

**Author:** Acting Chief Executive

### **Wards Affected**

All

### **Purpose**

To seek authorisation from the Leader to reopen the Bonington Theatre for cinema use only with effect from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 in line with government guidance.

### **Key Decision**

This is a key decision as it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the borough.

### **Recommendation(s)**

**THAT the Leader of the Council:**

- 1) Authorises the reopening of the Bonington Theatre from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 as detailed in this report.**
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director responsible for Leisure Services to authorise any operational measures necessary to facilitate the reopening of this facility.**

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 On 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the decision was taken to close the Bonington Theatre to the public as a result of government guidance and regulation in respect of social distancing and to ensure the health and safety of staff and the public.

- 1.2 The government has announced that from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020, there will be some relaxation to the rules around social distancing and the opening of certain facilities. Whilst theatres cannot reopen for live performances in front of a live audience, cinemas are able to reopen from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020.
- 1.3 On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020 the UK cinema association produced guidance in respect of the safe reopening of cinemas. This guidance has been produced in consultation with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).
- 1.4 The guidance covers appropriate risk assessment, and suggested appropriate controls to be put in place to protect customers visiting the cinema to ensure social distancing is maintained and limit the risk of transmission of Covid-19. This guidance has been considered by Leisure staff and it is considered that a number of measures would be necessary to ensure a safe reopening of the cinema including:
- Customers will have to book tickets in advance, no on the door sales
  - The capacity within the cinema may be reduced to enable social distancing and sufficient gaps between seats.
  - Face coverings will be encouraged to those attending the cinema
  - There will be additional cleaning of the cinema seats, toilets, handrails, door handles, lift buttons and touch points between showings
  - Hand sanitising stations will be set up at the cinema at appropriate entry and exit points.
  - There will be a one way system in place for customers entering and leaving the cinema.
- 1.5 In addition to the auditorium there is also a bar area within the theatre for customer use. The government has announced that from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 bars can reopen provided government guidance is followed to limit transmission of Covid-19. The guidance issued to support pubs reopening sets out a range of measures for pubs and restaurants to deploy where possible to become Covid-19 secure for staff and customers and advises that detailed risk assessments are essential when considering reopening of pubs. Some of the measures suggested in the guidance for reopening pubs include:

- Keeping records of customers visiting pubs for 21 days in order to assist the NHS track and trace service
- Limit capacity to ensure seating can be arranged in line with social distancing of 2 metres or 1 metre with mitigation.
- Staggering entry times to avoid queues or capacity issues
- Managing the entry of customers for example through reservations systems.
- Encouraging customers to use hand sanitisers or handwashing facilities as they enter the venue
- Providing clear guidance on social distancing and hygiene as people arrive on the premises with signs and visual aids

Reducing the number of surfaces touched by staff and customers for example the bar area, and encouraging customers to remain at tables where possible.

- 1.6 Reopening the bar area has been considered and it is considered safe to do so for evening cinema showings. Bookings for the cinema are taken before hand and so numbers within the bar area can be controlled. Risk assessments have been conducted and appropriate measures, in line with guidance can be taken to ensure capacity is limited and social distancing maintained.

## **2 Proposal**

- 2.1 It is proposed, in line with government measures that the Bonington Theatre reopen from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 initially as a cinema. The bar facilities will be available prior to evening screenings only observing government guidance on the reopening of bars published on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 and operational measures will be taken to ensure the health and safety of staff and those visiting the cinema as detailed above.
- 2.2 It is proposed that a delegation is given to the Director responsible for Leisure Services to make any operational decisions necessary to ensure the safe reopening of the facility including any limits or changes to capacity should they be necessary.

## **3 Alternative Options**

- 3.1 The Theatre could remain closed entirely until live performances are permitted, however, there is an opportunity to offer the cinema service to the public safely and in accordance with guidance. As such, in order to resume this service and provide the public with some recreational activity it

is considered appropriate to reopen as a cinema until full service can be safely resumed and government permit the reopening of theatres for live performances.

#### **4 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Staff and building costs have continued to be incurred during the closure period, although some staff have been re-allocated to other cost centres.
- 4.2 Although potentially operating at a limited capacity, well within social distancing guidance, cinema activity has the potential to earn income and contribute towards running costs on opening.
- 4.3 Ticket prices will remain at 2019/20 levels; film costs are directly related to box office income (currently between 25% - 40% or less).
- 4.4 With a carefully planned increase of capacity throughout the remainder of 2020/21, initial financial forecasts indicate the potential to earn £120,000 box office income, against an original budget, pre Covid 19, of £143,000.

#### **5 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The government has permitted the reopening of cinemas from 4<sup>th</sup> July. Any reopening should be done following risk assessment and ensuring appropriate safety measures are taken to protect residents and staff.
- 5.2 Where personal data is taken from customers, the Council need to ensure that the data is taken in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data protection Act 2018. Customers will need to be advised that their data will be held for the purposes of supporting the NHS track and trace service if applicable, as well as to facilitate any booking. Privacy notices will be updated to reflect the capture of data. Further government guidance is anticipated in respect of data collection for track and trace and further legal advice will be given when necessary.

#### **6 Equalities Implications**

##### **6.1 Access – to the venue**

Those potential customers exhibiting Covid 19 symptoms have been asked not to attend. The reopening of the facility may pose a greater risk to those within the protected characteristics of age and disability who are at greater risk if infected by Covid-19, although measures taken within the facility are to limit the risk of transmission.

##### **Access – to tickets**

In observing social distancing guidance, ticket sales will be limited to online or by telephone, bookings in advance. This may affect a small proportion of the cinema's potential audience who prefer to have face-to-face contact at the box office and use cash such as those within the categories of age and disability.

### **Access – for patrons with mobility issues**

There is a lift available which will be limited to one family group at a time, providing access to the first floor where the auditorium is located.

There is full access to the auditorium. The number of seats available will be adjusted to reflect those seated in a wheelchair, with appropriate social distancing.

Access to the toilet for patrons with disabilities is limited to that available at the entrance to the swimming pool changing rooms.

## **7 Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications**

- 7.1 There is a limited impact in relation to sustainability and carbon reduction. Opening the cinema is likely to result in an increase in cars travelling to the theatres to view performances.

## **8 Appendices**

- 8.1 None

## **9 Background Papers**

- 9.1 <https://www.cinemauk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CINEMAS-keeping-workers-and-customers-safe-during-COVID-19-JUNE-2020-V1.0.pdf>
- 9.2 Government guidance in relation to reopening pubs at:  
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb96e8e86650c278b077616/Keeping-workers-and-customers-safe-during-covid-19-restaurants-pubs-bars-takeaways-230620.pdf>

## **10 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 10.1 To enable the reopening of the Bonington Theatre initially as a cinema, to give residents the opportunity to visit and use the facility for recreational purposes.

- 10.2 To ensure that any re-opening is undertaken in a way that is safe and to ensure any operational decisions can be taken quickly without overburdening the Executive.

**Statutory Officer approval**

**Approved by:** Tina Adams  
**Date:** 1/7/20  
**On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer**

**Approved by:** Francesca Whyley  
**Date:** 1/7/20  
**On behalf of the Monitoring Officer**