ELECTRIC PALACE
HARWICH

Invitation to Tender

Strategic Review and Business Development Framework: Electric Palace Harwich

Background

The Electric Palace, Harwich, is one of the oldest purpose-built cinemas in the United Kingdom and operates as both a heritage asset and a community cinema venue.

Between 2018 and 2022 the organisation completed a major programme of roof restoration works to secure the future of the historic building. The organisation is currently delivering a National Lottery Heritage Fund-supported archive and heritage engagement project.

The organisation operates through a charitable structure responsible for the stewardship of the historic building and heritage objectives, alongside trading activities associated with cinema screenings, events and venue use.

The Electric Palace is largely volunteer-led. Paid staffing is currently limited to project-specific roles and a part-time cinema manager responsible for film programming.

The Board of Trustees recognises that the organisation has significant unrealised potential as a heritage attraction, cinema, cultural venue and community asset. To achieve this potential, the organisation wishes to commission external consultancy support to review current operations, governance and business activity and to develop a practical framework for future growth and resilience.

Purpose of the Commission

The purpose of this commission is to provide an evidence-based assessment of the current organisation and to produce a practical development framework that will enable the Electric Palace to:

- Improve organisational resilience
- Increase earned income
- Strengthen governance and decision-making
- Clarify operational responsibilities
- Better integration of charitable, heritage and trading activities
- Increase participation, audience engagement and community impact
- Identify opportunities for future staffing and capacity building
- Create a clear roadmap for sustainable growth

The Board is seeking a pragmatic and implementable approach rather than a purely theoretical business plan.

Strategic Context

The commission should be informed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage 2033 Investment Principles, particularly:

Saving Heritage

Ensuring the long-term stewardship, relevance and sustainability of the Electric Palace as a nationally significant historic cinema.

Inclusion, Access and Participation

Increasing opportunities for people to engage with the building, its stories, collections and activities, and identifying opportunities to broaden audiences and participation.

Organisational Sustainability

Building the organisational capacity, governance structures, staffing model, volunteer base and income generation required to secure the future of the organisation.

Protecting the Environment

Considering opportunities to improve environmental sustainability and responsible operation of the historic building where appropriate.

Objectives

The appointed consultant will:

1. Review the Current Organisation

Assess:

- Governance structures
- Trustee responsibilities and capacity
- Volunteer roles and responsibilities
- Existing operational arrangements
- Relationships between charity and trading activities
- Current decision-making processes

2. Assess Current Business Activity

Review:

- Cinema operations
- Venue hire activity
- Heritage and visitor activity
- Community use
- Existing income streams
- Financial performance and sustainability

3. Identify Future Opportunities

Identify realistic opportunities to:

- Increase earned income
- Develop new audiences
- Increase venue utilisation
- Improve visitor experience
- Build strategic partnerships
- Secure future investment

4. Develop an Organisational Roadmap

Produce recommendations for:

- Future staffing requirements
- Volunteer management and support
- Governance improvements
- Operational structures
- Commercial development
- Phased organisational growth

5. Scope of Work

Consultants should propose an appropriate methodology which may include:

- Review of existing documentation
- Trustee interviews
- Volunteer consultation
- Stakeholder engagement
- Operational observation
- Benchmarking against comparable heritage and cultural venues
- Financial review
- Workshops with trustees and volunteers

Consultants may recommend alternative approaches where appropriate.

Required Outputs

The final commission should include:

Strategic Review Report

Including:

- Current position assessment

- SWOT analysis
- Key organisational challenges
- Opportunities for development

Governance and Organisational Review

Including:

- Governance recommendations
- Organisational structure recommendations
- Clarification of trustee, volunteer and operational responsibilities

Business Development Framework

Including:

- Income generation opportunities
- Priority business development actions
- Audience and market opportunities
- Commercial development recommendations

Financial Sustainability Framework

Including:

- Potential income diversification opportunities
- Resource implications of future growth
- Recommendations for achieving greater financial resilience

Risk and Performance Framework

Including:

- Strategic risk assessment
- Key performance indicators
- Monitoring and evaluation recommendations
- Measures of organisational success

Implementation Roadmap

Including:

- Short-term actions (0–12 months)
- Medium-term actions (1–3 years)
- Longer-term aspirations (3–5 years)
- Resource requirements
- Staffing recommendations

Budget

The available budget for this commission is up to £10,000 inclusive of consultant fees and expenses.

Recognising the budget limitations, consultants are encouraged to propose:

- A full commission within the available budget; or
- Modular options that allow individual elements of work to be commissioned separately

Consultant Requirements

The successful consultant should demonstrate experience in:

- Heritage sector business planning
- Organisational development
- Charity governance
- Cultural venue management
- Volunteer-led organisations
- National Lottery Heritage Fund projects
- Income generation and commercial development

Experience working with independent cinemas, theatres, heritage attractions or community cultural venues will be advantageous.

Tender Submission

Consultants should provide:

1. Understanding of the brief
2. Proposed methodology
3. Project timetable
4. Details of relevant experience
5. Examples of comparable commissions
6. Project team biographies
7. Breakdown of costs
8. Proposed modular options (where relevant)

Indicative Timetable

Submission Deadline: 31st of July 2026

Appointment: 1st September 2026, or before.

Project Completion: February 2027

Evaluation Criteria

Submissions will be evaluated against:

Criteria	Weighting
Understanding of the brief	20%
Relevant experience	25%
Quality of methodology	25%
Deliverability within budget	20%
Added value and innovation	10%

The Board wishes to appoint a consultant who can act as both a critical friend and strategic advisor, helping the Electric Palace identify a realistic pathway from its current volunteer-led model towards a resilient, financially sustainable and integrated heritage and cultural organisation.

The commission should provide a practical roadmap for achieving this ambition over the next three to five years.

For further information please contact:

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