

An outline proposal from a representative of the Sarah Thorne Theatre for consideration by Council at the meeting of 26 October 2026

As KCC Adult Education vacated the Hilderstone site it became clear that the property was to be added to the KCC Asset Disposals programme. Sarah Thorne Theatre CIC engaged with the Theatres Trust to ascertain what level of protection could be given to the site via The Theatres Trust Act 1976. Protection was assured following the Theatres Trust letter of 16th May 2025.

KCC was then forced to issue a lease to protect Sarah Thorne as a sitting tenant. However the lease was only for a five year period, which in fundraising terms is useless, particularly for capital expenditure and redevelopment. KCC refused to issue a longer lease and entered the site for auction with the protections and caveats in place. Unsurprisingly, the site failed to sell at auction as the necessary protections placed a severe limit on its private development potential. At this point 1 private individual stepped in to buy the site, giving Sarah Thorne CIC time to restructure and take it on.

Work to achieve this had hardly begun when there was an opportunity to engage with TDC to apply for Pride in Place funding for the Broadstairs area, and this led to a provisional acceptance for £50,000 worth of capital funding, which is fundamentally to be spent on improving and/or providing community facilities in buildings which may have rundown.

As part of the theatre plot there is a disused stable area which had been used as a pottery. KCC closed it down when they started the rundown of their own Adult Education courses on this site.

Sarah Thorne had already been assisting Tanya Curran in establishing Coastal Community Learning, who use the theatre facilities on weekdays, along side Hilderstone College for a variety of adult education courses and they have proved extremely popular, and particularly assist with lonely people who value this type of social interaction with others.

All of this fits with the objectives of the Pride in Place funding, and potentially provides a source of ongoing income to support the complimentary activities of Sarah Thorne CIC.

Thus Sarah Thorne have been working with Tidal Architects to produce plans for the restoration of this site together with an extension to house pottery kilns and also improve the rear garden area into a more modern facility. It is intended to sub lease this part of the building to Coastal Community Learning to enlarge their operation. A planning application has now been submitted to this effect.

In addition Sarah Thorne has instructed solicitors to change the lease to a 25 year full repairing lease and the landlord has agreed to undertake this change, which will be completed in tandem with the planning decision timescale.

Current cost estimates of this work are around £140,000 for full restoration to a working pottery for the start of the new term in September 2027.

Pride in Place can provide £50,000, which must be committed before the end of the current financial year. We are applying to a separate Trust for the payment of architect fees; and have an offer of an interest free loan from a potential donor of £50,000. Allowing for some contingency, this leaves us some £40,000 short for this opportunity to happen.

Pride in Place funding also hopes it can assist applicants in unlocking other funds to contribute to their projects. Work is scheduled to begin in January - subject to planning permissions already submitted - and complete in the early autumn of 2027; so any commitment can be for the new financial year 2027-28.

The planning application decision window ends in early December 2026.

Ongoing works are in hand to improve facilities at the site including repainting, new windows, stage equipment and a complete re-vamp of the heating system.

Sarah Thorne Theatre will continue its popular programme of events since it was founded in 2007.

Sarah Thorne Theatre CIC now politely requests the Broadstairs Town Council consider a grant of £40,000 to complete this project to add to the community facilities in our town. This project provides both a renewed building for community use, and support for two community projects which will enrich the community life of our town.