

The Redhill Harlequin Theatre bows out for 5 years.

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It could take another five years before the Redhill's Harlequin Theatre reopens after dangerous crumbly concrete forced its closure.

The popular theatre and cinema space in the heart of the town centre welcomed up to 120,000 people a year through its doors before it suddenly shut when reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, which can collapse without warning, was discovered in September 2023.

Now it appears it will potentially remain closed until 2030 while Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, which owns the theatre, carries out the £10m safety refurbishment work.

Council leader Richard Biggs told the January overview and scrutiny committee: "I understand the strong feeling and interest in resolving this situation at the Harlequin.

"I think we can all agree that none of us wanted to be in this situation but the safety risks associated with RAAC are paramount.

"The critical red nature of the RAAC panels means that this is going to take some time to resolve."

He added: "Optimistically two to three years, possibly up to five years to get it back.

"I don't think that's changed from the conversations that we've had so far but we need to get further down the road and then we can start putting proper dates on things."

The Harlequin Theatre is regarded as a key cultural venue in Redhill and acts as a hub for cultural and social activities.

It's closure has forced the council to look at providing alternate venues but early pledges to find a 500 seater venue have so far proved fruitless.

Cllr Biggs has still not ruled out the possibility of a larger venue being found but feels it is more likely that the arts community will have to settle for something less than half that size.

He said: "The likelihood at the moment is that we haven't found a suitable arrangement for something of that size and costs.

"If we've got to spend the money I want to spend it straight on getting the Harlequin back up and running."

He added: "I have said consistently that at the moment, we haven't found any suitable temporary venues.

"We have to consider the cost. I know people think that there's a money tree somewhere, there isn't.

"My priority is to get the Harlequin back up and running, particularly because of our lease obligations but partly because I genuinely believe that it's a huge asset to Redhill and for the borough and for the wider area.

"There are lots of reasons for getting it back up and running as quick as possible and I want to make sure that we are concentrating on the right thing."

He did not rule out the possibility of finding a larger site but added that there is a need for a variety of spaces.

In 2023 they sold about 69,000 tickets at the Harlequin's box office with a further 5,000 sold via alternate sites.

On average the Harlequin Theatre cafe welcomed a further 40 people per day and about 2,400 a year.

The productions would bring a further 6,000 people to the site and room hires an additional 10,000 each year.

Room hires included local churches and the NHS for café Milk and baby weigh-ins.

The council said it is looking for a mix of sites to fulfil these roles as well as audition spaces and performance venues.

The council leader invited interested groups who may have suitable sites to come forward with options but stressed that he did not wish to distract from his main priority of finishing the Harlequin project.

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