

£3 Million New All Weather Indoor Adventure Sports Attraction Proposed for Bournemouth Pier

Openwide International, managers and operators of Bournemouth Pier, is submitting a change of use planning application on 26th May 2011 for the redevelopment of the Pier Theatre into all weather, indoor adventure sports attraction.

The development will consist of a number of indoor adventure sporting activities including a standing wave surfing attraction, climbing walls, a bouldering wall and an indoor high ropes course. Openwide's plans also include new changing rooms, retail, food and drink areas and an improved foyer area.

Steve Cutbush, MD of Openwide explains how the proposed development would draw visitors to the area; "This major new facility will work alongside similar outdoor activities by creating a year round attraction for visitors and local residents alike. The outdoor element would offer plenty of activities during the summer months and the indoor facilities would mean the pier can offer an all weather attraction to people of all ages. "

"The estimated investment to achieve the total scheme is in the region of £3million," he added.

The proposal sets out to enhance the Pier and make use of a redundant space by creating an all weather attraction. The planning application meets the objectives of Bournemouth Borough Council's District Wide Local Development Plan, and is granted work towards an economically sustainable future for the town's much loved pier.

Steve explained; "We have worked hard to make sure the highest standards of design are adopted in this scheme and ensure it retains the structural integrity of the original building. There are few material planning implications as much of the work is 'like for like' replacement or internal alterations, whilst the structure of the building remains mostly in its current form and capable of being refitted to its current use in the future."

As part of the proposed scheme the current fairground rides and games will be replaced by modern attractions such as an outdoor standing wave, a high ropes course with a child friendly safety 'belay' system, and additional climbing facilities and games, which together will provide entertainment for all the family.

Other attractions may include Palm Tree Climbing, DIGIWall, Rolling Wall and Bouldering Rock

Steve added; “The scheme aims to encourage active participation and sporting fun and introduce children and new users to fitness activities in a fun and entertaining format. We also want to provide experienced users and local residents with training facilities, and become a social hub to the local community.”

Openwide International have consulted with other local business and trade organisations in the Bournemouth area and have received significant support and encouragement for the additional visitation the scheme will drive to the area.

Rory Holburn, Commercial and Operations director for Openwide, said; “This is a first in the UK, not only is it the first standing wave to be placed on a pier but it is the first multi activity attraction combing a wide range of adventure sports in an offer designed to appeal to the day out family market.”

He added “The development of the Theatre building into an adventure sports facility provides just such an attraction that celebrates the beach and seaside purchase intent behind a visit to the seaside. By bringing outdoor sports inside the Theatre building and providing a surf training opportunity alongside climbing, high ropes and bouldering in an all weather environment visitors to Bournemouth can be guaranteed a seaside experience matched to the demands of the market in all weather conditions.”

If granted the new development would be a major new attraction to Bournemouth’s seafront and would increase visitors to the Pier whilst at the same time offering the local community, in particularly schools, a great new facility.

All weather attractions support the local tourist economy both by providing a reason to visit and by providing an option for day visitors and overnight visitors when the weather reduces or removes the appeal of Bournemouth’s main tourist assets, its beaches.

Steve, concluded; “We understand and appreciate the pier is a much- loved and iconic local landmark and it is very much with this in mind that we need to develop this attraction to give the Pier a sustainable future.”

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Note to editors:

Background information

Pier Theatre

The Pier Theatre building should form an integral part of the tourism and visitor offer within Bournemouth and over the years its primary objective has been to provide an indoor entertainment attraction to visitors to Bournemouth, mostly throughout the summer season and most especially on rainy days experienced in the normal British summer.

Theatre provision within Bournemouth is exceedingly well covered in such venues as the 1600 seat Pavilion Theatre and the 3,400 seat Bournemouth International Conference Centre, both located within 400 meters of the Pier Theatre.

Additional venues within an easy half-hour drive time include the 665 seat Lighthouse Theatre in Poole with an annual attendance of over 200,000 and significant funding from both Poole Borough Council and the arts Council.

In addition to these main venues numerous other live performance spaces compete for business around the Bournemouth:

- 2500 capacity Purbeck Hall – BIC
- 2500 capacity Solent Hall – BIC
- 1000 capacity Ballroom – Pavilion Theatre
- 2000 capacity 02 Academy – Old Opera House
- 483 seat Tivoli Hall - Wimbourne
- 450 seat Regent Centre- Christchurch

Plus numerous live music and comedy venues including The Old Fire House, Mr. Kipps, The Centre Stage Comedy Club and Jagers Comedy Club.

Bournemouth is over provisioned for theatre and live performance with multiple competing venues placing each others viability at risk and driving up the costs to the public purse to subsidise the main venues at the Pavilion Theatre and the BIC. The Pier Theatre was, until 2004, managed by the Pavilion Theatre management team but was regarded by them at the time as superfluous to their needs and a distraction to their core purpose of providing a community theatre for the residents of Bournemouth and the surrounding area. In 2005 the Pier Theatre was passed over to the management control of the Seafront Services with an estimated subsidy of £60,000, to run as a seasonal offer targeted at the traditional seaside tourism market for a 15 week summer season and remained closed the rest of the year.

In 2006 Openwide International assumed management control of the theatre, with no public subsidy and have made repeated attempts to develop a sustainable market and business model for the Pier theatre and have incurred losses of over £300,000 in supporting the provision of live entertainment in a bid to attract an audience to the theatre, however the tourist market has moved on. On April 11th 2007 new European regulation governing the working hours of coach drivers and the use of digital tachographs removed the ability of drivers to add “in resort” trips to their schedules and destroyed a large percentage of the over night live show market. The tourist market now demands other forms of entertainment and, combined with the excessive extent of local competition from alternative venues supported by subsidies from the local Council and Arts Council, the commercial viability of the Pier Theatre has been rendered completely unrealisable.

The Pier Theatre does not receive any public funding and must look to commercially viable operations to maintain both its accessibility to the general public and its structural integrity. The Pier is primarily a tourist attraction and must adapt its offer to the demands of the tourist market if it is to become a sustainable operation. The

demand for active and participative forms of entertainment has superseded the long past demand for a live show as a part of the day out or overnight stay.

The provision of live entertainment, in all its forms, is well catered for by the Pavilion Theatre and the BIC within 400 meters of the pier theatre and more than satisfies the demand of the local and resident markets. Current occupancy levels within the Pavilion Theatre & BIC are at 71% having dropped from 77% in 2006/07, demonstrating both plentiful spare capacity to meet any enhanced demand and the overall decline in the demand for live performance in the area.

In 2010 the Pavilion Theatre sold 204,767 tickets compared to the 16,600 sold by the Pier Theatre. With the Pavilion Theatre having 29% capacity still available these 16,000 seats would require only 8% of the spare capacity and were any of these sales to transfer from the Pier Theatre to the Pavilion Theatre they would represent a significant economic gain for the Pavilion Theatre and thus the public purse. This economic gain would be disproportionately positive for the Pavilion Theatre as they would incur no additional overhead costs for the benefit of these additional patrons with a potential for an additional £249,000 of income if all 16600 patrons transferred at an average ticket cost of £15.00. If these same patrons are serviced via the Pier theatre the overhead costs of running this second venue result in a loss.

The Requirement for Indoor / All Weather Attractions

It is a stated objective of Bournemouth Borough council to invest in “All Weather Family Attractions” as stated in the Bournemouth Borough Councils Corporate Plan 2010/11:

http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/Council/Best_Value/CorporatePlan200809.asp