



OUTCOME 1 – THE CIVIC AND CULTURAL HEART

The quarter core as the enduring home for the arts, culture, entertainment and civic life, creating a unique destination experience.

While the Aotea Quarter boasts an impressive array of performing arts venues and cultural institutions, there is more work that can be done to help deliver a living, breathing, arts precinct, with vibrancy, creativity and design excellence. The quarter core, defined as the zone within the Mayoral Drive arc and including the Auckland Art Gallery, Toi O Tamaki has been the home to civic, arts, cultural and entertainment activities for well over 100 years. This role has recently been reaffirmed through strategies including the Aotea Quarter Plan 2007 and CCMP 2012. Internationally, investing in the creative and cultural industries has proven to bring significant economic and social benefits. Cities around the world are investing in their creative and cultural resources, knowledge, talent and diversity to spur innovation and generate wealth (Auckland as a Creative City Report, Committee for Auckland, 2014).

The Auckland Arts and Culture Strategic Action Plan Toi Whītiki identifies and supports the quarter as a premier arts and culture area.

Recent investment since the Aotea Quarter Plan and Action Plan (2010-2015) includes the upgrade of Aotea Square (2010) and the underground Civic Car Park, the award-winning redevelopment of Auckland Art Gallery (2011) and development of the Q Theatre (2011). The Basement Theatre has also had a significant upgrade over the last few years. This investment is set to continue with the joint council and privately funded refurbishment of the St James Theatre now underway.

Creating a unique destination

The future of the quarter core lies in the hands of a number of stakeholders, with Regional Facilities Auckland (RFA) being a key stakeholder in the quarter. RFA owns, programmes and manages more than \$1 billion worth of major regional facilities and landmark venues across the city. RFA's purpose (and passion) is to enrich and enhance life in Auckland by engaging people in the arts, environment, sports and events through their programmes, facilities and events.

Over a million people a year experience these venues, as well as the Quarter surrounds. This section celebrates each of the venues, facilities and organisations that influence the success of the quarter's heart, and offers ideas and opportunities for a more people-focused civic, arts and cultural quarter.

AUCKLAND ART GALLERY - TOI O TĀMAKI

Heralded in 1888 as "the first permanent Art Gallery in the Dominion", Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki remains the largest art institution in New Zealand, with a collection numbering over more than 15,600 works in its collection. These include major holdings of New Zealand historic, modern and contemporary art, and outstanding works by Māori and Pacific Island artists, as well as international painting, sculpture and print collections ranging in date from the 11th century to the present day.

The Gallery's 2011 restoration and expansion united the building with neighbouring Albert Park to present new opportunities for interaction between inside and out. The refurbishment and extensive redevelopment project completed in 2011 has won 24 awards, including the 2013 World Building of the Year at the prestigious World Architecture Festival in Singapore.

During 2012-14 both Upper and Lower Kharoum Place were upgraded to better tie Auckland Art Gallery into the neighbouring street network, specifically Lorne Street. Opportunities include the ability to strengthen the relationship across Wellesley Street between the Auckland Art Gallery, the Central City Library and the recently reopened St James Theatre.

The gallery provides visitors with fresh ways to think about art and participate in creativity. With multiple exhibition spaces spreading across three levels of the award-winning building, it is the largest and most inspiring visual arts experience in Aotearoa New Zealand. The collection includes major holdings of New Zealand historic, modern and contemporary art. The collection includes major holdings of New Zealand historic, modern and contemporary art, alongside outstanding works by Māori and Pacific artists, and significant international painting, sculpture and print.

As the fastest growing city in Australasia, Auckland has strong Māori and Pacific populations, as well as an expanding Asian demographic. In this context, the gallery plays a vital role as an inclusive hub for creativity for the city's diverse communities.



AOTEA CENTRE

The Aotea Centre was the product of a post-war urban intention to create a new civic centre and square for Auckland, in the spirit of the age. The outcome was a horizontally scaled building or 'hull' that functions to some extent as a 'building as landscape'.

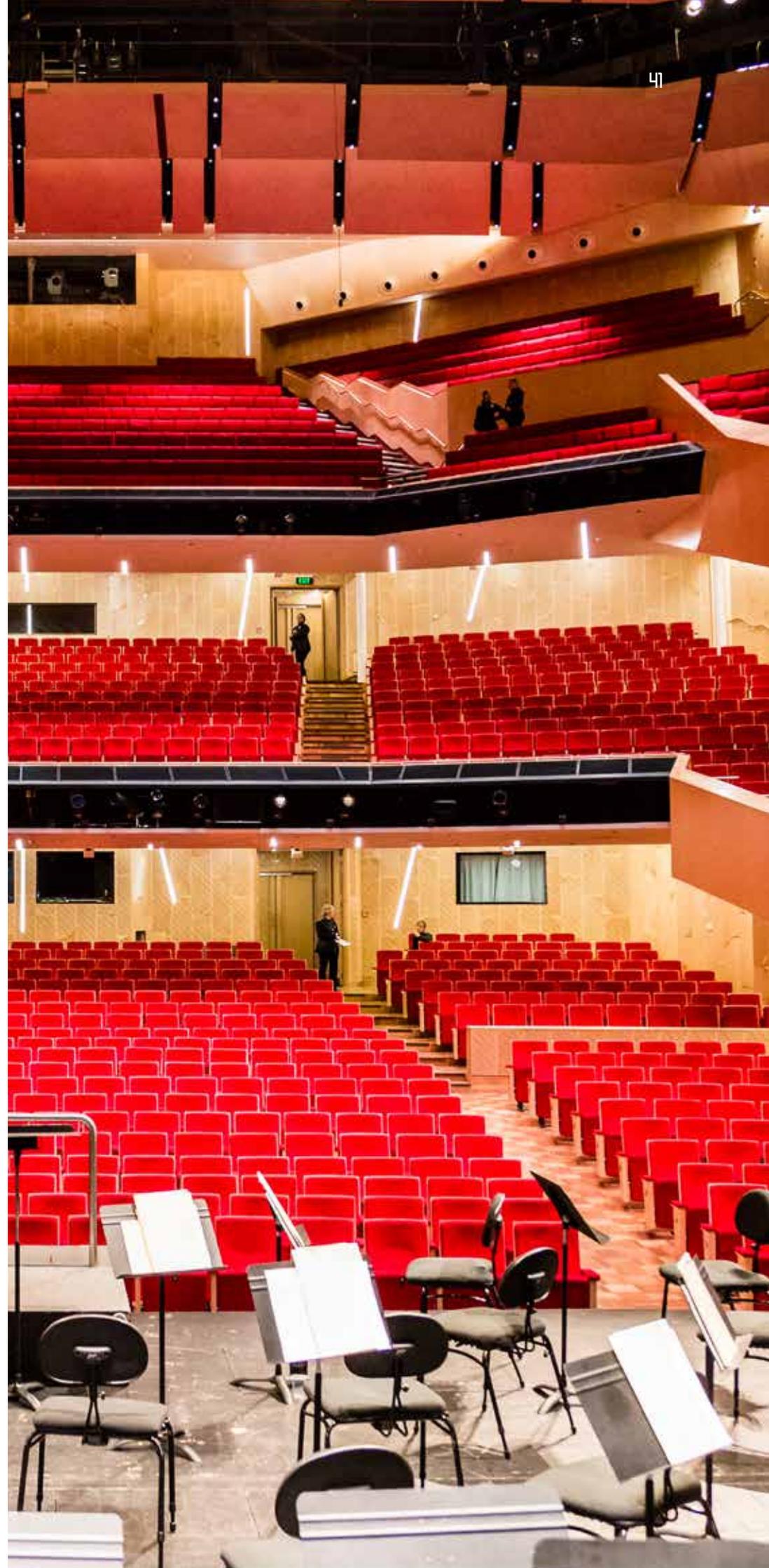
Facilities include foyers, gallery spaces and function rooms, the 2256-seat ASB Auditorium and the much smaller 186-seat Herald Theatre, which is mainly used by small independent theatre companies.

The relatively recent upgrade to the lower terrace fronting Aotea Square, including the new steps, extended canopy and the Box café, has significantly improved this edge and the level of activity near the square.

RFA is in the early stages of planning a significant redevelopment of the Aotea Centre and surrounding land. The centre is 25 years old and in need of exterior refurbishment. The foyers too are dated and need an upgrade, including more sustainable equipment and fittings.

The land behind the centre was always considered as a space for an Aotea Stage II development. RFA is proposing a series of studio spaces, practice rooms and offices as a base for a range of performing arts companies.

One criticism of the original building is that it lacks urban scale and fails to seamlessly transition the change in level from Mayoral Drive and Aotea Square. The opportunity exists to add terraces down from Mayoral Drive, with bars and restaurants and/or accessible green roofs so people can use the exterior.





AOTEA SQUARE

At 4500m² Aotea Square is the largest hard-paved public space in the city centre. Officially opened in 1979 by Sir Dove-Myer Robinson, the square is used for open-air concerts, gatherings and political rallies as well as a series of staged and managed events.

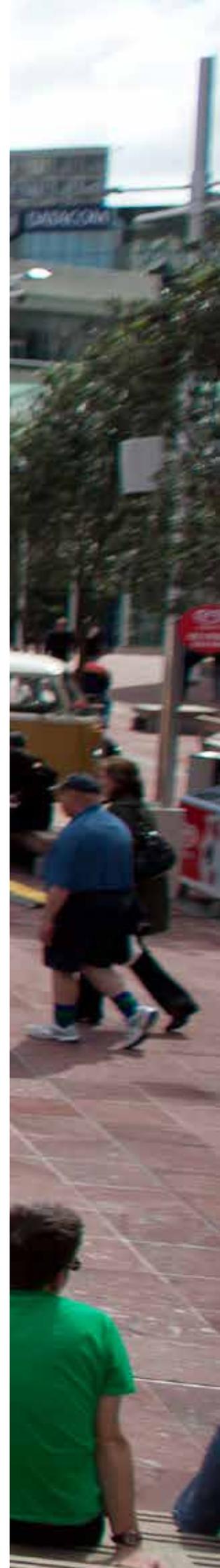
Recently there have been upgrades to the building edges defining the square, such as the Box café fronting the Aotea Centre, and new retail tenancies on the southern side of Sky World (previously the Metro Centre) offering a degree of activity along the boundaries. However, the southern edge still lacks definition and activity, to the detriment of natural orientation and safety.

A strong theme drawn from the framework's engagement process was to balance hosting programmed events with enabling local cultural groups, art students and independent performance collectives to showcase their work in this civic (community) environment.

"Sometimes the square feels too privatised. If you don't have the bucks to pay for it, you're excluded".

- Community focus group member.

RFA and other council departments are looking at stronger coordination of the events and activity providers that use Aotea Square and nearby spaces such as Khartoum Place, South Town Hall and shared spaces.



THE CIVIC THEATRE

The Civic Theatre, one of the world's few remaining 'atmospheric theatres', was built in 1929 and designed as a movie palace for talking pictures ('talkies'). A restoration in late 1990s provided the opportunity to convert to live theatre and upgrade to modern movie technology. As a result The Civic Theatre has become an immensely popular venue for major touring shows and musicals, while once again providing Auckland's most unique cinema experience.

An opportunity exists to add pedestrian space outside The Civic's main entrance, on the corner of Queen and Wellesley streets, creating a more user-friendly and important civic corner.



TOWN HALL

The Auckland Town Hall is a prominent civic landmark in the neo-Baroque style. As a Category A scheduled heritage building it takes pride of place on the apex corner of Queen Street and the original alignment of Greys Avenue.

With the purchase of the tower at 135 Albert Street as the headquarters for Auckland Council, some of the administrative functions of the Town Hall have been relocated. However, the council continues to use the chambers and many meeting rooms. Feedback suggests that a greater civic presence in the building would be desirable to heighten 'civicness' in the quarter core.

The Town Hall is currently used for citizenship ceremonies for the central area, as well as providing a premier events space for showcasing arts and culture, including concerts by the Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra and NZ Opera along with other New Zealand performers and a wide variety of international shows and performances. The two main events spaces are the Great Hall and the concert chamber.



CENTRAL CITY LIBRARY

With well over a million visitors per year, the Auckland Council-owned and operated Central City Library, fronting Lorne Street, is an asset used by city centre residents, students, Aucklanders and visitors from New Zealand and overseas.

Sitting between the Aotea and learning quarters, it is cut off from the main pedestrian flow from arts-related activity in the core of the quarter. Built in 1972, the building has been remodelled over the years and continues to face challenges in adapting to the expectations of a 21st-century library, while proving costly to maintain.

The natural orientation between Aotea Square and the library could be better, as could the pedestrian crossing across Wellesley Street to connect to the Art Gallery and other visual and contemporary galleries. The St James suite apartments will affect the existing building in terms of light, user experience and shade, but there are great opportunities for collaboration, activation and improvements to the Lorne Street shared space.

A strategic review is required to consider how the building could provide central library services in the future, including:

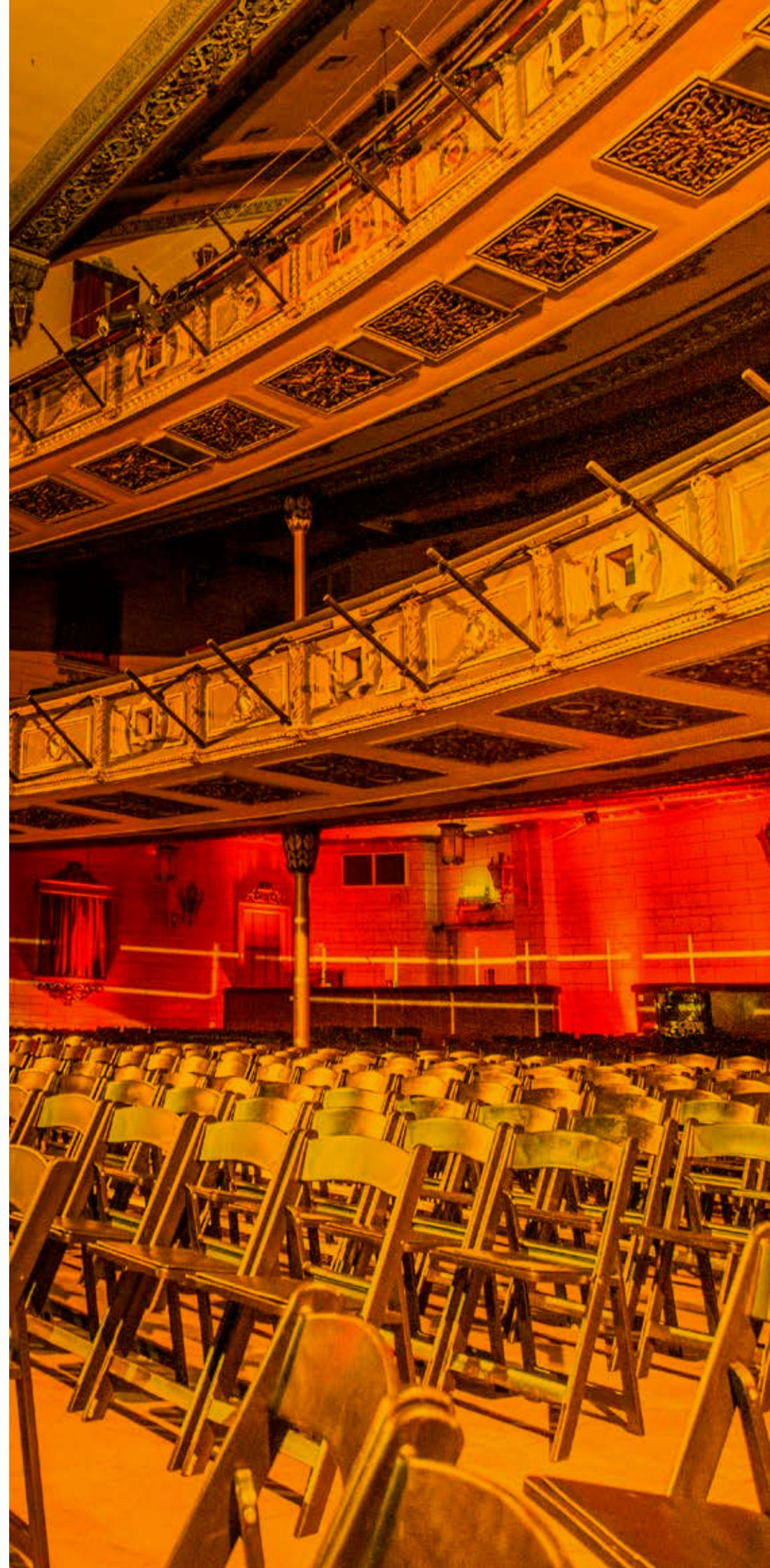
- how the role of central city libraries has changed in 40 years
- how it can adapt to changing research and customer expectations in the digital age
- improved flexibility and catering to the growth of inner-city residents and students
- a strategic asset-planning approach to understand the investment required to ensure the building is well maintained and adequate to protect the unique collections in our care (estimated value \$150 million) for future generations
- how the central library contributes within the larger library network of locations and services.



ST JAMES THEATRE

With a welcoming entrance on Queen Street and a through-site link to Lorne Street, the restored St James Theatre, alongside the Civic Theatre, re-establishes the entertainment node as Auckland's theatre-land. The new café in the grand foyer is surrounded by beautiful frescos (currently being refurbished), and has a spiral staircase, high ceilings and soft mood lighting.

Six prime retail tenancies are also being created either side of the St James entrance along Queen Street, ranging from 65m² to over 1000m². Many of the 308 luxury apartments in the new 42-level tower to be built above have already been sold, with 195 basement car parks accessed off Lorne Street. The apartment component of the project is expected to be complete by mid-2018.



Q THEATRE AND THE BASEMENT

Since its celebrated opening in 2011, Q Theatre has attracted an annual ticketed audience of over 90,000 visitors through the doors. Q's range of unique and flexible spaces showcase a full spectrum of contemporary music, theatre, dance and comedy. Citizen Q, the popular bar, café and restaurant, is continually booked out, demonstrating the demand for quality food and beverage, especially in the evening. Q Theatre is a two time winner of the EVANZ (Entertainment Venues Association NZ) winner of 'best venue under 1000 seats', receiving the award in 2013 and 2014.

Adjacent to Q, facing the car park, is the Basement Theatre, which was voted best theatre by Metro magazine in 2014. The Basement proudly showcases the best new voices and fresh perspectives, with world premieres making up over half their programme.

Both Q and The Basement theatres, as well as the NZ Comedy Trust (Comedy Festival), have noted the absence of space for rehearsal. The co-location of the arts can strengthen the arts offer, leading to the development of shared resources and fostering new ideas. The Power House in Auckland's sister city of Brisbane is a successful model.

"At the moment you have all these venues in close proximity to one another, and yet for whatever reasons, they do feel miles away. I was talking to someone the other day who regularly goes to Q Theatre but didn't know where The Basement was. How is that possible? Anything that can be done to integrate these creative spaces is going to be good for Auckland."

Sam Snedden, Basement Theatre

A new building on the south-western corner of Mayoral Drive and Greys Avenue could invigorate this underperforming site. A plaza or courtyard at the rear could become a mecca for outdoor performances and pop-up arts events. A projector on the Mayoral Park underpass portal facing the new back of the Q Theatre façade (south-facing) could also be used for a visual media exhibition. Using the plaza (which could be known as Waihorotiu Square) as a multi-functional space for festivals, flanked by evening bars and late-night cafes, would also boost the perception of safety after 9pm.

The venues have convened an arts quarter group, which includes staff from RFA's Auckland Live, Q and the Basement, looking at ways to work together and share knowledge, resources and expertise. A well-connected approach is essential for all the arts stakeholders to work together and share benefits and efficiencies.



PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Strong public feedback emphasised the need for a creative, coordinated and accessible information hub, to share what is on throughout the quarter. A significant opportunity exists to showcase the wider diversity of events, including those from the adjacent arts-student population (such as AUT's Co-Lab), the library, the Waitematā Youth Collective and #Claimthecity, and independent art galleries and performance venues.

Natural orientation throughout the quarter is also a key issue. How to find all the destinations (including less visible ones such as the art galleries and makers' spaces, independent theatres, AUT's venues), activities and amenities requires a joint wayfinding project between all the arts-related stakeholders.

There is an opportunity to better showcase the full extent of arts and cultural activities, for instance via an information hub, interactive signage (especially for accessible routes) and natural sequences that build on walking connections.

Safety was also a key concern for the public. While Aotea Square and Myers Park are popular during the day, there is little activity at their edges to provide a feeling of comfort and safety in the evening. Over time, new development or redevelopment could continue to give more attention to active edges and a mix of uses, encouraging natural surveillance and a flourishing evening economy as well.

In April and May 2015 Auckland Council's Public Life Survey revealed a lack of opportunities for people to dwell and stay in open spaces after 6pm, unless attending a show. This is even more noticeable after 9pm. The survey also noted reasonably high numbers of rough sleepers.

FRAMEWORK RESPONSE

The Implementation Plan chapter contains a number of projects and initiatives that deliver on this outcome. Three key moves identified through the Framework that build on the previous Aotea Quarter Action Plan and support current investment plans are:

1. Development of a virtual and potentially physical hub that will provide information on activities/events occurring in the quarter, showcase cultural stories and perhaps reveal city plans (e.g. an architectural centre) reinforcing the core as the regional centre for arts, culture, entertainment and civic activity.
2. Development and delivery of a placemaking/place activation strategy for the quarter as a means of enhancing the destination offer and better projecting the quarters identity regionally as well as nationally and internationally.
3. Improvements to the library and its surrounds to ensure it remains relevant as a public resource and is better connected to the wider quarter core with, for example, the corners of the building opened up to address Wellesley Street and Rutland Streets, a formal footpath along the eastern edge of the library (alongside Mayoral Drive) and improved pedestrian crossing across Wellesley Street.

