

Dame Norma Redfearn DBE  
North Tyneside Council  
Quadrant  
The Silverlink North  
Cobalt Business Park  
NE27 0BY

22 March 2023

Dear Mayor Redfearn,

**RE: The Exchange theatre, North Shields**

I am the Regional Official for Equity for the North East Yorkshire and Humberside. Equity is the trade union for professional performers in the entertainment industry, representing over 47,000 members who are actors, stage managers, dancers, singers, directors and a huge variety of other roles.

I am writing to express my dismay at the news that The Exchange theatre, run by The Exchange theatre charity, is to close its doors to performers and the local community as a result of your decision to grant a long-term lease to a new commercial operator.

This decision has already attracted much negative comment on social media and local press attention as members of the community are disappointed to see the work of The Exchange going.

We understand that the charity was unsuccessful in its bid to win the long-term lease of the building and that North Tyneside Council have opted for a commercial company, Stonebanks Properties Ltd.

It is clear that this is purely a commercial decision and does not represent a real investment in the cultural value to the local community.

We also understand that the rapid decision has left the theatre charity unable to reach any agreement with the new owners about continued offering of work. Such a decision will have a massive impact on the arts and cultural work available to the local community.

In the absence of support from your council, the theatre has announced that it will close its doors on 17 April, less than a month's time.

This is a shocking failure of leadership by the North Tyneside Council.

We appreciate that the council is seeking commercial investments, but this should proceed on the basis that a venue offering real cultural value is maintained or at least supported in finding an alternative place, or even better, properly supported to work within a commercial setting.

You and the council have the power and indeed the responsibility, to ensure the cultural work on offer is supported and enhanced rather than shut down.

This decision is particularly difficult to accept in light of the regeneration of the North Shields Cultural Quarter. According to the NTCA website:

**'The heart of the Cultural Quarter will be the cluster of buildings at the crossroads of Howard Street and Saville Street including The Exchange, the Globe Gallery, the Business Centre (Saville Exchange), and the North Shields Customer First Centre. The funding will see the development of work and performance space, shared facilities, business support and a brand for the Cultural Quarter.'**

The focus of North Tyneside Council seems to be on buildings rather than enhancing the cultural value on offer.

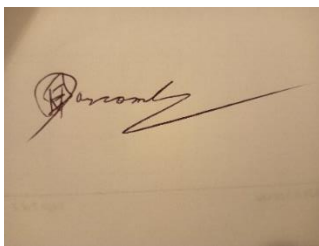
This is simply wrong. We know that when arts and culture is diminished there is a long lasting impact on local communities.

We are calling on you to consult with The Exchange theatre charity about a sensible way to proceed in addressing this matter, either through ensuring that they and the work they do for the local community is supported and able to continue in the current space or viable alternatives are found for their work to continue and support provided to them.

We are also keen to secure commitment from you that all work taking place at The Exchange and cultural venues across North Shields will operate under agreed trade union agreements.

I look forward to hearing from you to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored piece of paper. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Dominic Bascombe'.

**Dominic Bascombe**

**Regional Official**

**North East, Yorkshire and Humberside**