



BE PART OF SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY



New Forest Open Air Theatre

**Connecting people with world-class theatre,
nature and each other**

Set within the stunning landscape of the New Forest, New Forest Open Air Theatre brings together exceptional cultural experiences, environmental responsibility and human connection.

This proposal invites you to help create a magical woodland theatre — a place of beauty, imagination and wellbeing, enjoyed by generations to come.

We are honoured to count among our patrons Sir Mark Rylance, the renowned actor and former Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe; Academy Award-winning actress Dame Judi Dench; acclaimed actor Sir Derek Jacobi; cultural icon Sir Lenny Henry alongside New Forest residents Dan Snow, historian and broadcaster; Geraldine Somerville, stage and screen actor; and Lady Candida Meyrick, author, artist and entrepreneur.

"I am so happy to be a patron of the beautiful New Forest Open Air Theatre. There is nowhere like it. A glorious mix of theatre and trees; what could be better?" Dame Judi Dench

"Theatre and the great outdoors are two of life's greatest treasures. A combination of both, amongst the oaks of Britain's most cherished forest? That will be very special indeed."
Dan Snow

"I am very happy to be a patron of New Forest Open Air Theatre. This thrilling new venue will be a draw for people from across the country, as well as a boon for people in the local community."
Sir Derek Jacobi

"The excellent quality and dynamic spirit of the New Forest Open Air Theatre's productions are a magical must every summer and a huge asset to our community." Geraldine Somerville

Our Story So Far

In 1592, when theatres closed due to plague, Shakespeare's company packed up their costumes and took their plays into the countryside, performing in forests, glades and glens.

In the summer of 2020, after months of COVID 19 isolation, when theatres once again fell silent, we did the very same thing.

In record time, we assembled a troupe of actors from stage and screen, borrowed lights and costumes from closed theatres, and staged two of Shakespeare's best loved plays in the open air, surrounded by the beauty of the New Forest.

Two weeks of magic followed. People of all ages came together to laugh, cry and be inspired in the woods. Audiences travelled from near and far, and the response was overwhelmingly positive, with a clear demand for more.

Following this success, we presented a Christmas promenade production of A Christmas Carol, before taking up residency at the beautiful Furzey Gardens in Lyndhurst. There, we continued to stage classic comedies with live music and song, alongside family productions for Christmas, Easter and Halloween — making theatre all year round.

Six years on, we are ready for the next chapter: **a permanent home — an open air theatre in the woods.**

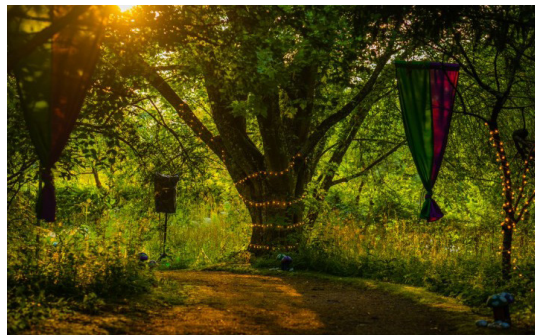
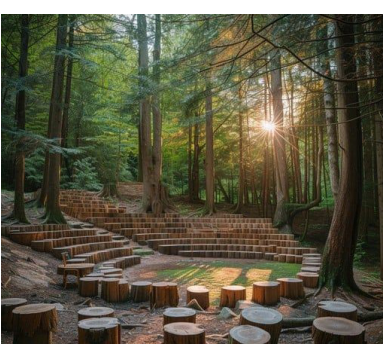


Our Mission

Our mission is to create a unique open air theatre with lasting cultural impact in the UK: a seasonal destination arts venue and a hub for outdoor learning, creativity and wellbeing.

The New Forest is significantly underserved in terms of access to culture. We believe audiences in this region deserve **West End quality theatre without West End prices** — work that is ambitious, accessible and rooted in place. We are already working with Culture in Common on bus services for isolated people and outreach events.

New Forest Open Air Theatre will be a world class producing house, standing proudly alongside iconic venues such as Shakespeare's Globe or the Minack Theatre, while remaining deeply connected to its local community and landscape.



The Theatre Structure

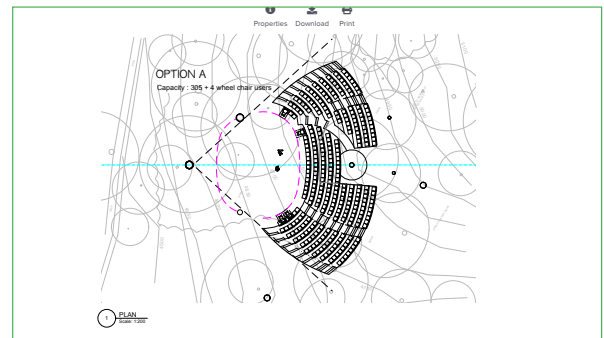
The proposed theatre will be a **300 seat woodland venue**, designed with exceptional care for both audience experience and the natural environment. Key features include:

- Crafted from **coppiced timber from the same woodland**
- Set within a natural basin, surrounded by oak, beech, birch and holly trees
- A form inspired by ancient performance spaces, such as Greek amphitheatres
- Sensitive integration with existing vegetation and landscape

The structure will be **dismantled at the end of each performance season and carefully stored**, ensuring no lasting impact on the ecology of the site. This reversible approach allows the theatre to exist in harmony with the woodland, rather than imposing upon it.



*Left and right:
Theatre site
diagrams
Below: Artist
drawing of the
theater*



The Location

The theatre will be located on the **Hinton Admiral Estate**, near Burley in the New Forest. The Hinton estate is a hub for the King's Harmony Project which aims to promote the prescription of access to nature as a direct health benefit. Its woodland forms part of a 5,500 acre estate that already hosts a retreat and wellbeing centre and provides excellent existing infrastructure, including:

- Electricity and water supply
- Parking and road access
- Toilets and restaurant facilities

The audience experience will begin from the moment they arrive. An enchanted, fairy-lit journey through the woods will lead to a theatre nestled among the trees. Audiences will be encouraged to picnic, linger and fully immerse themselves in nature.

Sustainable culture and responsible tourism are central to our values. This site offers the ideal balance of **creative possibility, environmental protection and accessibility**, making it the perfect home for New Forest Open Air Theatre.



"There's magic there for sure. So amazing to think of Jane Austen's grandfather, Lewis Carroll and Alice all having strolled about in those woods... it's an Arden." Lady Meyrick, Hinton Admiral

*Left top: Aerial view of site
Below: Approach to the site*



New Forest Open Air Theatre Charitable Objectives

- To advance the arts and culture for the public benefit, in particular by promoting and supporting theatrical performances and other creative and cultural activities, including out door theatre.
- To advance education for the public benefit through the provision of workshops, training, mentoring, learning opportunities and educational activities relating to the arts, culture, performance, creativity, and the natural environment.
- To promote social inclusion for the public benefit by working with people who are socially excluded, disadvantaged or otherwise underrepresented, including people experiencing loneliness or social isolation, those living in rural communities, and others who face barriers to participation in arts and cultural activities, and by providing opportunities for participation in creative, educational and community activities.

"I am delighted to support New Forest Open Air Theatre. Everyone should have the chance to experience the excitement and wonder of live theatre. This wonderful project will help people of all ages enjoy live performance, while giving families and young people the chance to discover its unique magic in the open air." Sir Lenny Henry



Beyond the Stage: Creating Opportunities, Connections and Cultural Access

Theatre for children and young people

Alongside world-class theatre, we will deliver learning, participation and community programmes that connect people with creativity and each other.

We love offering children their very first experience of theatre. To date we have produced five brand new musical versions of classic children's stories which we have presented as open-air walk-about shows. The beauty of this for pre-school audiences is that they can run around, sing and dance along and get involved whilst going on a journey with the characters. This is something we are very keen to deliver at our new woodland site; walk-about theatre experiences for younger audiences.

Participation, Education and Training

We will run two youth theatres at the new site, which will perform a show each summer in the woodland, for children aged between 6 and 11, and 12 and 18. Youth theatre participants will have opportunities to be cast in our main productions.

We are looking to partner with local schools to offer workshops and bespoke creative collaborations, and to support engagement with syllabus texts. Our patrons and ambassadors will run masterclasses for young people, offering a unique and thrilling opportunity to be taught by world class actors and creatives.

We will offer apprenticeships, work placements and practical training in technical theatre and front-of-house management, creating pathways into creative industries.

Education for everybody

We will also offer a diverse schedule of talks, seminars, workshops and learning activities for people of all ages to explore literature, performance, history and culture while developing confidence, communication skills and cultural capital. We will prioritise working with children and young people where we can make a real impact.



Community and Outreach

Opportunities for community engagement will include volunteering for our organisation and participating in cultural workshops and performances.

Our previous partners have included Culture in Common, The Minstead Trust, and Roy Kinnear House. We have co-created work with youth clubs, refugee support organisations, care homes and people with learning disabilities.

We have worked with Community First to provide accessible transport for isolated people who love to attend our shows but are unable to drive.

Opportunities at the woodland theatre

Our setting is so unique. People gathering together among the trees sharing stories is powerful and we will make that experience as widely accessible as possible for isolated people through assistance with transport and subsidised ticket prices.

We will create a cultural meeting place where people feel welcome. We will work with a community group each year to create a community production in the woodland, inspired by the themes of our programme.

“Absolutely brilliant. Grandparents, parents and children all enjoyed it. Thank you for a wonderful, immersive theatre experience.”

The importance of outreach

To share our performances, and participation offers with people who face significant accessibility challenges, we will take our teams of world-class creatives to offer workshops and performances in diverse community settings.

“One of the best pieces of children’s theatre we’ve seen. Also lovely for adults to watch.”
Family show participants

Community Partners

Our future community partners include Culture in Common, Hammersley Homes, and inspirational differently-abled artist Tjili, with whom we are designing programmes around work in care homes, with people who experience mental health challenges and people who are differently abled.





Access to Nature

The Government's Glover Review states National Parks have an obligation to serve diverse communities across the UK and must do more to reach out and welcome new audiences.

New Forest Open Air Theatre complies with the review's recommendations that:

- The nation's most cherished landscapes must fulfil their mission to provide opportunities for enjoyment and spiritual refreshment.
- More must be done to meet the needs of our fellow citizens who do not know the countryside, or do not always feel welcome in it.
- Help must be given to those living in these landscapes, creating meaningful social and economic activities.
- National landscapes should pioneer sustainable tourism.

The Government and NHS are prioritising primary care initiatives, where healthcare professionals prescribe artistic pursuits, shared cultural experiences and time in nature.

Open air theatre creates a safe space for social connection and promotes physical and mental well-being.

'We believe it is now more important than ever for everyone to enjoy the remarkable mental health benefits of connecting with nature'

The Mental Health Foundation UK

"Your shows bring me so much joy. Fun, laughter, music...brilliant. Thank you!" Audience member 2025

'I just needed this. Thank you.' Audience member 2024

'Seeing this outside made me more relaxed and calm.'
Audience member 2023

First Summer Season

Our inaugural summer season will open with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — a natural choice given the woodland setting and Shakespeare's links to the region.

Alongside this, the season will include:

- A family show, leading young audiences on an interactive expedition through the woods.
- An intergenerational community project working with isolated people from across the region.

The new work will connect isolated older people and young people to nature, to world-class creatives and to each other, establishing a strong sense of community and ownership at the new theatre. This new community production will explore the theme of 'run away to the woods,' from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Year Round

While most of our shows will happen at the site during the summer months, year round we will deliver co-productions off-site with venues such as The Globe. We will offer outreach performances and participatory activities off-site throughout the winter and we will also offer walkabout performances down at the site during those cooler months where audiences can keep warm by being on their feet and following the action around the woodland.

"I am very pleased to support New Forest Open Air Theatre. At a time when so much of life is experienced through screens, it is wonderful to see a project that brings people together in nature to enjoy live performance".

Sir Mark Rylance



Fundraising

It takes a whole community to create a landmark cultural project such as this. Every contribution is vital to its success.

Your support will enable us to establish New Forest Open Air Theatre as a fully equipped seasonal venue, creating the infrastructure, facilities and capacity required to deliver professional outdoor theatre in the heart of the New Forest.

Every donation will play a part in ensuring the theatre opens to a professional standard and is positioned for long-term success.

Our ambition is for New Forest Open Air Theatre to become a financially resilient organisation, supported through ticket income, partnerships, philanthropy and community engagement. This initial fundraising campaign will provide the foundations from which the theatre can grow and thrive.

Key areas for support are:

- Creating a unique woodland theatre experience that is carefully installed each season and removed at its conclusion
- Seasonal audience facilities and supporting site infrastructure
- Professional theatrical infrastructure, including staging, seating, lighting and sound
- Community participation, accessibility, education and skills development
- Organisational capacity to support long-term growth and sustainability



Your Support

We are seeking supporters and ambassadors who share our vision and values, and who believe in the power of culture, nature and shared experience.

We have an exceptional creative team, world-class talent, a beautiful site, and a loyal audience built over six successful years. Your support can turn this dream into a lasting reality.

Founding supporters will be invited to special events including events with distinguished industry guests, open rehearsals, behind-the-scenes updates, as well as being acknowledged in programmes.

Every gift large or small will make a big difference. Gifts of £2,000 or more offer opportunities for on site acknowledgements or dedications. With funding secured, we will open in summer 2027.

If you are able to make a gift, help spread the word, or would like to discuss the project further, we would love to hear from you. We cannot do this alone. Thank you!

Abbey Wright

Artistic Director, New Forest Open Air Theatre

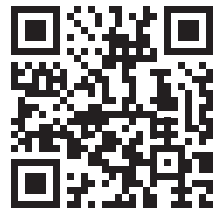
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Marcel Bruneau

Chair of Trustees, New Forest Open Air Theatre

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Our Company:

Actors Our productions feature leading actors from the West End, alongside performers from major Netflix and BBC series. Previous casts have included internationally recognised screen and stage talent. This combination of world-class theatre and an extraordinary natural setting is what makes New Forest Open Air Theatre distinctive.

Artistic Director Abbey Wright is an acclaimed theatre director, writer and producer. Her directing credits include the Donmar Warehouse, Wyndham's Theatre, National Theatre, Nuffield Southampton, Leeds Playhouse and Nottingham Playhouse. She has also worked as Associate Director with Danny Boyle, Michael Grandage, Jamie Lloyd, Alan Rickman and Jeremy Herrin. Abbey has directed youth theatre, and worked as education associate at the Donmar and Theatre Royal Haymarket; she has designed and delivered drama programmes with refugees, young offenders, differently abled people, people with mental health challenges, and residents in care homes.

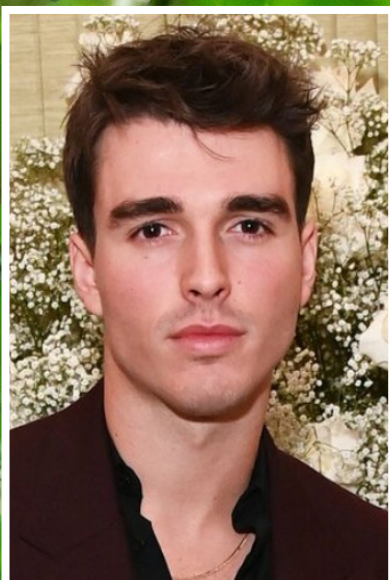
Design Consultant Charcoal Blue is the world's leading theatre, acoustic and experience consultancy, specialising in spaces that bring people together through culture and performance. Its portfolio includes the Dorfman Theatre at the National Theatre, Sadler's Wells East, Kiln Theatre and projects across Europe, North America and Australia.

Architect Natalie Skeete, Founder and Director of Forest Architecture, is an award-winning architect specialising in heritage and contemporary design. Based in Lymington, her work has received national recognition, including awards from the Daily Telegraph Home Building & Renovating Awards, the New Forest National Park Authority and the BLT Design Awards.

Designer James Turner trained at Motley Theatre Design and has worked internationally across theatre, television and film. He was Associate Designer on several of Ivo van Hove's landmark productions, including A View from the Bridge and Opening Night, and has designed work in New York and Shanghai. His screen credits include projects for Netflix, Sky Atlantic and Amazon.

PR Kate Morley is a leading theatre publicist working across the subsidised and commercial sectors. Her clients include the Donmar Warehouse, English Touring Theatre, Menier Chocolate Factory, Michael Grandage Company and Sonia Friedman Productions.

Chair of Trustees Marcel Bruneau is Development Manager at Dulwich Picture Gallery, where he helped deliver a major sculpture meadow and play space connecting art and nature. He previously worked in the development team at Shakespeare's Globe.



"I had such a fantastic time performing Shakespeare in the spectacular open air setting of the New Forest. I can't wait to see what this company does next."
Corey Mylchreest, currently in Netflix's 'Seven Dials Mystery' and 'Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story'.









Audience Testimonials

*"You are a class outfit and **I will always beat a path to see your productions.**"*

"Outstanding performances under starlight skies. Put quite simply; perfection."

*"Your usual **dazzling** blend of live music, belly laughs, top performances and the beauty of the forest. **We wouldn't miss your shows.** The highlight of our year."*

"We will be thinking about this summer evening long into winter."

*"**Even the young children and dogs were enthralled!**"*

"We would just like to say a huge thank you. We saw both shows and loved them. It was magical to see theatre in the woods. Thanks to all of you for two beautiful evenings!"

*"**One of the highlights of the year for me...** I wish you all the best of luck"*

"Your production in such a wonderful setting made an outstanding occasion with our family."

"What an amazing production. The acting was sublime. The most perfect evening."

*"We would love to attend again. **Couldn't you put on a play more often please!**"*

"Superb acting, comic timing, brilliant music, a lot of laughs and a magical setting. Thank you"

*"**This is how Shakespeare should be seen!**"*

"Well done everyone and we look forward to attending another wild and magical show"

*"Thank you again and good luck with your efforts to **keep theatre alive in the New Forest**"*

Below: Night tests at the site, February 2026

