

New Forest Open Air Theatre



All production shots in this proposal are from our shows and are courtesy of Marc Brenner Photography.

New Forest Open Air Theatre

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

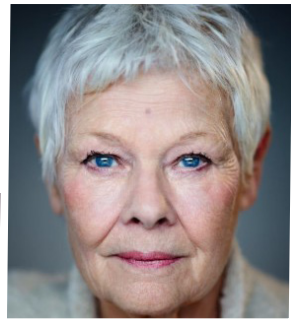
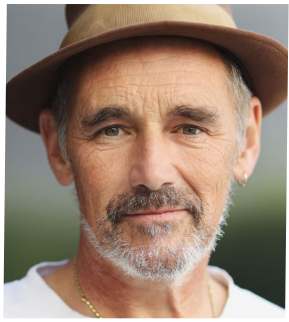
Set within the stunning landscape of the New Forest, **New Forest Open Air Theatre** brings together exceptional cultural experiences, environmental responsibility and human connection.

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 have as our Patrons the renowned actor and former Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe, **Mark Rylance**; Oscar winner **Judi Dench**; and New Forest residents, historian and TV presenter **Dan Snow**, and stage and screen actor **Geraldine Somerville**.

"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

"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.

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

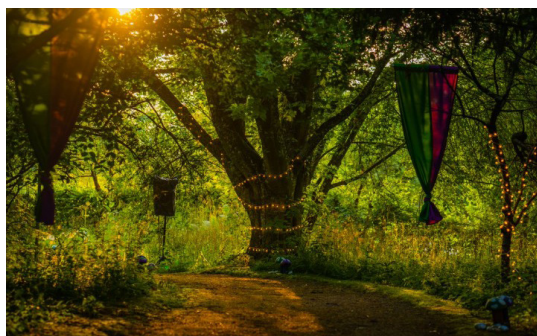
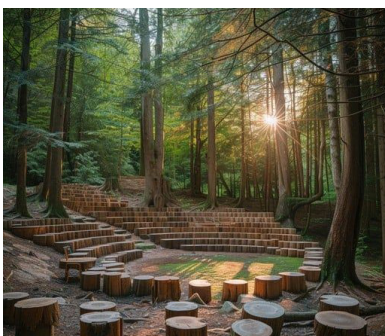


Our Mission

Our mission is to build a unique open air theatre with lasting cultural impact in the UK: a 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.



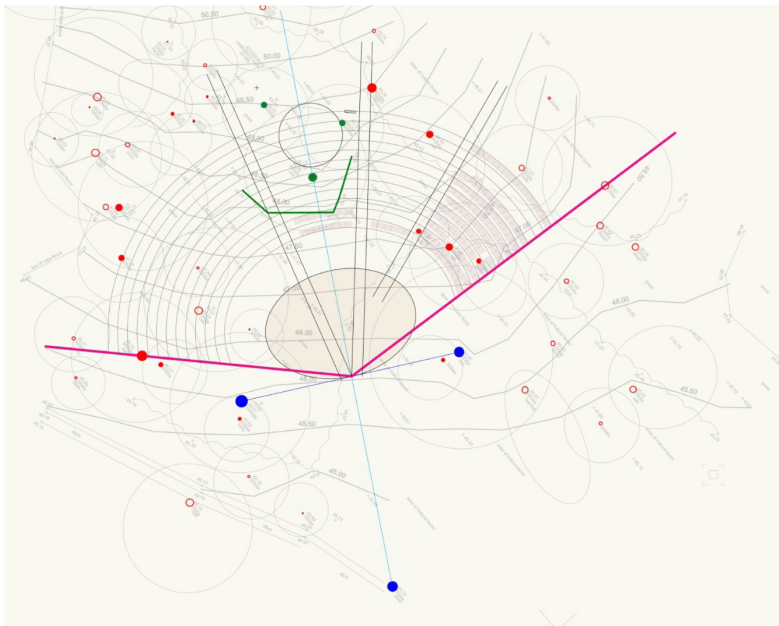
The Theatre Structure

The proposed theatre will be a **400 seat woodland venue**, designed with exceptional care for both audience experience and the natural environment.

Key features include:

- Construction using **coppiced timber from the same woodland**
- A setting 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 top: Theatre site diagram
Below: Approach to site in Hinton Admiral*



The Location

The theatre will be located on the **Hinton Admiral Estate**, near Burley in the New Forest. The woodland forms part of a 5,500 acre estate that already hosts a retreat and wellbeing centre, providing 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: Theatre site
Below: Aerial view of site





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



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, in partnership with **Culture in Common**, 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*.

Long Term

After our flagship summer season, we will develop a programme of walkabout open air shows. These have been particularly successful in engaging younger audiences. We will also offer events such as storytelling, trails, workshops, and participatory activities in the woods, ensuring we remain active, welcoming and relevant throughout the whole year.

Fundraising

We have **£730,000 left to raise, to meet our £1,000,000 target.**

This investment will enable the **design and construction of New Forest Open Air Theatre**, cover **essential operational costs for the inaugural season**, and equip the venue with **long-term theatrical infrastructure**. Together, these elements will ensure the theatre launches strongly and is positioned to become a **self-sustaining cultural venue** for years to come.

Our long-term goal is for New Forest Open Air Theatre to operate independently through ticket income, partnerships, and community engagement. This initial investment is crucial to establish the venue to a professional standard and build a resilient foundation.

We have secured 18% of the total fundraising target through In Kind support; and 10% through ticket sales from previous productions—demonstrating both **strong audience demand** and our organisation's **proven ability to deliver successful outdoor theatre**.

Our key areas of expenditure are:

- Construction of a brand new woodland theatre
- Creation of associated facilities on site
- Creation of theatrical infrastructure
- Opening costs of our inaugural season
- Community participation, accessibility, education and training



Examples of costs:

£582,000 – Design and Construction

Creating a theatre nestled in the woods, complete with lighting rig. This figure includes essential earthworks, building materials, electrical installation and skilled labour. It also includes the following core elements to transform the space into an enchanting, immersive venue:

£850 – Fairy Lighting

Gentle lighting along the approach, guiding visitors safely while creating a sense of enchantment from the moment they arrive.

£1,000 – Woodland Screens

Discreet screens to conceal actors within the forest when not on stage, preserving the illusion and magic of the performance.

£2,000 – Planting & Natural Cover

Thoughtful planting to soften and conceal technical areas such as screens and the soundboard, blending them seamlessly into the woodland.

£2,500 – Acoustic Baffles

Specialist acoustic features to ensure clear, high-quality sound in an outdoor setting.

£3,000 – Timber Footbridge

A beautiful pedestrian bridge over the woodland stream, forming part of the audience's journey to the theatre.

£5,000 – Landscaping

Careful shaping of the woodland paths from car park to theatre, ensuring accessibility, safety, and a magical, immersive experience—while embedding all technical elements subtly within nature.

£6,000 – Compostable Eco Loos

Environmentally responsible facilities.

£12,000 – Wardrobe & Workshop

A fully equipped costume department complete with sewing machines, allowing us to create and reuse costumes for years to come—supporting long-term sustainability.

A detailed budget is available on request.



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 five successful years. Your support can turn this dream into a lasting reality.

Founding supporters will be invited to special events including open rehearsals, VIP performances, behind-the-scenes updates, and acknowledgement 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 for your consideration.

Abbey Wright

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Our Company:

Actors: Our returning cast feature lead actors from the West End, and major Netflix and BBC Series. Previous cast members include well known faces in Hollywood. This is what marks us out; the marriage of world-class theatre, with a spectacular natural setting.

Artistic Director: Abbey Wright is a critically acclaimed theatre director, writer and producer, former Associate Director of Nuffield Southampton Theatres and the New Vic, and a resident of the New Forest. Her work has been supported by leading figures across the arts, including Mark Rylance, Emma Thompson, Paul McCartney, Kenneth Brannagh, Keira Knightley & Dawn French.

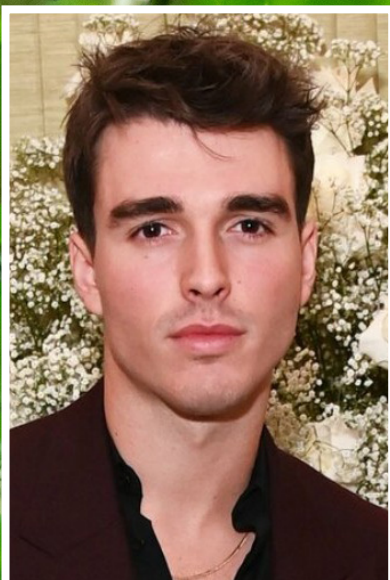
Her directing credits include productions at the Donmar Warehouse, Trafalgar Studios Wyndham's Theatre, (West End), alongside productions for Hampstead Theatre, The Coronet, Leeds Playhouse, Nottingham Playhouse, and the Royal & Derngate.

Abbey has worked extensively as an associate director, including with Danny Boyle at the National Theatre, and as Resident Assistant Director to Michael Grandage, Jamie Lloyd, Alan Rickman, Sean Holmes, Peter Gill, Jeremy Herrin and John Tiffany at the Donmar Warehouse. Since 2020, Abbey has been Artistic Director of New Forest Open Air Theatre.

Architect: Natalie Skeete, BA(Hons) M.Arch MSc Building Conservation RIBA (Dist). Natalie is Founder and Director at Forest Architecture, based in Lymington. Her awards include: Build Magazine - Best Heritage Architectural Design Specialists 2024, Hampshire Winners of the The Daily Telegraph Home Building and Renovating Awards, Best Extension 2023 Winners of the New Forest National Park Authority Building Awards, Best Residential Scheme 2022 Winners of the BLT Design Awards for Heritage 2021.

Designer: James Turner studied theatre design at Motley. Associate Designer on many of Ivo Van Hove's seminal productions including A View From the Bridge, Young Vic and Wyndham's, and Opening Night at The Gielgud, as well as designing shows in New York and Shanghai. He also works in tv and film for Netflix, Sky Atlantic, Amazon.

Development: Marcel Bruneau. Development Manager at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London. Marcel's team have just finished building a sculpture meadow and play space where people can go to be inspired by art and nature. He was previously in the 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 2 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 outstanding occasion with our family."

"We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and cannot wait for your next play."

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

"We enjoyed your productions in the 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

