

Apex Forward Plan



Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

West Suffolk
working together

Contents

Page

1. Background	1
2. Apex Forward Plan - Vision Statement	2
3. Economic Impact and associated links to the Vision and Strategic Priorities of West Suffolk	3
4. Artistic Programme	4
5. Community & Education	5
6. Partnerships	7
7. Marketing & Audience Development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ticket Sales• Ticket Sales income projection 2017-22• New Apex customer analysis• Geographical Analysis /ticket sales by geographical area• Ticket Sales Growth by Geographical area• Marketing activity/digital and Social• Apex Brochure• Newspaper Supplements• Website• Bury St Edmunds & Beyond	7 - 11
8. Commercial Growth <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commercial income growth projections• Apex Membership Scheme• Booking fees• Venue and room hire• Box Office /Ticketing Service• Sponsorship and sponsorship in Kind• Donations• Trusts and Foundations• Corporate Membership	12 - 14
9. Staffing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current & Future	15
10. Bars & Catering Operations	16
11. Finance	17-18
12. Aims and Objective	19
13. Work Plan	20-24
14. Future opportunities, aspirations and finances	25 - 26
Appendix 1 - Economic Impact Evaluation - The Apex Report By Destination Research Ltd	
Appendix 2 – Apex Budget Current year	

1. Background

The Apex opened in October 2010 and from the very beginning it was clear that something special had been built. Designed by Hopkins Architects, the beauty of the build, the comfort of the auditorium and the outstanding acoustics (delivered by Threshold Acoustics) were quickly being applauded by artists as diverse as Julian Lloyd Webber, the European Union Chamber Orchestra, the Brodsky String Quartet, folk/rock band Fairport Convention and noughties rockers, Funeral for a Friend.

The auditorium has a capacity of just over 500 for a fully seated event, but the capacity increases to 697 with a mixture of standing and seated areas. The auditorium is extremely flexible; it can be set up for tiered seating, a mosh pit, a cabaret set up or a flat floor for exhibitions, parties, sports events etc. There are 2 studio spaces, one with a fully sprung dance floor and these are widely used for meetings, workshops, classes and can also act as extra dressing room space. A large light and airy bar area which doubles up as an art gallery is served by 2 bars. There is also a bar in the auditorium and the foyer doubles up as a café, with an outdoor seating area.

In the first full financial year (April 2011 to March 2012) 125 shows took place with an audience of 37,626. This has grown steadily each year so that in 2017/18, there were over 260 ticketed shows (combined own promotions and hires) with an audience of over 105,000 and a gross ticket sales income figure of £2M.

The Apex is now established as part of the cultural life of West Suffolk, it is delivering the broad programme originally envisaged by the Council and it is on the national music circuit; given the planned growth in the area, we can now look at its continued growth and development with a ten year strategic vision.

Research conducted in 2016 by the Audience Agency identified that 97% of the survey strongly agreed or agreed that The Apex is good for Bury St Edmunds and West Suffolk's image.



2. Apex Forward Plan - Vision Statement

Our vision for The Apex is:

“ To be acknowledged and recognised locally, regionally and nationally for the quality and the breadth of its artistic programme and for being a regional centre of artistic and cultural excellence.”

The progress the venue has made in all aspects of its operation from the quality of its artistic programme, tickets sales, general footfall and customer service levels is significant. However, as part of a ten year vision, we would like to document hopes and aspirations for the future, based on realistic and achievable expectations.

Within this document we will cover Forward Plan vision for The Apex and we will clarify what success will look like. The vision will encompass many different aspects of The Apex’s operation including:

- Artistic programming
- Gallery space
- Education and community work
- A pricing strategy that offers value for money and accessibility for all
- Working in partnership with local businesses and creating and developing new income streams
- Audience Development & Marketing
- Customer Service

The popularity of the Apex has grown rapidly since 2010 and is now well established in West Suffolk with a busy programme and a loyal and growing audience. This is an opportunity to not only take stock of what has been achieved to date, but also to see what possibilities there are for further growth and development.

St Edmundsbury’s Vision 2031 document plans for a significant expansion in housing across St Edmundsbury. Current forecasts for the next 5 years (to 2022/23) are for 4006 new builds in St Edmundsbury and for 2574 new builds in Forest Heath.

Similarly, other areas within the Apex’s catchment are also planning for significant housing growth:

Ipswich’s Local Plan identifies a housing target of at least 9,777 dwellings for the period 2011 to 2031.

The Thetford Sustainable Urban Extension plan identifies 5,000 new homes by 2026

The Greater Norwich Development Partnership (Broadland, South Norfolk District Councils, Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council) has produced a Joint Core Strategy which aims to deliver 37,000 new houses by 2026 bringing a population increase of around 50,000 people.

Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire are proposing 33,500 new homes by 2031.

The increase in population in West Suffolk and further afield gives us a clear opportunity to increase the Apex’s audience.

3. Economic Impact and associated links to the Vision and Strategic Priorities of West Suffolk

Councillors and staff across West Suffolk are committed to:

“Supporting and investing in our West Suffolk communities and businesses to encourage and manage ambitious growth in prosperity and quality of life for all”

The Council’s three key priorities are:

- Growth in West Suffolk’s economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc.
- Resilient Families and communities that are healthy and active.
- Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk in both towns and rural areas.

In February 2018, an economic impact study was undertaken by Destination Research Ltd to assess the impact of the Apex. This clearly demonstrates that the provision of a performing arts centre in the heart of Bury St Edmunds is having a significant impact on the towns’ economy. The study concluded that:

The Apex has a net annual impact on the local economy of £6,667,106 sustaining the equivalent of 84.7 local jobs

For further details about the economic impact of the Apex please refer to Appendix 1.

The benefits of attending performing art events (theatre, music and dance performances) is celebrated in numerous academic reports and these benefits include both physical and mental health, as well as community involvement.

As well as supporting all communities in West Suffolk, the Apex is well placed to provide a regional venue for the performing arts.



4. Artistic Programme

The professional artistic programme is a mix of activity either promoted directly by The Apex, co-promoted with other promoters, or brought to us by external promoters hiring the Apex. The Apex is also an important home for a range of local amateur performing organisations hiring the Apex for their performances (including Bury Bach Choir, Newmarket School of Dance and Suffolk Sinfonia), local schools and the Suffolk County Music Service.

We strive to be commercially minded and we work hard to maximise income while minimising costs ensuring the majority of events we promote generate a profit. However, we do recognise that in order to deliver a broad programme and to maintain our reputation as a quality venue, we will also programme events that will not necessarily make a profit. This will include much of the classical music programme, some of the world music programme and occasionally some particularly high profile names which help to enhance the profile of the venue with audiences and promoters alike.

The Apex is primarily a music venue with quality at the core of everything we do, we will continue to develop a broad and diverse programme including:

Classical Music

To include chamber orchestras, string quartets, piano recitals and other ensembles as opportunities arise. We will also explore the opportunity of residencies from high profile groups.

Jazz

To include contemporary jazz, big bands, ensembles and named soloists. In addition, Songbook Sundays will continue at the Athenaeum.

Folk

The Apex has become a key and renowned venue on the folk circuit and the relationship with Milkmaid Folk Club will continue with joint promotions. Additional folk promotion opportunities will be explored including an annual mini folk festival.

World

We will review current consortium partnerships and will seek to develop relationships with other promoters and agents for larger scale world music gigs. In addition, we will work with The Apex caterers to create and market a world menu package.

Pop/Rock

We will maintain a programme of heritage pop and we will continue to work with agents and promoters to bring more current bands to the Apex.

Tribute bands

We will continue to programme tribute nights, however we will ensure that we only work with the best quality acts as part of a well-balanced programme.

Comedy

We will continue to bring the best names on the comedy circuit to the Apex and we will remain the home of the monthly Fat Cat comedy night.

Evenings with

We will programme a number of evenings of chat each year with personalities.

Mini Festivals

We will explore the feasibility of mini art-form specific festivals – i.e. possible folk/world weekend.

Other venues

The monthly songbook Sundays currently take place at the Athenaeum and alongside Sodexo we will

explore further appropriate programming at the Athenaeum, particularly events that can include a dining element.

Art Gallery

The Apex is blessed with a number of large walls and the light and airy first floor lounge space has provided the perfect opportunity to create a gallery space which has proven extremely popular. It has been developed from a loss-making part of the business to one which now turns a profit each year and provides an opportunity to showcase professional and amateur artists alike. Exhibitions are changed once a month and the space is in great demand, generally booked over a year in advance. We will continue to seek new collaborations and developments.

Bury Festival

The Apex is the key venue in the Bury Festival programme each year and hosts the majority of the festival's higher profile events. Every member of the Apex team has a role in making the festival run smoothly each year covering the areas of programming, fundraising, marketing, box office, front of house, technical and administration.



5. Community & Education

During the planning and development phase of the Apex, it was always of fundamental importance that in addition to a busy professional programme, the venue should also be home to a wide range of community activity.

There is an incredible wealth of talent, of all ages, in and around West Suffolk and we will continue to make the Apex accessible to help nurture and showcase that talent. We host the final of BurySOUND (the band competition), the 545 nights (5 bands for a fiver) and a number of amateur orchestras, choirs and local dance schools. We act as host venue for several County Music Service projects and local schools and we will continue to develop relationships with schools across the whole of West Suffolk. The lounge and studio spaces provide more opportunities for community activity and the Apex is home to a range of classes and community groups, including the Milkmaid disability folk group, harmonica workshops, film workshops and a number of classes for baby ballet, yoga and Tai Chi. A wide range of people and groups use the lounge space more informally, including two chess clubs, a bridge club, a breastfeeding group and a group of ballroom dancers.

The Apex team liaises closely with all the groups who use the Apex to ensure that they are able to have an ongoing presence. Their preferred dates are booked into the diary well in advance and we ensure that the hire rates available to these groups continue to be affordable and yet still contribute to the venue's running costs. As with the professional programme, a close eye is kept on the balance and range of bookings to ensure that there is an even spread throughout the year and that unhelpful competition is avoided.

“Without the generosity of venues in reducing their normal hire charges, the cost to the County Music Service of the week.....would be beyond our means. We are extremely appreciative of your understanding, patience, and practical help in ensuring the success of the whole venture, the outcome is that a large number of youngsters have received an amazing experience – musical, educational, social..... The facilities you are able to provide to us and the support we receive from the staff at The Apex has yet again ensured that each day ran smoothly. We know from contact with these youngsters, teachers and families long after the event that the day presents them with an unforgettable store of memories, responses and achievements. The feedback we received from schools tells us how much they value these events and the unique experience they provide for their pupils.” Letter dated 27.7.16 from Philip Shaw, Head of Suffolk County Music Services



6. Partnerships

As a recent addition to the events life of West Suffolk, the Apex has sought to add to and complement existing provision rather than compete with other venues and promoters. The Apex has a close working relationship with the Theatre Royal and the two venues co-exist happily side by side, with the Theatre Royal mostly promoting drama work and the Apex concentrating on music. Inevitably there are areas of cross-over, particularly in the worlds of comedy and light entertainment and the programming teams at the two venues ensure they communicate regularly to ensure that clashes are kept to a minimum.

The Apex has always been enthusiastic about working with a number of different promoters to bring a wider range of events to West Suffolk. The partnership with the Milkmaid folk club has helped the Apex to become firmly established on the national folk music circuit with great success. The Apex will continue to identify and develop relationships with new promoters to further broaden the range of the Apex programme.

The Apex will continue to work alongside, rather than in competition with other venues and organisations in West Suffolk and will seek to develop closer relationships with the University of Suffolk, The Guildhall, the National Horseracing Museum and the American bases.

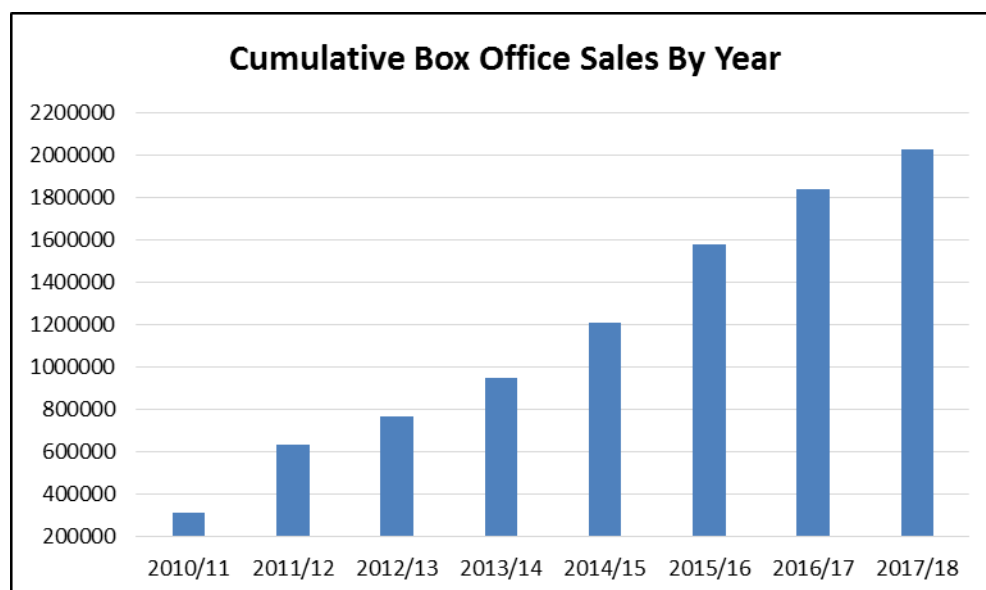
7. Marketing & Audience Development

The Leisure & Cultural Services Marketing & Sales Team, based in the Apex, promote and market a multitude of venues, events and activities across West Suffolk, in addition to the Apex. The team currently comprises of two full-time and two part-time members of staff.

The marketing team use a combination of digital and database marketing, social media and traditional print to market shows and events. Put simply, The Apex's marketing strategy is to attract as many new customers as possible and by using sophisticated data analysis, segmentation and targeting to ensure those customers return on an increasingly frequent basis.

Ticket Sales

Ticket Sales have continued to grow year on year since The Apex opened in 2010. The venue is now well established and known and since 2014/15 alone, we have seen a 67% increase in box office income for Apex shows.



Ticket Sales Income Projections 2017 – 2022

Using the past two years figures as a benchmark, we anticipate gross box office income will continue to rise by £100,000 per year, so by 2021/22 we project an annual ticket income of £2,340,500. This will be achieved through a gradual increase in programme, careful increases in ticket prices.

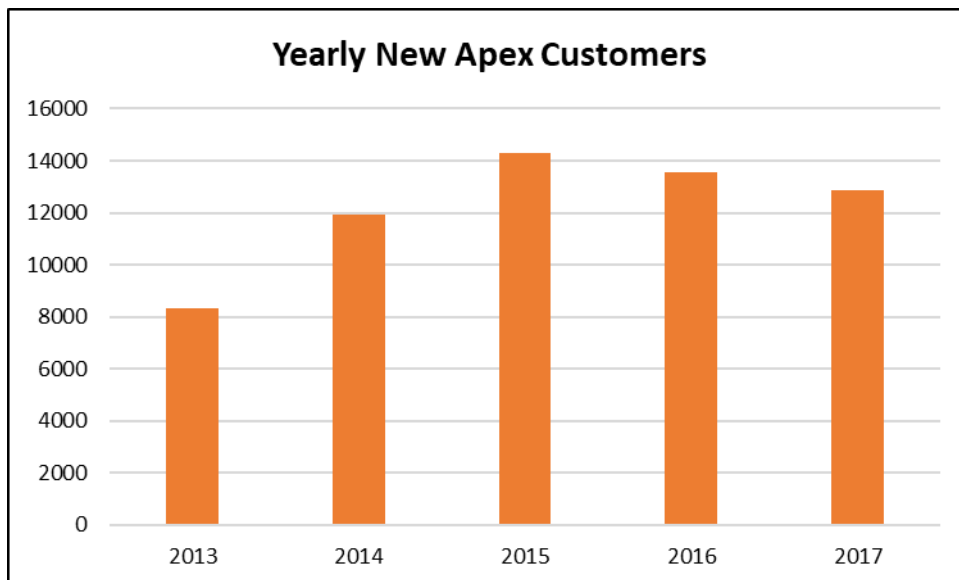
Audience figures will increase through a combination of attracting new customers and encouraging customers to attend more frequently.

Year	Box Office income
2017/2018	£1,940,496.10
2018/2019	£2,040,500.00
2019/2020	£2,140,500.00
2020/2021	£2,240,500.00
2021/2022	£2,340,500.00

New Apex Customer Analysis

The table below shows the number of new (first time bookers) purchasing tickets for The Apex by month and year. In 2016, we attracted 12,876 new bookers, who purchased over 29,000 tickets. The number of new customers being attracted to The Apex on an annual basis appears to have peaked, which is to be expected as The Apex becomes more established. Even so, the numbers of new customers we are achieving far outstrips the figures that other major regional venues are achieving.

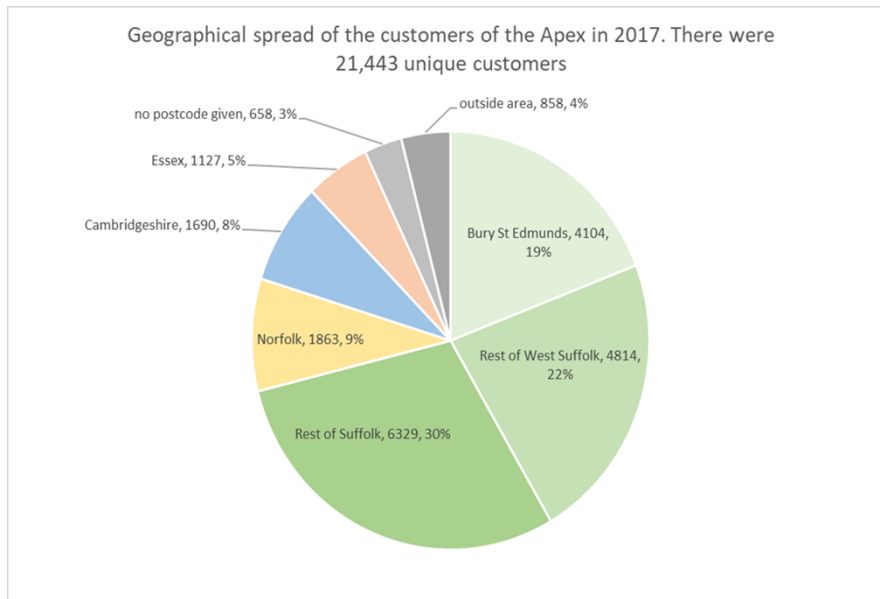
Please see the paragraph below *Geographic Areas for Potential Growth*, for details of how we intend to counteract this.



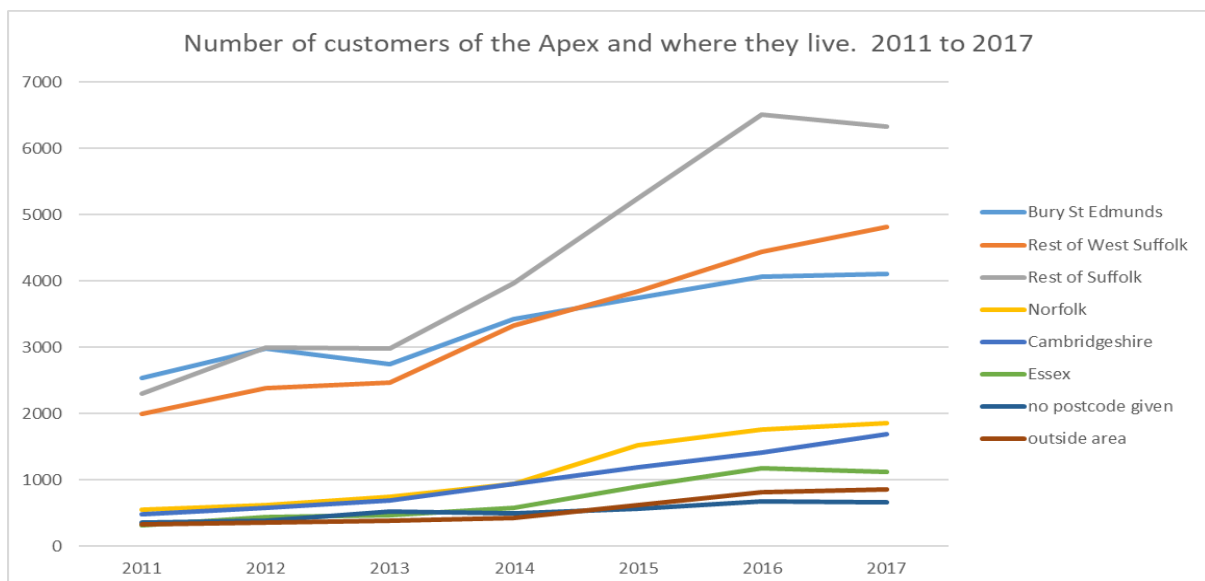
Geographical Analysis – Ticket Sales by Geographical Area

Typically, the core audience is from within a 20 mile radius, however, 40% of Apex customers currently travel more than 20 miles to visit a show at The Apex.

At present 41% of customers come from West Suffolk. In 2011, 51% of customers came from West Suffolk. At present 22% of customers come from either Essex, Cambridgeshire or Norfolk, in 2011 this figure was 15%.



Customer numbers have increased year on year. From 2011 to 2013 we saw similar numbers of customers from Bury St Edmunds, the Rest of West Suffolk and the Rest of Suffolk. However from 2013 to date, we have seen a steep increase in the number of customers with the steepest increase being in the Rest of Suffolk (although this does appear to be slowing down now). It would also appear that the number of customers from Bury St Edmunds has reached a plateau.



Ticket Sales Growth by Geographical Area

Due to targeted marketing activity to specific geographic areas since 2014, we have been able to increase ticket sales from Ipswich by 120%, **Haverhill** by 111%, **Sudbury** by 153%, **Stowmarket** by 81%, **Newmarket** 110%, **Ely** by 94% and **Cambridge** by 78%. We will continue to target these geographic areas.

As mentioned above, we will also target our marketing activity to new geographic areas slightly further afield and up to one hours travel time. These include, **Norwich**, **Colchester**, **Brandon**, **Thetford**, **Attleborough**, **Diss** and **Braintree**.

We are confident by increasing the marketing activity to these areas will have a significant positive impact at The Apex box office, resulting in new customers, increased ticket sales and more sold out shows. In 2016-17, 74 events (28% of the programme) achieved an audience capacity in excess of 90%.

	Actual		Projected		
Geographic Area	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Sudbury	5311	6376	7651	9181	11017
Ipswich	5062	6074	7288	8745	10494
Mildenhall	4880	5856	7027	8432	10118
Stowmarket	3695	4434	5320	6384	7660
Newmarket	3179	3814	4576	5491	6589
Cambridge	2400	2880	3456	4147	4976
Diss	1815	2178	2613	3135	3762
Thetford	1748	2097	2516	3019	3622
Haverhill	1586	1903	2283	2739	3286
Ely	1461	1753	2103	2523	3027
Brandon	1406	1687	2024	2428	2913
Colchester	925	1110	1332	1598	1917
Norwich	513	615	738	885	902
Attleborough	264	316	379	454	544
Safron Walden	247	296	355	426	511
Braintree	282	338	405	486	583
Swaffham	69	83	99	120	144

Marketing Activity / Digital & Social Marketing

The Apex customer database currently has over 30,000 customers who have given us permission to email them. In addition, The Apex has a following of over 6,000 on both Facebook and Twitter respectively. These figures have been growing by 30% per year.

The frequency of email campaigns and social media has increased significantly in the two years. Utilising targeted email campaigns we have been able to increase the frequency of attendance by our existing customers and by utilising social media (predominantly Facebook & Twitter) we have been able to increase the number of first time attenders coming to The Apex.

Apex Brochure

We will continue to produce the general Apex What's On brochure three times a year. Haart Estate Agents are currently the Apex's print sponsor and pay for the three main What's On brochures to be printed each year. This provides a saving to The Apex of over £6,000 per year.

In addition, we will introduce art-form-specific pieces of print for key and appropriate genres which will give us the opportunity to give out more information about artists performing and the programme. As well as increasing audience levels, these will also help us to obtain sponsorship for series of concerts and seasons. The first of these specific pieces of print will be for classical music and will be produced in time to promote the programme from autumn 2018. The second additional piece of print will cover jazz, blues and world music and a third for family events.

Newspaper Supplements

The newspaper supplements have proved to be a very effective marketing tool in raising awareness of the Apex, its programme and importantly in attracting large numbers of new customers to the Apex. We will look to increase the number and frequency of supplements that are circulated with ILIFFE and Archant newspaper publications.

Website

70% of the Apex's ticket sales are now sold via The Apex's website. The Apex's new website was launched in August 2017 and is now mobile compatible, making booking online via mobile phones and tablets even easier. This has already had a positive impact by increasing the number of tickets we sell online from 64% to 70%.

The Apex will continue to research best practice technology which will benefit customers and increase ticket sales. For example, we are currently investigating 'print at home' ticketing and ticket machines in the Apex foyer for use out of hours and / or to relieve box office staff when busy.

Bury St Edmunds and Beyond

Currently, about 8% of The Apex ticket sales are purchased by customers travelling for over 60 minutes.

We are working closely with Bury St Edmunds and Beyond and will look to create a strategic approach to attracting customers from much further afield (2 hours drive and above) to The Apex - resulting in the number of overnight stays increasing. This will benefit accommodation providers and further increase the Apex's economic impact on the town and surrounding area. This has already been successfully implemented working alongside the Bury St Edmunds Festival.



8. Commercial growth

The Apex currently attracts commercial income, sponsorship and sponsorship in kind, but there are very positive opportunities for this to increase over the next few years. The table below highlights all of the key areas of commercial income, and indicates our income projections for each area of income over the next ten years. Whilst there has been some success in establishing a variety of income streams, it is going to be very difficult to increase this income without a dedicated fundraiser on the staff. Bringing in an experienced fundraiser will help us to bring down the cost of the Apex and at the same time grow and develop the programme.

Commercial income growth projections

£	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Membership	8,750	17,500	25,250	35,000	43,750	45,000	46,000	47,000	48,000	49,000
Booking fees	20,000	100,000	100,000	110,000	110,000	120,000	120,000	130,000	130,000	140,000
Venue/Room hire	150,000	153,000	157,590	162,317	167,187	172,202	177,368	182,689	188,169	193,814
Box Office & Tktg	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
Sponsorship	3,000	5,000	8,000	15,000	20,000	25,000	25,000	30,000	35,000	40,000
Sponsors (in kind)	8,000	8,000	8,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Trusts/Foundation	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Corporate Club			2,000	3,000	4,000	5,000	6,000	7,000	8,000	9,000
Legacies							1,000	2,000	3,000	4,000
TOTAL	244,750	338,500	355,840	390,317	409,937	432,202	440,368	463,689	477,169	500,814

It must be remembered that with increased income, there will be increased costs. As ticket income increases, artists fees will also increase as many deals are on a split of the box office. Other increases directly tied to ticket income will be box office costs, Performing Rights Society costs and credit card costs.

In addition, as the number of shows increases, so do the staffing costs – particularly stewarding and tech staff. However, the team works hard to ensure that costs stay low and income is maximised. The average profit per show has risen from c. £250 in 2014/15 to c. £880 in 2018/19.

Apex Membership Scheme

Like many other arts and cultural venues, we will introduce a premium level of service, whereby customers are given the option to pay an annual fee in return for enhanced benefits, including offering a priority booking period. With an increasing number of events achieving an audience capacity of over 90%, priority booking will be seen as a key benefit.

The primary purposes of the scheme are to provide customers with the choice of an enhanced level of service, whilst generating up to an additional £8,750.00 per year from membership fees.

Financial membership and income targets (*Based on an annual membership fee of £35*)

- Year 1: 250 x members = £8,750
- Year 2: 500 x members = £17,500
- Year 3: 750 x members = £26,250
- Year 4: 1,000 x members = £35,000
- Year 5: 1,250 x members = £43,750

Booking Fees

Booking fees were introduced into the ticket buying process in April 2018, bringing us in line with the majority of venues and theatres in the UK. We are being open and transparent about it and we will incorporate it into the advertised ticket price. Based on current ticket sales, we are predicting this will generate £100,000 per year by the end of the 2019/20 financial year. We will explain how this fee is used to sustain the Apex as a vibrant local venue.

We are maintaining the option for people to give donations but these will be targeted at particular areas of work or particular fundraising activities. We expect to lose the majority if not all the £20,000 that we currently earn from voluntary donations, but we expect the income from booking fees to vastly outweigh this loss.

Venue & Room Hire

There is growing interest from all sorts of organisations in hiring the Apex – from musicians wanting to record, promoters (local and national) wanting to put on gigs and businesses wanting to hold conferences and parties. We will continue to develop income from hires, with the aim of generating £150,000 per year and increasing on an annual basis by 3%.

Box office & Ticketing Services

Whilst 70% of The Apex's tickets are purchased online, 30% are still purchased in person or by telephone. In addition, the box office team manage Shopmobility and the Tourist Information Centre, which gets very busy between March and October. The Apex box office team also sell tickets for events for Moyses's Hall Museum, West Stow Anglo Saxon Village and the Bury Festival. The box office operation provides a vital service for visitors and the local community alike. By keeping the box office in house (rather than using a third party ticket agency) the box office collates tremendous amounts of customer data which is in turn used for marketing purposes. We would not have such access to this data if we outsourced our box office operation.

Furthermore, the Apex box office currently earns £50,000 commission providing a box office/ticketing service for Saffron Hall, Ely Folk Festival, Bury Festival, other Council services and occasional local groups.

Sponsorship & Sponsorship in Kind

Haart estate agents currently sponsor the Apex's print and this saves us about £6,000 per year. Likewise, we would like to develop more working relationships like this.

We will build on the current successful sponsorship arrangements by generating sponsorship for genre seasons, including: Classical, Jazz, Folk, World, Comedy, Evenings with, and The Apex Gallery.

Donations

At present, we generate around £20,000 per year by asking customers for a donation at the point of sale. This figure is likely to decrease as a consequence of introducing a booking fee.

Trusts & Foundations

A more coherent and longer term strategy to programming will make it easier to plan ahead and put together projects that will both enhance the Apex programme and be attractive to funding bodies. We need to be aware that the number of avenues open for funding for organisations that aren't registered charities is significantly reduced.

Corporate Membership

Now that the Apex is established and is being recognised locally as a success, there is growing awareness from the business community of the benefits of being associated with the Apex. Consequently, we will look at the development of a corporate membership scheme from 2019 onwards.

Individual giving

The amount of money that cultural organisations have been receiving from local authorities, funding bodies and business sponsorship continues to be in decline and while it doesn't mean that we should ignore these areas, we do need to look carefully at individual giving.

"Individual giving refers to the many charitable gifts made by the general public and is by far the largest source of charities' income from donations." Institute of Fundraising

It is well established that the majority of charitable giving is provided by the over 55's. This is partly because there are more of them and also because they tend to have the disposable income that makes it possible for them to be charitable.

The Arts Index, published in late 2017 by the National Campaign for the Arts (NCA) and covering the condition of arts and culture provision in England, reported a rise of 68% in individual giving since its last edition in 2015.

The creation of the Apex membership scheme will take us on the next step up the donor pyramid by establishing a group of people who regularly donate to the Apex in exchange for agreed benefits. We must engage with these supporters to nurture and encourage some of them to move on to further phases of giving to become bigger supporters, bigger donors and perhaps in the longer term, to be leaving legacies. Legacies are generally the biggest gifts received by organisations from individuals. In 2007/08 alone they were worth £2 billion to fundraising organisations, representing by far the largest source of voluntary income to the sector.



9. Staffing

Future staffing

The current Apex team is very lean for a venue of its size and stature hosting in excess of 200 shows per year. Whilst things run very smoothly most of the time, the team is undoubtedly stretched when staff take holidays, illness strikes or someone leaves. With the proposed increase in programme there will be a need for increased staffing, particularly with tech staff, casual staff (stewards).

If the bars and catering operation came in house (section 10 below), we would also need to look separately at the structure and make-up of the front of house team to incorporate bar staff and appropriate management.

As the programme and the use of the Apex grows, we will need to consider the implications on the staffing structure and its capacity.

We will continue to explore opportunities to share resources with partners as and when the opportunities arise.



10. Bars & Catering operation

In early 2012 St Edmundsbury Borough Council tendered for the provision of catering and bar services at a number of its public buildings in Bury St Edmunds including:

- The Apex
- The Athenaeum
- Gardeners Rest (Kiosk in the Abbey Gardens)
- Moyses's Hall Museum

At the time of tendering The Apex had recently opened, in October 2010, and there was no 'going concern' to put to the market. The contract was awarded to Sodexo Prestige with a start date of November 2012 and is performing well. However, the contract terminates in November 2019 although there is an option to extend until 2021. So we will need to make a decision on the future shortly, one that supports this plan.

When the Apex first opened, the bars were managed by the in-house team. The in-house team looked after all bar facilities and stock and employed casual bar staff. There was no food offer on site, but a preferred list of caterers was made available to hirers for dinner dances, parties etc. The caterers brought in all equipment, staff and food. The council at that time received the hire income from a hirer plus a percentage of the caterer's fee.

As part of the contract awarded in November 2012, Sodexo were commissioned to manage the bars and catering services at the Apex exclusively. Sodexo as part of the contract invested in the kitchens and the setting up of the café which now operates on site.

As part of this plan the Council will appoint the services of a suitably experienced consultant to undertake an independent assessment of how the borough council's catering contract(s) for sites in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk might be procured and managed in the future to achieve its corporate objectives for the facilities.

While the commission will take the current operations as a baseline, this is not a review of the performance of the current contractor. It is an assessment and scoping exercise so that we can understand how the borough council's catering contracts can be best delivered in the future, when the current contract expires.

The consultant's recommendations will inform the future procurement of the catering offer which will be taken forward under the normal delegations in the Council's constitution, subject to it delivering a solution which meets the financial and service objectives to be agreed by Councillors through this Forward Plan.

11. Finances

When the Apex opened in 2010, the budget was c.£793,050. The team has been able to reduce the cost to the Council by 28% and so the budget for 2018/19 has been set at £570,780. The budgets are reviewed on an annual basis with a view to increasing efficiency and reducing the overall cost of the Apex.

The Budget for the current financial year is included as **Appendix 2**

12. Aims and Objectives

The following five objectives have been identified for the Apex and will be reviewed annually as part of the O&S reporting mechanism:

1. Ensure The Apex continues to programme and host a broad range of quality arts and entertainment events.

Targets

- a) Conduct a minimum of 2 visitor surveys each month selecting a range of events

2. Reduce the overall cost of the Apex

Targets

- a) Achieve a rise in gross box office income of £100,000 each year
- b) Increase Hire Income by 2% a year
- c) Employ a Consultant to look at future bars & catering provision at the Apex
- d) Maintain current income levels from sponsorship and grants
- e) Review & procure contracts for services and supplies associated with The Apex as they come up for renewal

3. Ensure The Apex is maintained to a high standard

Targets

- a) Agree the cleaning schedule and rigorously monitor
- b) Visual weekly check of the Apex infrastructure – floors, walls, lights, seats etc.
- c) Ensure that all equipment is regularly checked and serviced
- d) Maintain regular communication with heating engineers
- e) Liaise closely with West Suffolk's Property Services team on building maintenance issues

4. Increase footfall at, and public engagement with The Apex

Targets

- a) Increase new customers by 10,000 a year
- b) Increase mailing list by 10% a year
- c) Increase Facebook following by 15% a year
- d) Establish the membership scheme in 2018/19 and attract 250 members
- e) Increase membership by 250 a year

5. Ensure that the local community feels part of and welcomed at The Apex

Targets

- a) Maintain regular classes and courses in the studio spaces
- b) Ensure that the lounge space is readily available and comfortable for a wide range of groups to use.
- c) Annually review the Apex's hire prices ensuring that they remain affordable to community groups in West Suffolk.
- d) Ensure that the site remains accessible to all in the community by conducting regular DDA audits
- e) Customer complaints & compliments are acknowledged and where necessary action is taken to address any shortcomings in service provision

13. Work Plan

	Work Plan Target	Delivered by	Benchmark 17-18	Resource required	Monitoring
	1. Ensure The Apex continues to programme and host a broad range of quality arts and entertainment events.				
1a	Conduct a minimum of 2 visitor surveys each month selecting a range of events	Sales & Marketing Manager	80% of respondents scoring either 4 or 5 stars (out of 5) for: a) the event b)the venue c)value for money	Officer Time	Two visitor surveys each month. Report key findings every third year to O&S

13. Work Plan Cont.

	Work Plan Target	Delivered by	Benchmark 17-18	Resource required	Monitoring
	2. Reduce the overall cost of the Apex				
2a	Achieve a rise in gross box office income of £100,000 each year	Sales & Marketing Manager & Events & Programming Manager	£2million	Officer Time	Ticket sales (volume & income) will be presented to PASC as part of Operations Balanced Score Card quarterly review. Income will also be reported every third year to O&S.
2b	Increase Hire Income by 2% a year	Administrator	£150,000	Officer Time	Monthly monitoring Reported every third year to O&S.
2c	Employ a Consultant to look at future bars & catering provision at the Apex	L&C Operations Manager	N/A	Officer time preparing, procuring and monitoring consultant. Estimated cost of Commission £8k to £10K	- Consultant commissioned June 2018. - Consultant's recommendation received by end of August 2018 - Procurement process progressed in accordance with agreed delegated authority
2d	Maintain current income levels from sponsorship and grants	Sales & Marketing Manager	£6,000 in kind £3,000 advertising	Officer Time	Monthly monitoring Report quarterly to PASC and every third year to O&S
2e	Review & procure contracts for services and supplies associated with The Apex as they come up for renewal	All staff who procure services & supplies	N/A	Officer Time	Services and supplies are procured in accordance with Council standing orders

13. Work Plan Cont.

	Work Plan Target	Delivered by	Benchmark 17-18	Resource required	Monitoring
	3. Ensure The Apex is maintained to a high standard.				
3a	Agree the cleaning schedule and rigorously monitor	Front of House Manager & Verse contract manager	N/A	Officer Time	Weekly internal monitoring
3b	Visual weekly check of the Apex infrastructure – floors, walls, lights, seats etc.	Front of House Manager	N/A	Officer Time	Weekly internal monitoring
3c	Ensure that all equipment is regularly checked and serviced	Front of House Manager. Technical Manager	N/A	Officer Time	Ongoing monitoring and annual checks - internal
3d	Maintain regular communication with heating engineers	Front of House Manager and Building Services Manager	N/A	Officer Time	Weekly visits and quarterly meetings - internal
3e	Liaise closely with West Suffolk's Property Services team on all building maintenance issues	Front of House Manager	N/A	Officer Time	Weekly reports – internal

13. Work Plan Cont.

	Work Plan Target	Delivered by	Benchmark 17-18	Resource required	Monitoring
	4. Increase footfall at, and public engagement with The Apex.				
4a	Maintain the number of new bookers at around 10,000 a year	Monitored by Sales & Marketing Manager	12,976 new customers in 2017-18	Officer Time	Reported every third year to O&S.
4b	Increase mailing list by 10% a year	Sales & Marketing Manager	30,000 currently on mailing list	Officer Time	Reported every third year to O&S.
4c	Increase Facebook following by 15% a year	Sales & Marketing Manager	6,093 following The Apex on Facebook	Officer Time	Reported every third year to O&S.
4g	Establish the membership scheme in 2018/19 and attract 250 members	Sales & Marketing Manager	N/A(New scheme)	Officer Time	Reported every third year to O&S.
4h	Increase membership by 250 a year	Sales & Marketing Manager	N/A (New scheme)	Officer Time	Reported every third year to O&S.

13. Work Plan Cont.

	Work Plan Target	Delivered by	Benchmark 17-18	Resource required	Monitoring
	5. Ensure that the local community feels part of and welcomed at The Apex				
5a	Maintain regular classes and courses in the studio spaces	Administrator	N/A	Officer Time	Reported every third year to O&S.
5b	Ensure that the lounge space is readily available and comfortable for a wide range of groups to use	Front of House Manager & Sodexo General Manager	N/A	Officer Time	Daily monitoring-internal
5c	Annually review the Apex's hire prices ensuring that they remain affordable to community groups.	Administrator & Events & Programming Manager	N/A	Officer Time	Fees & charges reviewed & set annually under the normal delegations in the Council's Constitution
5d	Ensure that the site remains accessible to all in the community by conducting regular DDA audits	Front of House Manager & Events & Programming Manager	N/A	Officer Time	New DDA audit to be undertaken in 2018/19 Findings will be summarised in the next scheduled O&S report.
5e	Customer complaints & compliments are acknowledged and where necessary action is taken to address any shortcomings in service provision	Events & Programming manager	N/A	Officer Time	A summary of the customer complaints and compliments will be reported every third year to O&S.

14. Future opportunities, aspirations and finances

Overall cost of The Apex

In 2010/11, the budget set to run The Apex was £793,050. Significant progress has been made in reducing the cost of the Apex to the extent that the budget for 2018/19 has been set at £570,780; this is a reduction of 28%.

As acknowledged by consultants Bonnar Keenlyside in 2012, the Apex is “not large enough as a venue to operate on an independently commercial basis” and that it will continue to “rely on public funding in common with many other regional venues of their type.” This funding has always been seen by the Council as an investment in its strategic objectives.

Although we are planning for the long-term we will produce a rolling 2 year financial forecast. We are confident of achieving further reductions in the cost to the Council of running The Apex over the next 3 years and we are aiming for the budget for 2021/22 to be set at £450,000.

Although an ongoing reduction in subsidy is important, it is recognised that The Apex brings tremendous value to the local area; we will therefore ensure that the drive to reduce the cost of The Apex will not be done at the expense of the quality of what we do and how we do it.

Investment

We are confident that the cost of The Apex can be reduced still further, however this will need increased investment. As the Apex calendar gets more booked up, there is reduced opportunity for any growth in shows and so we will need to increase audiences at those shows and increase other sources of income. We therefore see the most pressing need for investment will be in the marketing budget and for the establishment of a fundraiser post. We will continue to monitor and assess the performance of the Apex and will make the case for this investment when the time is right.

In the longer term, there are areas of potential capital investment that could give us the opportunity to decrease the cost of The Apex further and/or improve the service we deliver and the range of events we offer. These would need to be investigated further and a business case established.

Auditorium capacity

We do not want to change the size or alter the shape or fabric of the auditorium because we currently have something very special, however we would like to explore whether it is possible to make any other changes that would enable us to increase our capacity. We know that we can physically fit more people into the auditorium but the number and position of our fire exits dictate a reduced capacity. If we could regularly get 200 more people into the stalls for standing gigs then that will make us more attractive to other promoters, would allow us to broaden the programme further and would increase box office income. We will ensure that any alterations or additions to exits from the Apex are tied into the Bury Masterplan particularly with regards to St Andrew’s Street.

Kitchens

Depending on the outcome of the catering consultant’s report it could be that we change the way we deliver catering for functions. If this allowed us to reduce the number of kitchens in the Apex, one or more of these spaces could be converted for more generic use, opening the way for increased numbers of classes, workshops, rehearsals etc.

Accessibility

We would like to review the accessibility at the Apex for people with physical or mental disabilities, and make subsequent improvements in our operation with a view to signing up to “Attitude is Everything’s Charter of Best Practice”.

See Link: <http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/the-charter-of-best-practice>

We will undertake a DDA audit in 2018/19.

Apex Lounge

The Apex Lounge, including bars and upstairs café area is a beautiful, bright, light and airy space and while this is popular and gets regular use, it does have its limitations. We would like to spend some time exploring different options for this space and whether small levels or indeed more significant levels of investment could turn it into a more useful space that gives us more income generating opportunities.

Education

A strong community and education programme can help raise levels of access and participation in the arts which can offer social, physical and mental benefits. We would therefore like to encompass the opportunity for lifelong learning, particularly the art of making and performing music, as a central element to the Apex's ten year vision. Education work should become a regular and integral part of the Apex's artistic programme but it would require additional funding for staffing and for projects. A thriving education programme should help us to open the door to a number of trusts and foundations.

Future Management

We recognise that although the management and operation of the Apex is currently strong and delivering all that is required, we will remain open and responsive to future developments, both internal and external, which may require us to explore alternative management and delivery options for the Apex.

