

Rochford District Council Asset of Community Value Nomination Form

Area to be covered

Please describe the nominated land including its proposed boundaries and exact location, address, postcode, and a map attachment, if possible, using the box below

The Mill Arts & Events Centre, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh, Essex

Situated within Rayleigh Mount Conservation Area, between main entrance to Rayleigh Mount (National Trust Scheduled Ancient Monument) & Rayleigh Windmill (Grade II Listed Building.)

Documents: Picture of the Mill Hall, plus Conservation area maps.

Ownership

Please state all the information you have on:

1. The names of current occupants of the land

Current Owners: Rochford District Council

The names and current or last-known addresses of all those holding a freehold or leasehold estate in the land

Rochford District Council, Council Offices, South Street, Rochford, Essex, SS4 1BW

Documents: Land Registry Map & Title Deeds

Include your reasons for thinking that Rochford District Council should conclude that the building/land is of 'community value', having regard to the definition in the Localism Act.

Reference should be made to the following:

1. **Current or recent use of the land and/or building**

The Mill Arts & Events Centre (known as 'The Mill Hall'), is located within the Rayleigh Conservation area off the main high street adjacent to Rayleigh Mount (National Trust Ancient Monument) and Rayleigh Windmill (listed Building).

The Mill Hall is a Council-owned building built in 1971 (refurbished in 2003) and, prior to the Covid 19 Pandemic, was the main social events venue for the District.

It is part of a portfolio of Rochford District's Leisure Assets managed by Fusion Lifestyle, which includes Clements Hall & Rayleigh Leisure centres, the Freight House, and Castle Hall.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak all leisure sites, were required to close completely on Friday 20th March 2020 as part of central government advice.

Rochford District Council's Executive unanimously voted on 11th August 2020:

All leisure facilities to be reopened on a phased return. The Mill Hall and Castle Hall were to be reopened in October 2020.

Rochford District Council's Executive unanimously voted on 2nd December 2020:

The Mill Hall and Castle Hall sites will be mothballed to end of June 2023, then disposed of as part of the Council's Asset Delivery Programme.

The Mill Hall was re-opened 12th February 2021 as a large-scale vaccination centre as the NHS continued to accelerate its vaccination program across Essex. Leader of Rochford District Council, Cllr Simon Wootton, said: "The Mill Arts & Events Centre has been closed for much of the pandemic so I am pleased we have been able to work with the NHS in putting it to good use, providing a vaccinations service which will be of benefit to the whole community.

Once the NHS no longer required the facility as vaccination centre. Rochford District Council closed the Mill Hall 31st October 2021.

With a of 1,700 total msq, and a Main Hall capacity of up to 400 people standing, 250 table-seated, 320 seated theatre style and overall capacity of 500 people, the Mill Hall is the only multi-purpose venue of this scale & arts/ culture/ heritage provision in the District. The Mill Hall was regularly used throughout the day, as well as evenings and weekends.

It ran a broad variety of community arts and events that stimulated social well-being and were in the interests of the local community. The events reduced loneliness and isolation, providing opportunities for volunteering, and developing new skills. However, it is not simply just a community centre.

Usage included:

- Rayleigh Operatic and Dramatic Society (RODS) and Rayleigh Brass (orchestra) held weekly shows and rehearsals
- Rayleigh Horticultural held three shows a year
- Annual pantomime
- Annual Rayleigh Town Trinity Fair.
- Charity social nights (including Rayleigh British Legion) and local school Proms.
- Weddings (including religious celebration events requiring maximum Mill Hall capacity) and christenings, birthday parties, and other family celebrations / events.
- Rochford District Council Network meetings (>40 local businesses present.)
- Police meetings
- Commercial events: Touring theatre companies, professional Wrestling & Boxing shows, monthly comedy club, live music gigs & concerts, dance shows, craft/ photography / art exhibitions plus antique / collectable events, business meetings/ conferences.
- Weekly Community clubs included U3A (over 200+); No.1 Retirement & Good-fellowship (both 100+); Funky Voices Choir plus family exercise classes.

2. **How the nominated land and/or building meet the social interests of the local community as a whole** ("Social interests" includes cultural, recreational and sporting interests.)

From Fusion Lifestyle webpage: "Welcome to The Mill Arts & Events Centre. We are a community arts and events venue offering local activities, as well as catering for your very special occasions. As a community focused venue with something for everyone, we can help you arrange that special occasion, as well as welcoming you for a coffee in our cosy coffee shop, or to take part in one of our many clubs and fitness classes."

Below is the type of events previously held in the Mill ranged from (but not limited to):

The Arts & Culture

- ✓ Showcase local Artworks within its Foyer
- ✓ Art exhibitions, craft fairs, market stalls
- ✓ Permanent mosaic completed by children of local schools.
- ✓ Rayleigh Horticultural held three shows a year
- ✓ Yearly pantomime
- ✓ Annual Trinity Fair.
- ✓ Scale & performance provision for staging Theatre, Musical Concerts, Comedy shows, Live Bands, Professional Wrestling (see Appendix 1.)

Recreational (Clubs & Social Groups)

- ✓ Rayleigh Operatic and Dramatic Society (RODS)
- ✓ Rayleigh Brass held weekly shows and rehearsals
- ✓ U3A (over 200+)
- ✓ No.1 Retirement & Good-fellowship (both 100+)
- ✓ Funky Voices Choir

Heritage & Tourism

- ✓ A large noticeboard of all events, shows, and clubs available, plus the 'tourist board' style information desks is immediately welcoming and accessible for all.
- ✓ The Mill Hall is popular with residents and visitors to Rayleigh, with a coffee shop, art displays in the foyer, and information of the many Heritage sites within the Town Centre. This includes the Rayleigh Windmill, Rayleigh Castle, The Dutch Cottage, Rayleigh Museum, and King George's park.
- ✓ The Mill Hall is situated between the Districts only Scheduled Ancient Monument (The National Trust owned Rayleigh Castle) & ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL owned Grade II listed Windmill (Visit England Accredited.) Both are major historical assets in the Rayleigh Conservation Area, and both benefit from the building footprint and service provision within the Mill Hall.

Sporting, Health & Well-being

- ✓ Weight watchers / healthy lifestyle classes
- ✓ Tea Dances & competitive ballroom
- ✓ Adults & Children's exercise classes
- ✓ Weight watchers / healthy lifestyle classes
- ✓ Boxing & Wrestling events
- ✓ Children's sports classes
- ✓ NHS South Essex Mobile Breast Screening Unit

Rochford District Council's Executive unanimously voted on 11th August 2020, that all leisure facilities to be reopened on phased option, including the Mill Hall.

Rochford District Council's Portfolio Holder for the Community, Cllr Mike Webb said (at the time): "We know how important it is for our residents to get back to their health and wellbeing activities and we are working hard with Fusion so that they can open as soon as possible whilst adhering to the safety regulations concerning COVID-19. "We want to do everything we can to support the reopening of leisure centres as soon as possible because they play an important role in the community, increasing our members physical and emotional wellbeing."

Rochford District Council Partnership Panel meeting (Notes: 21-Jan-2022) accept the type of events previously held in the Mill ranged from (but not limited to):

- ✓ Shows/seated events
- ✓ Weddings
- ✓ Parties/social events
- ✓ Sports clubs/activities
- ✓ Market stall events
- ✓ Meetings

3. Why the nominated land and/or building usage is seen as having social value for the local community

Social Value is defined through the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 (Act) which came into force in January 2013 and requires all public sector organisations (and their suppliers) to look beyond the financial cost of a contract and consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of an area.

The Rochford District Council New Local Plan (Spatial options consultation) confirms Rayleigh as the only Tier 1 settlement in the District. “Rayleigh has a significantly larger population (34,000 people) than any other settlement in Rochford District, and contains by far the widest range of local and regional services, including two secondary schools, a large town centre and a generous range of retail, employment and community facilities.” It is clear the Mill Hall was purposely built in Rayleigh with the footprint size, scale, and provision to ensure the local community had facilities commiserate with the settlement status.

ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL’s Executive, on 4 September 2019, reviewed the Leisure Management Contract achievement targets (known as Key Performance Indicators) 2018/2019. Fusion Lifestyle’s management of the Mill Hall failed to achieve the 55% occupancy target. They failed the previous year as well.

Key Performance Indicators 2018-19

Key Performance Indicator	Year End RAG	Year End Target	Year End Result
Leisure Contract			
LPI001 Clements Hall Sports Centre visits	A	559,545	551,419
LPI002 Rayleigh Leisure Centre visits	A	113,631	111,574
LPI004 Freight House visitors - Percentage Occupancy	G	27%	27%
LPI005 Mill Arts and Events Centre visitors - Percentage Occupancy	A	55%	51%
LPI816 Health and Safety Audit	G	97%	98%
LPI817 Customer Satisfaction	A	90%	86%
LPI818 Accidents per 10,000 visits	G	<3	2.93
LPI819 Planned Maintenance completed on schedule	G	100%	100%

Key Performance Indicators 2017-18

Key Performance Indicator	Year End RAG	Year End Target	Year End Result
Leisure Contract			
LPI001 Clements Hall Sports Centre visits	G	568,794	552,407
LPI002 Rayleigh Leisure Centre visits	A	119,217	110,368
LPI004 Freight House visitors - Percentage Occupancy	A	28%	24%
LPI005 Mill Arts and Events Centre visitors - Percentage Occupancy	A	54%	52%
LPI816 Health and Safety Audit	G	97%	98%
LPI817 Customer Satisfaction	G	90%	90%
LPI818 Accidents per 10,000 visits	G	<3	3
LPI819 Planned Maintenance completed on schedule	A	100%	95%

The Mill Hall is a community asset, which must be run as a community asset, not as an ‘add-on’ to the ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL leisure contract.

It is the belief of a many in our community that with a different management approach, and investment, The Mill Arts & Events Centre could increase the visit rate, and variety of events that currently only it can offer to Rayleigh residents, and ultimately increased financial revenue.

ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL's Leisure & Cultural Strategy (2019-2024) vision is for 'a collaborative and aspirational approach to Leisure & Culture to support and enable people of all ages to lead an active and healthy lifestyle as well as discovering and celebrating the heritage of our District'. Priority includes Heritage, Events & Celebrations: Promote and expand on existing cultural offer.

ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL Partnership Board committed to investigate the possibility of direct funding for, but not limited to, arts and culture in relation to the Mill Hall site. (P/Panel meeting 26th May 2021.)

ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL also applied to the Arts Council for funding under the 'People & Places' initiative. Whilst unsuccessful, it was noted that community participation was vital and impressed the Arts Council. The Save Mill Hall Community Group would expect the Council to continue with this funding workstream.

First Tier Tribunal decisions, upholding ACV nominations, noted there is a very marked acceptance that financial problems can be overcome if there is a strong sense of local community especially when credible advisers with experience of community projects are available for support.

The Save Mill Community Group met with Arts Council advisors & The Theatres Trust to request advice and support on preserving the footprint & arts provision of The Mill Hall. The feedback received was that Rochford District Council needed to invest in their existing Arts & Events venue facilities and improve cultural provision for the District. A cultural vision & strategy, with policies in place to support them, an agreed budget plus a funding workstream is the direction needed by this Council to improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the Rochford District.

The value of live performance is increasingly being recognised not just in terms of improving social and cultural wellbeing of local people, but also how important cultural venues are for supporting the vitality of town centres especially as retail comes under increased challenge.

The joint Castle Point and Rochford Health and Wellbeing Board launched, on 10th January 2022, a new health and wellbeing strategy, which sets out their three-year plan to improve the health and wellbeing of residents in Castle Point and Rochford.

In summary, it states: "Our vision is that Castle Point and Rochford will be inclusive places where we are empowered, informed, and supported to live healthy lives. Our focus is on an all-age approach across our four priorities – mental health & wellbeing, physical health & wellbeing, ageing well, and community resilience. We will utilise the strength in our collaborative working and the many assets in our communities. We need to preserve, maintain, and capitalise on these to ensure that what our residents' value is sustained. Our strategy highlights the importance of maximising our assets, these can include buildings.

Social interactions are an important part of ageing well. They help people to maintain health and wellbeing through our communities.

Depression can affect 1 in 5 older people living in the community, and 2 in 5 living in care homes. Older people are especially prone to loneliness and social isolation. Older people should have the support and opportunity to make and maintain meaningful connections and participate in worthwhile activities so that they can enjoy life as much as possible for as long as possible."

The Mill Hall is an integral part of our community, part of people's daily lives and a source of happiness, pride, and well-being for so many. The pandemic has meant those who love culture in their lives haven't heard live music for over a year, or admired a work of art up close, or taken their children to a Pantomime. Getting involved in creative activities in communities reduces loneliness, supports physical and mental health and wellbeing, sustains older people, and helps to build and strengthen social ties - this is indicated by the constant use of the hall by residents of Homeregal House, situated adjacent to the Mill Hall.

A revitalised Mill Hall could once again become the hub of our community, providing services and facilities for which there is a strong local demand. In the process, the Mill Hall will continue to help create a more inclusive and vibrant community.

The Theatres Trust, national advisory body for theatres and a statutory consultee within the planning system, contacted ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL regarding the Asset Delivery Programme, below are extracts from their correspondence.

- The Theatres Trust have had no engagement from the Council or Voyage regarding the proposal of demolishing the Mill Hall and replacing it with a smaller community centre. These proposals fall within their interest because of the theatre and performance provision offered by The Mill Hall. They have significant concerns as the replacement facility would lose much of its functionality for live events. Furthermore, potentially the replacement hall would lack the functionality to effectively host live events and certainly not to the capacity stated. As a single-height space, that would also limit the ability to host theatre as there would be constraints on sets and potentially poor sightlines for audiences. It is clear from local objection and petitions the current facility is well regarded.
- Sustainable development as defined through the NPPF (2019) includes a social objective to support social and cultural wellbeing. Paragraph 92 seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities and to guard against unnecessary loss.
- We do not consider there to be sufficient justification demonstrating the existing Mill venue and the live events it hosts are no longer required.
- We would also suggest the economic impact on the town should be considered in terms of loss of audience spend in other businesses when attending shows and events.
- There will be significant harm to social and cultural wellbeing through the loss of existing events held at the Mill Hall.

4. How strongly the local community feel that the land and/or building usage furthers their social interest.

1. Objections have been raised throughout the Asset Strategy Delivery Programme by District Councillors and residents with Rochford District Council over plans to demolish the Mill Hall.
2. During the May 2021 elections to this council the literature from, or on behalf of, many of the successful candidates contained a position of discontent toward Rochford District Council's plans for the Mill Hall site, as outlined in their wider Asset Delivery Programme.
3. ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL's own public consultation for the Civic Suite and The Mill Hall Arts & Events Centre sites ran from 9th March 2021 for an extended engagement period following high levels of interest. It closed on 25th April 2021.
 - Over 480 completed surveys were received regarding the Mills Arts and Events Site.
 - Over 150 people attended the live public webinar event.
 - 91% opposed in principle to the redevelopment of the Mill Hall site.

4. Verbatim comments from the public consultation:
 - Rayleigh is expanding with more and more flats and houses, but less space and facilities.
 - It is the only large Civic Amenity we have; the population is growing not shrinking – it's illogical to decrease capacity. The proposed new building does not cater for larger events that will bring people into the town
 - We don't need more housing in Rayleigh, especially if it means pulling down a local community centre and arts facility
 - I belong to an over 50's keep fit group and we fully utilise the WHOLE space of the larger hall at Mill Hall. Without that amount of space our current members will have to be significantly reduced.
5. More than 4,000 residents from the District have signed a petition opposing the demolition of the Mill Hall and building of housing in the Rayleigh Conservation Area. <https://www.change.org/p/rochford-district-council-save-rayleigh-mill-hall>
6. More than >1,600 members in our Community have joined our 'Save the Mill Hall' Facebook group.
7. ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL have set up a Community Workstream to "revisit the Council's requirement for the Mill Arts & Events Centre" following the meeting of Council on 2 December 2021.
8. A significant consequence of the decision by the Council to keep the Mill Hall closed, has meant organisations have disbanded, and others have become less well supported.
9. Housing and Communities Secretary, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP on 14th July 2020 presented a written ministerial statement: " Our theatres, concert halls and live music performance venues are the envy of the world and are central to our cultural heritage. Performance venues should not be permanently lost as a result of current conditions. These buildings cannot be easily replaced and are an intrinsic part of our cultural heritage, which is why the government is clear that temporary social distancing restrictions should not be an excuse for them to be permanently lost. Councils will now need to take the temporary impact of coronavirus into account when considering permission for change of use, redevelopment or demolition of a theatre, concert hall or live music performance venue. That's why we're investing £1.57 billion to protect Britain's cultural, arts and heritage institutions, as well as ensuring these buildings aren't destroyed. It is vital they are properly protected by the planning system for both people today to enjoy and future generations.
10. Jon Morgan, Director of the Theatres Trust, responded to the ministerial statement: We welcome the news of revisions to the planning system, which reinforce and increase protections for our treasured theatres and provide reassurance for the communities that use and value them. The COVID-19 lockdown has rendered otherwise vibrant theatres vulnerable to permanent closure and we have already seen a number of theatres fall vacant due to the operator going into liquidation. These measures will help ensure these vital community assets are protected during the current crisis and can be revived to serve their local communities once again.

5. Please attach any relevant documents to the application form

Item No.	Documents
1	Land registry Map & Title Deeds
2	Pictures of The Mill Arts & Events Centre
3	Rayleigh Conservation Area map
4	Save Mill Hall Community Group Purpose & Constitution
5	Rochford District Council Public Consultation results
6	Theatres Trust letter to RDC dated 16-Apr-2021
7	Save Mill Hall Campaign – Press, Protests & Supporters
8	Mill Hall Campaign - ITV Anglia report May 2021 (Including interview with Cllr Craig Cannell)
9	RDC Full Council Meeting 2-Nov-2021: All Items related to The Mill Hall
10	Examples of Events held at Mill Hall (Flyers, posters, etc)