

From the Big Screen to Big Business!

One year on from its historic reopening, the Bo'ness Hippodrome - Scotland's first purpose built cinema - is not only proving popular with cinemagoers but also with the local business community. The cinema has welcomed over 18,500 visitors in the past 12 months with the increased footfall to the central Scotland town resulting in its diverse range of retailers reaping the benefits.

Bo'ness has welcomed new visitors and old faces since the Hippodrome has re-opened with local businesses reporting positive effects from increased numbers of customers. Some shops have even teamed up with the venue to run joint promotions. One significant change for Bo'ness is the flourishing evening economy, identified as a key factor in any urban renaissance, with a new bar scheduled to open shortly in a time when many are closing down.

The Hippodrome - recently shortlisted in the 2010 Scottish Civic Trust My Place Awards - was reopened in April 2009, 97 years after its first customers took their seats in the auditorium. Costing £2.1 million, the cinema project is the centrepiece of a wider £5million Townscape Heritage Initiative, which aims to repair heritage buildings and rejuvenate underused properties in Bo'ness.

Spearheaded by My Future's in Falkirk, the innovative multi-partner economic regeneration project led by Falkirk Council, the transformation of Bo'ness is a prime example of the initiative's town centre development work, driving economic regeneration whilst taking into account the unique fabric and heritage of individual communities. Over the past three years nearly £700,000 of improvements have been delivered in the town which has been awarded Outstanding Conservation Area Status due to the prevalence of historic buildings. The local harbour and foreshore area is also the subject of extensive regeneration plans including up to 750 new properties, reinstatement of the 400 year old harbour and creation of new infrastructure.

Val Trotter, owner of Bo'ness based Pebbles Jewellery and vice-chairperson of local business organisation Bo'ness Means Business, believes the Hippodrome is part of the renaissance taking place in Bo'ness.

She said: "We have noticed an increased footfall in the town, particularly on the days there are matinee screenings at the Hippodrome. Anything that brings people into the town centre is really good for us.

"In particular it's great the Hippodrome attracts people from out of town, who might visit just for the cinema and find that we have a fantastic historic town centre to explore in Bo'ness. The cinema is also attracting former residents, interested in seeing all the changes that have taken place in recent years.

"People are impressed with all the regeneration that has happened, including the refurbishment of the Hippodrome - it's a big investment in Bo'ness and it's great that a small town like ours has facility like this. It's a gorgeous place to visit."

Councillor Adrian Mahoney, the convener of economic strategy and development at Falkirk Council - which runs the venue - says: "It's great to hear about the positive impact the Hippodrome has made on the local community and the local economy.

"Local firms have really taken this wonderful old picture house to their hearts and are feeling the benefits of having this fantastic facility on their doorsteps. They're also seeing old buildings and other parts of Bo'ness town centre being revitalised as part of the Council's My Future's In Falkirk strategy. The initiative is breathing new life into the area."

He added: "The Hippodrome offers all the comfort and high quality presentation of a modern-day cinema, but with all the glamour of an old-style picture house. Over the past year, we've built up a loyal fan base of customers who thoroughly enjoy the revitalised Hippodrome experience. If you haven't been yet, treat yourself and go."

The Hippodrome first opened in March 1912 and claims to be Scotland's oldest purpose-built cinema.

In 1975, the building stopped showing movies, but continued as a bingo hall until its closure in the 1980s. The pre-art deco structure then fell into a state of disrepair, before being rescued in a £2.1 million refurbishment programme. It re-opened to movie fans on April 6, 2009.

"The classic interior - all red velvet seats and dark wood - looks stunning," said Councillor Mahoney. "And the new sound and projection equipment doesn't disappoint either."

Since the Hippodrome re-opened, two new restaurants - Bassi (an Indian) and Roberta's Bistro - have launched in the town centre. Other new businesses are also being established.

"The Hippodrome has certainly created a much stronger evening economy in the town centre - and boosted trade around daytime screenings too," said Councillor Mahoney. "It's great to see regeneration in Bo'ness - and it's great to see great movies in the fabulous Hippodrome."

The Hippodrome celebrates the first anniversary of its re-opening by showing movies from 1975 - the year it ran its last picture show. Monty Python and the Holy Grail, The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Jaws will all be screened at the end of April. For details, visit <http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/hippodrome>

My Future's in Falkirk is an innovative economic development initiative which is transforming the Falkirk area into a diverse and modern economy and a desirable place to work, live and visit. Launched in 2002, My Future's in Falkirk is a public and private sector partnership between Falkirk Council, BP and INEOS.

LOCAL BUSINESS CASE STUDIES

Rock'n'Rolls

James Redpath runs Rock 'n' Rolls, a cafe and shop in South Street, round the corner from the Hippodrome with his wife Lynn. The shop also sells movie and music memorabilia.

"On Saturday mornings, we notice we're busier with the matinee film shows for children. Lots of families come in for food after the film and that helps boost our footfall. The Hippodrome is a really good symbol of all the regeneration that's going on in the town and hopefully that will continue.

"My wife and I both big film fans and we love the fact that we can see movies in a great little cinema like the Hippodrome."

Lynn added: "We're getting lots of positive feedback about the Hippodrome. As well as boosting trade on a Saturday, we also notice we're busier on Monday mornings, when the Hippodrome has 'cuppa' screenings from 11 a.m. People sometimes come in before and after the film and tell us what they've seen - and, of course, to enjoy our food.

"The Hippodrome has become a good meeting point for local people and gives a bit of a feel-good factor to Bo'ness. It's particularly good that as well as big blockbusters, the cinema also stages special events on local history. These are really popular with locals and visitors.

"It's great the way the Hippodrome has been restored. The downstairs area has been made accessible for disabled people - not bad for a building first designed nearly 100 years ago. I've spoken to families of users with disabilities who say how good it is to visit the cinema and how helpful staff are."

The Bo'ness Toyshop

Sisters Lesley-Anne King and Fiona Brown run The Bo'ness Toy Shop which they opened in 2007.

"We have been running the toy shop for the last three years from 35 South Street and in January this year we moved to our larger shop on the corner at 19 South Street.

"We decided we wanted to work for ourselves and to do this in Bo'ness was always the priority, we have lived in Bo'ness all our lives and have young children who attend a local school so it made sense." Lesley-Anne explains.

Fiona said: "We are now closer to the Hippodrome and have noticed a real buzz on a Saturday morning when the Jeely Jar (children's matinee) showing comes out. We have also noticed a range a new visitors to the town. When we talk to them they tell us they are through visiting the

Hippodrome. We will continue to work with the Hippodrome and hope it continues to bring new faces to the town."

Inkspot and Silverleaf Booksellers

Karen Millar set up the Inkspot and Silverleaf bookshop in South Street, a few minutes' walk from the Hippodrome, two years ago.

"I've seen an increase in people coming into the shop before and after the films are shown, so that's a good thing.

"We've done joint promotions with the Hippodrome - offering discounts on books of the films being shown. It's good that local businesses can work with the venue in this way. Hopefully we can all help each other and bring more people in the town centre.

"It's been hard work but I've loved every minute of it," she says. "There's been a lot of work going on in the town centre - for instance streetscape works and refurbishment work to old buildings, including the Hippodrome. But it's been a positive thing. I'm glad, as a new business, to see public and private sector investment in Bo'ness and hope that can continue."

The Corbie Inn

Gail Fairholm and her husband Giles run a successful joinery business in Bo'ness town centre. The couple are also restoring the former Kinneil Bar in the town which is to be reopened as The Corbie Inn later this year. Gail and Giles moved to Bo'ness seven years ago.

"It's a fantastic town and it was great to set up home here," she said. "In recent years, the picture house re-opening, the town centre regeneration work and all the other stuff going on have really helped put Bo'ness on the map. It's an exciting time to live here.

"The Hippodrome's been a great addition to the town and I'm sure we'll benefit from passing trade when we open the pub. There's a real evening economy developing in Bo'ness and the cinema is part of that. I'm confident we'll attract people going out to the movies or coming in for a drink after the film. I know other local businesses are already benefiting."

The couple recently visited the Hippodrome with their 11-year-old son Angus to see the Oscar-winning 'Avatar'.

"We're keen to support the Hippodrome, so held back on going to see 'Avatar' in one of the local multiplexes and we weren't disappointed. The Hippodrome uses some of the latest technology. So the digital print of the film looked fantastic and the sound was great too.

"My husband and I are real ale fans, so we particularly enjoy that you can get a pint of local-brewed ale from Tryst Brewery in the Hippodrome. You can

even take it to your seat with your popcorn. You don't get that in the multiplexes."

ABOUT THE HIPPODROME

- A key project in the My Future's in Falkirk economic development initiative, the Hippodrome is Scotland's oldest purpose built cinema and first opened on 11 March 1912.
- The building - with its distinctive round auditorium - was designed by Bo'ness architect Matthew Steele, working in conjunction with local film-maker Louis Dickson.
- Early screenings were films made by Dickson himself, including movies about the annual Bo'ness Children's Fair Festival. Several of his films survive to this day and are part of the Scottish Screen Archive. Louis Dickson had previously been the official cinematographer at the 1908 Scottish National Exhibition in Edinburgh.
- In the 1960s The Hippodrome added bingo to its repertoire and finally stopped screening films in 1975. However, it continued to operate until the 1980s as a bingo hall, before finally closing its doors to audiences.
- The building fell into disrepair in the 1980s and 1990s - and many local people feared it would eventually be demolished, however, in 2006, an ambitious programme was started to repair and refurbish the building, as part of a wider Townscape Heritage Initiative to restore significant buildings within Bo'ness.
- The £1.95m initial restoration programme was funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund, Falkirk Council through the Townscape Heritage Initiative, Historic Scotland, the Architectural Heritage Fund, Falkirk Environment Trust and the Manifold Trust. A further £200,000 was spent on a technical fit-out, funded by Falkirk Council with support from The National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council.

- The revitalised Hippodrome was re-launched on April 6, 2009 with a community screening of "Mamma Mia!" Since then it has entertained audiences with the latest Hollywood blockbusters, world cinema, local movies - and much more. It also hosts special events.
- In contrast to its early days - when 510 people crammed into the distinctive round movie theatre's stalls and 215 squeezed into the balcony - the building now provides new, comfortable seating for just under 180 paying customers
- The latest digital projection and sound equipment has also been installed to give movie-goers all the trappings of a new cinema coupled with all the glamour of an early picture palace.
- The architects re-instated an internal decoration scheme from 1926 - when the Hippodrome was extended and altered - and a new screen has also been installed along with a cafe/bar area, disabled toilet and baby changing area.

- Falkirk Council (12/04/2010)

http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/about_council/news/press_item.aspx?pid=2436