

Cheese and Grain

Training and Skills Annex (Event Tec)

Design Brief

Cheese and Grain (C&G) is a community owned, not-for-profit social enterprise, registered as a charity. Its chief activity is running the Cheese and Grain music and events venue. The venue has an 830-capacity main auditorium, a suite of meeting rooms, a bar and café. It also has a recording and sound engineering studio in the top floor at the very rear of the building.

Over the past 8 years just over £1m has been spent improving facilities at the C&G. It has developed its business to the extent that it now needs no public revenue subsidy. Not only are its day to day running costs met by trading, but it also uses its social enterprise income to provide a range of services and support activities to the local community.

A key partner throughout the C&G's development has been Frome Town Council, acting both as a "good landlord" and a creative and committed investor.

The Cheese and Grain is establishing a reputation as a centre for training and professional development for a wide range of music industry specialisms, including sound and light engineering and it is currently running apprenticeship/trainee and internship schemes.

The area hosts several music festivals (Glastonbury being the largest and best known) and music venues. Frome and the surrounding area are increasingly becoming a location of choice for a range of music industry professionals and companies. However, the best employment opportunities are rarely available to local people and a broad training and work experience programme (the working title is "Event Tec") is being developed by the Cheese and Grain. Sound and light engineering, stage rigging, business skills, event logistics, marketing and hospitality are all included in the plans.

The C&G currently has eight trainee places. However, to grow this work, to "scale-up" the C&G needs more space. This required space includes a service area so that logistics training can be based on good practice and a full range of facilities. It requires editing suites and a properly equipped training and rehearsal room.

The Event Tec project will benefit from support from the C&G's Patrons: Glastonbury's Festivals Emily Eavis, the radio DJ and television presenter Jo Whiley and folk singer Cara Dillon.

The scheme will complete the development of the sound studio at the C&G that lacks adequate access for larger equipment, and which sometimes need a larger live room than is currently available.

The studio has been a huge success using income from commercial recording and editing to fund a range of music-based youth work and music industry related vocational training.

The C&G has been able to deploy Dom Monks, one of the country's leading sound engineers and the studio has been used to produce albums by leading artists like Nick Cave, Tom Jones, the Vaccines and Seth Lakeman. The proceeds have paid for work with local schools and with youth work delivery partners Young Somerset and Young People Frome. Dom Monks will be able to act as a key advisor in the design process.

Tenure has been secured (a 25-year lease) on 200sq metres of land (the footprint) between the C&G building and the neighbouring river-side Canoe Club. See illustration below



Orange box indicates the build site

The aim is to extend the C&G onto the build site connecting this new build to the existing C&G studio. The current thinking is to leave a 2.5m gap between the new build and the canoe club that can be used for waste bins and help facilitate construction of the river-end wall of the build. It is anticipated that the build on the other end (next to the C&G studio) will be fully connected making the most of available space and ensuring access.

A two-floor build is envisaged. The ground floor will need to be a high ceilinged (at least approximately 3m) service area for recycling, ladders, crowd barrier storage, staging, beer barrel deliveries and large items of equipment needed by the venue. Doors, at least as large domestic double garage size, will be required across the frontage to allow access to the service area. An idea to be considered is that one or two standard sized steel containers could be housed in the service area. These containers would have specialised uses - one being refrigerated.

A floor above will house a general-purpose meeting room to be used principally for vocational training and used as rehearsal space. One or two much smaller rooms are required as editing suites and must have excellent sound proofing and should be accessible without going through the main room.



At the rear of the proposed building is a railway line. The aspiration is to build using as much of the available space as possible, but this will present some construction challenges. In addition, it will be desirable to reduce noise coming from the railway and provide maintenance access. Ideally the build can be accomplished without having to reach access agreements with Network Rail/GBR.

The new build must interconnect with the studio on the first floor in such a way as not to compromise the sound insulation achieved when the studio was installed.

There may need to be a stairwell at one end (a fire escape) and/or a second main stairwell adjacent to the lift.

There will need to be a service lift at least 2.5 sq. m. enabling equipment and musical instruments (including pianos) to be taken up to the first-floor studio in the existing C&G building. This lift will also ensure disabled access to the first floor of the new build.

A design challenge is to create a façade/frontage that reflects the presence of two very different buildings on each side of the new build. A utilitarian basic modern commercial style building housing the Canoe Club sits on one side of the build footprint and a taller Victorian building (1870) on the other. Although the building is first and foremost commercial there is an aspiration to have an attractive frontage. The area in front of the building is currently largely viewed as a service area/parking area but the hope is that work on the river side of the Cheese & Grain will contribute to developing the area as a space used recreationally by the public. This would align to aspirations set out in the FTC “River Corridor Plan”.

The anticipated budget (including VAT) is approximately £800K to £1m (2021) but there is the possibility of Frome Town Council taking the role as client, which would reduce costs by 20% as local authorities do not pay VAT. But this would be contingent on the source of funding and FTC agreement.



This image shows the “tower” at the rear of the C&G building that houses the recording studio.

As an extension of the project there is the possibility of securing further funds to repair and enhance the C&G side wall (see image above) reinstating windows and improving visual amenity and access. Further enhancements that will improve visual amenity, pedestrian access/use of the land immediately in front of the proposed build would also be desirable.

A builder’s yard will have to be established on land currently owned by Mendip District Council. The smaller this yard is, and the speedier the build, the easier it will be to negotiate its use.

Another reason for a speedy build is business interruption, as this end and side of the building is essential for load-in of bands and event services. The build process must allow for access or be as speedy as possible.

There is some concern about how robust/sufficient, the supply of electricity is to the building. Furthermore, the Town Council is deeply concerned about carbon footprints and is keen to promote alternative/renewable forms of power and insulation. To build in some form of electricity generation and storage would be highly desirable. The building would be south facing although a two-storey building would be somewhat overshadowed by the C&G “tower”.

Appointment process

The aim is reach RIBA Stage 3 by 12 December and therefore an accelerated appointment process is required and only an architectural practice that can start work immediately can be considered. The remaining criteria on which the appointment will be based are as follows.

Capacities and experience	Weighting	Notes
Experience of developing buildings with their own power generation and power storage	15%	Power supply to the C&G is an issue and any additional usage will need to be generated and stored by features in or on the new build.
Experience of, and track record of developing buildings with high levels of sound insulation	20%	One use will be for rehearsals and there are homes nearby.

Experience of working with third sector/voluntary & community organisations	20%	Although FTC is procuring this work the end user is a voluntary organisation and the Stage 3 report is required for capital grant applications
The ability to give examples of work that has been completed to budget	15%	There will be a strictly limited budget to the build
Work on public venues (music venues, theatres etc.)	15%	An understanding of the logistical needs of a venue would be an advantage
Any direct knowledge of the Cheese and Grain building and its history	15%	The Cheese & Grain building has a complex history and presents some specific challenges. Given the brief time available for this work any existing knowledge of the building would be helpful

Fee

The work is subject to a blind tendering process but offers between £5,000 and £10,000 will be considered. The contract will be awarded on a best-value basis rather than being based on cost alone.

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