

The Future of the Albany

01

The Albany is exploring a long-term transformation project to ensure it can continue serving Deptford and Lewisham for generations to come.

The Albany is **South East London's leading arts centre**, in the heart of Deptford. Originally established in the 1890s and rebuilt in 1982, the Albany has long played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Lewisham.

Today the Albany supports **hundreds of artists and community groups, thousands of young people, and tens of thousands of audiences** every year through performances, workshops, festivals, community programmes and creative development.

However, the building increasingly limits what the organisation can achieve, and without investment faces an increasing risk of decline. This is why the Albany is now exploring a long-term transformation project to sustain the Albany's current programme of events, and improve accessibility and flexibility.

As the proposals for the Albany progress, we want to work collaboratively with the community to define what the future Albany needs to deliver.

The Albany from Douglas Way. Credit: Agape's Angle



Come As You Are. Credit: Agape's Angle

Meet the Team

The Albany is working with Stories, a purpose-led development company focused on creating sustainable communities and long-term social value.

Working in partnership with cultural, civic and community organisations, Stories develops projects that balance financial responsibility with public benefit. The project will be developed through their Joint Venture with Aviva Capital Partners, bringing together purpose-led development expertise and long-term institutional investment. The Albany is supported by a project team:

ALBANY
TRANSFORMATION
ARCHITECT

WITHERFORD WATSON MANN
architects

PLANNING
CONSULTANTS

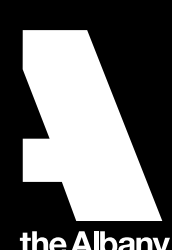


LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTS

LD Æ DESIGN

COMMUNICATIONS
CONSULTANTS

LCA



MADE FROM
DEPTFORD

S_

AVIVA
Capital Partners

The Albany receives core funding from



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Made from Deptford

02

The Albany is not simply located in Deptford – it is made from Deptford.

The Albany has always been shaped by the people, creativity and communities around it. Approximately 44% of Albany audiences identify as Black or Global Majority, making it **one of the most representative cultural spaces** in the UK.

We are proud of our history and are now entering an exciting new chapter of our story.

Tell us your favourite memory of the Albany

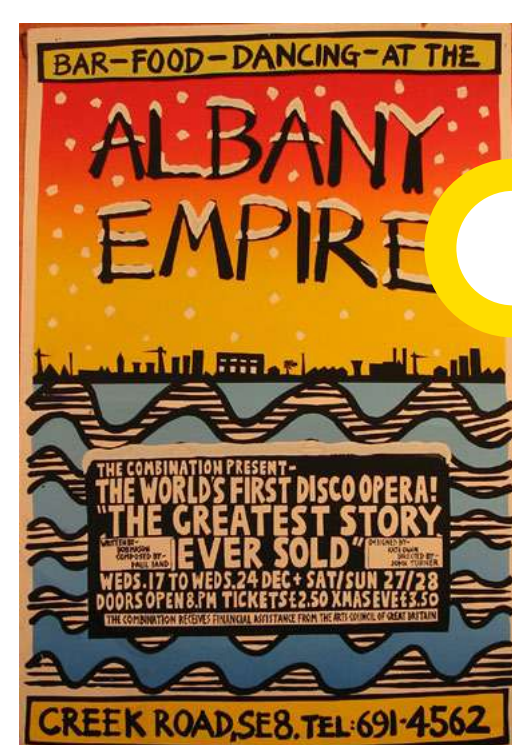
1894

The Deptford Fund is established by a group of local women to improve the lives of people living in the area.



1899

The Albany Institute, named after its new royal patron the Duchess of Albany, opens on Creek Road. The new building acts as everything from a nursery to a classroom for boot mending and domestic science classes, and a social space for young women who work in the slaughterhouse.



1972

Theatre company The Combination move from Brighton to take over the building, which now becomes an arts venue known as the Albany Empire.

Credit: Chris Schwarz



1977

Dire Straits make their debut at the Albany Empire, a moment commemorated in 2009 by the installation of a PRS plaque on the site of the old building. Music legends including Squeeze and Elvis Costello have also performed at this venue.

Credit: Chris Schwarz

1978

The Albany Empire is destroyed by fire in a suspected arson attack by the National Front in retaliation of Rock Against Racism gigs held in the venue.

2026 and beyond...

Plans are underway to transform the Albany to ensure its survival for years to come. We are undertaking a programme of community consultation, and want to hear from you, to ensure the Albany remains a key part of the Deptford community.

2012

The Albany takes over management of Deptford Lounge, a purpose-built library and community hub over the road on Giffin Square.

2000

The Albany is saved from closure by a partnership with the National Theatre 'Art of Regeneration' which brings in £3m worth of investment to rejuvenate the building. In 2003, Gavin Barlow takes over as CEO and goes on to lead the organisation for the next 20 years.

2022

The Albany is appointed as lead delivery partner for 'We are Lewisham', London Borough of Culture 2022, a programme of over 600 events attracting 400,000 audience members throughout the year.



Sun and Sea at the Albany as part of LIFT 2022 and We are Lewisham. Credit: Ellie Kurtz

1980s

The Albany becomes a launchpad for rising stars, with Lenny Henry, Whoopi Goldberg, Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer all performing here at early stages in their careers.



1982

Diana, Princess of Wales, officially opens the new building in its current location on Douglas Way. A purpose-built multi-arts venue, the designs originally included plans for a ceramic studio, photography dark room and soft play space for children.



Credit: Chris Schwarz

The Albany today

03

Our current building limits what the organisation can achieve, and without investment faces an increasing risk of decline.

Our building was built between 1979 – 1981 and has served us well. However, a series of operational challenges is limiting what we can offer.



Sound bleed and operational constraints reduce flexibility.



Ageing systems and gas boilers make the building expensive to run, difficult to heat and environmentally inefficient.



Accessibility challenges prevent some people from fully using the space.



Parts of the building are becoming harder to maintain and operate.

The Albany also operates within a difficult financial climate. Public funding continues to reduce, while the organisation increasingly relies on earned income to sustain its work. The building must work harder and more efficiently if the Albany is to remain affordable, accessible and community-led in the long term.

The organisation therefore faces a choice: invest in a long-term solution that improves how the building functions for artists, audiences and communities, or continue managing a building that becomes increasingly difficult and costly to operate.

The project is about acting now to sustain a thriving community asset for decades to come.

“The Albany is an essential community resource - bringing people together in a welcoming space. But the building clearly needs some love. We support the need for change and are excited that the community can be involved from the very start.”

Alan Robertson
CEO, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network

Safeguarding the Albany's future

04

We have been exploring options that can help support the long-term future of the Albany.

A simple refurbishment would not resolve many of these underlying challenges. While it could address some immediate maintenance issues, it would leave significant operational inefficiencies in place and limit the Albany's ability to adapt to future needs.



Although there are many aspects of the building that we value and cherish including the theatre, we explored the option of demolishing the existing building and replacing it with a completely new one. We concluded that the estimated costs, disruption and environmental impact of this approach would be substantial, without delivering sufficient additional benefits for the local community.



Zone uses allowing flexible operation and variable opening hours for different parts.



Build flexible spaces with spare capacity for future evolution.



Construction of energy-efficient and soundproofed new spaces.



Connect the building to relate better to the open spaces around the street, square and garden.

"The Community Council has collaborated with a selection of local schools, residents, and creatives to ensure the suggestions of our key users will be considered for the redevelopment of the Albany. I'm confident the new building will bring in many more visitors, and the upgrade will be something our long-standing visitors will enjoy too."

Member of the Albany Community Council

We are working with Stories, Trinity Laban and other partners on the development options for the site and want to work with the community as our proposals develop.

Inside the Albany

05

We are exploring how the Albany can adapt for the future while retaining the elements that make it distinctive and well loved.

The original building was designed for two organisations operating under one roof, and has a large complex footprint that is difficult to manage and expensive to operate.

Our early thinking reconsiders the layout of the Albany to create a **more compact, efficient and sustainable building** that is fit for the future.

This includes reshaping the building along Idonia Street, including the west wing of the arts centre and the Red Room, to create a more manageable and compact footprint.

As a non-negotiable, the **main theatre space remains firmly at the heart** of the building.



Current layout of the spaces for performance, rehearsal and hire at the Albany.



The main theatre would be supported by new purpose-built performance and event spaces, allowing a greater range of programmes, activities and groups to be accommodated within the building.

At present, the Albany's performance and hire spaces are not well connected to backstage areas. Some are awkwardly shaped, and they are not acoustically isolated, which means sound can travel between spaces. This makes it challenging for multiple groups to use the building at the same time.

Indicative future layout of the Albany with enhanced spaces for performance, rehearsal and hire.

The proposed layout addresses these issues by locating the new performance and event spaces closer to the main theatre, allowing better backstage access. Improved soundproofing would also mean these spaces could be used at the same time as a performance in the main theatre.

What one word would you use to describe the Albany?



We will also re-provide office and workspace, ensuring that the organisations, groups and freelancers who currently use the Albany continue to have a home here.

At present, the offices do not have independent access, which means they can only be used during the Albany's opening hours.

A new café

06

We are exploring the opportunity to create a new café that better connects to Douglas Way.

Our café has always been an important part of the building as **a place to meet, relax, connect**, and hold workshops, performances and community activities.

As part of the wider renewal of the Albany, we are looking at how a **new café space** could better support everyday use of the building and create a more welcoming arrival point for visitors that invites people into the building.

Tell us your priorities for the new café space by completing our survey



Sketch of the proposed Albany from Douglas Way. Credit: Witherford Watson Mann



Early concept design for the café. Credit: Witherford Watson Mann

Opening up to Douglas Way

The café's current location limits its visibility to the local community and passing trade, and prevents it from operating independently.

The emerging ideas include a **new kitchen and café space** that could open out onto Douglas Way, bringing in more natural light and helping to create a stronger relationship between the Albany and Douglas Way.

This could make the building feel **more open and visible** whilst continuing to have an inviting atmosphere. The new space will also be able to support activity throughout the day and into the evening.

The Albany Garden

07

The garden is a valued space for growing, gathering, learning and wellbeing.

As the proposals develop, we want to make sure its role in the life of the Albany is recognised and strengthened.

Tell us your priorities for the garden by completing our survey



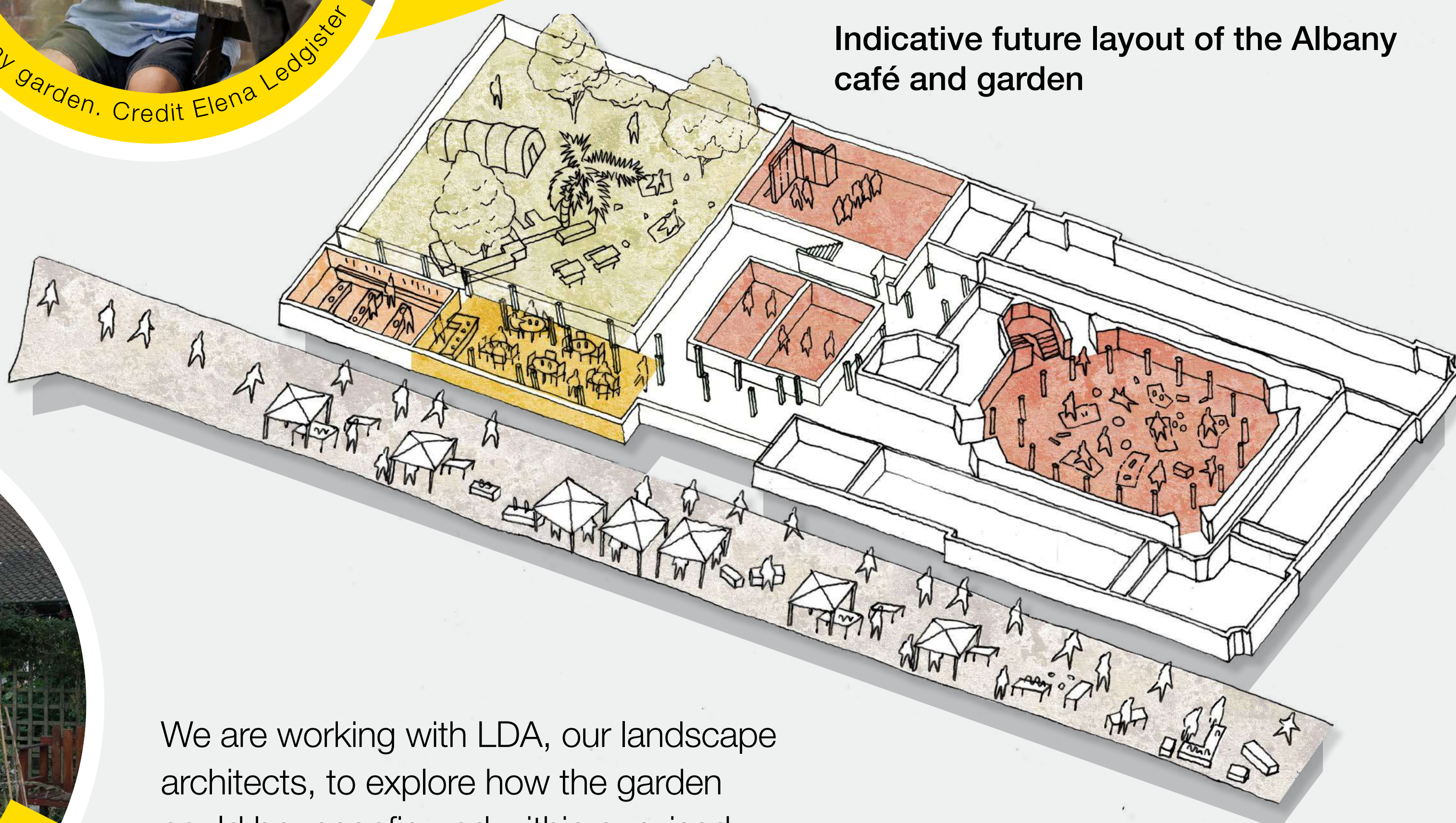
MMA in Albany garden. Credit Elena Leogister



MMA in Albany garden. Credit Emmanuel Cole



Photos of the current Albany Garden. Credits: Philipp Ebeling



Indicative future layout of the Albany café and garden

We are working with LDA, our landscape architects, to explore how the garden could be reconfigured within a revised footprint to accommodate the new development that is needed to safeguard the Albany.

The proposals aim to **create a stronger connection with the new café space** while continuing to support community growing, outdoor activity and time spent in nature.

We are exploring:



Introducing water in a safe and playful way that is suitable for families and young children



Introducing more biodiversity to help people connect with nature



Continue providing space for food production, with a more flexible layout



Bringing indoor activities outside during the summer months



Create well-lit social spaces for friends and groups to meet during summer evenings



Provide a mixture of intimate and open spaces



Creating flexible spaces that can be used in different ways by different groups

New student homes

The Albany is exploring the opportunity to provide new student homes, including affordable student housing, in partnership with Trinity Laban.

Trinity Laban is one of Lewisham’s leading cultural institutions and an important part of Deptford’s creative life, with students already contributing to the Albany and area’s cultural identity through performance, collaboration and creative practice.

As two Lewisham-based arts institutions, **Trinity Laban** and the Albany have an existing close working relationship. Discussions between our organisations have identified a local need for more high-quality, **student accommodation including affordable for Trinity Laban students** which the Albany is exploring providing on a limited part of the site.

Providing student homes on site would help create stronger connections between learning and practice, **opening up more opportunities for collaboration**, and help more young creatives access the cultural opportunities, networks and experiences that the Albany provides.

We will announce the architect working on the student homes development over the coming months.

The proposals also offer opportunities to:

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Strengthen connections between the Albany and its surroundings
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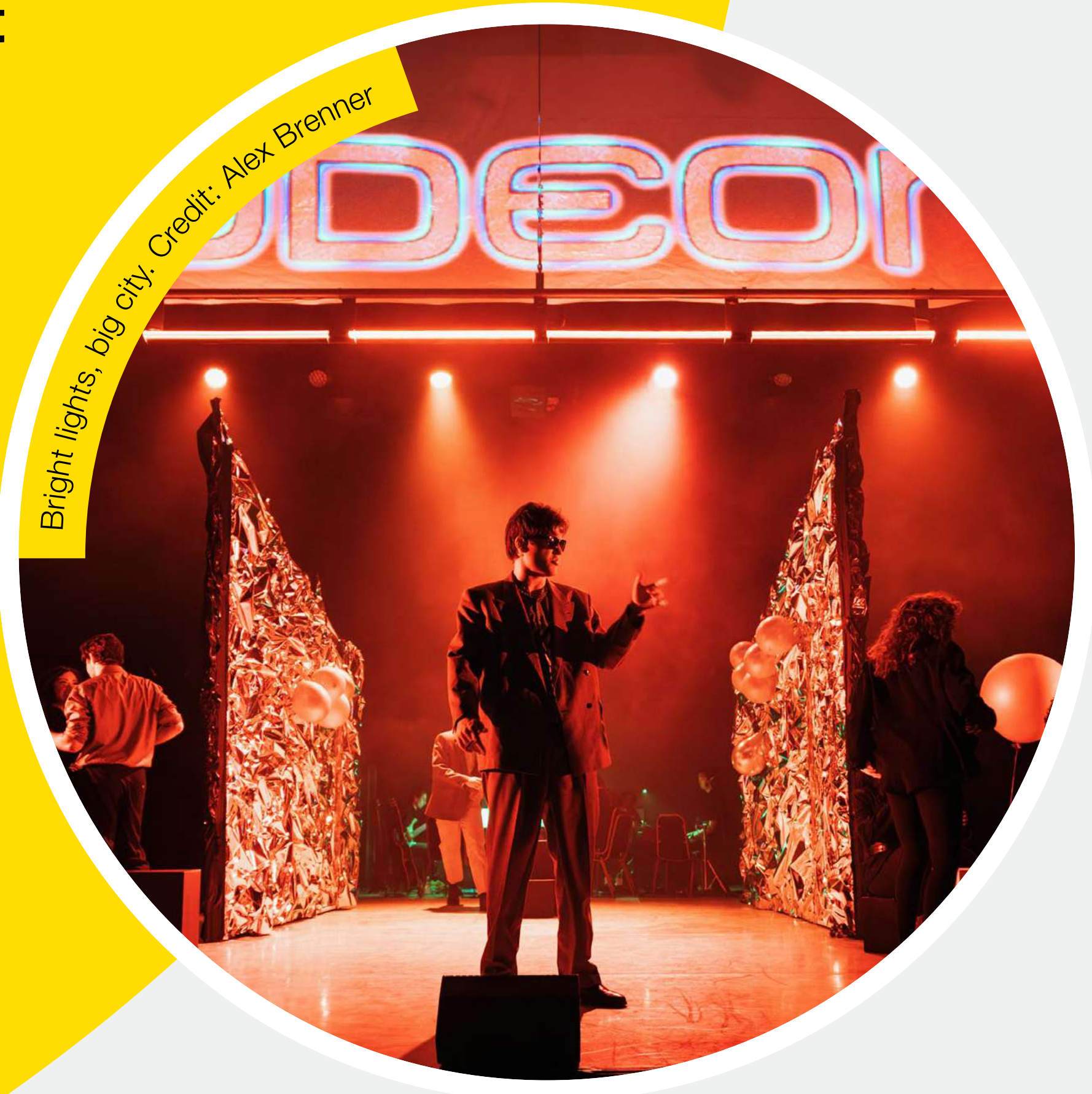
Improve safety, activity and natural overlooking throughout the day and evening.
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Create a more welcoming and active site
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Support Deptford’s wider creative community.

Investment generated through the proposed student homes will be reinvested directly into the Albany building itself, helping to support the arts centre’s future and improve the facilities it provides for local communities, artists and audiences.

This is intended to generate around half of the overall funding needed to safeguard the Albany. The remaining costs will be met through a fundraising campaign later in the year, with more information to follow in due course.



“Student accommodation is central to strategic plans for Trinity Laban to support the growing number of students who need high quality and affordable accommodation”

Professor Anthony Browne
Principal of Trinity Laban

The Albany is at an early stage of exploring this opportunity and wants to hear from local people and partners as the ideas develop.

Next steps

09

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about our early vision and proposals for the Albany.

We have begun a series of co-production workshops with youth and community members to explore how the Albany is used and the current challenges it faces.

You can share your feedback on our early vision and masterplan proposals by taking our survey.

It is **important that we hear your feedback** so that we can better understand your priorities for the Albany to seek to incorporate these into our proposals as they develop.



Next steps

Summer 2026

Consultation on early vision and proposals for the Albany including community workshops



Autumn 2026

Further engagement on proposals for the Albany



Summer 2027

Submission of planning application to Lewisham Council



Co-production workshop photos.
Credits: Philipp Ebeling.

Get in touch

If you have any questions or would prefer to share your feedback with us by email or phone, please get in touch.



thealbany.org.uk



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Scan to take part in our survey

