

Theatre could close after funding cut - councillor

34 minutes ago

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The Derngate auditorium seats up to 1,400 people

A councillor has warned that a county could lose its biggest theatre if a planned funding cut goes ahead.

The Royal and Derngate in Northampton is set to lose £30,000 of its grant from West Northamptonshire Council.

Dennis Meredith, a Liberal Democrat member of the authority, told councillors: "Every year, you pick on the Derngate."

The council said it "greatly valued" the venue but had to "make difficult decisions".

The Royal, a traditional repertory theatre, opened in 1884. The Derngate, a modern flexible auditorium, staged its first performance next door almost a hundred years later.

They were merged into one complex in 2005.

West Northamptonshire Council's budget for the next financial year, which was agreed last week, included a measure to cut £30,000 from the venue's £300,000 subsidy.



Dennis Meredith, a former Northampton mayor, said he was "horrified" by the budget cut

Meredith, a former Mayor of Northampton, said he was "quite horrified" by the proposal and said the theatre was putting on plays "on a shoestring".

He told the Conservative-controlled council: "Every single year, you pick on the Derngate.

"If you're not careful, we're going to lose the Derngate, and that is a fact."



Royal and Derngate

The Royal and Derngate auditoriums share a foyer and bar facilities

A spokesperson for the Royal and Derngate said: "Annual grant funding from both Arts Council England and West Northamptonshire Council contributes an important 15% of annual income at Royal and Derngate, with the theatre earning the remaining 85% from tickets sales, bars sales and other activities.

"Any decrease in funding is always of concern but we are very grateful for the ongoing support of our stakeholders and funders who help us to continue delivering the level of work of which we are so proud."



Getty Images

The film star Errol Flynn appeared several times at the theatre early in his career

West Northamptonshire Council said: "We greatly value the Royal and Derngate and the contribution they make to West Northamptonshire.

"However, like all councils nationally, we have had to make difficult decisions to deliver savings across all non-essential services so we can balance the book for

taxpayers."

A spokesperson said the £30,000 reduction reflected its "continued financial challenges".

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