



In spring 2024 the Gatehouse theatre told us that they were going to increase their booking fee for each film to £3 and increase the hire charges for the auditorium in line with inflation. The Film Theatre (SFT) has sympathy with the Gatehouse which is contracted out to Freedom Leisure, a not-for-profit charitable leisure and cultural trust. The theatre is a valuable part of the culture of town and the age and structure of the building makes it expensive to maintain.

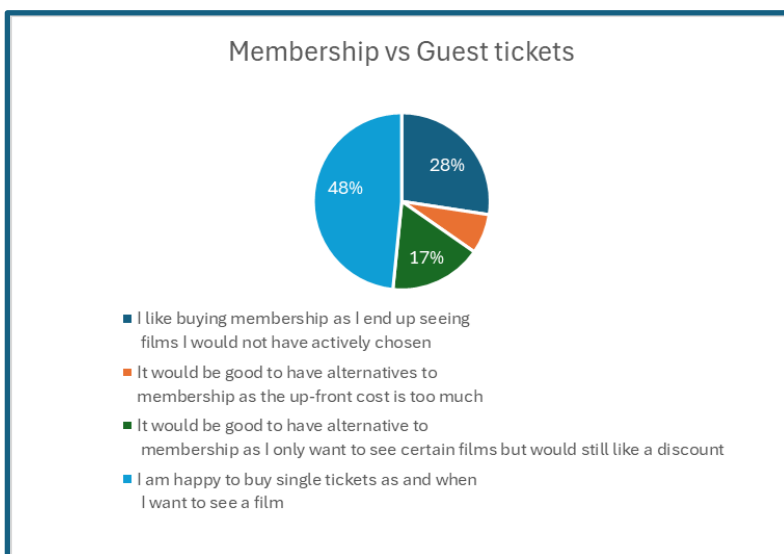
However, the SFT is also a non-profit making organisation and is run entirely by volunteers. The pandemic and the recent rise in cost of living has seen a drop in revenue. We cannot continue to lose money season on season so will need to increase ticket prices to continue showing films in the Gatehouse. The theatre provides an authentic cinema experience with a big screen and high-quality sound system, which we are keen to continue to use. However, we needed to make sure that increased ticket prices and our present set up is still acceptable to members and guests.

We asked questions about our present membership structure, the price of tickets and whether a smaller venue would be acceptable if that was all that our funds allowed. We also asked members and guests for any comments that they had about SFT.

We had a fantastic response with 123 people completing the survey. Of these, 31 were present members, 19 had been in the past, 64 were guests and 9 not stated.

Here are the questions, with a summary of the responses and the actions that we have, or will take following them.

We asked whether people liked the existing membership offer (a one-off payment to see all 12 films, saving up to £2 a film)



It is useful to break up the total responses between members and guests. 30 of the 31 members who responded said that they liked buying membership. 29 of the 41 guests who replied were happy buying single tickets although 11 (7% of respondents) said that it would be good to have alternatives to the present membership. Suggested alternatives were included in the next question.

We asked which alternatives to the present membership people might prefer.

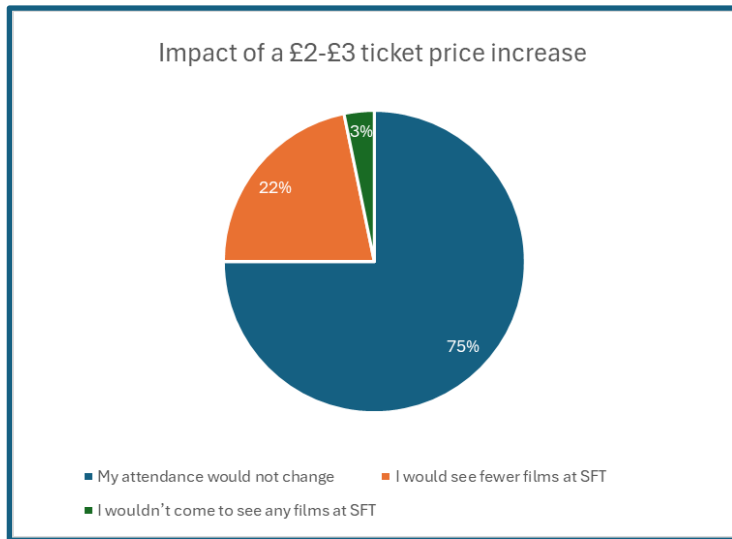


The option of a free loyalty card was the most popular option (41%), followed by a paid loyalty card (34%) with 25% of respondents favouring paying for half a season's membership at a time.

What we are going to do

- For the next season we will introduce a free loyalty card, like the one that many coffee shops offer. Guests will be given a stamp for each film they see. 7 stamps will allow the 8th film to be seen for free. After being issued, each loyalty card will be valid to the end of the following season. A paid loyalty card with a discount for each film would be difficult to administer, so we have favoured the free option.
- Half-season membership will be made available for the first 6 or second 6 films in each season to help spread the cost. Some members asked for a half season membership that would give a choice of 6 from any of the 12 films. We have offered something similar in the past, which had a very low take-up and so we have decided not to offer this. However, we hope that the option of paying for 6 films at a time will help spread the cost for members.

We asked how an increase of between £2 and £3 per film ticket would affect your attendance.



Only 3% of respondents said that they would no longer come if prices increased.

22% of respondents said that they would come to fewer films, 2 of these were present members, the rest normally buy guest tickets.

The attendance of the remaining 75% of respondents would not change.

Many people have been coming to the Film Theatre for many years, including one committee member who first joined in 1961! This loyalty is greatly appreciated but our audience is growing older over the years as one respondent said, “You are therefore losing revenue that a younger audience could bring in as they would not get a concession”. The way that many young people watch films has changed with different streaming services on offer, which presents us with a challenge

What we are going to do

- We are going to increase the price of a guest ticket by £2.50 and an equivalent increase of £2 per film for members (if they watch all 6 or 12 films paid for in advance through a member’s ticket).
- We are introducing a new concessionary for young people under 25 to encourage them to enjoy films on the big screen and will publicise this in local sixth forms, Stafford College and Staffordshire University.

These are the new prices from September 2024.

Guest tickets

Full price: £12 Over 60: £11 Under 25: £7.50

Membership (cost for 12 films)

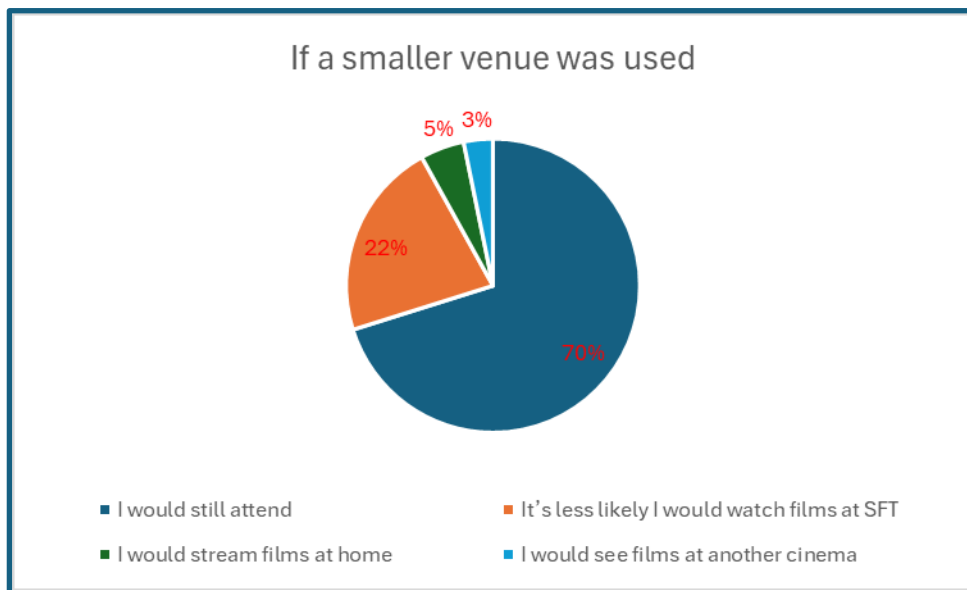
Full member: £114 Over 60: £102 Under 25: £66

Half-season option (for either the first 6 or the second 6 films)

Full member: £57 Over 60: £51 Under 25: £33

All ticket prices above include the £3 booking fee levied by the Gatehouse theatre for each film

We hope that the extra money received with increased prices will allow us to stay at the Gatehouse, but we also asked people what they would feel about SFT moving to a smaller venue.



We were heartened that 70% of all respondents said that they would still attend the Film Theatre. However, we feel that it is important to provide the full cinema experience for as long as we can. The use of the smaller MET studio in the theatre has also been discussed. Concerns have been raised by our members and guests about access and comfort in this space, given the mobility issues that some of them now have. As a result we have discounted the MET as an option in its present form.

What other issues were mentioned in replies?

- **The use of subtitles for English language films**

We experimented with providing subtitles for a couple of British films last season. Several people with hearing loss have told us that this was a real help in following the dialogue. The subtitles were inadvertently accompanied with an audio description of other sounds in the film. Some people found this distracting.

[In future we will request subtitles for any English language films where we are aware that some of the dialogue may be difficult to follow. We will not ask for an additional audio description for these films.](#)

- **Could you consider a 15 min earlier start time for longer films at 7.30?**

[It's a difficult balance between having some of our volunteers being available after work in time to greet guests at the theatre and having a film finishing late in the evening. If we do book any future films that are approaching 3 hours long, we will consider this request and make sure that the earlier starting time is clearly advertised.](#)

- **Temperature in the auditorium**

On a few occasions in the winter, guests have complained that the auditorium has been very cold

As an historic building , the Gatehouse can take a long time to warm up especially if the building has been open previously to remove large pieces of stage scenery or there has been an earlier fault with the boiler. After some issues in January after the pantomime and Christmas break, we are not aware of any problems since them. We will continue to work with the Gatehouse staff to make sure that are evenings are as comfortable as possible for our audience during the coming autumn/winter season.

- **Could membership be paid by monthly direct debit?**

All payment for tickets and membership is organised by the Gatehouse theatre. We will ask if this can be an option and report back to members and guests.

Finally, we had many comments praising the work of Stafford Film Theatre, a few of which are included below. These are much appreciated. Please spread the word through friends, work colleagues or social groups! We always welcome more volunteers on the committee, if you feel that you could help us out, do have an informal chat with us at any film evening or email us at membershipSFT@outlook.com Thank you.

- The most important aspect of SFT, for me, is the opportunity to see a varied range of films including World Cinema
- We enjoy coming and would be sorry if it were to close
- I so enjoy being a member of the Film Theatre. I just hope that we can keep going, adapting as needed.
- I don't come very often, so my voice won't count as much as a regular but I think that you do a fine job. Thank you.
- I love the choice of films. We don't want to end up seeing naff films at the Odeon! We need you!
- I would be devastated if Stafford Film Theatre ground to a halt and stopped.
- Always a lovely night out
- It's great to be able to choose films often missed at the main cinema
- I like attending as I always enjoy the films - especially the foreign language films which aren't offered elsewhere. I also see others I know at the films.
- Pleasant and helpful volunteers. Like the raffle idea and choosing of film at the end - like or dislike
- Thank you so much for all you do!