

THE FARNHAM THEATRE ASSOCIATION LTD.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 27 SEPTEMBER 2008

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

On 16th.April 2007 the FTA Committee decided that we should become a **company limited by guarantee** and on 17th. May last year we were registered with Companies House. This is the first important step towards becoming a Charity. You will have heard from the Treasurer about our funds - these are adequate for small scale campaigning, but are insufficient for our transition to charitable status. Our valiant fundraising efforts at fairs and carnivals have been marvellous but we still need to increase our financial status and so we have made an application for Grassroots funding. We will also look at other ways in which we can improve the situation and your input will be particularly valued. This is something which all our members can help us achieve.

Thanks to the generosity and expertise of one of our members, we now have our own **FTA website** – but it will need further funding to enable it to fulfil its potential in helping FTA to expand.

On one day in May last year we launched the **FTA Pledge** and raised promises of pledges worth £9,500 towards running costs of a new theatre. However, against the very negative backdrop of Crest Nicholson and Waverley's determination to drive their plans for East Street through, further marketing of The FTA Pledge has been put on hold until a more hopeful scenario emerges.

Last year the new administration at Waverley promised to "Get it right for Farnham" by initiating what they termed as a 'scaled down' scheme for East Street. The thousands of objectors to CNS plans, a lot of them supporting the FTA campaign, had had an effect, but disappointingly, the new plans submitted this year from CNS, are too large, have many problems and still contain no theatre.

We wrote to **Sir Tom Hunter**, the multi-millionaire owner of Crest Nicholson, and gained a distinguished list of signatories to that letter, including Lord Richard Attenborough. However, we did not receive a reply– but in the present financial climate, who knows what will happen!

Last summer, to see if we had support in the town centre, FTA conducted a **survey of local traders**. We asked them for their preferences for East Street: a cinema only, a theatre only or a small cinema and theatre together. We were delighted to find that 72% of the 65% who responded, put theatre and cinema together as first choice and we passed this information on to Waverley.

Last October we wrote to the **Audit Commission** requesting an investigation into Waverley's financial handling of theatre in Farnham over the years. We were referred back to Waverley's Finance Director, whom we met a few weeks ago. We told him that Councillors are given the impression that Waverley tax payers have lost vast amounts of money on theatre at the Redgrave. We now have evidence that the sale of the Castle Theatre site for £215,000 to Waverley in 1996 has brought the Council a substantial income over the last 10 years. This is currently running at £47,000 per year and over the last 13 years more than balances Waverley's total capital outlay on both theatre buildings– a sum of £405,000. In the years to come, this income will in principle recover the revenue grant funding sum put into the Redgrave's theatre companies in its final 6 years. Waverley tax payers have a very good deal here! However, we are still investigating whether Waverley have anything more than a moral obligation to compensate the public for their contributions - at least equivalent to £2million in today's money. Unfortunately, the charitable status of the Farnham Repertory Theatre Trust was not transferred to Waverley in 1998 and the Charity Commission oversaw the winding up of the Trust.

Our research confirms that in 1998 £21,125 for dilapidations was passed to Waverley by the Farnham Theatre Trust on surrender of the lease of Brightwell House and the Redgrave. We also know that this money was put into the general fund and not spent on the buildings. The Farnham Building Trust Survey last year of the Redgrave shows that water penetration through the roof has taken place over many years. The repairs which were due in 1998 have now resulted in widespread deterioration of the fabric. Our Consultant, Michael Holden indicates that a full restoration of the theatre, based on this survey, would now be in the region of £4 million in contrast with a total replacement sum of around £5.5million. (Incidentally, neither of these figures is anywhere near the exaggerated claims of Waverley's leader, Richard Gates last year).

Crest Nicholson's new plans for East Street have now received **3,014 objections** on grounds of the loss of the Redgrave alone and only 3 supporting. We are so grateful to all our members, especially those who stood for hours on the streets helping us to achieve this remarkable total. The number of objections to the main application has, with our help, reached 5,842 with only 25 in support. In May FTA joined others from Farnham making presentations at the Waverley Briefing Session for Councillors on East Street. We were delighted to be supported by Rupert Rhymes, the Chairman of the Theatres Trust. This organisation is a Statutory Consultee and was set up by Act of Parliament to protect the nation's theatre facilities. His intervention gave our campaign a strong profile and we are extremely gratefully for his input. Councillors were left in no doubt that the demolition of the Redgrave would be more than 'a little local difficulty'. The Redgrave is now officially one of the nation's top ten theatres at risk.

Waverley is relying on support for Farnham Maltings and help for amateur theatre to justify the loss of the Redgrave. FTA together with 6 amateur groups and the NFRAC put together a response to Waverley's consultation "What Theatre Makers Really, Really Want" and we said that a theatre building was top of the list – not the answer that Waverley wanted to hear and so, it has been ignored. Waverley may now use the recent sell-out performances by the Cry of Players in the Maltings' Tindle Room and a tent in the car park for the NFRAC next year, as evidence that a theatre building is not wanted or necessary. However, in lieu of a proper needs and impact study, such excuses would not carry much weight at a Public Inquiry. This remains a serious omission.

We have recently responded to the latest amendments to the Crest Nicholson's plans and have pointed out that an amphitheatre, primarily designed as a drainage system for the development in the flood plain, does not compensate for the loss of the theatre either! The CNS plans are to be decided at Waverley next Wednesday the 1st. October at 7.00 pm and we will be represented there by our legal adviser, Ellis Nicholls. The Farnham Society will also be represented by a lawyer who will deal with all the main issues concerning the development proposals. *It is possible that the Secretary of State will call in the plans for her own determination and the Waverley Planning Meeting may be cancelled, or even the decision withdrawn. *

On a positive note, we have visited the newly formed **University of the Creative Arts** to find out if there might be any interest in UCA forming partnerships with others to provide a theatre for Farnham. We were welcomed by the Executive Dean who said, "You are knocking on an open door!" The 'others' are of course, the catch – we are trying to interest F and C, the Woolmead owners, who have their own plans for East Street, to become involved. Yesterday, Kika Myrilees and Abigail McKern attended the UCA Freshers Fair for FTA and we now have over 100 of student supporters, thanks to their inspiring enthusiasm.

The FTA team, are working full out to exploit every opportunity to bring our case for a theatre to the forefront – chipping away at the resistance and inching forward every month. We have a great team with a great aim – *to build on our successes and continue to raise aspirations – to encourage everyone interested in theatre to be ambitious and not to settle for second best – to aim high and see what we can all achieve together.*

Anne Cooper 27.09.2008