

# Farnham Theatre Association Ltd

*Working for a Regional Theatre in Farnham*

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Jeremy Hunt MP  
The Conservative constituency office  
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22<sup>nd</sup> September 2009

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for meeting with us on Friday last which we very much appreciated. We recognise, of course, the many demands on your time and that your schedule for the day was probably heavier than you had originally anticipated, so it might be helpful to confirm and elaborate a bit on what was raised.

Anne Cooper mentioned the letter which she had copied to you, addressed to Kentake Chinyelu-Hope, chairman of the SE Regional Arts Council, about taking up the offer of a meeting with representatives of SERAC, to which there has so far been no response. You kindly agreed to pick up on this with Kentake, which would be very helpful.

I'm sure you are already well aware of the fact we emphasised on Friday that the FTA feels very strongly that it has never been given a fair hearing by Waverley Borough Councillors. For instance, the level of debate when the application for demolition was considered last October was extremely disappointing with no councillors addressing any key issues on the viability and public and commercial benefits (or otherwise) of restoring quality theatre as an integral aspect and focal point of the town. Unfortunately members still appear to be shackled to the past and unwilling to give consideration to any alternatives which would meet the strong public demand to see a revival of professional theatre in Farnham, something which it is accepted by all parties cannot be provided at the Maltings. FTA has frequently suffered the detrimental effects of casual misinformation put into the public domain. We understand that it is difficult for an MP to intervene in the business of a local council, and that attempts to do so may actually be counterproductive, but we do hope we managed to put forward points that will be helpful to you in discussions with both Waverley BC and to your constituents regarding a theatre for Farnham.

You will recall that Mike Silver outlined in some detail the make up and work of the Farnham Rep and the high level of performances and other activities which it has sustained over recent years employing a combination of professionals and volunteers in all areas and working in conditions which are far from ideal and cannot replicate a traditional 'evening out' at the theatre.

The points below will be of interest to those who understand the importance of theatre to the economy and to the Cultural Capital for Farnham. We would like to think that these points are of interest and are understood by Waverley Councillors: we feel it is very important that they do address these.

In 2007 FTA commissioned a 'Traders Survey' in Farnham to which 65% of local traders and businesses responded. This showed the support for a theatre in Farnham. The findings were not surprising to FTA and given the support by Farnham shops and businesses we extrapolated the loss of income to Farnham businesses and the negative impact this loss inevitably has on business survival.



[www.farnhamtheatre.co.uk](http://www.farnhamtheatre.co.uk)

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Registered office: 6 Bishopsmead, East Horsley, Surrey KT24 6SR

Registered in England No. 6250927



### **Loss to the businesses of Farnham - £12.6 Million**

Redgrave Theatre seated 300 people and therefore, at 50% capacity, with 6 performances per week, 40 weeks a year, 36,000 people would have been entertained. More importantly, to the economic health of Farnham, the same dispossessed individuals would have spent around £35 each on items such as a tickets, programmes, confectionary, dining out, shopping, etc. This totals £1,260,000 per year. Multiplied by 10 years since Redgrave Theatre was closed by Waverley this now amounts to £12,600,000. This is a significant loss and one which has not only damaged Farnham businesses but has also, as a result, cost the rate payer dearly. Leading up to its opening in 1974, the local population donated the equivalent in today's money of £1,900,000 toward the building of Farnham's new theatre. Although this public altruism was not at that time called Public and Private *Partnership* – indeed that is what the town's people believed 'in good faith' their investment to be. It is clear that Waverley BC has mischievously misunderstood their role as 'Guardian of Farnham's Cultural Capital and Cultural Heritage' and overlooked the economic spin off our theatre had as a directly linked investment.

This significant amount - to restate, £12.6 million - can never be recovered but should be realised and accounted for by Waverley BC. Indeed, £12.6 million is a conservative estimate as it is likely to be twice this amount if one includes jobs generated and the 'recycled spend of increased income' over the past 10 years. Building a new theatre today costs by comparison a mere £5m. The question is... Did Waverley BC ignore the town's people's investment *and* their role as Cultural Guardians and did Waverley BC produce a financial argument to account for the leveraging effect a theatre has on Farnham's economy and a counter argument to the benefits of Cultural Capital? Was Michael Holden's Business Plan read and understood or conveniently ignored against all logic?

### **Cultural Capital**

As you are only too aware, the term Cultural Capital is used increasingly because, like money, our cultural inheritance can be translated into social resources (things like wealth, power and status). As people accumulate Cultural Capital it has a positive impact on society at large. Just like education, this 'spend' has a positive and 'real' social effect. Conversely, it has long been recognised that the absence of Cultural Capital results in higher 'real' costs to society. We are pleased to see that Boris Johnson and Kevin Spacey are highlighting this issue. One can only speculate what this loss has meant to the people of Farnham and how it has affected the attitude of younger people who have been deprived of Cultural Capital resulting from an unused theatre.

### **Who cares about theatre?**

The National Office of Statistics figures show a steady 24% of a population attends the theatre 'these days'. Behind the 3,000 objectors to the closure of The Redgrave Theatre are the 7,500 theatre goers (just from a local population of 30,000) and this grows ten fold to 75,000 individuals\* in the theatre catchment area.

\*Catchment area circa 340,000 recognising that there will be substantial development in Aldershot and with the new Bordon Eco Town.

Very best regards,

Joe Michel  
Charity Advisor  
On behalf of Farnham Theatre Association