

REF CF116

Mrs Anna Power

June 7<sup>th</sup> 2021

Elaine McGinty FRSA  
CEO/Founder Phoenix Cultural Centre  
CIC/Fiery Bird Live Music Venue

Dear Elaine,

Re: Phoenix Cultural Centre & Fiery Bird Music Venue.

I write as a resident of Woking and as Head of Music at Woking College for the past 13 years. Our recent meeting to discuss exciting plans to develop the Albion House site into the Phoenix Cultural Centre Arts Café and Acoustic Venue and the Fiery Bird Live Music Venue left me feeling extremely inspired and optimistic about the future of the Arts in Woking . I would like to formally support the bid for funding from the Surrey County Council Community Fund for this project.

As an experienced educator, specifically of post-16 Music and Music Technology students, I know just how important it is for young people to be able to express themselves through the visual and performing arts. It is a medium that brings communities closer together and fosters a strong sense of mutual understanding and wellbeing. I have been struck by the talent that exists in Woking residents, young and old, yet there is a real need for an outlet for that talent. Clearly, the visual arts are well catered for by The Lightbox, which has proved to be a fantastic venue that has rightly garnered national and international attention and respect. However, music for local people, by local people, is less well-resourced and students of mine must seek performance opportunities elsewhere, mainly in Guildford and London. We have such a wealth of local talent that it seems a shame that there is nowhere for them to gain valuable performance experience in a supportive, community environment which is so very much needed in the early stage of their careers. Certainly, the Rhoda McGaw theatre is a much-loved local venue, but this is expensive to hire and difficult to fill without a large and established following, so it is out of the reach of many young performers. Most young people embarking on a performance career, as well as older professionals and amateurs alike, prefer the feeling of a more intimate venue, the informality and friendliness of a smaller space and the opportunity to share the stage with others. It seems that the proposal by the Phoenix Cultural Centre is just what Woking has been waiting for. I can already envisage forging some longstanding and valuable links with the possibility of providing our very talented and keen arts students with opportunities to share their performance work locally with parents and friends at a venue away from the College, thus giving them the first taste of true public performance.

Indeed, it should be noted that several of our students are already benefitting from the outstanding Young Promoters' course, organised by yourselves at the Phoenix Cultural Centre and at least one of our students will be undertaking work experience with you. This is real industry training and advice, opportunity and guidance from professionals into putting on gigs

without risk in their hometown venue with speakers from every aspect of the live music industry working successfully across the UK. Having spoken to students on this course and other students and staff at the College, as well as local neighbours, friends and parents of students, I just wanted it on record that I wholeheartedly support the plan, both as a Woking resident and as a teacher at Woking College. I have also noticed that some of the acts planned for the Autumn season include several ex students of Woking which is great as it means that musicians who have gone to London Conservatoires and colleges to train are returning to the town to perform. The interest it would generate locally is huge, not to mention the positive effect on other local businesses such as restaurants and shops, as no doubt audiences will patronise the town in other ways when they visit for performances. The fact that the proposed venue is so close to Woking train station is also a great advantage and will surely draw audiences from further afield, thereby regenerating interest in the Woking arts scene after such a devastating pandemic.

I would therefore support the bid for funding and urge YourFund Surrey to give generously to such a worthwhile and enduring cause.

Kind regards

Anna Power, Head of Music, Woking College, and resident of Woking.

CF116



Your Fund Surrey  
Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Phoenix Cultural Centre/Fiery Bird Albion House – Letter of support.**

On behalf of LinkAble Woking Limited, please accept this letter of support to Phoenix Cultural Centre/Fiery Bird Albion House in their application to Your Fund Surrey and their request for funding.

Since 1989 LinkAble has been supporting children and adults with learning disabilities in Woking and the surrounding areas. We aim to provide life-long support to people of all ages to enable them to live happy, healthy, and independent lives. Attending LinkAble provides routine, familiarity, and social interaction for its service users.

We are the only charity in the area supporting both children and adults with learning disabilities. For over 10 years part of our programme for adults with learning disabilities, pre pandemic, was a nightclub night known as 'Mayhem'. Unique to Woking, this was held 5 times a year alternating between the HG Wells Centre and Fiery Bird as venues, regularly attracting over 250 people.

For our adult service users not being able to attend Mayhem because of the pandemic has been hard and losing the two venues as part of the town centre redevelopment means that there is no suitable and accessible place to hold Mayhem once restrictions are lifted. Not only will it impact our service users personally in a negative way, but it also means LinkAble loses out financially from the income future events would generate.

From our experience of working with the Fiery Bird team, we are confident that any bid will take into consideration the specific needs of our service users and those of other stakeholders. In fact, they have collaborated with LinkAble to develop their plans as part of their work to ensure that the premises they are developing will be suitable to be used by the widest range of the community as possible.

If you require more information about the importance of the Phoenix Cultural Centre/Fiery Bird Albion House application, please contact me or our CEO, Alison Keeley, who will be happy to discuss our support of this project and the positive impact it will have in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Rhys Parker

**Fundraising & Communications Manager  
LinkAble**

Email: [rhys.parker@linkable.org.uk](mailto:rhys.parker@linkable.org.uk)  
Tel: 01483 770037

---

**The Link** 2 Board School Road, Woking, Surrey GU21 5HE  
t 01483 770037 e [info@linkable.org.uk](mailto:info@linkable.org.uk) [www.linkable.org.uk](http://www.linkable.org.uk)

*Our Mission Statement* – to enable those with learning disabilities to develop their potential and enjoy socially inclusive fulfilled lives



LinkAble Woking Limited Registered Charity Number 1119596  
Registered in England and Wales as LinkAble Woking Limited No. 06056940 Registered office as above





Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum Ltd.  
Astolat, Coniers Way, Burpham, Guildford Surrey GU4 7HL  
Tel: 01483 497 292 Email: [admin@smef.org.uk](mailto:admin@smef.org.uk)  
[www.smef.org.uk](http://www.smef.org.uk)

CF116

29<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF) is Surrey's one and only 'Race Equality Charity' with a membership of forty-eight grass root community groups of diverse ethnicities. SMEF wholeheartedly supports the Pheonix Cultural Centre one of its earliest member groups in its bid to house the 'Fiery Bird Live Music Venue'.

The Fiery Bird promises to be an open, inclusive cultural space for people of all ethnicities, faiths, and dispositions to mingle, interact, make music, and enjoy the arts.

SMEF and its forty-eight member groups endorse this project and cannot wait for the venue to be opened. We intend to use the space for our community workshops and events. We see the 'Fiery Bird' as our opportunity to mix, integrate and share our culture with all communities in Surrey. The pandemic year has tested the resilience of people, the lockdown and social isolation has not boded well for the vulnerable amongst us. We look forward to the coming months and relish the idea that at long last a truly inclusive space will be open for the people of Surrey.

Upwards and Onwards Pheonix!

Suzanne Akram  
SMEF Executive Director

## PHOENIX CULTURAL CENTRE FEEDBACK, PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVELOPMENT

### Comments From Users

**Greg Freeman** - Published Poet & Woking Writers Circle Management, Heart of Woking Blog. Local resident and father of four.

I've enjoyed coming to the Phoenix to read poetry off and on over the last couple of years, and have been very impressed with the warm, encouraging welcome there to newcomers and first-timers, just a kind of place a proper centre for the whole community should offer. Woking desperately needs a designated community building to give it some heart, and to help create an identity. The Phoenix music and community arts centre can be that place. There is a crying need for it in Woking. Just as the Lightbox and WWF have done, it will help to put this town on the map and give it confidence and pride.

**Jane Armitage** Admin officer, children grown up, Grandmother and wishing to meet others and try music -

'Just look what its done for my confidence, which has meant I have grown musically too. You help and encourage. No-one fails, we are all on a journey and you help us find the way.'

**Tracy Ginn** Local Resident who lacked confidence and being a single mother, was looking for some social interaction after her son went to university, she now gets up and sings regularly and has progressed from singing along to her phone to singing in front of an audience with musicians from the Phoenix who support her. She has now asked to volunteer at The Phoenix Centre to help others, she regularly attends music events both in and around Woking and feels she has a safe group of friends amongst those she has met there so is happy to go alone to things.

'This place is great I have singing here for 6 months and yes where have time going I don't know it made me grow and I thank all the people there and all there support and I did not think that I get up and sing again but now I just love every minute of from the bottom of my heart I would to say a very big thank for the Phoenix central xxx'

**Catherine Rogan - local resident mother of one who works and previously socialised in London.**

The Phoenix Centre ran the music for Adult Learners Week and was looking for inexperienced adult musicians to try out doing a gig to inspire others to try learning and Catherine responded. From that first gig we found other opportunities for them and they grew from scared people to seasoned performers doing 80 gigs in that year, many secured by the Phoenix Centre. They have now been booked by us to entertain dementia patients in care homes as well as a variety of other performances and have become well known on the Surrey Scene recently supporting Bella Hardy Radio 2 award winning folk artist on her national tour at The Boilerroom. Through the Phoenix Centre, Catherine was introduced to Woking Writers Circle and wrote a novel which she launched at the Centre, she was also introduced to We Love Woking who had her on their Radio Woking show to talk about the novel.

'I first came across the Phoenix Centre on Facebook when Elaine put out a call for people to have a go at performing on the bandstand at Woking. I pasted the message onto the UkeJam facebook and somehow got landed with arranging something. That something

turned into the The Surrey Ukeaholicss! Back when the Ukeaholics started I didn't sing audibly. I'd stand well away from the mike (I still do a bit) and if someone asked how a song goes I'd find it on YouTube rather than try and hum it. I gradually got used to singing with the band, albeit quietly. The first time I sang alone (in front of people) was at the phoenix open mike night, I sang The Phone Book by Editors. There was hardly anyone there or I would have bottled out.

The open mike is very welcoming. You feel like you can mess up and it doesn't matter - people want each other to do well.

I've sung on my own a few other times at the phoenix, often roping Julian Ukeaholic into playing bass on a song he's never heard of. The Ukeaholics are busy gigging and I've sung in front of people I don't even know. Some of whom had paid to get in! None of that would be possible without a friendly hub of people who care about music and art in a very inclusive way.

Alongside the music, I've met loads of great people at the phoenix, including Greg Freeman who told me about Woking Writers' Circle, which I joined, then I wrote a novel!! I had my book launch at the Phoenix as that was where it all began.

I've lived in Woking for 14 years now and to begin with I'm afraid I thought it was a bit of a cultural wasteland. But there's actually loads going on and the Phoenix is a focal point for all that. While chatting with the Ukeaholics I only half-jokingly compared it to Factory Records in Manchester in the late 70s/early 80s - the cultural heartbeat of the town.

**Carola Bauer - Local Teacher and musician, mother of two** - from their appearance at The Phoenix Centre they are now receiving bookings all over the South East at festivals, gigs and radio shows

The Phoenix Cultural Center is a place of great importance. It hosts, among other community events, a welcoming place where artists can have a voice or platform to share their art. As a mother of two, I have been out of the music scene for a number of years and have just recently ventured back. One of the first places I played in was the Phoenix center on one of their music open mic nights. I was apprehensive but received a fantastic welcome which not only boosted my confidence, but also opened up connections with other local musicians. I have since continued to play live from these initial first connections I made that day. I fully support a permanent venue and hope to be able to perform and contribute to this center for years to come.

**Lisa VonH Local singer/songwriter, learning support assistant in a special needs school, mother of four.**

When I moved back to Woking I had retired from music for some 15 years or so. Most of my musician friends had also moved on and my confidence was lower than low. The Phoenix cultural Centre help to pick me up dust me off and get me back on my feet as a musician again. They started me off gently with little comfortable gigs in the cultural centre and before I knew it I was getting some really nice gigs and regularly my picture was being shown in the local newspaper. On top of that there was a bonus that I really wasn't expecting -I have made some of the best friends -beautiful hard-working honest people I never would have met without the Phoenix Cultural centre. I've no idea where I would be without them but I do know this, that with them my life is 100% richer.

### **Graham Armfield Local Resident - Father of One.**

Graham used to travel out of Woking to try and get opportunities to play but found the Phoenix Centre by recommendation from another music promoter working in Hants and from seeing one of our community events - The Last Post. Since then he has been a regular contributor and has gained in confidence to take part in Street Live and other opportunities we are arranging

'I have only started coming to the [Phoenix Cultural Centre](#) fairly recently, but it's already had a huge impact on me. My musical 'career' (for want of a better word) had tailed off dramatically over the last few years, and although I still played occasionally at other open mic events I felt quite isolated from other musicians. But the [Phoenix Cultural Centre](#) have created a warm, friendly and supportive environment for musicians of all abilities. The centre's open mic nights give a unique opportunity for musical development and collaboration - and they can help improve people's confidence no end - mine included. Improved confidence can help all aspects of people's lives - employment opportunities, relationships, health and well being. Another spin-off is that in the last two months I have gained a whole new set of friends, and I now feel more a part of Woking than at any time in the 14 years I've lived here. I want to be more involved - to give back some of the positivity and friendship that's been shown to me'

### **Other stories**

J & M are ladies in their fifties who are long term unemployed due to ill health. They found out about the Phoenix Centre by attending the Confidence Building and Workplace Readiness courses and Job Club run by Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership there. Being signed off with further medical problems which prevented looking for work, they felt isolated and, without confidence or funds, stopped going out. A few times over the year they would ask when the nights were on and say they would try and come. One day they said they definitely were and on the open mic night they arrived 30 minutes before opening to wait outside. We let them in to make themselves at home while we set up and they said they were that early so they could get a seat in a corner and no one see them. They were visibly shaking as they said they hadn't been out in the evening for over a year. They paid £1 each to come in and 50p for a cup of tea.

Three weeks later they come every week, they have also now been to a heavily attended feature music night and travelled to Guildford with Tracy Ginn (above who also would never go out) to see one of the artists they met at an open mic do a professional gig. They try out the instruments and join in on the songs and talk confidently to all the volunteers, other audience members and musicians.

P

Is a recovering alcoholic in his 40's who found out about the Phoenix on being referred by the Job Centre to a Confidence Building Course run by SLLP there. He struggles with recovering and is wary of situations that can stress him and set him back. He sat quietly on his first visit however by the end of the evening had got up to sing an Elvis song and has planned songs asking the volunteer musicians if they will learn them to accompany him next time.

A

Is a recovering alcoholic who is also bi polar and needs to ensure he takes his medication which he often forgets. He was a very successful musician and songwriter when younger but lost everything due to the alcoholism and, at the time undiagnosed, bi-polar. He

regularly attends open mic sessions and writes songs to perform there which he feels gives direction to his week. He was spotted and asked to write a jingle for the We Love Woking show on Radio Woking. Due to his financial situation he is given free non alcoholic refreshments which means he feels comfortable to stay and attend.

E, a 14 year old singer attends with her father. She is a highly talented singer but suffers panic attacks at school and in daily life however singing relieves this. She has spent some time with the Centre organiser working out how to write songs and put her feelings into words to express herself. This both relieves her stress and starts to gently move her onwards with her talent, matching her singing talent with the ability to write songs which will help her in her quest to attend music college in addition to improving wellbeing.

### **Cardboard Carousel**

A husband and wife duo highly talented and sought after. They released their first CD 'Into the Mire' and launched it at The Phoenix. They sought advice from the organiser on the final mixes before the CD was pressed and how to run a launch. They have been introduced to radio play and headline festival slots from the Phoenix Centre recommendations. They have taken on board industry advice and on which insurances they will require and what management model to look for to move onward. With involvement now from a major A&R and label they are writing their second CD which will have staged single releases in addition to the full album. Sadly they are unable to release this in Woking as on advice of the label without a venue it isn't a viable option to release to industry. They have been advised to seek a Guildford alternative, which as we have been supporting them with we are helping them source. Both they and we would have loved to have released the next CD into a new venue marking the development of both in a meaningful way.

### **The Sheraton**

At last years 'Our Big Gig' this young four piece band did their debut live performance having never played in front of people before. We now sell their first CD in The Phoenix Centre. The year of working with them and giving them opportunities, advice and networking has led to them being a successful regularly gigging originals band becoming more well known both in Surrey and further afield. We have now connected them with a national promoter who works with us and he is arranging more gigs and a touring schedule.

### **Theatre Reviews**

The Phoenix Centre introduced Woking Writers Circle to the Ambassadors Theatre. They are now included on the invitations to press night and write regular theatre reviews published for their readers. This gives amateur writers a chance to take part in professional writing activities which can encourage pathways to employment and/or increase wellbeing in the retired or those who wish to explore expressing themselves creatively. It also means that theatre trips for people who have a writing talent but not necessarily the funds, become accessible.

### **Radio**

We introduced We Love Woking to Radio Woking and now they have a weekly show with regular guests celebrating all that is positive about Woking. During the course of our work we often come across people with a Woking story to tell and put them in touch. They regularly attend our events and promote the Phoenix Centre via social media and radio.

Many of the presenters on Radio Woking have come via The Phoenix Centre

Rudeboy DJ's Friday Night Reggae show with Mabbs & Murph - (one of our stalwart volunteers Andrew Mabbutt runs this show)

We Love Woking

The View From Here - Sharon Galliford - a holistic practitioner runs this show

Sylvia Bryden-Stock - runs a positive thinking show on Weds eves.

Pride in Surrey

We also present ourselves covering issues of activism, community, arts & culture.

We have entered an agreement with Radio Woking that they will record our feature nights and play out on Radio Woking as well as use our premises to record some of their shows.

We invited them to be on board with Our Big Gig and they are now media partners.

Radio Woking was recently awarded DAB status by Ofcom and will now be available via digital as well as internet.

## **FUNDING & DEVELOPMENT**

### **Overall Project**

We are researching funding to apply for salaried positions that will cover core costs. The project is growing very large and needs to be run on more than a voluntary basis despite the appointment of a project manager and further volunteers. In order to keep up with the demands made on it as it reaches a pivotal point in development albeit without adequate venue space, wherein capital costs will be applied for and a mixed stream of funding.

We publish employment, and development funding opportunities via social media to encourage musicians to progress in their career

We are members of the **Music Venues Trust** and **Music Venues Alliance** which are working to promote the grass roots, small to medium venues and protect them with legislation such as Agent of Change and to expand tax breaks for these, bringing equity with theatres and orchestras. To bring recognition of the essential cultural work that small venues bring to feed a massive UK export. They have published their latest report and undertaken research on music cities. There is more detail in the national and international context for creative industries document attached.

### **Variety of Activities & Partnerships in Development**

We are working with Emma Hughes international bass player (Kate Nash/Xfactor/Echo Boom Generation) and teacher to bring her 'encouraging women in music' programme that she is designing for The Roundhouse, Camden to Woking.

We are in talks with Wishing Well - a charity that is part of Rhythmix the national charity that focuses on wellbeing through music especially with the young. Wishing Well works with dementia patients, hospices and hospitals to increase wellbeing via interaction and music. We are working out partner bids so we can reach those who are 'locked in' with dementia

We are placing musicians in care homes to entertain residents especially those with dementia and have been acting as an agency for this.

We are developing partnerships with new users who wish to use a larger space as well as current ones;

Friday morning meditations before work

Alcoholics Anonymous - lunchtime meet group attracts 23 weekly attendees

Woking Stanza Group

The Companions

Woking Project - they currently travel to Godalming and pay £10 pp to take part in music, they wish to use the centre in the day for a workshop and set up their own open mic evening.

Aspace - wish for accommodation for their Aspergers drama groups for both children and adults

Continued Digital Learning & Confidence building from JCP referrals provided by Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership

Outside promoters running live music nights different genres

Surrey CC exploring collaboration on Community Chef Leaders courses and training others to run a community cafe

We also receive overspill booking referrals from The Maybury Centre if they are unable to accommodate. However, we have an agreement in place that should an approach be made for a repeat booking, that they are referred back to The Maybury Centre as initial booking in order to work collaboratively with other community centres in our network.

### **Outside Activities**

Street Live Woking BC busking and street entertainment programme Summer 2015

Party In The Park Stall and busking

Byfleet Parish Day managing the stage and musicians

Our Big Gig part of a national celebration of community live music, seven hours of original and covers live music in Woking Park with partners We Love Woking and Radio Woking, Caribbean Food, The Mayford Arms Bar, Have a go at an instrument sessions, songwriting workshop, singing bowls and gongs demonstrations, stalls and facepainting.

Woking Food Festival - Providing Live music for third year running

Woking Arts Hub Fair

Promoting the Phoenix via Cellar Magneval Fete De La Musique a national day in France celebrating live music, they ran an open mic all day and many Phoenix musicians played, customers donated £155

Asked to source musicians for Sutton Green BBQ day

Asked to promote music to Knaphill youth club members to inspire them to get involved with music making activities.