

Grove Theatre  
Customer Forum Minutes  
Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2016



**1 Life Staff Present;**

Ellie Garrett - Head of Operations  
Helen Maile – Theatre Administrator  
Becca Henry – Marketing Manager  
Hannah Delaney – Sales and Marketing Assistant  
Matthew Vince – Box Office and Sales Assistant

**(NB staff comments noted by initials)**

**EG** – Ellie Kicked off the meeting by introducing everyone and welcoming Hugh (from Central Beds Council) to his first of our customer forums, he explained to the group his job role – Leisure Client Monitoring Officer, in which he attends our site weekly to make sure everything is as it should be for us and for them, making sure everything is in working order. He plans to attend as many forums as possible moving forwards to stay connected with us and the community.

EG continued by reading out a message left by Rhea, as she is unfortunately away on annual leave, RY wanted to welcome all and passes on her thanks to everyone for coming.

Lots has happened since last forum, 2 more floods, repairs to pipes, RY donning her DM hat, an epic summer project and putting finishing touches to the forthcoming season.

We have some amazing shows to look forward to; for kids we have Panto (obviously), Jurassic Adventures and Chris & Pui; Comedy we have Jon Richardson, Live at the Grove and Omid Djalili. We have Hysteria the hilarious drama and we invite the Vienna festival ballet onto our stage for the first time. There are so many new shows RY can't fit them all in, but don't fear we have all our classic's too...That'll be the day is still safe in our hearts.

You may be aware we managed to secure a date with Russell Brand which is set to be an amazing sell out event – he is apparently bringing treats!

Thank you to all those who came to GPP – Beauty and the Beast. I am sure you will agree that it was outstanding. RY is incredibly proud of the education department and the children for all their hard work and endless enthusiasm. We have already started plans for next year, we hope you will join us down the rabbit hole with Alice in Wonderland.

Pantomime season is fast approaching and we are starting to get the panto fever on site, the cast are wonderful and incredibly talented and we are very excited for the Aladdin hoodies to arrive. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> December there is an extravaganza of events happening around Dunstable, we have our annual craft fayre and the cast will be out and about giving away family tickets for the opening night. Make sure you put the date in your diaries as you won't want to miss it. Keep an eye out on Don't Let Dunstable Die for extra information.

**EG** – Continued with some of her own comments – informing everyone of Matt Kingslake's decision to leave us, he moves on to a new role after being with us since before the theatre opened. We are very sad to lose him but wish him well moving forward. We are now interviewing for his post next week, along with senior tech therefore you should see some new faces about the building.

We now also have a Jasmine for pantomime, she will be making more appearances now, seems lovely, we haven't formally met her yet but we are very excited to welcome her.

We have some fabulous encore and live screenings coming up – No Man’s Land being one of them (Starring Ian McKellan & Patrick Stewart) a real bargain for just £15 a ticket.

New film season – This week & Coming up - Bridget Jones, Pete’s Dragon, Café Society and Swallows and Amazons. In Jan – Girl on the Train, Inferno, Fantastic Beasts and Doctor Strange. These are all on sale now.

We have on Friday our Halloween Craft Workshop for children. It’s a trial this time but hope to run a few more of these in the future. Only £1 a child, under 2s are free, brilliant event for the half term.

We also recently took part in a triathlon to raise money for Wheelpower, our company’s charity for this year. Thank you to Cathy and Bob for coming down to support and waving at us in the pool.

Informed the group of our planned afternoon tea’s coming up – Munchkins theme and Mad Hatters Tea Party, along with our usual more traditional tea. EG explained how we have our supportive interns, as discussed last customer forum from Central Beds College, they have been planning and coming up with some ideas for the Alice in wonderland themed tea to tie in with GPP. The college are also going to hopefully be making some of our cakes/scones for these tea events.

We are as a theatre keen to make some stronger partnerships in the community, MV managed to have a fresher’s fayre at the College, informing all the students of the discounts on tickets we offer.

#### **Comments:**

Customer commented on King Lear Live screening, was wonderful, the most memorizing Shakespeare ever. Excellent. Also questioned our relationship with the library, why is there not more of one?

**HD/BH** - We have made closer links with the library very recently, worked with them during the BFG as part of their reading challenge, and slowly and carefully working with them more.

**Hugh**- what with the new move of the library into the leisure Centre it will actually be overseen by the same person, therefore we will have a lot more scope and a closer partnership in the future.

Customer commented on the fact local shops are advertising Aylesbury pantomime and Milton Keynes.

**BH** – explained we cannot stop the local shops doing so, we don’t have as big a budget as those other theatres unfortunately so it does limit us on where we can advertise and we have to try and be a bit clever to monitor the use of our marketing budget. Would love to advertise anywhere and everywhere, just not possible.

Comment made about BBC 3 counties radio plugging other pantomimes when they are right on our door steps, even members of their team starring in them.

**BH/HD/EG** – Reminded everyone how they have to be very mindful as although we are on their doorstep they do have to cover all the 3 counties and the other theatres within. We would like to work with them more as a whole but unfortunately they aren’t very keen on tribute acts, which is a majority of our productions. We have had Anna from our education department been interviewed about GPP, and they have said they would like Rhea to be on some kind of panel, but as you know we work back of house so plucking up the courage to go live on air can be difficult. They do love a local act though and are willing to support anyone from the area.

A customer expressed perhaps more publicity for live screenings would be necessary.

**BH** – reiterated problems with budgets and using the resources we have fairly. Discussion then moved onto signage in the area, lots of comments about it not being clear enough where the theatre is.

**EG/Hugh** – informed everyone that there will be new signage once all roadworks are completed, no point in adding now for the sake of it, they will change once new works are finished. Sharon from Don't Let Dunstable Die told everyone we should let the council know our views on this, then they can rectify it – go onto the council site and give your feedback.

A Customer commented re some customers who came to King Lear at the weekend, said they knew the screening was on but couldn't find the theatre. Hugh asked how they would know the screening was on if they didn't know the theatre. After some discussion BH revealed actually the screenings are on the national website listings so this could have been how. Customers commented how there are still many locals who don't know the theatre is here.

**MV** – Told the group how he has been speaking to local businesses and putting up posters where possible.

Customers asked about local notice boards, in shops/bus stops/ train stations/ council boards.

**BH** – Informed everyone this can be costly, a lot of the boards you have to pay, what do we chose to advertise? Theatre in general or a specific event, can be very difficult. Council tend to use the boards for their own events so probably wouldn't allow us. We have however been in discussions with the new quadrant manager and he has allowed us to advertise in the empty shops, not that there are many left now and with more coming in at Christmas time we may not have full use of this.

**MV** – ASDA did put up a poster for GPP for free but only because it was the children doing Beauty and the Beast therefore more community based.

Customer asked how much choice we have on our live screenings.

**EG** – RSC and ROH we have to have the whole season, we don't have a choice unfortunately. National Theatre we can have some flexibility. It does mean we can have these wonderful plays even if it only brings an audience of 100 people, whereas a live play would have vast financial issues. We just have to be smart about what we can offer.

Customer requested Othello live screening

**EG** – Informed customer we already have it scheduled and can be booked now.

Customer commented about possibly having some more publicity about our Wheelpower events, encouraging people to donate more.

**EG** – pointed out the new signage behind box office but has agreed perhaps more would be beneficial. Bob Maile of Dunstable Downs rotary explained to the group what the charity does, funding wheelchairs for Sports men and women, brilliant charity who also back some of the Paralympians. Suggestion made for Bob to give us contact of CEO/Trustee who we could perhaps present final balance to.

**EG** – Informed of the Quiz night we will be having for Wheelpower, date TBC, inviting all to have teams and make some real money for the charity that way.

Customer asked if Disabled toilet is being fixed soon.

**Hugh**- Informed them that this is actually a CBC issue and is in hand, there is a leak that needs to be fixed before it can be reopened.

**EG**- Informed customer there is another toilet the other side and a disabled cubicle in the ladies loos themselves, as stated on the signage on the doors.

Customer commented on Money monster, and what a great film it was. Said it was a shame not many people saw it.

**HD**- Informed customer the evening showing was much better sold and that weekday afternoons are generally less busy audiences.

Customer enquired about craft fayre.

**EG** – Gave details of stalls/tables (6ft) - £25 a table, unless for a charity then can be offered at reduced rates. At the moment we are just planning a Christmas craft fayre but could lead to more in the future, the only problem is we have Saturday morning

performing arts school so we can't really do them too often to make sure we aren't disturbing them too much.

Customer asked for a friend why she doesn't receive our brochure by post anymore.

**BH-** Explained that if the customer themselves haven't booked any tickets within 2 years they are taken off our mailer list for the brochure, they can request to be put on but it is just what automatically happens.

Customer stated that our website had an issue with the minutes from the last meeting, they clicked the link and nothing happened.

**BH –** Apologised, unfortunately we don't have a lot of control over our website but we will look into it, perhaps we can email them out to everyone who attends. HM to email them once typed up.

Customer asked why more people don't come to the customer forums.

**EG –** Honestly, we don't know. We have tried many different times. Hopefully if we try a later time in the summer would be better. Getting dark now so does put people off and traffic doesn't help. Lots of people do voice their opinions on social media, so some may feel they don't need to attend as they already let us know and can get instant answers.

Customer commented on how doesn't always see posts/advertisements etc. mentioned about the Facebook not being official.

**BH-** explained boosted post process and how it works. Will look at that site as ours is official so must be another site, will see if we can merge the two.

Customer asked about 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**EG –** There is going to be a big celebration – there is a hint in the new brochure to it, keeps your eyes peeled.

Customer commented on how they will put more on their own Facebook to help let their friends know what is on, do their own countdown maybe to live screenings etc. Can tag/Share with the grove.

Customer congratulated Hugh on car park restrictions.

**Hugh-** Commented on how they haven't fully worked but it's a start.

Customers commented on feeling safer now, requested perhaps some more lighting in the park/pathway to the theatre from Weatherspoon's, can be a little scary in the dark.

A discussion was had re a drop off point, Hugh answered many questions re this but really is a town council matter not CBC or Grove Theatre. Hugh also informed us that the car park would be changing when Astro turf goes anyway so could be slightly different layouts and some new works happening anyway.

**EG –** finished the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and for their comments.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2017 at 1.00pm