

Dear Member

This year our AGM, on **Saturday 20th November at 11 am**, will be held at the Farnham Maltings and we look forward to welcoming you there.

You can find the relevant documents at farnhammaltings.com/agm including proxy forms so that you can register your vote even if you are unable to join the meeting.

This is my first year Chair. I took over from Lisa Hennessey who will be retiring from the board at the AGM. All our thanks go to Lisa for her leadership and contribution over the past 6 years. We have 2 other trustee directors retiring this year – Andrew McWhirter has been our Treasurer and Secretary and Christina Hughes, who brought her special skills to the work of the Maltings. Thanks to both Andrew and Christina for the time and energy they have given to the Maltings.

When we look back at the past year, in all aspects of our lives, it has been an extraordinary time. The entire team at the Maltings have been working throughout this time to maintain the Maltings and plan as best we could for coming out of the lockdowns.

So much energy went into reopening last year, only to be closed down again. This has been a massive challenge for everyone involved and our thanks go to them for their dedication, energy and patience. This was achieved in a remarkable way and all credit to the team for bringing us back to a version of normality.

Throughout, the team has worked towards providing a safe and welcoming space for everyone, with the rules changing continually. One legacy of the time will be Farnham Connects. Early on, it brought together all the main local charities, was spearheaded by the Maltings alongside Farnham Town Council, to support our community in ways we have not done before. It has helped us to focus on who we are and what we can be in the future. Thanks need to go to all the participants in Farnham Connects for reaching out and helping the entire local community. It continues today, so all involved have achieved something quite unique.

In addition to Farnham Connects, the Maltings has responded to the pandemic by working with the Town Council to establish a help line which supported over 2000 requests for help, set up a share store, established a hardship fund, set up a buddying scheme and run a programme of work to tackle social isolation. Later in the crisis we were approached by Surrey County Council to lead on the delivery of a programme of work to tackle social isolation and began a similar programme, *High Hopes*, with support from Arts Council England.

Alongside this work Arts Council of England continued to invest in the Maltings to increase the range, quality and audience for theatre across the region. This required us to repurpose our services as we began to support the region's venues to adapt, share knowledge and practical solutions to surviving the pandemic, investing in artists to continue to make work in these extraordinary times, reframe how artists and companies might think and work internationally and consider how we better use the digital realm. The team also managed to move fast and pivot the in-person *caravan assembly* planned for May 2020 to happen entirely digitally, which was attended by over 60 international delegates.

When we could open the buildings we managed to offer a limited programme of activities and delivered an adapted programme of craft festivals. Some of the learning from this has proved useful and will stay with us – hybrid events, use of our outside spaces, introducing a one-way system, timed entry and paperless ticketing.

In those times when we could not open the building to the public we continued to undertake a programme of maintenance to the whole estate. We also made the decision to continue with our planned new website development and launched the new site in February 2021. The new website was a key tool in our Spring Forward fundraising campaign, through which we were delighted to raise over £68,000.

On behalf of the Council of Management, I want to thank all our Members for supporting us through this difficult time – whether by making donations to our fundraising campaign, visiting the Monthly Markets and attending other events as we strive to provide services, film screenings and other events that support our local community.

As with everyone else in our sector, it will be a long time before we achieve “business as usual”. That said, we are very well positioned and with your support, we will get there.

Thank you to everyone involved in making Farnham Maltings such a special place and in particular to Gavin and the team, our volunteers and all the creative people who enrich our lives with their expertise, energy and enthusiasm.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the forthcoming AGM. As usual, you will hear from Gavin with an update on how we are managing in these times. Do bring your comments and suggestions if you have them.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maher
Chair