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An Open Letter to the Leader of BCKLWN and other councillors

12 April 2017

Dear Councillor Long,

Service Level Agreement, Westacre Theatre

Following recent events which have brought the decision into sharper focus I am writing to ask the Council to re-evaluate its plan ultimately to terminate its strategic funding of Westacre Theatre.

In one form or another events at Westacre have been part of the cultural landscape of West Norfolk for over 25 years. The inexorable development of Westacre Theatre over that time, assisted in part by BCKLWN together with other local authorities and grant giving bodies, has resulted in us now being proud to present a wide and varied programme of performing and creative arts events, in beautiful surroundings, in a rural corner of West Norfolk that has often been starved of such fare compared with that available to the borough's more urban areas. We hope our contribution is of significance considering that the overwhelming majority of households actually reside in the rural areas of this district.

In addition to our own in-house productions we support acclaimed touring theatre in conjunction with Creative Arts East and have also, through our live and recorded transmissions of work by world famous practitioners, enabled the local population to experience some of the greatest theatre events in the world - right here in West Norfolk.

We understand the financial constraints with which all local authorities are wrestling and acknowledge that priorities have to be chosen. It is indeed unfortunate timing for the Council in their campaign to contain expenditure that adverse publicity has recently surfaced regarding the comparative salaries of the BCKLWN CEO and the Prime Minister.

For ourselves, we believe that throughout our existence - and particularly over the last few years - Westacre Theatre has offered an incredibly good return on the Borough Council's forcedly limited investment (last financial year £6,400 p.a.). In return we have always been proud to receive such support and to display the council's logo on our promotional material.

Despite almost 95% of our revenue funding being self-generated we know that receiving the Borough Council's tangible support (**together with that of Norfolk County Council who are yet again managing to maintain their current level of support to us**) has been instrumental in persuading outside agencies to invest in the future of our organisation.

To lose such a token of the Council's commitment to our work would be a blow not just to us but to every citizen of this Borough that has benefited from the resulting inward investment in the past and might be able to do so in the future as our plans to complete the next phase of our development proceed.

We are led to believe that one factor counting against us is a perception amongst certain senior borough councillors that Westacre Theatre primarily serves the Breckland area. If so, this perception is alarmingly misguided.

Although Westacre Theatre draws its audiences from a remarkably wide radius (something of which we are actually very proud), a recent postcode analysis revealed that over 75% of Westacre patrons were resident within West Norfolk. We would assert that the other 25% bring much needed ancillary tourist income into this district. We would also wonder whether such narrow strictures are applied to the other venues of the district, all of which in order to survive presumably receive patronage from residents of other Norfolk districts as well as from residents of Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire.

We would welcome a statement from the Council outlining clearly its strategy in relation to all its future cultural commitments, especially in relation to fulfilling its titular designation as the Borough Council for the **whole** of West Norfolk.

We believe that the long established relationship between Westacre Theatre and BCKLWN has served both parties very well over the years and that the decision to drip feed this relationship to starvation is ill conceived and counter productive. We urge the members of the Borough Council to re-consider.

We are writing this as an open letter because we feel these issues deserve the widest local discussion.

Yours sincerely,



William Smith
Chair,
Westacre Arts Foundation Ltd.
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