

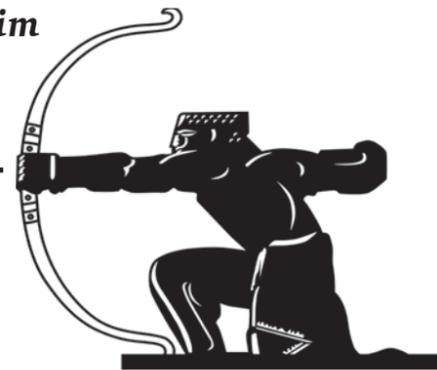


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New management: The Phoenix Cinema has been independent since 1985. Photo Mike Coles.

Phoenix finds new future in Curzon chain

By John Lawrence

The independent Phoenix Cinema is on the point of becoming part of the national Curzon Cinemas chain. The charitable Phoenix Trust will retain ownership of the listed building but hand over the day-to-day operations of the cinema, to be renamed the Curzon Phoenix East Finchley.

Trust members say the deal, still to be finalised, is essential for the long-term survival of the 106-year-old picture house, run on a not-for-profit basis since 1985 but now facing dwindling revenues. Annual admissions fell from 100,000 to 75,000 in the last four years.

A Save the Phoenix campaign began as soon as the news was announced. Campaigners say the decision has been made without consulting staff or the community and claim there are better alternatives which would preserve the cinema's ethos. An online petition calling for the Phoenix to stay independent had gathered 3,000 signatures as we went to press.

Why is the deal being made?

The ten members of the Board of Trustees, all volunteers, say general changes in cinema-going habits and increased local competition from the likes of the Everyman in Muswell Hill have hit ticket sales badly, leaving them with less money to invest in the future of the Phoenix.

Trustee Alison Gold told *The Archer*: "The cinema is at serious risk of insolvency and the trust is working hard to avoid that. We have considered other options, including remaining independent, but believe that a partnership with Curzon offers greater security as well as bringing some new benefits to the Phoenix staff and its community."

What are the concerns?

Campaigners say the independence of the Phoenix is

being surrendered and Curzon will ultimately be able to make its own decisions about staffing and programming. They want the Trust to consider alternatives like community fundraising to keep the cinema going as an independent, pointing out that the Phoenix raised more than £1 million for its centenary restoration project.

Lauren Wright, from the Save the Phoenix campaign, said: "Rather than building on this, fundraising has been limited. Save The Phoenix is calling on the board to pause, listen to the community, and make sure they have exhausted all other options before going down this extreme path."

The campaign said the Curzon deal had been arranged without consultation with any staff or the local community for whom the Phoenix Cinema Trust was set up.

The Trust argues that it had to maintain confidentiality around the deal until it was secure enough to make public and states that the cinema will remain in local hands as the Trust will retain ownership of the building and continue to oversee community and education activities for local people.

What impact will it have?

Phoenix staff have been told that their jobs will be transferred to the new operators and that they will be paid the London Living Wage for the first time. Save the Phoenix campaigners argue that there is no guarantee redundancies won't be made once the transfer is complete.

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Thieves steal from studio

A computer, monitor and several cameras were stolen from a studio in Huntingdon Road, N2, when opportunistic thieves spotted that keys had been left in a door.

The items were taken from the art and music studio in Huntingdon Works during the Friday night of the August bank holiday.

CCTV footage appears to show two people sheltering from the rain under the premises' arch and then entering after seeing the key in the door. They leave five minutes later with several items and then return at midnight to carry more away.

The burglary was reported when the owners turned up for work on the Tuesday morning. Police are currently investigating.



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