

## Jo Meredith statement

Good evening, thank you to Councillor Dave Biddleston for inviting me to speak this evening on the need for a new community hall in Keynsham.

A quick introduction to who I am. My name is Jo Meredith and I have been a member of Keynsham light opera group for 25 years, serving as chair of committee for over 10 years and a director for the group since 2010.

Our members are aged 18 to 80.

I am also the volunteer artistic director of Phoenix Keynsham Youth Theatre who are an affordable, award-winning musical theatre group for children aged 10 to 17. I helped to re-establish the group over 10 years ago starting with 13 children and we have grown to a cast of nearly 40 with a waiting list!

Both groups serve an important role in the community of Keynsham and the wider area.

Klog rehearse Monday and Wednesdays throughout the year, perform two shows a year, a Christmas concert plus hold fundraising events throughout the year.

The children rehearse once a week and perform one to two shows a year plus hold fundraising events.

Both groups perform at the Keynsham music festival, Winter festival, carol singing at retirement homes, and we have sung for the twinning committee of Bath and the Lord Mayor and their guests.

We find ourselves in the difficult position of having no guaranteed theatre space in Keynsham or the wider surrounding area to perform our shows.

We are also currently having difficulty finding a new home for rehearsals since having to leave Broadlands Academy due to astronomical rising hire charges, unavailability of the venue due to the fact there is only one hall which is also used for exams and school not having available funds to

make their theatre space safe with a condemned theatre rig and essential Stage repairs not completed for several years.

We have for the last two years been trying to make The Space (above keynsham Library) work as a theatre but unfortunately the venue is wholly inadequate.

It is without changing facilities, we currently use the upstairs library offices for the boys to change and we have to use library display boards to create a hanging area and cover the floor to ceiling glass windows so girls can change in safe surroundings, there is no adequate space for technical teams and we currently empty the storage cupboard to house them, the maximum seating for the audience is 108 and in a week long show of Annie in the Easter holidays this year, we sold every seat and had a waiting list for tickets.

When the venue is at full capacity, there is a lack of suitable toilets and front of house space for patrons to comfortably enjoy refreshments.

There are no lighting bars fitted at the venue or ceiling curtain tracks which would be standard in any theatre space.

Next year, we are unable to book the venue for a stage show as it has already been pre booked throughout the year for council meetings, and booked for numerous external classes.

We are now looking as far afield as Conygre Hall in Timsbury, the Rondo Theatre in Bath, and we've just been turned down by Warmley community hall as a venue due to their bookings being at maximum capacity.

A new community hall in Keynsham, would benefit not only the users but the wider community. It would improve people's lives. Community theatre helps build strong community, encourages inclusivity and diversity, supports mental well-being, supports learning and development, provides a positive economic and cultural impact for the

town, fosters future artists and provides community the opportunity to be involved from stepping out on stage, making and painting set, helping front of house serve teas, or attend a show in your local town, with no need to travel long distance or pay high theatre prices and experience the magic of theatre in your town, in a hall you are proud belongs to your town.