



Director backs the Phoenix as fight steps up for independence

By John Lawrence

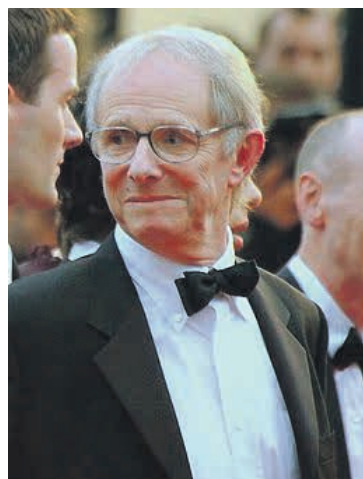
Veteran film director Ken Loach has thrown his support behind the efforts of the team at the Phoenix Cinema to keep the picture house independent by urging everyone to watch movies there and to back the fundraising drive.

The director of *Kes* and *I, Daniel Blake*, himself a patron of the cinema, said he was delighted that staff and trustees had joined forces to boost the cinema's finances by £50,000 before the end of March after calling off a deal to hand operations to the Curzon Cinema group.

Mr Loach said: "The Phoenix, one of the oldest cinemas in the country, has a unique identity which combines quality programming with education and community activities for all ages. Please help the Phoenix rise again with your donations and support, and enjoy visiting this special cinema."

The Phoenix Cinema will this month merge its crowdfunding campaign with that of the Save the Phoenix group, originally set up last September when news of the potential Curzon deal was first announced. Donations are extremely welcome at uk.gofundme.com/savethephoenixcinema and look out for updates on the cinema's website: www.phoenixcinema.co.uk. Save the Phoenix said in a statement: "We understand that many people feel there has been little action since the

it will remain independent, we now believe they are committed to doing all they can



Cinema patron: Ken Loach

to ensure that it remains so." A fundraising screening of *It's a Wonderful Life* in December and a raffle added cash to the coffers. At the same time, James Kessler's term as chair of the Phoenix trustees has ended after nine years and he has been succeeded by existing trustee Alison Gold. Significantly, the board has announced it will be drawing on the expertise of its former chief executive Paul Homer, who left the cinema seven years ago after leading it through its hugely successful



Palace of delights: How the Phoenix first looked in 1910, when the screen was at the High Road end

Four incarnations of the Phoenix

The Phoenix Cinema has had four different names and many owners in its 108-year lifetime. Here's a potted history of the much-loved screen on the High Road

The Picturedrome (1910-1923)

Built in 1910 by Premier Electric Theatres as part of a wave of new cinemas, the Phoenix looked very different in its early years, with two large turrets either side of the main entrance on the High Road. Financial difficulties meant it didn't actually open its doors to filmgoers until 1912, showing a film about the recent sinking of the *SS Titanic*. The Picturedrome, as it was known, had an orchestra pit and twice as many seats in its auditorium as it does today, all sloping towards the High Road to take advantage of the lie of the land.

The Coliseum (1924-1936)

In 1924 the cinema's name changed to The Coliseum and a year later it was sold to Home Counties Theatres. In 1929, it was the first screen in the area to show a talking picture, Al Jolson's *The Singing Fool*, as the age of silent films came to an end.

The Rex (1937-1975)

With no need for an orchestra pit any longer, the cinema was completely redesigned in an Art Deco style and renamed as The Rex. The frontage of the building changed and the audi-

torium was reversed with the screen moving to the opposite end. It faced tough competition from the big cinema chains ABC, Gaumont and Odeon but fought its corner as a small independent with a more varied programme of films. In 1973, it was acquired by the Granada Group.

The Phoenix (Since 1975)

The cinema took its current name in 1975 under the

ownership of Contemporary Films. In 1983, with audience numbers falling, a developer applied to Barnet Council to build an office block on the site. The council approved it but the Greater London Council and local people opposed the sale. The GLC gave the charitable Phoenix Cinema Trust a grant to buy the building and it was saved from demolition. The trust has continued to run the Phoenix on a not-for-profit basis.



Fundraiser: Trustee Margaret O'Brien introduces a film classic at the Phoenix.

pause [of the Curzon deal] was announced and no changes have been made but much work has been done behind the scenes.

"We recognise that the cinema is under large financial strain and needs a significant amount of money to remain solvent. Whilst the cinema cannot guarantee 100% that

£1.1 million centenary restoration project in 2010.

A team of dedicated local volunteers are working with the cinema, co-ordinated by long-term Phoenix supporter Jacky Fairfax. If you would like to join them, contact phoenixvolunteers2018@gmail.com.

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