



# Phoenix set to reopen with secure finances

By David Gritten

As we went to press the Phoenix Cinema was hoping to re-open on Monday 17 May, showing the Bafta and Golden Globe-nominated *Nomadland*, starring Frances McDormand. Check [www.phoenixcinema.co.uk](http://www.phoenixcinema.co.uk) for times.

After a hugely difficult couple of years its staff and trustees are now looking forward to a stable, even prosperous future thanks to two sizeable grants from the government's Culture Recovery Fund.

With the spread of Covid-19 in March last year, the Phoenix had to close for nine months, re-opening briefly in December for four days before shutting down again. All this happened against a long-standing background of financial uncertainty.

## Financial boost

Alison Gold, chair of the Phoenix trustees, says: "We're in a better financial position now than for some years." As we reported in October, East Finchley residents Alex Kleiner

and Michelle McDowall have made a substantial private donation. Then in December the Phoenix was awarded £126,000 from government via the British Film Institute. More good news came last month when the cinema won another grant of £138,000 directly from the Culture Recovery Fund. Alison noted that this latest grant is for reserves to support the Phoenix when it re-opens "as trading is expected to be uncertain for a while."

## Fresh look for foyer

In anticipation of its re-opening, she explains that work has been going on to upgrade its foyer, to make it more welcoming as part of a refreshed and



Sitting comfortably: Oliver Meek from the Rio cinema, left, with Phoenix trustee chair Alison Gold, right, and team members Ewelina Sadlowska and Jelena Milosavljevic getting ready to reopen. Photo Mike Coles.

reinvigorated venue.

There will also be a new emphasis on serving first-class food and drink, sourced wherever possible from local suppliers. "Finally, fresh popcorn!" says Alison. "This also helps the cinema to start earning revenue beyond ticket sales."

## Link with Rio cinema

Making the cinema sustainable in the future will also help it to remain independent.

A 2018 initiative by ex-board members for the Curzon cinema chain to take over the Phoenix was fiercely opposed by audiences and staff and ultimately abandoned.

Still, it has now entered into a partnership with the Rio cinema in Dalston, not in the sense that one cinema would take over the other, but to pool resources and thus help cut their overheads.

Staff at the Phoenix are

delighted by the progress being made. Operations manager Ewelina Sadlowska enthused: "I can't wait for us to open again, because this building is wonderful, it's loved. We want to make sure our audiences appreciate it. There's been such sadness among us but now something positive will happen." Keep an eye on the cinema and its website [www.phoenixcinema.co.uk](http://www.phoenixcinema.co.uk) for a confirmed reopening date.

# Phoenix finds a friend out east

By David Gritten

These past few weeks, a group of Phoenix staff have been concentrating on upgrading the building's interior in an attempt to make it more striking and approachable to visitors.



Partners: The Phoenix is joining forces with the Rio in east London to share ideas and find economies of scale

The East Finchley team have a friendly advisor in Oliver Meek, executive director of the Rio in Dalston, an attractive, independent Art Deco cinema, not unlike the Phoenix.

He jumped at the chance to form a partnership, seeing an opportunity for both venues to take advantage of economies of scale: "We could get a bit more influence with distributors, and share data," he says. "Hopefully we can channel our efforts together and both be stronger as a result. Why should the big cinema chains have all the benefits? There's now only a handful of cinemas in London left with buildings like these."

## To alter ... or not

Many of the proposed changes to the Phoenix will

focus on the foyer. "It has hot, bright downlighting, and it doesn't feel very warm," says Oliver. "For me, a cinema's somewhere you go to be cosy and in the dark. We can create moods, make the place feel warmer."

But everyone concerned with the alterations inside the building insists that the Phoenix's magnificent auditorium will stay virtually untouched. "It's beautiful, that's the thing," Oliver says. "You can't create something like that again. But we want to enhance everything around it."

## Second screen dreams

There's another item on the mind of Alison Gold, chair of the Phoenix trustees: the long-term ambition for the Phoenix

to have a second screen. "That would be a big thing," she says. "We're wondering if it might be possible to fit something in what is now the café area. If so, it would be transformative." Oliver oversaw a second screen project at the Rio and says: "It gave us 20,000 more admissions a year. So that was really major."

Equally important is getting Phoenix audiences to support and make use of a vastly improved bar. Alison and Oliver agree that could be a huge income source. There's a long list of objectives, but by year's end the Phoenix might finally look prepared for an exciting, brand new era.

"Yes," says Alison. "I think it can be."

# Burglary at station shop

By Janet Maitland

The newsagent at East Finchley station was broken into and burgled sometime during the early hours of Monday 12 April. The smashed window and ransacked shop were discovered when staff arrived at 6.30am.

A local man walking through Cherry Tree Wood spotted a discarded cash till drawer on the ground. He said: "When I got to the station I saw the busted-in window, put two and two together and told the guy from the shop I'd seen the drawer with all the stuff strewn around. I told him I'd go back and make sure no one disturbed it. So I went back and waited till the owner came and took it."

British Transport Police confirmed they were called to East Finchley station following reports of criminal damage and burglary of a shop.

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