



The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ  
United Kingdom

20 July 2020

Dear Secretary of State

**The Plough Arts Centre**

I am writing on behalf of The Plough Arts Centre, a notable local charity and community arts organisation in my constituency of Torridge and West Devon. The Plough is under severe financial pressure because of the COVID-19 pandemic and has recently been forced to begin redundancy consultations for all its staff, putting this vital community asset at imminent risk of closure.

In normal times, The Plough is an integral part of the local community and losing it would be a bitter blow to my constituents. It has strong connections to local schools, hosts theatre and cinema events, and provides a hub for artists to collaborate and display their work. These facilities help to reduce social isolation, particularly for older generations, and generate footfall for local businesses as visitors spend time in nearby shops, pubs, and cafes.

As you know, community arts charities like The Plough are particularly vital for isolated rural communities, like those in Torridge and West Devon, which often lack adequate public transport links to larger venues in cities like Exeter and Plymouth. Torridge is also a relatively deprived rural area that hopes to benefit from this Government's commitment to "level up" funding and opportunities across the country.

It was therefore extremely welcome news to see the Government's recent announcement of £1.57bn to protect the arts sector from the impact of coronavirus. It is only right that we do all we can to safeguard our cultural assets, both national and local, as we take steps to rebuild the economy. Any successful recovery from the coronavirus crisis must include a vibrant and thriving theatre and performing arts sector, from major studios and stages to local community arts venues.

With the above in mind, I would welcome an update on the Government's support for this sector and details of how the package of measures announced this month will benefit a local arts charity like The Plough. I would also strongly urge DCMS to consider making funding available for local venues like The Plough which receive no other public subsidy and are at imminent risk of closure.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Cox QC MP