

# Marie Goldman



Deputy leader of Chelmsford City Council and Liberal Democrat Parliamentary candidate for Chelmsford

POINTS OF VIEW

**T**HIS is Dave Hughes. Dave is a Chelmsford community champion. He also happens to be the founder of Hot Box Live, an independent, dedicated live music venue in Chelmsford and I'd really like you to know more about the truly fabulous work he and his small team have been doing, right in the heart of our city.

First off, let's talk about the Hot Box venue. If you've never been, it's possible that you may never have seen or heard of it.

Hot Box is a tiny space, tucked away in one of the arches under the railway viaduct, right beside Chelmsford bus station in Duke Street.

And when I say tiny, I really mean it. Hot Box has a maximum standing capacity of just 100 people, plus a small bar area. But its small size is easily one of its greatest charms. It means that you're never far from the action. The bands are just there – real people, creating real music for real fans.

I've been to lots of music gigs at lots of differently-sized venues around the country and in particular in London, from huge arenas and stadiums like the O2 and Wembley, to mid-sized venues such as The Forum in Kentish Town and the O2 Academy in Brixton.

I've also stood in mud-logged festival fields such as Glastonbury, Reading and Latitude, cheering late into the night as act follows act and the sun sets on a long day of talent and energy.

But my absolute favourite way to see live music is in the up-close-and-personal venues – the ones where you feel that the bands are playing just for you and a small group of friends and neighbours, all there to share a unique experience.

In my late teens, my favourite small venue was a place called The Cavern in Exeter, where I grew up.

Buried beneath the street in a very old part of the city, I'm pleased to see it's still going strong.

In fact, it reminds me a lot of Hot Box in Chelmsford, with the intimacy, the cosiness and the diversity of the acts that it attracts.

A couple of weeks ago, I was lucky enough to have tickets to see a band at Hot Box called The Dunwells, two brothers who create some of the best-matched harmonies you'll ever hear. Chatting to Joe Dunwell

(see, this is the kind of thing you get to do at a tiny venue), we worked out that the first time I'd seen them perform was in 2012 at easily the poshest festival I've ever been to, called Cornbury in Oxfordshire. (When I say posh, I'm not

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# Community champion Dave gives live and affordable music a charming home underneath the arches

exaggerating – thanks to the friends I was with, I had tickets to the VIP area. When we left our seats, it was none other than Prime Minister, David Cameron, who came and filled them!)

The Dunwells played brilliantly, finishing off their headline set with an acoustic version of a song that they played not on the stage, but standing in the middle of the crowd. Such a treat for everyone there and such fabulous talent.

As amazing as they are, The Dunwells aren't from Chelmsford, but one of their brilliant support acts, The Jackson Line, are.

As I arrived a bit late to the evening (I was taking part in a debate about education, hosted by the National Education Union at The Orange Tree – lots to be said about chronic and systemic under-investment in education, but I'll leave that for another day), I only caught some of their set,



The Dunwells performing at Hot Box in Chelmsford  
CLLR MARIE GOLDMAN

but what I heard was wonderful and a timely reminder of the wide array of talent that we have right here in the city that we all call home.

Which brings me right back to Dave Hughes and why he truly is a Chelmsford community champion.

You see, Dave doesn't run Hot Box to make money. In fact, he's set it up as a non-profit Community Interest Company or 'CIC' for short (pronounced 'kick').

Dave's vision and the thing that has kept him motivated even through the very dark days of the pandemic has been to re-introduce live and affordable (free if necessary) original music and arts for everyone, in an extremely safe environment. Dave and his very small team of staff and volunteers go out of their way not just to seek out new and emerging talent, but also to nurture and grow new acts.

Hot Box's mission is to provide cultural activities that have artistic value as well as being financially accessible to all age groups, and to engage with young adults in other ways by involving them as volunteers.

Hot Box hosts about 300 concerts, club nights, workshops, and other events annually, focusing on established popular artists as well as new talent. The venue's activities draw

about 20,000 people per year.

For such a small venue, that's an impressive record. I hope you will agree this is something we need to ensure is able to continue and flourish in Chelmsford.

The great news is that you can help with that in several ways. The first is by popping along to their website at [www.hotboxlive.co.uk](http://www.hotboxlive.co.uk) and buying a ticket or two (I hear The Dunwells are coming back later in the year – they are well worth checking out).

The second is by donating to the on-going crowdfunding campaign that is still helping Hot Box recover from the ravages of Covid: [www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/hot-box-recovery-fund](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/hot-box-recovery-fund).

And finally, you can help by spreading the word about the great work they're doing. Looking for some time out in Chelmsford and some great music? Tell your friends!

Do you know someone who is a Chelmsford community champion and deserves more recognition for their contribution to our city? Let me know! Write to me at: [office@mariegoldman.uk](mailto:office@mariegoldman.uk)

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