

Chairman's Report 2019-2020

AGM 17 June 2020



Welcome to our Annual General Meeting for the year ending 31 March 2020. This year we, like everyone else, are holding the meeting online due to COVID-19 restrictions (fortunately our constitution is forward looking enough to allow that). We have already moved our regular campaign meetings online since the beginning of the lockdown, and they have continued to be useful ways of keeping members up to date and for planning the campaign.

I have tried to pull together here the key points for the year ending March 2020, and a few weeks more to bring us up to date. I'm sure I've missed a few things out; it has been an eventual period!

The highlight of the year has been our successful **Crowdfund** (though it ran into the current year). We had been advised that having a professionally conducted viability study was necessary to demonstrate that there was a future for Streatham Hill Theatre (or maybe not). It would cost tens of thousands so we would need to raise the money somehow.

The crowdfund site Spacehive was identified as it had a focus on spaces for the community, and had a tie-in with the Mayor of London who might also provide funds. A couple of quotes from consultants helped us set a target of around £36,000 by the time platform fees and VAT were included.

So, we kicked off in January, with an initial target to show significant support by late February, so as to be eligible for consideration of a pledge from the Mayor. With a great social media and email campaign, helped by significant support from celebrities with a local connection, over 300 people pledged over £10,000, making us the most supported Spacehive project active in the UK at that time. This resulted in a pledge of £15,000 by the Mayor.

After a quiet period, coinciding with COVID-19, the campaign took off again, reaching and then exceeding the target amount, to be added to by a pledge of £7,500 from Lambeth by the 25th May deadline. The total pledged comes to just under £42,000, including over £19,000 from just under 450 individuals and businesses, which will certainly cover the cost of the viability study.

We were also successful with an application for £6,000 from the **Theatres Trust** through their *Theatres at Risk Capacity Building Programme*, supported by Historic England, The Pilgrim Trust and Swire Charitable Trust. This will allow to extend the scope of the viability study to include an assessment of the likely economic impact on the local area as a result of rejuvenating SHT. The Theatres Trust have been great supporters throughout our whole campaign and continue to provide advice and contacts.

So, can I say a big thank you to everyone who has helped with the campaign, giving time, pledging money and spreading the word! Give yourselves a big round of applause...

A couple of our campaigning and fundraising plans did fall by the wayside, so its even more amazing we exceeded the funding target.

We had hoped to run a **'Street Party'** style event in Barrhill Road next to the theatre to correspond with the Streatham Festival in October 2019. Although initially it seemed promising that we could make the necessary arrangements with Lambeth, as we proceeded more and more council and TfL requirements popped up, eventually making the event impractical. I subsequently went on a Lambeth community event organisers course, and found even more regulations we would need to comply with, so am thinking we won't try that again! Perhaps we could just turn up on the day with a pink yacht!

We had also been planning a **fundraising music and dance event for VE Day**, and to attend the **Kite Day** the same weekend but both were cancelled due to COVID-19.

But we did manage to organise a **'birthday party'** to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the theatre's opening in November 1929. Through local contacts we were able to get support from 'celebrities' Simon Callow – who was born in Streatham and who saw his first theatre show at Streatham Hill Theatre – and Catherine Russell – who was born locally and now lives in Streatham. Both joined us to cut the cake, specially made by one of our members, celebrate the theatre's heritage and launch our crowdfunding campaign. A video of the occasion is available via our website. Praesepe, the building operators, kindly allowed us into the theatre foyer.

Praesepe closed the bingo back in 2017 and have been running a slot machine lounge, known as a Merkur *Cashino*. That had to shut due to COVID-19 and they have only just reopened (or maybe not – there was a poster about staffing issues). Before COVID-19, Praesepe told us they were thinking about what to do with the rest of the building not in use, but we suspect this is all up in the air. Lambeth are leading the attempts to find out their plans.

After we all went into lockdown for COVID-19 it was suggested we could facilitate an **'online showcase'** for local talent, hosting curated programmes of online content. This has been slow to start due to lack of volunteer resources, but we hope to have some content available soon.

Our ongoing efforts with **Lambeth Council** have ensured that SHT features in Lambeth's *Streatham Investment and Growth Strategy*, which commits Lambeth to exploring opportunities for Streatham Hill Theatre, with "an opportunity analysis and appraisal to explore the feasibility of refurbishing and rejuvenating Streatham Hill Theatre". This was confirmed at Council by Matthew Bennett (Cabinet Member for Planning, Investment and New Homes) as a result of a question from Streatham Hill Councillor Liz Atkins. It has also made it into Lambeth's draft *Local Plan*: "The council will support the regeneration of the former Streatham Hill theatre to become a major leisure and entertainment venue alongside workspace for creative and cultural industries."

Lambeth have pledged £7,500 to our viability study and allocated a member of their regeneration team to work with us. The regen team has also been speaking with the freeholder Pollmount about their plans for the building.

We have also made contact with the **GLA**, partly via the Theatres Trust at Risk register, partly through industry contact Nick Allott at Cameron Mackintosh, and partly as a result of the Crowdfunding - The Mayor of London pledged £15,000 to the Crowdfund in recognition of the huge support we have from individuals. The GLA Culture at Risk team is helping with advice and connections, and we have been allocated a main contact at the GLA to work with us. This can help with dealings with TfL too.

TfL have proposed changes to the road and pavement layouts around the building as part of a broader scheme for the A23 Streatham Hill, and held a public consultation. We flagged up some issues regarding access to theatre – it turns out they had not factored in the plans for regeneration – and submitted a written response. The consultation is currently paused due to COVID-19 but we await TfL's response.

We also continue to work closely with **inStreatham**, our local business improvement district (BID) – your Chairman is a volunteer director there. inStreatham would like to see the theatre rejuvenated as a 'destination' venue, and offer workspace and space for events, markets etc. and support our campaign. inStreatham invited us to bid for funding but unfortunately when COVID-19 hit, inStreatham's funds were badly hit and they were unable to provide any funding.

Meanwhile, our **expert panel** of architects, consultants, engineers etc. also continues to provide help and advice on a pro-bono basis. A workshop with the panel developed some practical and effective ways of making good use of the building in the future, in a phased way, without adversely impacting on its

heritage. Our lead architect is developing drawings and 3D models to demonstrate these visions.

We continue to talk to anyone or any organisation interested in the theatre, perhaps as a user or operator, or as a supporter, or who can offer advice. For example, Simon Callow put us in touch with **English Touring Theatre** who are looking for a new home with better facilities to develop shows, and they are now a potential partner. We have spoken to live events companies, mime companies, theatre companies and so on. We have had industry advice, including from Nick at the **Cameron Mackintosh** organisation as mentioned above, and from members of our expert panel.

On the agenda tonight is a resolution to turn the Friends into a **charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)**. At the moment we are an unincorporated members association so have none of the benefits of a formal charity or an incorporated organisation (like a company). Armeet and I recently attended a seminar of charitable structures which helped us determine the right way to proceed. CIO status is a relatively new form of body, and suits our needs well. It will bring more formal management and reporting requirements which we need as we receive our funding and engage a consultancy for the viability study, and as we move forward with subsequent steps. We will need a new constitution, as the Charity Commission provides a template which they strongly recommend CIOs adopt – a draft version customised for us is available on our website. There will be applications and paperwork to be done, so the resolution empowers the Committee to get on and do that. We may well need another general meeting to confirm final arrangements.

Our Committee will become the charity Trustees, which is why you will see some new names among the nominations later – including a qualified accountant. Our day to day campaign is already run by a separate but overlapping Steering Group, and the seminar confirmed this as an effective approach which we will continue. You can think of the Committee/Trustees as the board of directors, and the Steering Group as the management team.

As we move forward it would be good to get some well-known names as Trustees, or Patrons, and we will be pursuing some likely people from among our industry and arts contacts.

To sum up, we have had a very successful year, moving the campaign forward with key stakeholders including local government, and raising funding to carry

out the viability study which we expect to show how a revived Streatham Hill Theatre can benefit the community and local businesses. This is particularly important as we come out of COVID-19 to help give the area a boost. By having a flexible, multi-use offering we believe SHT can rise again and provide the facilities and activities needed here in Streatham and south London.