

# Chairman's Report April 2023 to March 2024

## AGM 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024



Welcome to our Annual General Meeting for the year ending 31 March 2024. This year we are able to hold this meeting online, as a result of the amendment made to our constitution last year, which was subsequently accepted by the Charity Commission.

I have tried to pull together here the key points for the report year April 2023 to March 2024, and have added more to bring us up to date.

Our first objective [I paraphrase] is to save the Streatham Hill Theatre for the benefit of the community. We address this by campaigning to bring the theatre to the attention of the community and to relevant organisations, and to work with them to seek a way to achieve this, for example as an arts and cultural centre, centred around a large performance space.

We applied for a new 5-year term of Asset of Community Value status for SHT as the previous award expired in July 2023. It was finally granted in December 2023, after a number of delays.

We continue to work with a range of stakeholders, including Lambeth Council (officers and Streatham Hill councillors), Theatres Trust, Streatham Society and InStreatham business improvement district, to keep Streatham Hill Theatre, its condition and its potential in the forefront of their minds. We also keep a second tier of bodies up to date, including Historic England, who are responsible for listed buildings. Most of these organisation have joined our virtual Action Team, through which we coordinate activity. We expect to meet our new MP, Steve Reed, in the next few weeks too.

We have recently made contact with the technical team at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane which was recently renovated by Lloyd Webber Theatres, to learn from their experience. We visited the theatre, and they joined our existing expert panel.

We also try to engage with the building owners and occupiers (less successfully), and with potential users.

We have continued to engage with IC Venues Ltd (International Creative Venues) run by two established theatre practitioners, Thom Southerland and Morgan Large. They have said:

*"Working with Lambeth Council (Regeneration), Theatres Trust, Historic England and Arts Council, a business plan was formulated which would see the full renovation and reopening of the theatre, working in partnership with first class architects, similar national large scale theatre owners and operators and international theatre producers."*

However, as you know, the freehold of the building was ultimately purchased in July 2022 by Ruach City Church in order to relocate from their Brixton premises. After a long wait, the Land Registry has been finally updated with the changes of freehold

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and leases. The original Mecca lease has been terminated, and Merkur's lease modified to cover only the slot machine area and extended to 2038.

The new owners will need change of use, planning and listed building consent, which provide an opportunity for us to influence how the building is renovated and used. Ruach also own a Grade II\* former cinema in Kilburn, which may prove a model for how they will approach Streatham Hill. While we understand that they want to retain and restore the building, we are concerned that use for arts and performance, and community access, may be lost as at Kilburn. IC Venues remain interested in the building and have finance and shows – they have made proposals for shared use to Ruach but have had no substantive response.

Ruach seemed in no rush to occupy the theatre, leaving it empty for two years with some maintenance issues. However, when it became clear they would need to leave Brixton by the end of June 2024, they rushed to carry out works in the building to make it ready. It appears the works were done without permission (Lambeth and Theatres Trust are aware) but from what we know the heritage aspects of the building have not been affected. They seem to have addressed the water ingress in the basement and dealt with a pigeon problem. Other issues remain, and we understand they have not started work on the non-public areas.

Ruach opened in Streatham on 30<sup>th</sup> June, bringing their congregation in a march from Brixton. Concerns were raised about the lack of necessary health and safety inspections. The church also have no planning permission for change of use, but have an application in preparation. This was briefly published in error, showing a proposed 3-to-5-year temporary change of use, but no works. Lambeth deemed the application incomplete and we believe Ruach are still working on it. The Friends have been asked for input and will comment on the application as and when it is published – we will be calling on our wide range of contacts and expertise in preparing that response. We can cover this in more detail after the formal meeting.

We continue to receive enquiries from organisations, including some major entertainment companies, wanting to use the theatre, e.g., for filming or shows. Obviously, we cannot oblige but we pass these enquiries onto the new owners to show the level of interest. We are also getting requests from researchers looking for information about appearances by performers, which we can often help with information from our archives.

We are constantly adding more to our [website](#), which is the gateway to everything about the theatre and the campaign, including documents, photographs, and, through our Memories project, audio or video interviews with people who performed at or otherwise remember the theatre. These provide some great insight into the

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theatre's history, as do the various historic entries, some with photos and images, in our blog which goes back to 1912!

We have catalogued our archive of theatre programmes, donated by kind supporters – we welcome more donations. We aim to scan these and make them available online for you to read. We have been in touch with Lambeth Archives to discuss joining forces to bring our and their collections together virtually. This collaboration has also led to our patron Simon Callow supporting the Archives by reading from Lambeth's very own copies of Shakespeare Folios at a recent event.

We have now added greeting cards to our merchandise, along with the John Cresswell book about the theatre...available online via the website.

Looking at our supporters, we now have 12 'famous name' patrons. Plus, we have 215 creative industry supporters, joining the 1356 supporters on our mailing list, together with 88 supporter organisations plus 1570 X (Twitter), 1279 Facebook and 1613 Instagram followers.

The Friends and the campaign are run entirely by volunteers giving their time and experience for free – **I would like to thank them all** – and **appeal for others to join them in helping**, so as to spread the load over a wider number.

Of our volunteer charity Trustees, one third are required to stand down at this AGM but are eligible for re-election. We have also invited nominations for other Trustees to join the board. The election is later on the Agenda.

Our day-to-day campaign continues to be run by a separate but overlapping Steering Group. You can think of the Trustees as the board of directors, and the Steering Group as the management team. A number of dedicated teams are focussed on specific areas of the campaign, such as digital comms and social media, creative supporters, our Archives, and the Memories and Your Vision projects.

We have had stalls at Streatham Kite Day, Lambeth History Fair, and Woodfield Pavilion community day to publicise our campaign. We have also given a presentation about the theatre and our campaign to Lambeth Tour Guides, and have been asked to present to the Cinema Theatres Association and also Streatham Society. I was recently interviewed (again) on local radio station Riverside Radio (hear again via a link on our website).

Remember we have regular campaign meetings, held online, where you can get updates on the campaign, and contribute to planning. Please register for these at the website!

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Plus, we regularly email out a newsletter to friends and the press, and post on social media – primarily X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and Instagram. Links to these are also on the website, or search for Streatham Hill Theatre or FoSHT.

Finally, 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...

*David Harvey, Chairman*

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre

*A volunteer-run community campaign*

A CIO and Registered Charity 1193643

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Patrons: Akram Khan MBE, Baroness Floella Benjamin OM DBE DL, Catherine Russell, David Harewood OBE, Jessica Thom, Jools Holland OBE DL, Paul Merton, Renato Balsadonna, Robert Glenister, Samira Ahmed, Simon Callow CBE & Sir Mark Rylance