

14th December 2018



Flash mob highlights growing support for campaign to save Streatham Hill Theatre

It's almost Christmas and Panto season is well underway. Meanwhile, campaigners to save the Streatham Hill Theatre are working towards a time when the landmark building, known most recently for being a bingo hall, will be transformed into a fully-fledged and diverse entertainment space, with a panto of its own playing again to full houses.

Growing support for the campaign to save the district's own Sleeping Beauty, this historic 1920s theatre, was most evident just a few weeks ago when around a thousand people gathered to press the case for saving and re-launching the venue as a multi-purpose arts and entertainment space for the benefit of the community.

David Harvey, Chairman of the campaign group, Friends of the Streatham Hill Theatre, commented:

"We send our huge thanks to everyone who took part in our flash mob photo call on Sunday 25 November. About a thousand of us demonstrated the community's real enthusiasm for saving the beautiful Streatham Hill Theatre and transforming it into a vibrant new arts-centred space, which will also boost the on-going regeneration of the area."

The photo call, which was covered by the local press and the BBC, coincided with the Friends submission of a response to the appeal by Beacon Bingo against Lambeth Council's recent decision to list the building as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). ACV status presents the community with the opportunity to work to buy the venue; ACV status also must be considered as part of any planning application. A decision on the appeal against ACV status is expected in January.

The Streatham Hill Theatre first opened in 1929 and was a substantial venue on London's theatre scene playing to audiences of up to 2800 until 1962. The venue then changed course becoming home to bingo, under various companies, up until January 2017 when the current owner/operator, Beacon Bingo, ceased to offer bingo. In a much reduced offering the venue now houses slot machines in its foyer.

Beacon Bingo are seeking a new operator for the venue and, although appealing against ACV status, have recently confirmed that they are "very keen to see this beautiful building returned to a venue for live entertainment and wider community use". Prior to

the closure of bingo, Beacon supported use of parts of the building by local groups for events, but this access ceased along with the bingo. The Friends have introduced potential operators to Beacon's representatives at the theatre, and have also made clear their own interest in the building, unfortunately without success so far.

Beacon has 10 years left on a lease of the building from freeholders Pollmount Ltd who have ideas for redevelopment of the building. Although no specific plans have currently been submitted, their recent statement suggests that areas of the building, apart from auditorium and foyer, could be developed. The Friends are concerned that any partial development would leave an unsustainable, impractical rump of a building.

The Friends are grateful for the support of the Theatres Trust, the national advisory public body for theatres, which serves as a statutory consultee on theatres in the planning system. The Theatres Trust has recognised the historic and future value of the Streatham Hill Theatre to the cause of arts, culture and live performance by listing the venue on its Theatres at Risk register.

Explaining the importance of the register, the Theatres Trust writes:

"The Theatres at Risk register is our way of highlighting and supporting the theatre buildings under threat and at greatest risk across the UK.

"A working theatre plays an important role for its local community, both in terms of creating identity and also as an economic driver for creating employment and for the night-time economy."

The campaign has also won the support of the Association of British Theatre Technicians, local councillors and businesses as well as local people. Visit this page to find out more about the history of the Streatham Hill Theatre and the prospects for a new and dynamic future for the venue:

<http://www.theatrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk/484-streatham-hill-theatre>

Active supporters of the Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre will continue to meet regularly in the New Year to take the campaign forward. The group is also keen to work with representatives of Beacon Bingo to reinstate access to the building for organised visits and/or to stage performances.

"The building really is a great community asset and many more people would love to experience its beauty, character and atmosphere as its future is considered.

"The campaign will be staying in touch with supporters and we'll continue to reach out to the community to further boost the support we have.

"We encourage those keen to see the revival of the Streatham Hill Theatre to connect with us via social media and our website." added David Harvey.

"Follow the Friends on Facebook as *StreathamHillTheatre*; Instagram *StreathamHillTheatre*; and Twitter @*StreathamHillT*. And visit the campaign website and join our mailing list at www.streathamhilltheatre.org."

[ENDS]

Press enquiries (including photos and video):

David Harvey, Chairman, Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre

07770 843030 | pr@streathamhilltheatre.org

The Friends website www.streathamhilltheatre.org has further press resources.

Notes for editors:

1. Streatham has a long history in theatre and entertainment and was known as "the West End of south London" - and due to the wealth of talent living in the area - as "The Beverly Hills of London". Arts and cultural activity of all kinds continues in modern day Streatham.
2. Streatham Hill Theatre (SHT) was opened in 1929 as the Streatham Hill Playhouse. It was bombed in WW2 but was rebuilt and reopened in 1950. It closed to theatre in 1962, becoming a bingo hall. Much of the original theatre and its equipment remain. Small scale theatre returned via Streatham Theatre Company from 2013 to 2016. Bingo ceased in 2017.
3. The theatre was granted a Grade 2 listing in 1994 as "an unusually lavish example of a theatre built in the short-lived revival of building in 1929-30; as a suburban example of this date the building may be unique".
4. It is located at 110 Streatham Hill, SW2 4RD. More can be found at www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/Streatham.htm#hilltheatre
5. The Streatham Society has published a book about the theatre, written by John Cresswell www.streathamsociety.org.uk