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Streatham community coming together to back arts and cultural hub

The bid to save the magnificent Streatham Hill Theatre for the community has taken a big step forward with the start of a crowdfunding campaign.

Scores of contributors have immediately committed to back the plan to rescue the Grade 2 listed building and bring it back to life.

The scheme has been given added urgency for Streatham, shaken by the recent terror attack on its high street, as the area comes together to show its community spirit. Campaigners for the theatre say that the building has a vital role to play as a community hub and resource in an area sorely lacking in facilities.

The Theatres Trust has just placed the Streatham venue, turned into a bingo hall more than 50 years ago, near the top of its 2020 list of theatres at risk. The Trust has given Streatham Hill Theatre its highest ranking for community value and potential use for performance.

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre propose a multi-use arts and cultural centre by re-opening the auditorium, bringing back live performance, and activating the ancillary spaces to create a vibrant and sustainable venue supporting a creative community.

The first step is to fund a professional viability study developing proposals and options for a sustainable business model for generations to come. It will include modelling of revenue, capital restoration, and reopening costs. It will also work with the heritage of the Grade 2 listed building which also has Asset of Community Value status.

If sufficient support for the crowdfund can be demonstrated, the Friends may attract a contribution from the Mayor of London's Crowdfund 2020 scheme. The campaign already has the backing of leading theatre figures, such as Streatham-born Simon Callow who says: "I'm sure all kinds of marvellous things can be done with this building, it's very versatile and flexible as long as its essential character is preserved because that's what makes it splendid."

And Catherine Russell says: "The auditorium is stunning and amazing. It would be absolutely fantastic if the whole building could be used - and used for the community and for live theatre. And it would help the whole area."

The Friends have gained widespread support from many organisations including the local authority (Lambeth) and national arts and heritage bodies. They have set up an advisory panel of expert professionals to provide help and support.

The Friends' Chairman, David Harvey says "Streatham has a great community spirit with a wide range of creative organisations active locally. However, there is no local creative hub on the scale that could be created by reawakening this amazing empty theatre – it's the only building left in Streatham large enough for the community to come together. Our campaign aims to show how a sustainable creative resource can be created in the building. Please pledge your support at save.streathamhilltheatre.org."

The crowdfunding page at Spacehive is at save.streathamhilltheatre.org

More about the campaign to revive Streatham Hill Theatre is online at www.streathamhilltheatre.org

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The Friends website www.streathamhilltheatre.org has press resources, including video and photographs of the campaign and the theatre.

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. Simon Callow was born in Streatham and went on to become a famous star of stage and screen, as well as an author. His most recent book is *London's Great Theatres* with photographer Derry Moore.
3. Catherine Russell was also born locally and lives in Streatham. She has extensive stage and screen experience but is currently best known for her role as Serena Campbell in the BBC medical drama *Holby City*.
4. Streatham Hill Theatre (SHT) was opened in 1929 as one of the largest theatres in London. 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, leaving only a small 24/7 slot machine lounge operated by leaseholders Praesepe plc.
5. 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". <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1244564>

6. The theatre is at seven on the Theatres Trust list of at-risk theatres, with much of the building unused, and the risk of development or splitting off parts of the building a concern. <http://www.theatrestrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk/484-streatham-hill-theatre>
7. In 2018, Lambeth Council approved The Friends' nomination of Streatham Hill Theatre as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), which was then appealed by the owners. After a flashmob demonstration of support by over 1000 people in November 2018, ACV status was confirmed in early 2019. More on our website www.streathamhilltheatre.org.
8. Lambeth Council's *Investment and Growth Strategy* for Streatham commits the council to "exploring opportunities for Streatham Hill Theatre, with an opportunity analysis and appraisal to explore the feasibility of refurbishing and rejuvenating Streatham Hill Theatre." <http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Lambeth%20Council%20Q&A%20re%20SHT%20Jan%202020.pdf>
9. The Streatham Society has published a book about the theatre, written by John Cresswell www.streathamsociety.org.uk