

**Report says regenerating Streatham Hill Theatre can kickstart local high street revival**



This photo and others are available at <http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/>

An independent study published today says that restoring the dormant historic building as a centre for arts and culture “*could play a major role in leading the post-Covid high-street recovery, developing the 15-minute neighbourhood, increasing localised co-working opportunities and ultimately making a significant economic contribution to the regeneration of this part of London*”.

The Viability Study and Economic Impact Assessment was carried out by a team led by renowned arts consultancy, FEI, and supported by the Mayor of London, Lambeth Council, the Theatres Trust and over 400 crowdfunded donations from the local community.

The Streatham Hill Theatre opened in 1929. Designed by eminent theatre architect W G R Sprague, it has a capacity of 2,800 and is on a similar scale to the London Palladium. It presented shows until 1962, and then became a bingo club until 2017. Apart from hosting a small slot machine lounge, the rest of the large Grade II listed building now remains inactive. It was added to the Theatres Trust’s Theatres at Risk Register in 2017 in recognition of its architectural significance and potential to return to community use.

The study says that the theatre has the potential to generate footfall, jobs and economic growth, adding over £70m to the local economy over 30 years. It identifies

a broad range of economic and social benefits that restoring the theatre for arts and culture could bring. These include: fostering local creative enterprise; supporting the night-time economy; providing access to affordable workspaces; enhancing education and learning for children and young people; enhancing local quality of life and wellbeing; supporting moves in London to 15-minute neighbourhoods; and lowering potential carbon emissions by regenerating rather than redeveloping the site.

The study recommends a phased, incremental and collaborative approach, with the immediate focus on making meanwhile use of parts of the building. Following on from this, a 'minimal refurbishment' of the theatre could be implemented as a sustainable operating model in the medium term, while longer term plans are developed for full refurbishment and operation as a fully commercial theatre.

The study carried out extensive work on mapping competitors, audiences and users, financial and operating models, and an economic impact assessment. Its report ([of which a summary is published today](#)) makes clear there will be challenges to restoring the theatre, including uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and ownership issues. However, with the right circumstances, and a significant level of third-party capital investment in retro-fitting and refurbishment, the ongoing operation of the theatre as a leisure and entertainment venue promoting arts and culture, is a viable long-term proposition.

### **Responses to the Study:**

*"Time and again, it's been demonstrated how arts and heritage can be a catalyst to regeneration. This study shows that here in Streatham it can be done, it should be done and it needs to be done, and quickly."*

**David Harvey, Chair, The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre**

*"I'm so excited at the idea of the West End of South London coming back to life. The pandemic has made us all cherish our neighbourhood assets and think about them as community hubs for inclusive art and culture. As we're all so much more conscious of celebrating our history, Streatham Hill Theatre feels like it's been biding its time ready to spread its wings again. A phoenix rising."*

**Samira Ahmed, Arts & News Presenter and Theatres Trust Ambassador**

*"To dream, to imagine, to dare to hope that Streatham might once again have this beautiful theatre up and running - is like a breath of warm, exciting fresh air that could ignite the whole community with a sense of real future promise."*

**Catherine Russell, Actress**

*"Looking at the viability details just makes you realise what a huge asset the theatre could become for the community as a whole. Brilliant."*

**Robert Glenister, Actor**

*"I am so thrilled to read the unequivocal outcome of the Viability Study and Economic Impact Assessment. It is a vital catalyst project to regenerate Streatham, securing long term benefits for the community and businesses. By preserving such a spectacular Theatre and utmost example of Lambeth's historical and cultural heritage, we build a brighter future for Streatham and South London."*

## **Renato Balsadonna, Opera and Symphonic Conductor**

*“Historically Lambeth has an established landmark of theatres and a community of dedicated theatre goers. The Council recognises this much-loved community asset that is the ‘Streatham Hill Theatre’ and fully supports the community’s commitment to deliver a diverse and much needed theatre at the heart of Streatham.”*

**Cllr Sonia Winifred, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Culture, Lambeth Council**

*“There is strong local support to regenerate this historic building and reintegrate it into the local community.*

*“Creating a local hub for culture, live arts and entertainment wouldn’t just enrich Streatham’s cultural offering, it would also bring important benefits to our local economy at a time when the High Street has taken an even deeper hit.”*

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy, MP for Streatham**

*“Theatres Trust firmly believes that Streatham Hill Theatre can play a valuable role at the heart of its high street and are pleased to see this borne out by the results of the Viability Study, which we supported through our Theatres at Risk Capacity Building Programme. Returning empty theatres to use is often a long and difficult process, but as we have seen with other theatres we work with, the incremental approach suggested by this report is a practical achievable route to revival.”*

**Claire Appleby, Architecture Adviser, Theatres Trust**

*“Streatham’s long-term sustainability absolutely depends on the sort of intervention that the regeneration of Streatham Hill Theatre could bring. We need more diverse leisure provision, increased co-working opportunities and community spaces that can build on and enhance the local pride. The Streatham Hill Theatre is a beautiful and historical building that really could be the jewel in the crown of Streatham’s renaissance.”*

**Louise Abbotts, BID Manager, InStreatham Business Improvement District (BID)**

**ENDS**

## **Notes to Editors**

### **Contact**

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Further resources including a selection of photos: [streathamhilltheatre.org](http://streathamhilltheatre.org)

The study report summary is available here:

<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Streatham%20Hill%20Theatre%20Viability%20Study%20Summary%20-%20Digital.pdf>

### **Interviews**

Patrons Catherine Russell and Renato Balsadonna are available for interview.

### **Streatham Hill Theatre**

Streatham Hill Theatre originally opened in 1929 and is a Grade II listed building with an auditorium with a capacity of over 2,800. It was the last project by the renowned

West End theatre architect W G R Sprague, whose other surviving theatres include the Wyndhams Theatre, Noel Coward Theatre, Aldwych Theatre and Gielgud Theatre.

After a direct V1 'doodlebug' hit in 1944, it closed for the rest of WWII and reopened in 1950 to entertain visitors for another twelve years, before being repurposed for bingo in 1962, until the closure of the bingo in 2017.

In 2019, after a flashmob of over 1,000 people demonstrated huge local support, Lambeth Council turned down an appeal by the theatre's owners to remove its Asset of Community Value status.

The Friends have no access to or control of the building, which is currently only partially in use as a small slot machine lounge by leaseholders, Merkur Casino UK (formerly Praesepe). The freeholders are Poll Mount Ltd.

### **The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre**

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre's mission is to help find a sustainable solution to the future of the building, and to promote returning it to use as an arts and culture venue. They are a volunteer-run unincorporated association supported by the Mayor of London, Lambeth Council and The Theatres Trust, and have recently been granted CIO charity status.

On the 91st birthday of the opening of the theatre, on 20th November 2020, the Friends announced nine Patrons for their campaign: Baroness Floella Benjamin, DBE, DL, Catherine Russell, Jessica Thom, Paul Merton, Renato Balsadonna, Robert Glenister, Samira Ahmed, Simon Callow, CBE and Sir Mark Rylance. They have recently been joined by Akram Khan, MBE. In addition, nearly 200 creative industry individuals and organisations have so far given their support to the campaign and many others continue to add their names.

### **Community support**

The Draft Revised Lambeth Local Plan says "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".

The Streatham Investment and Growth Strategy 2019–2030, adopted by Lambeth, sets out a priority action to explore the feasibility of refurbishing and rejuvenating the theatre, and says that 5 successfully restoring this building would bring significant improvements to the public realm and historic/cultural fabric of the area.

The Save Streatham Hill Theatre crowdfunding campaign to support a viability study and economic impact assessment was launched on 28th January 2020. It gained a huge groundswell of support from the local community, political leaders, and businesses, as well as support from the wider creative and heritage communities. It reached its funding target on 13th May 2020, along the way gaining funding pledges from the Mayor of London Lambeth Council to help reach a total of £41,680, as well as a £6,000 grant from the Theatres Trust.

**NOTES END**