

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**07 April 2021**



## **Theatre campaigners object to ward boundary changes**

The group masterminding efforts to revive the magnificent Streatham Hill Theatre has objected strongly to Boundary Commission proposals for the area.

The 1,100 member Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre say the commission's plan to split Streatham Hill Ward into four parts and move the theatre into a new Thornton ward would damage the project and the interests of the surrounding community.

Public consultation on the commission's proposals, which affect every ward in Lambeth, closes on April 12 - [have your say on the Boundary Commission web site](#).

The current focus of Streatham Hill Ward and its community is the A23 Streatham Hill. The current boundaries of the ward, straddling the road, recognise that and the history of the area. To split the area up, using Streatham Hill as a boundary completely negates that historic reality and the common interests of the community and businesses on both sides of the main road.

The theatre belongs at the heart of the Streatham Hill area, as it is currently. It shouldn't be put on the periphery of a non-Streatham ward. This would be hugely damaging both to the project itself and the regeneration and development of the wider area.

The Friends recently gained charity status and commissioned a crowd-funded viability study and economic impact assessment, which also received financial backing from the Mayor of London, the Theatres Trust and Lambeth Council. The study report has recognised the major importance of the project to the regeneration of the Streatham Hill area.

The Secretary of the Friends, Chris Sluman, who has lived in Streatham Hill for 45 years, commented: *"Since the mid-1970s we have established a much stronger community across the whole of the Streatham Hill area. This boundary change would be very divisive.*

*"There is huge support for our plans for the theatre. The community are behind it and, as a result of our campaign, it has been declared an asset of community value. The Boundary Commission wants to split the community up when its job must be to set ward boundaries which reflect community interests.*

*"The A23 is not a dividing line; rather, it is a focal point for Streatham Hill. The Theatre is at the heart of that focus."*

**The text of the Friends' submission to the Boundaries Commission follows:**

## **OBJECTION TO BOUNDARIES COMMISSION PROPOSALS FOR STREATHAM HILL WARD**

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre, a registered charity with 1,100 members, object strongly to the Boundary Commission's proposals which we regard as damaging to the community and businesses in Streatham Hill.

The proposals fail to meet the central requirement to "reflect community identity", which should not be given less weight than other considerations.

The identity of the area would be fractured by splitting Streatham Hill ward into four component parts.

Worst of all for the aspirations to revive the Streatham Hill Theatre is the proposal to move it and the adjacent community into a ward which will not identify with Streatham. This is evidenced by Thornton Ward not even being included in the section of the proposals dealing with Streatham (paragraphs 160 to 189).

The current focus of Streatham Hill Ward and its community is the A23 Streatham Hill. The current boundaries of the ward, straddling the road, recognise that and the history of the area. Streatham gets its name from being the 'village' on the 'street' (Streat – ham). Its whole history and development reflect that.

To split the area up, using Streatham Hill as a boundary completely negates that historic reality, reflected for example in the long-standing SaferA23 campaign uniting community concerns east and west of the road and major proposals by Transport for London to transform that section of the A23 into a safer place for pedestrians and cyclists, and overcome the severance produced by the current dual carriageway layout. Residents on both sides of the road are united by common concerns, whether they be about highway safety or retail and commercial development, and community safety.

The area has been treated as an entity in council proposals and policies, and the council supports the campaign to revive the 2,800 capacity Streatham Hill Theatre, on the west side of the A23 at Streatham Hill, into a thriving cultural hub as a key driver to the regeneration of the area.

The Draft Revised Lambeth Local Plans states: "*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 2019-30 sets out as a priority exploring the feasibility of refurbishing and rejuvenating the theatre, and says that "*successfully restoring this building would bring significant improvements to the public realm and historic/cultural fabric of the area, as well as delivering against a number of other objectives presented in this strategy (e.g., Strengthening and Diversifying the Town Centre)*."

The restoration and revival of the theatre, which has been designated an Asset of Community Value, have the active support of the Mayor of London, the GLA, the Theatres Trust, and leading professionals. An independent Viability Study and Economic Impact Assessment, which has been crowd-funded with additional contributions from the GLA, the Theatres Trust and Lambeth Council, has been looking at options for the venue. The Friends were recently registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and are driving moves to restore and reuse the theatre, a campaign which has huge local buy-in and support.

The theatre, together with surrounding residents and that part of the Streatham Business Community, would end up under the commission's draft proposals in a ward represented by just two councillors whose clear focus would be on a community which identifies with Balham and Clapham. The draft proposals are based on the consideration that the Hyde Farm area "*looks towards Balham*" and part of Streatham Hill is being hived off to make up the numbers.

The theatre belongs at the heart of the Streatham Hill area, as it is currently, in a strong three-member ward. It shouldn't be put on the periphery of a non-Streatham ward. This would be hugely damaging both to the project itself and the regeneration and development of the wider area.

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors follow:**

## **Contact**

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

## **Use of photographs**

Please contact us to request photos for publication.

## **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 WGR 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 150 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

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. The outcome of the study is due to be published in April 2021.

**NOTES END**