



**On the venue's 91st birthday, The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre announce nine Patrons including Baroness Floella Benjamin, DBE, DL, Paul Merton, Samira Ahmed, Simon Callow CBE and Sir Mark Rylance.**

- South London's 'Sleeping Beauty' marks its 91st birthday on **20th November 2020**.
- Baroness Floella Benjamin, DBE, DL, Catherine Russell, Jessica Thom, Paul Merton, Renato Balsadonna, Robert Glenister, Samira Ahmed, Simon Callow, CBE and Sir Mark Rylance are the Patrons for the campaign to return the building to public use.
- Over 100 creative industry individuals and organisations give their support to the campaign.

The announcement on what would have been the theatre's 91st birthday, is some welcome good news at a time when the industry is in crisis.

A recent report from Arts Council England shows that cultural buildings are located at the very heart of our high streets. They promote social cohesion and support local economies. The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre believe it is more important than ever to see this iconic dormant building reopened to serve the community.

A lavishly decorated Grade II listed 2,800 capacity building with Asset of Community Value status, it was once a thriving off-West End theatre. It currently sits empty except for a row of slot machines, on a high street in need of regeneration.

The campaign's new Patrons are past and present Streatham or South London residents and join a long list of local business, members of the community, public bodies, and creative sector supporters who all agree it should be returned to public use.

**Paul Merton, Comedian, Improviser, Writer and Presenter:**

*'Such an amazing array of stars played at the Streatham Hill Theatre back in the day. It would be wonderful to see this beautiful theatre brought back to life so we could enjoy watching the next generation of performers tread its boards.'*

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

*'Opening up Streatham Hill Theatre to the public again would be truly exciting. What could be a finer community asset than this building?'*

**Sir Mark Rylance, Actor, Theatre Director & Playwright:**

*'I live very happily in South London as did my grandfather and great grandfather before me. I totally support the amazing efforts of the Friends to reuse this gem of a building for the community as an arts and creative hub.'*

**Robert Glenister, Actor:**

*'I applaud the Friends' campaign to bring this wonderful theatre back to life and help make Streatham the place to visit for creative entertainment, as it used to be many years ago.'*

Welcoming the venue's 91st birthday and announcement of Patrons:

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

*'I would like to thank all of those who have come together from the community, the creative sector, businesses, and public bodies, to show such huge support for saving this historic theatre for public use. At a time of huge challenge for the arts and for the economy, this overwhelming show of support makes clear that reopening this grand building would be a welcome light on the horizon.'*

**Jen Batchelor, Chair, InStreatham, Business Improvement District (BID):**

*'At the BID, we're extremely keen to support and work with the Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre to achieve their aspirations to restore the Theatre to its former glory. We want to help grow Streatham as a destination, and feel that the Friends objectives for our beautiful theatre will help us achieve this. We'd love to create a destination venue for diverse leisure and hospitality offerings, as well as space for creatives, start up and entrepreneurs to grow. As we start to come out of the current pandemic in 2021, businesses and local people need a venue like this to help support the local economy, and enable us to bounce back and regenerate the High Street.'*

**Bell Riberio-Addy, MP for Streatham:**

*'As Streatham Hill Theatre celebrates 91 years we are reminded of what has been, and could again be a fantastic community hub for culture and entertainment. At a time of real precarity for creative industries across the UK, it couldn't be more important to protect historic venues and support the arts at a local level.'*

**Councillor Jack Hopkins, Leader, Lambeth Council:**

*'Happy 91st birthday to this incredible Lambeth landmark. The creative sector is going to be absolutely critical to our recovery from COVID-19. Restoring Streatham Hill Theatre to public use is integral to, and would be a major catalyst for, our plans for investment and growth in Streatham.'*

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

*'Theatres Trust is delighted to be supporting the Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre, contributing to the Viability Study through our Theatres at Risk Capacity Building Programme. This glorious W. G. R. Sprague theatre has been on our Theatres at Risk list since 2017, but we believe it has the potential to be returned to use by the community in south London and to, once more, become an important, bustling venue at the heart of the high street. We look forward to the study revealing the best way forward to make this a reality.'*

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre are now working alongside stakeholders to protect the building from neglect or inappropriate redevelopment. A crowdfunded Viability Study and Economic Impact Assessment on the historic building will deliver a report at the start of 2021 on the theatre's potential to become a multi-purpose arts and culture centre. Renowned arts business consultants FEI will deliver this milestone work.

Anyone inspired by the campaign is encouraged to join the Friends, help spread the word, and contribute to the proposed future for this local landmark, via their website [streathamhilltheatre.org](http://streathamhilltheatre.org)

**ENDS**

## **Notes to Editors**

### **Contact**

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Photos and biographies of the Patrons are available at:  
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Patrons/>

Photos of the theatre and other resources are available at  
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/>

### **Streatham Hill Theatre**

Streatham Hill Theatre originally opened in 1929 and is a Grade II listed building with an auditorium seating over 2,800. It was the last project by the renowned West End theatre architect WGR Sprague. After a direct V1 'doodlebug' hit, it closed during WWII. It reopened in 1950 to entertain visitors for another twelve years before being repurposed for bingo in 1962. With the closure of the bingo in 2017, the auditorium that hosted John Gielgud, Paul Robeson, Peggy Ashcroft and Sean Connery's first ever acting performance, now stands empty.

Much of the original theatre and its equipment remain. It is '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' (Historic England). The building was added to the Theatres Trust Theatres at Risk register in 2018. In 2019, after a flashmob of over 1,000 people demonstrated huge local support, Lambeth Council approved the theatre as an Asset of Community Value.

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

The Draft Revised Lambeth Local Plan says that the council will support the regeneration of the former Streatham Hill theatre to become a major leisure and entertainment venue. The '[Streatham Investment and Growth Strategy 2019 – 2030](#)' commits 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 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 public 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 applied for CIO charity status.

### **Community support**

The Save Streatham Hill Theatre crowdfunding campaign to support a viability study 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.

### **Arts Council England Report**

'[The Arts and Placeshaping: Evidence Review](#)' was published on 15 September 2020. It points to a body of evidence that demonstrates how culture-led regeneration and investment can help drive local economic growth, help regenerate the high street, and promote social cohesion.

### **The Patrons**

More information about our patrons can be found at [www.streathamhilltheatre.org/support#patrons](http://www.streathamhilltheatre.org/support#patrons).

### **Creative Industry Supporters**

More information about our supporters from the creative industries can be found at [www.streathamhilltheatre.org/support#creatives](http://www.streathamhilltheatre.org/support#creatives).

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