

Streatham Hill Theatre

Update at 17 January 2019



Now that bingo has ceased, the **Friends of Streatham Hill** are campaigning for the building to be brought back into use for arts/culture/performance use for the benefit of the community. This would support regeneration of the local area, provide much needed support for local arts and culture, and offer a destination for leisure and entertainment in Streatham.

Lambeth has confirmed the building as an **Asset of Community Value (ACV)** in Jan 2019 after a review requested by Beacon Bingo. ACV was originally granted in July 2018 after an application by the Friends. This recognises that recent use of the building for the benefit of the community and that it could have a community use in the future.

ACV status requires owners to give notice of planned sale of freehold or lease of 25 years or more. The community has 6 weeks to state they want to bid, then 6 months to raise funds. The owner does not have to accept a community offer. ACV is also a material consideration in planning applications.

The building is **Grade II listed** (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*”.

Listing means that development needs listed building consent as well as planning consent (both assessed by Lambeth). Permission could be granted if the building cannot have a future without those changes.

The building is also on the **Theatres Trust ‘At Risk’** register, entering the list at number 7 last year. It will be on this year’s list to be launched on 22 Jan 2019. The Trust is a statutory consultee on planning involving theatres.

The freeholders **Pollmount Ltd** have said they do not currently have development plans. However we understand they are considering some kind of redevelopment and have previously submitted a pre-application to Lambeth.

They have said in a press statement that any such development would not impact on the auditorium or front of the building. However the Friends are concerned that without the rest of building, these parts would be unsustainable.

The sub-leaseholders **Beacon Bingo** shut down their bingo operation in Jan 2017 and now operate at 24/7 slot machine lounge in part of the building.

They wish to get out of their lease which it ends 2028 (they have a sub-lease under head-leaseholders Mecca). With less than 10 years left on the lease, and a potential liability for costs of ‘dilapidations’, it is unlikely that anyone would take over Beacon’s lease. Therefore they would seek a new arrangement with Pollmount and Mecca.

They have said that they will seek a performance-related operator to take over the building, who would work with the community. They have had a number of enquiries but nothing firm at the moment. The Friends have introduced a number of organisations.

The Friends consider there are a number of routes to a **positive outcome** for the building:

- A commercial operator takes over who may (or may not) work with the community.
- The Friends partner with another organisation – we are currently pursuing this.
- The Friends take over the building and create a community-focused centre, funded by capital grants. Lambeth could help here, for example by acquiring the freehold. The centre would be run by a community charity.

Without these, the **building could be lost to development or abandonment** – there are many examples of theatres sitting empty and deteriorating for years which would be very expensive to restore. This building could be saved much more quickly and cheaply if fast action is taken.

Some History:

Built in 1928/9 and opened 1929, the theatre staged theatre, variety, opera, ballet etc. often with West End shows prior to, or immediately after, their opening there. Their slogan was ‘West End Theatre at provincial prices’. Streatham Hill Theatre was part of the group of buildings including the Gaumont Cinema (which became the Megabowl) and the Locarno ballroom (Caesars) which made Streatham the ‘West End of south London’. It is a similar size to the London Palladium, and featured many of the big names of their day. Put out of action by a bomb from 1944 to 1950, it continued until 1962 when it lost out to TV and bingo. It was a flagship Mecca site for many years before changing hands as a bingo hall a few times, ending up with Beacon.