

Present State and Concerns

Ownership:

- Until recently Streatham Hill Theatre (SHT) freehold was owned by Poll Mount Ltd for many decades, with a headlease to Mecca from 1962 to 2028, and sublease to Merkur (formerly Praesepe) to 2028
- Theatre company IC Venues Ltd had tried to purchase the freehold in 2022
- The freehold was sold twice in 2022, ultimately to trustees for Ruach City Church
- Merkur have a revised lease on part of the ground floor, details unknown
- Mecca lease believed terminated
- The above changes not yet confirmed by Land Registry
- IC Venues remain interested in acquiring the theatre and have funding

The building is:

- Grade II listed
- situated in a Conservation Area
- an Asset of Community Value
- identified as 'at risk' by statutory bodies Historic England and Theatres Trust, amongst others
- classified by the Valuation Office Agency as a Bingo Hall, a *sui generis* Use Class
- licensed for bingo by the Gambling Commission

Concerns for building's state include:

- flooding in the basement
- water ingress in other areas
- water damage to foyer plasterwork
- concern that damp will affect other parts of the building
- plants are growing on some outside walls/roof
- loose soffit on roller shutter enclosure for stage dock door

Occupation:

- Merkur have removed bingo fittings and signage from most of the building, but retain a slot machine operation in a partitioned area of the rear stalls.
- A corridor has been created across the foyer, apparently with no planning consent.
- The rest of the building is believed to be currently unused.

Given the change of ownership, and the largely unoccupied nature of the building, and this water ingress, Lambeth should use its powers to inspect the listed building.

Ruach's planning activity (to relocate its Brixton venue to SHT) is believed to be ongoing.

- It is likely they will not wish to make major changes to the building as they like the grandeur
- However, there has been little or no response from Ruach to communications, and their co-ordinator may have left or been reassigned
- Ruach are also engaged in another large planning application with LB Merton

There are concerns regarding:

- potential loss of stage/performance facilities
- potential loss of ongoing use for performance and the arts
- future community access to the heritage and the facilities
- transport and parking in local roads
- impact on local businesses of church use rather than leisure use – including footfall and spend across the week. InStreatham, the business improvement district, remain supportive of an arts and leisure use to help regenerate the high street.

Planning Authority approval will be needed for:

- change of use
- any building works
- listed building consent

This document will be updated as and when appropriate.

Ruach did a similar change in LB Brent at the Grade II* Kilburn State Cinema, including promised performances, community access and usage. However, it does not appear that these have substantially materialised.

As a statutory body and required consultee, Theatres Trust has considerable experience of other venues where planning has imposed such conditions, and their compliance and enforcement (or otherwise). Their experience should be taken into account.

There are several other exemplar venues where similar changes of use have been considered by planning authorities, including Crystal Palace cinema and Walthamstow Granada, and have been refused in favour of arts and cultural use.

Given the above, the Planning Authority should consider any applications in the light of experience of Kilburn, and other similar venues. It should take on board the concerns and needs of the local community for this building to be brought back as a creative hub at the heart of a regenerated Streatham. If after such considerations, approval for change is to be given, it would need to impose suitable conditions, and ensure they can be effectively enforced.

The timeline below adds further detail and background to the current status.

Significant History

1928-9: **Built** by architects **WGR Sprague** – the last by this well-renowned theatre architect – and WH Barton. Popular actress Evelyn Laye laid the foundation stone in September 1928.

1929: **Opened** and operated as a theatre - **fourth largest theatre in London** - presenting “*west end shows at provincial prices*”.
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/info/The%20Story%20of%20Streatham%20Hill%20Theatre.pdf>

1944: Damaged by **bombing** in 1944.

1950: **Reopened** after restoration. It remained a theatre until 1962, presenting a wide range of entertainment: plays, revues, concerts, opera, ballet, pantomimes, film etc.
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/info/FoSHT%20SHT%20Shows%20and%20Programmes.pdf>

1962: Leased (until 2028) by Mecca Social Club as the **largest bingo hall in Britain**. Operated as a social club and bingo hall by Mecca then sublet to various operators until 2017 (as Beacon Bingo, now Merkur). It also staged some shows, pantomimes, wrestling etc.

1994: Granted **Grade 2** listing 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>

1999: Lambeth designated **Conservation Area** 54 including Streatham Hill Theatre.

2013-2016: The theatre also hosted **events and exhibitions** for the annual Streatham Festival, and Film Festival. Local open-access Streatham Theatre Company has staged **performances**, promenade site-specific performances, and **guided tours** attracting the community to the theatre.
<http://streathamtheatre.org.uk/venue/streatham-hill-theatre>

2017: **Bingo closed**, leaving only a slot machine lounge. Operators initially sought alternative entertainment use.
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Praesepe%20Beacon%20Bingo%20Streatham%20Closing%20Press%20Release.pdf>

March 2017: The ABTT visited the theatre for historical research. They took many photos and published articles in their magazine *SightLine*.

Streatham Hill Theatre

1928-Present (December 2023)



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<https://www.flickr.com/photos/fosht/albums/72157712259167417>
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/info/SHT%20in%20ABTT%20Sightline.pdf>
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/info/SHT%20in%20ABTT%20Sightline%20Addendum.jpg>

July 2017: Interest from an Arts Club as a base; they rented space for several months and staged a festival. Operators did not proceed with their proposal.

2018: After management change, operators decided to retain lease.

2018: Added to the Theatres Trust **Theatres at Risk** register and remains on that list.
http://www.theatretrust.org.uk/assets/000/000/799/2018_TheatresTrust_Theatresatrisk_assessment_register_and_map_web_original.pdf?1516114610,
<http://www.theatretrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk/484-streatham-hill-theatre> and
<https://database.theatretrust.org.uk/resources/theatres/show/2522-streatham-hill>

2018: Lambeth Council granted **Asset of Community Value (ACV)**, confirmed in early 2019 after a review requested by the owners and our flashmob demonstration in November 2018.
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/ACV/2018/>

2019: **Streatham Investment and Growth Strategy** 2019-2030 sets out plans to explore opportunities for the theatre as part of a wider regeneration strategy for Streatham that aims to: challenge perceptions and attract inward Investment to Streatham; diversify the town centre economy; provide space for growth and enterprise; improve the resident and visitor experience; and progress development opportunities. It states 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).

https://moderngov.lambeth.gov.uk/documents/s115279/Appendix%201_Streatham%20Investment%20Growth%20Strategy.pdf.

Feb 2019: Architects visit, photograph and study the building and its condition. A **Site Condition Report** is prepared with photographs, noting flooding, water ingress and damp, with damage to plasterwork, paintwork and historic windows.
http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/study/029_SHT_Existing%20Site%20Conditions%20Report.pdf

2020: The Friends run a **crowd-funder** to pay for a Viability study to show if and how the theatre could be regenerated. This received huge support from the local community, local businesses and the creative industry. Over £46,000 was raised with support from over 400 individuals, the Mayor of London, Theatres Trust and LB Lambeth.
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Message%20of%20Support%20from%20InStreatham.pdf>
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Message%20of%20Support%20from%20Streatham%20Festival.pdf>
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Message%20of%20Support%20from%20Streatham%20Society.pdf>
<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Message%20of%20Support%20from%20Streatham%20Theatre%20Company.pdf>

2021: Added to **Historic England's Heritage at Risk** register, noting "There is flooding in the basement subways causing deterioration of the fabric and other areas show signs of water ingress."
<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/212434>

2021: The 2020-2035 **Lambeth Local Plan** states: *The former Streatham Hill theatre is Grade II listed and provides a transformative opportunity to provide a major leisure and entertainment venue with the potential for workspace for creative, digital and cultural industries.*
<https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-09/Lambeth%20Local%20Plan%202021.pdf>

This document will be updated as and when appropriate.

2021: The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre published a **Viability Report and Economic Impact Assessment**, funded through crowd-funding and support from Theatres Trust, Mayor of London and Lambeth. It summarises:

The Viability Study and Economic Impact Assessment ... shows how the refurbishment of the currently under-utilised former Streatham Hill Theatre (the Theatre) is a real opportunity to make a valuable contribution to the regeneration of Streatham as a major town centre and to addressing inequalities in a diverse and up-and-coming area of Lambeth and South London.

With the right circumstances, and a significant level of third-party capital investment in retrofitting and refurbishment, the ongoing operation of the Theatre as a leisure and entertainment venue promoting arts and culture, is a viable long-term proposition. This project will involve overcoming challenges, but has the potential to generate footfall, jobs and economic growth, leveraging support from key stakeholders such as Lambeth Council and the GLA.

Summary report:

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

2022: Added to **Save Britain's Heritage Buildings at Risk** register.

<https://www.savebritainsheritage.org/campaigns/item/796/SAVE-Me-Im-Yours-New-Entries-List-in-full#:~:text=South%20East-,Streatham%20Hill%20Theatre,-%2C%20110%20Streatham%20Hill>.

Also, added to the **Art Deco Society's Heritage at Risk** list.

<https://artdecosociety.uk/buildings-at-risk/#:~:text=Streatham%20Hill%20Theatre>

2020-22: **IC Venues Ltd expressed interest in acquiring the theatre**, to operate as a theatre with 'destination shows' along with community use. Survey visits showed deterioration due to water ingress. Initially IC Venues' discussions were with Praesepe/Merkur about a lease.

Working with Lambeth Council, Theatres Trust, Historic England and Arts Council, IC Venues **business plan** would see the **full renovation and reopening of the theatre**, working in partnership with first class architects, similar national large scale theatre owners and operators, and international theatre producers.

March 2022: IC Venues enter **discussions with Poll Mount Ltd** for a freehold purchase, for which an offer was made and accepted in April 2022. However, IC Venues were then told the building had been sold.

May 2022: Poll Mount **sold the freehold** to a property company Hold Land South East Ltd for £2.76m. IC Venues continued to negotiate a potential acquisition with agents Tri Capital, achieving an agreement in principle for a lease. However, a day before signing, IC Venues were then told the building had been sold again.

July 2022: Hold Land South East **sold on the freehold** to Ruach City Church for £4m, but this is not yet shown at the Land Registry. The church plans to move from Brixton, where it has sold its current premises for £4.5m, by the second anniversary of that sale. Planning approval will be required for change of use, building works, as well as listed building consent.

It is understood that the headlease, held by Mecca, has been surrendered, and the sublease held by Merkur renegotiated or replaced. However, this is not yet shown at the Land Registry.

August 2022: **The Friends and Ruach meet** to open dialogue. It was a friendly meeting. Ruach will be taking about two years to relocate from Brixton. They are open to discussions about community use of the building, subject to their policy.

IC Venues make Ruach an offer for the freehold, which was declined, but Ruach explained they would be in touch to work out how they might be able to work with IC Venues in the future. However, no proposals have been forthcoming.

Streatham Hill Theatre

1928-Present (December 2023)



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Oct 2022: Hold Land South East Ltd, who purchased the freehold in May 2022, is put into voluntary liquidation.

June 2023: The Friends applied to Lambeth for a new period of **Asset of Community Value** status; the previous ACV expires in July 2023.

<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/ACV/2023/SHT%20ACV-nomination-form-2023%20Redacted.pdf>

August 2023: **IC Venues remain interested in acquiring the theatre.**

December 2023: Lambeth approves a second period of **Asset of Community Value** status.

<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/ACV/2023/ACV%20Decision%20Letter%20Streatham%20Hill%20Theatre%20-%20Letter%20to%20Nominator%20Dec%202023%20Redacted.pdf>

December 2023: Merkur installs **new signage** on the canopy, for the slot machine lounge.

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More information

The book “**The Streatham Hill Theatre – The Story of a Suburban Theatre**” by John Cresswell documents the history of the theatre until the end of the 20th century. Published by Streatham Society in 2000, ISBN 0950443166 and available from The Friends.

The **Arthur Lloyd Theatre History** website has a comprehensive article concerning the theatre. <http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/Streatham.htm#hilltheatre>.

The Friends’ **Statement of Heritage Significance** shows the importance of the building in much more detail. It summarises:

The Streatham Hill Theatre is significant on a number of levels: its place in the work of the original architect W.G.R Sprague, being a rare example of interwar suburban theatre buildings, its aesthetic completeness, quality and scale - and its role in the collective cultural memory of its local community.

<http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/SHT%20Statement%20of%20Heritage%20Significance%20%28Web%29.pdf>.

The Friends’ **Statement of Heritage Risk** collates the at-risk information to date. <http://resources.streathamhilltheatre.org/press/Streatham%20Hill%20Theatre%20-%20Statement%20of%20Heritage%20Risk.pdf> .

The **Lambeth property database** shows more information about the building’s planning and licencing history. <https://planning.lambeth.gov.uk/online-applications/propertyDetails.do?activeTab=relatedCases&keyVal=004L5YBOLI000>.

The **Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre website** <http://streathamhilltheatre.org> is a comprehensive source for information and photographs of the theatre and its heritage.



Supporters join the Flashmob Photoshoot 25 November 2018

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