

## **The Streatham Hill Theatre at 110 Streatham Hill, SW2 4RD, a Grade II listed, at-risk, Asset of Community Value.**

Lambeth have noted that Ruach have not included a Community Use Plan in their planning application. *“This plan must outline how the premises can be shared as a place of worship and for theatrical rehearsals and performances outside of church services and events. It should also demonstrate how both uses can function efficiently within the building without impacting amenity.”*

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre (FoSHT or the Friends) have been asked by Lambeth *“how the Friends envision the building being used, specifying who would be involved in all activities related to a theatre use”*.

Our vision in summary is

***A rejuvenated premises, offering arts, cultural and performance activities and facilities for the community.***

We describe this vision and its benefits in more detail below, but first we present some important context.

*Note that this document is not the Community Use Plan, which is for Ruach to present as part of their application. Ruach’s engagement with the community has been lacking to date, but we are always willing to talk.*

### The Friends Campaign

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre is currently a registered charity (England No. 1193643), tasked with as its first objective:

*to protect, preserve and restore for the benefit of the people of Streatham, of south London, and of the nation at large, the building known as Streatham Hill Theatre and situated in Streatham Hill, London SW2, its historical, architectural and constructional features, and its environs.*

And also

*to promote, maintain, improve, assist and advance public access, participation, appreciation and understanding in all aspects of the arts and culture including (but not limited to) design, architecture, drama, theatre, poetry, the spoken word, literature, mime, circus, magic, opera, music, dance, singing, art, photography and cinematography.*

The Friends are entirely volunteer-run and engage with the community through newsletters, social media, regular campaign meetings and personal contact, as well as meetings with councillors, Theatres Trust, Lambeth, GLA, InStreatham BID and other interested parties. We draw on our supporters from residents, the community, the creative industry and experts across a wide range of professions.

Since 2017 when bingo closed at the premises, the Friends have been working to return the premises to an arts and cultural use for the benefit of the community.

A summary of key points during that time follows. More can be found on the Friends website [streathamhilltheatre.org](http://streathamhilltheatre.org).

- Lambeth has recognised the building as an **asset of community value** (ACV) for two consecutive 5-year terms.

- As well as having a **large auditorium** (capacity c. 2,800) and **stage comparable with the London Palladium**, there are a number of bar and foyer areas suitable for use for **events, meetings** etc., and a large dressing room block usable for **workspace**.
- It is **the only large space left in the area** which could host large events.
- Lambeth has included **rejuvenation** of the theatre as part of the **Streatham Investment and Growth Strategy**:  
*“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 **Lambeth Local Plan** also includes rejuvenation of the theatre to **deliver regeneration** in Streatham and neighbouring areas:  
*“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.”*  
The theatre is situated in the Streatham Hill primary shopping area.
- Theatres Trust and Historic England have recognised that the building is **“At Risk”** of loss. This has been confirmed by SAVE Britain’s Heritage and the Art Deco Society.
- Note that the building is already a **Grade II listed** building noting that 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”*. It is also situated in a **conservation area**.
- The Friends have carried out a *Viability Study and Economic Impact Assessment* for the future of the premises. This was paid for by £46,000 raised through crowdfunding with support from GLA/Mayor of London, Theatres Trust and Lambeth. It **confirms the viability of the building as an arts and cultural centre**, centred around a large auditorium for performance, with a combination of professional and community use. It **demonstrates the economic benefit to the local area**. It also documents the historical significance of the building.
- The Friends have met with a number of potential **operators** of the building and have identified one which has since been trying to acquire the building over the past few years. **IC Venues have financial backing from investors and industry partners, a programme of destination shows, a vision and plans for the long-term restoration of the building and a desire to work with the local community**. They attempted to acquire the building but lost out to a property company. During negotiations with that new owner, they sold on to Ruach. Since then, IC Venues have been trying to engage with Ruach about some kind of shared use of the building, without success to date.

## Local Needs

It is clear that there is a real need for spaces for use by the local community. There is no similar sized building in the area and groups have to travel to find suitable venues – for example Streatham Choral have to rent the Cadogan Hall for concerts, forcing audiences to travel into the city centre. There are few performance spaces available for show runs at a reasonable cost – for example Streatham Theatre (who used the building between 2013 and 2016) struggle to find available spaces for their week-long productions.

Streatham Space Project (capacity c. 120) has proven to be too expensive for community groups, and has recently announced a funding problem, resulting in a loss or reduction in their arts

provision. There are now no active performing arts venues in Streatham and the south of Lambeth - with provision in the north of the Borough so rich, it is important to develop arts venues in the south

The local economy also needs a focal point for regeneration; to draw footfall to the area and benefit local businesses, as highlighted in the *Streatham Investment and Growth Strategy* and the *Lambeth Local Plan* noted above.

### Vision

The Friends vision for Streatham Hill Theatre is based on their considerable experience of the building, several years of consultation and engagement with potential users, community groups and residents, professionals, and with local and national bodies, and draws on the Friends viability study and further research.

#### ***A rejuvenated premises, offering arts, cultural and performance activities and facilities for the community, including:***

- Use of foyer and bar spaces for meetings, events, small performances, exhibitions, food and beverage offerings
- Use of auditorium for large and medium scale performances or events, exhibitions, conferences, markets and fairs, weddings and other social gatherings
- Presenting professional and amateur performances and events from visiting organisations, community groups, and local festivals
- Use of the former dressing rooms as workspace and meeting spaces for emerging businesses, artists, cultural and community organisations, with shared facilities available to all users.
- Use of the premises for photo shoots, filming, one-off activities etc.
- Building tours and heritage displays; open days.
- Opening all day and all week, with food and beverage, access to front of house for activities such as exhibitions, events, meetings etc, plus access to the auditorium when not otherwise in use.

#### *Providing for:*

- All forms of art and culture (as per the Friends second objective)
- Receiving and producing a wide range professional performances, events and activities, for diverse audiences, with affordable prices
- Practical, affordable use by community groups, including for example choirs, orchestras, theatre companies, dance companies, youth groups, heritage groups, arts groups, cultural groups, faith groups
- A base for local festivals e.g. Streatham Festival, Free Film Festival
- Likewise for individual artists etc
- Educational users such as Schools/Colleges/Youth Groups for education and training, concerts, performances, work experience
- Commercial users, especially small businesses, particularly those connected with arts and culture
- Use by Lambeth, NHS, GLA and other public bodies for exhibitions, meetings, consultations, campaigns etc.
- Enhancement of footfall and patronage for local businesses by bringing customers to the area
- Use of income from larger commercial users to subsidise community uses.

## Operating Model

The Friends envisage a partnership between building owners, operator, community groups working together.

While the premises was an operating bingo hall, the operators allowed community use for events and shows, using parts of the building not being used for bingo purposes. A similar model could work in the future.

There is an operator with the desire and means to deliver this vision – IC Venues, led by award-winning theatre director Thom Southerland, whose proposals are outlined as an appendix below. Thom has approached owners Ruach with proposals for joint use of the premises, whereby IC Venues can use the building to programme events and performances, and Ruach can use it for their services and other activities, while allowing for community use as part of the schedule.

Thom states:

*The opportunity with us is, to develop a creative offering for Lambeth to include theatre, cabaret, dance, opera, music, comedy, performance art and gallery space. We would re-establish the theatre on the weekly touring scene and develop the model to enable longer runs, creating our own work, and being the theatre of choice for commercial producers to create new work. As currently demonstrated in venues such as [Papermill Playhouse in New Jersey](#), [BAM in Brooklyn New York](#), London is devoid of a venue of scale and scope to develop new pieces for an ongoing commercial life. Streatham Hill Theatre will become the UK's answer to these international flagship arts institutions, developing work of international standard to be enjoyed by local audiences.*

*We would actively engage community, participation and outreach programmes as well as forge creative and commercial partnerships with arts organisations nationally and internationally to share work for the benefit of audiences in Lambeth. We would look to develop several Food and Beverage offerings as well as creative workspaces, ensuring the theatre and spaces are used throughout the day. With the loss of many of the entertainment venues in Streatham, this is the opportunity to collect the creative ambition for Streatham and Lambeth as a whole and celebrate it within a multi-use creative space within the heart of the community. Having successfully founded performing arts venues within the UK and internationally, we now look to re-establish Streatham Hill Theatre as one of the UK's leading arts and culture providers, establishing a strong commercial operation balanced with an enriching cultural asset for the local community and London as a whole.*

## Governance

To achieve this, it would be appropriate to approve a *sui generis* use for the premises to allow for this wide range of activities. An *F1-f Place of Worship* or other *F* class would be too limiting.

Any planning consent should include agreements (e.g. section 106) with the owners/operators setting out requirements for community use. It should stipulate that there should be regular use of the auditorium and other spaces in the building for arts, entertainment and creative performance use, both professional and amateur. It should set minimum proportions of time for community and professional use, which shouldn't include performance solely linked to church activities.

These requirements should be clear, measurable and legally enforceable by Lambeth and the community (e.g. as covenants).

A simple system should be put in place to manage bookings and usage of the various parts of the building, without excessive costs and overheads. Fees for community groups should be kept to a minimum. Commercial rates should be charged for large businesses and funded organisations.

A charitable body should be formed to oversee the community use, with membership from Lambeth councillors and officers, community groups (including The Friends, Streatham Society and regular users), the owners and operators. It should provide a means to arbitrate and resolve any disputes regarding activities, artistic content, and access. It should meet regularly and hold open public meetings at least twice a year in the theatre. As a charity it would be able to support community use, and seek grants and sponsorship for community events.

### Conclusion

This summary of the Friends vision for Streatham Hill Theatre is supported by our extensive research and understanding from several years of the campaign, including our Viability Study and Economic Impact Assessment, applications for Asset of Community Value, collaboration with national bodies like Theatres Trust and local government for Lambeth and London, familiarity with the local community and businesses, and experience of the business and artistic aspects of arts, culture and entertainment offerings.

We know that Streatham Hill Theatre provides a great opportunity to bring benefit to the well-being and economy of Streatham and South London by offering a great resource to the people and businesses of the area.

*There is much more about the theatre, our research, our campaign and our vision on the website [www.streathamhilltheatre.org](http://www.streathamhilltheatre.org)*

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre

*A volunteer-run community campaign*

A CIO and Registered Charity 1193643

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Patrons: Akram Khan MBE, Baroness Floella Benjamin OM DBE DL, Catherine Russell, David Harewood OBE, Jessica Thom, Jools Holland OBE DL, Paul Merton, Renato Balsadonna, Robert Glenister, Samira Ahmed, Simon Callow CBE & Sir Mark Rylance

## Appendix: Thom Southerland & Streatham Hill Theatre

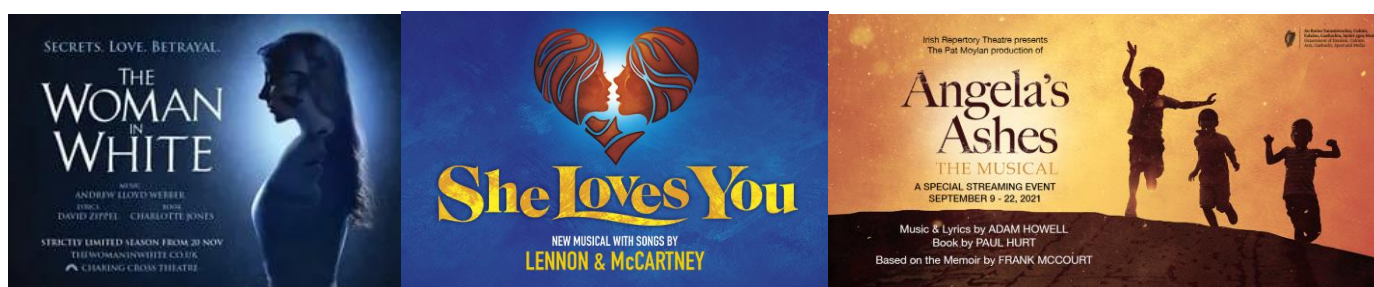
### Thom Southerland

I have been a theatre director for nearly 20 years and have held artistic leadership roles in theatre buildings (predominantly in South East London) for 17 years. I am currently Artistic Director at Mayflower Theatre and MAST Mayflower Studios in Southampton, the largest theatre on the UK's south coast. Mayflower generates annual revenues of £15-£20 million, and it does so without regular public subsidy. MAST, our studio spaces gained NPO recognition with the Arts Council under my tenure as Artistic Director which has allowed us to diversify our creative offering. This has enabled us to show commitment to artist and creative development, education, outreach and diversity programmes.



We present a varied season (drama, musical, dance, comedy) within a traditional theatre space, with a deep commitment to developing new audiences in all demographics and markets. I am the inaugural artistic director and have successfully developed the business from a presenting house to a commercial producing and receiving cultural hub, progressing rapidly to two successful international tours within two years. Never having done this before, Mayflower and MAST will be creating and premiering a new play and a new musical in 2025 alone, both of which will then embark on a UK tour.

The best arts institutions also share ownership with their audiences. The pantomime at Southampton has doubled gross revenue in the four years I have directed it, and this coming year many of the productions have sold out more than a year in advance because it has become part of our audience's ritual around Christmas, giving the theatre a prominent role in thousands of people's lives. Those people now feel it is 'their theatre', which also means they become more open to seeing other work, perhaps work that might be more challenging to them, keeping our theatre vital and relevant.



Again, under my tenure, Mayflower has the largest participation and outreach programme for its size: this year we engaged over 22,000 individuals (one third from targeted postcodes hyperlocal to the theatre), one in six youth theatre participants were on bursaries, and over half of schools involved have a high proportion of pupils on free school meals. We do not limit our education and outreach to smaller scale work; every year they also take over the main space.



## Appendix: Thom Southerland & Streatham Hill Theatre

### Our creative offering for Lambeth

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