

Context

Streatham Hill Theatre is situated at 110 Streatham Hill, SW2 on the corner of Barrhill Road. It is a mostly disused Grade II listed¹ theatre built in 1928/9 with a capacity of 2800. It is identified as “at risk” by the Theatres Trust², and is listed as an Asset of Community Value by London Borough of Lambeth³.

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre⁴ are campaigning to revive the building as an arts and cultural venue including workspace, for the benefit of the community and to support regeneration of the surrounding area. We have wide support including from the community (currently over 900), local organisations, businesses, councillors, Lambeth, local MP, Theatres Trust, the GLA and Mayor of London. Lambeth have included in their Streatham Investment and Growth Strategy⁵ (Box 1) and in their Local Plan⁶ (Box 2) their support for regenerating the theatre, and for using adjacent Barrhill Road for new public space and activities.

It is important that any reconfiguration of Streatham Hill A23 does improve the safety and amenity of the local area, but does not prevent the realisation of the theatre’s regeneration. Just at the time when the plans for the theatre are generating momentum and support, these TfL proposals as they stand risk putting off potential investors and production companies thinking of using it. This would cut off the building’s main revenue streams and could prevent the project from being viable.

Therefore, the Friends are submitting this response to the proposals by TfL⁷.

We understand that TfL were unaware of the theatre and the regeneration plans so current proposals do not take these into account and need to be revised in light of them. Lambeth will also need to be involved as they are responsible for the surrounding streets and we ask that all parties work together with the Friends to support this great potential opportunity for Streatham Hill.

Medium-Term - Explore Opportunities for Streatham Hill Theatre: Undertake an opportunity analysis and appraisal to explore the feasibility of refurbishing and rejuvenating the old Streatham Hill Theatre (currently Beacon Bingo). This should look at owner appetite, funding opportunities, lease structures, operating models etc. It will also need to identify potential occupant organisations or theatre production groups, as well as a broad scope of community uses outside of operating hours. To be successful it will need to accommodate a range of uses and performance types, including rehearsal and community spaces for hire, street-front activation and concessions that operate across the day. 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).

Examples: Granada Cinema, Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham Forest are purchasing Grade II listed cinema and plan to re-open as theatre with Soho Theatre), Everyman Cinema, Crystal Palace (former Rialto cinema which closed down in Crystal Palace is being refurbished and restored by Everyman) and Hackney Empire, Hackney (refurbished theatre and music hall in Hackney)

Box 1: Extract from Streatham Investment and Growth Strategy

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.

Box 2: Extract from Lambeth Local Plan (Draft 2020)

¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1244564>

² <http://www.theatrestrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk/484-streatham-hill-theatre>

³ <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ec-successful-acv-nominatons-june-2019.pdf>

⁴ <http://streathamhilltheatre.org>

⁵ <https://moderngov.lambeth.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=6535>

⁶ <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pl-draft-revised-lambeth-local-plan-proposed-submission-version-jan-2020.pdf>

⁷ <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/roads/a23-streatham-hill/?cid=streatham-hill>

Comments

We are aware that others, including local residents and businesses will have their own comments on the scheme across the wider area impacted. From the perspective of the Streatham Hill Theatre, we have some specific comments on the proposed scheme, and some general ones, based on feedback and discussions with members.

General

We support the aim to encourage pedestrians, cyclists and the use of public transport to access the area. We also wish to create an area in Streatham Hill where diverse audiences of all ages and abilities are able to come safely to enjoy arts and culture, and also take advantage of the food, drink and retail offerings.

To this end the scheme must present a friendly local high street feel and not show a through traffic focus which it currently does.

We need good pavement space, we need tables and chairs on the pavements outside cafes, we need good streetlighting, sustainable planting and suitable street furniture without cluttering the space.

And as well as cycle parking and disabled parking, the loading and short-term parking for visitors to local businesses needs to be retained if they are to survive and the area to be regenerated.

There is also an opportunity as part of the scheme to improve signage and wayfinding in the area, with map displays and signage from public transport (rail stations and bus stops) to key locations such as the theatre. Renaming the bus stops close to the theatre after the building (when any new name is confirmed) would also help audiences more easily navigate.

Specifics

Specific issues which concern us and could put any regeneration at risk are:

1. Footpath space
2. Accessibility
3. Loading Access

Detail comments follow in the sections below.

FoSHT Comments on TfL Proposals for Streatham Hill

Footpath Space

The auditorium currently has an audience capacity of 2800. It is likely that future plans will incorporate a flexible space with the ability to provide a range of capacities from 500 – 1800, but potentially retain the larger 2800 capacity for anything that warrants it. The plans also introduce other spaces in addition to the auditorium, and other uses in previously less used areas of the building, which will increase occupancy levels.

This means there needs to be sufficient space in front of the theatre, and to the side and rear, to allow for the ingress and egress of this revised capacity. In particular, in the event of an emergency, space free of obstructions for rapid evacuation to nearby assembly points with sufficient capacity.

The proposed scheme appears to reduce the footpath to the front of the building on Streatham Hill, and introduce a segregated cycle path directly in front of that space and across the top of Barrhill Road. These changes increase the risk to audiences and cyclists.

It would also greatly help the Lambeth objective for street-front activation if it were possible to have café tables and chairs outside the building for some of the day to encourage people to the building. And planters and space for outdoor arts exhibitions/sculpture would make the local environment more attractive. These would need more pavement space.

In discussion with TfL at the recent consultation event in Streatham Library a number of potential mitigations to the scheme were discussed to improve available pavement space in front of the theatre and reduce any risk of cycles and pedestrians coming together.

Potential design amendments could include:

- Re-siting the proposed additional pavement width on the east side to the west side outside the theatre.
- Reconfiguration of the cycle path, including at the top of Barrhill Road, to move it further back from the front of the theatre.

More radical changes could include:

- Re-siting the cycle lane to the east side of Streatham Hill to better co-ordinate with Lambeth's Low Traffic proposals for Streatham Hill East.
- Re-siting the cycle lane to replace the existing central reservation.

FoSHT Comments on TfL Proposals for Streatham Hill

Accessibility

Currently it is feasible for disabled visitors arriving by taxi, mini-bus or private vehicle etc. to be dropped off in front of the theatre or at the top of Barrhill Road on the same side as the theatre (even with the presence of the red route). This makes level access to the building easy.

The scheme proposes a number of changes which will adversely impact this accessibility.

- a) There will no longer be anywhere to drop-off in front of the theatre, due to the cycle lane and newly positioned pedestrian crossing. While the latter is welcome as it makes access across the A23 to the theatre easier, it does block a potential drop-off point.
- b) The potential for drop-offs in Barrhill Road is also reduced for a couple of reasons. Firstly, there is no access to Barrhill Road from Streatham Hill, so a circuitous route will need to be taken (potentially by those not familiar with alternative routes). Secondly, the proposal removes the parking and loading bays on the same side of Barrhill Road as the theatre, meaning people will need to cross the road and cross a kerb.
- c) For those arriving by bus, the relocation of bus stops in both directions further away from the theatre will also reduce accessibility, particularly for those less able to walk. They will also need to take extra caution when crossing the cycle lane.

In discussion with TfL at the recent consultation event in Streatham Library a number of potential mitigations to the scheme were discussed.

Potential design amendments could include:

- Re-siting the single-track exit from Barrhill Road to the south side, and the loading bays to the north side so drop-offs could be made adjacent to the theatre.
- Re-siting bus stops closer to the theatre.
- Renaming bus stops and adding signage to direct people to the theatre.
- Additional disabled parking bays and/or short-term drop-off/parking bays.

More radical changes could include:

- Allowing turns into Barrhill Road from Streatham Hill (perhaps left turn only), making Barrhill Road two-way again – this also helps with load-in/out as below.
- Re-siting the cycle lane to the east side of Streatham Hill to better co-ordinate with Lambeth's Low Traffic proposals for Streatham Hill East.
- Re-siting the cycle lane to replace the existing central reservation.

FoSHT Comments on TfL Proposals for Streatham Hill

Loading

The load-in point for the theatre is in Barrhill Road; there is a drop-kerb and ground level shutter to below the stage, and a high-level shutter for large scenery items directly to the stage.

As part of the regeneration we would be asking Lambeth to provide a loading bay outside these doors. There are currently loading and parking bays in Barrhill Road which could be simply reconfigured to provide this.

The scheme proposes a number of changes which would adversely affect this:

- a) Barrhill Road is to be one-way eastwards from Blairderry Road (behind the theatre) toward Streatham Hill. This prevents access to the load-in directly from Streatham Hill, requiring a major diversion for goods vehicles via residential roads with tight turns, and with on-street parking reducing the widths. Some potential routes will have width and weight restrictions, increasing the diversion necessary. This does not seem to be a good solution for the environment or for local residents. Note that Barrhill Road itself has few residents, it is mostly businesses.
- b) The exit from Barrhill Road onto Streatham Hill is to be left turn only, resulting in the need for diversion routes for goods vehicles on the way out too.
- c) The exit from Barrhill Road is to be single track to the north side, and the loading bay is to be on the south side. This could potentially mean loading taking place on the narrow pavement on that side below the only residences on the street, and equipment and scenery having to be taken across the road. There is much more pavement space on the north side.

In discussion with TfL at the recent consultation event in Streatham Library a number of potential mitigations to the scheme were discussed. We understand that it is possible for you to model access for goods vehicles around potential road layouts.

Potential design amendments could include:

- Re-siting the single-track exit from Barrhill Road to the south side, and the loading bays to the north side adjacent to the theatre.
- Signposting diversionary routes around the wider area.
- Allowing turns into Barrhill Road from Streatham Hill (perhaps for access only), making Barrhill Road two-way again.
- Allowing turns into Ardwell Road from Streatham Hill (perhaps for access only), giving a route to Barrhill Road via Blairderry Road.

FoSHT Comments on TfL Proposals for Streatham Hill

Conclusions

We support the aims of improving the local area around Streatham Hill A23, to provide a safe and welcoming area for residents and visitors, and have been campaigning to use the former Streatham Hill Theatre as a focal point to drive regeneration. We have gained wide support from local government, national bodies and the community.

However, we have raised a number of concerns with the current TfL proposals which could adversely impact the regeneration of Streatham Hill Theatre as a key part of that wider regeneration.

We ask that TfL reviews the proposals in light of their new knowledge of the plans and the concerns raised. We would like to work with key stakeholders TfL and Lambeth, with input from the national statutory body for theatres, the Theatres Trust, and the GLA Culture team, to bring about the best solution possible for all.