

Ref.: TC/2522

14 May 2025

Astra Spyrou
Lambeth Planning
PO Box 80771
London
SW2 9QQ

By e-mail: planning@lambeth.gov.uk

Application: 25/01141/FUL

Site: 110 Streatham Hill London Lambeth SW2 4RD

Proposal: Change of use to a Place of Worship (Use Class F1 (f)). The proposed development does not accord with the provisions of the development plan in force in the area in which the land to which the application relates is situated. The proposed development is a departure from policy ED13 (Visitor attractions, leisure, arts and cultural uses) of the Lambeth Local Plan 2021.

Remit:

Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We were established through the Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres' and provide statutory planning advice on theatre buildings and theatre use in England through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, requiring the Trust to be consulted by local authorities on planning applications which include 'development involving any land on which there is a theatre'.

Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission, which seeks change of use at Streatham Hill Theatre.

We object to the granting of planning permission for this change of use. We believe there is a compromise solution whereby a mixed-use is granted which both retains

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

CEO Joshua McTaggart

Trustees Vicky Browning OBE, Anna Collins, James Dacre, Liam Evans-Ford, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson OBE, Tracy Ann Oberman, Lucy Osborne, Saratha Rajeswaran, Truda Spruyt, Michèle Taylor MBE, Katie Town

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the building within cultural and leisure use and allows for the applicant's services and we set out our reasons for this below.

This building is on Theatres Trust's national Theatres at Risk Register and is also on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. That is on account of the building's historic significance and that we consider it to have realistic and viable potential for a return to theatre or other compatible performance use. For example, a viability and economic impact assessment published in 2021 confirmed that restoration and phased reuse of the theatre as a leisure and entertainment venue would generate footfall, jobs and economic growth which would contribute over £70m to the local economy over thirty years. Return to use for those purposes would also align with the council's published priorities and planning policy.

In heritage and theatrical terms, Streatham Hill Theatre was designed by renowned theatre architect W. G. R. Sprague. It is considered to be one of the most lavish 'sleeping beauties', a term describing significant theatres that fell into other uses but with minimal intervention meaning they would be readily capable of reversion back to performance use. It was built in 1929 and is possibly the largest and best-equipped Sprague theatre outside of London's West End. It has an imposing façade with spacious foyer and a lavish auditorium with two balconies. Original wooden stage machinery is still in situ together with the counterweight flying and three-part forestage orchestra lifts.

The building is Grade II listed and designated as an Asset of Community Value.

Paragraph 11.68 of the Lambeth Local Plan 2020-2035 (2021) states the building provides, "a transformative opportunity to provide a major leisure and entertainment venue with the potential for workspace for creative, digital and cultural industries." This is reiterated within Policy PN4.G.i which states the council will support such schemes.

Given the building's significance and demonstrable potential we are keen to see it returned to active use for the purposes of theatre and live performance. We consider there to be realistic potential for delivery of that.

The proposed change of use would move the building away from cultural and leisure use to a dedicated place of worship. Policy ED13.A of the Local Plan seeks to promote, safeguard and improve leisure, recreation, arts and cultural facilities in the borough where they meet local and wider needs. Part B of that policy specifically references Streatham's town centre.

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The presence of recent assessment on viability, identification of gaps in local provision for culture and the arts, and demonstrable social and community value arising from the ACV designation shows that this site meets local and wider needs. Part C of Policy ED13 does not permit the loss or change of use of existing leisure, arts and cultural uses. The existing use of this building fits within that parameter, having most recently been a bingo hall. The proposed change of use is therefore contrary to policy and should be refused in its current state.

Additionally, the existing and proposed plans appear to be the same but the Planning Statement notes, “essential maintenance and remedial works to improve access, fire safety and minor improvements as part of a more comprehensive approach have already commenced”. As noted within our comments on the corresponding application for listed building consent, this must be clarified and if necessary properly justified and assessed. Whilst not relevant to an application only covering change of use, there may be need for a further application for planning permission if they include relevant external works. Also, without that detail of interventions it is not possible to ascertain what level of harm may be generated in heritage terms, if any, and in turn with reference to paragraph 215 of the NPPF whether that would trigger considerations around optimum viable use. Planning guidance on the Historic Environment states, “the optimum viable use is the one likely to cause the least harm to the significance of the asset, not just through necessary initial changes, but also as a result of subsequent wear and tear and likely future changes”. With there being realistic prospect of theatre use and confirmed interest in purchase of the building for theatre use, theatre is self-evidently the optimum viable use.

The applicant has submitted a ‘Community Use Agreement’ as “a physical expression of commitment to promote access to the former Theatre for local theatrical, arts and cultural groups and organisations and so add to the cultural life of Streatham.” There would as a matter of course need to be confidence that this would be adhered to, particularly so in this case given we understand that the applicant has not upheld their obligations in that regard at the Kilburn State. Such planning conditions are difficult to monitor and enforce. Any legal agreement or unilateral undertaking would need to be robust, and we would be keen to advise on what those should be.

The agreement has been produced apparently in consultation with the council. We have great concerns about the proposed condition under paragraph 1.2. This requires within six months of the granting of permission for an agreement to be submitted for approval. However, in effect, as long as a document has been submitted, the condition would be discharged. It then requires proactive monitoring to

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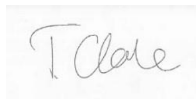
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ensure it is upheld and enforcement, something which has been lacking in the Kilburn case.

We recognise and appreciate the needs of the applicant in finding suitable premises with the capacity to accommodate their congregation. We believe there is a compromise solution whereby a mixed-use is granted which both retains the building within cultural and leisure use and allows for the applicant's services. This is in fact an approach being taken currently at Borough Hall in Greenwich, another building on our Theatres at Risk Register, where a live (part-retrospective) application seeks change of use to a mixed events, dance studio, theatre school and place of worship. The church services are held only on Sundays, but there would be flexibility for this to occur at other times. Other theatres such as the Dominion in the West End, Fairfield Halls in Croydon, the Leatherhead Theatre and Reading Rep Theatre host regular church services whilst being within full formal theatre or performance use.

In conclusion we object to the granting of planning permission for this change of use. However, as set out above, we consider there to be appropriate compromise solutions and would strongly encourage the applicant to work positively towards facilitating this.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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