

The future of Streatham Space Project: Community consultation

- Notes taken by Lambeth Council officers from the Business, Culture and Investment team to be circulated by those interested in submitting an EOI to operate SSP
- Before the engagement session, tours of the venue were conducted by a representative of London Square.

Who/what the venue should be used for

Participants described a strong desire for the venue to return to being an active, creative and community-focused space. People mentioned their experience of comedy nights, children's storytelling and other activities that once took place, and felt the programme had begun to decline even before the pandemic. There was consistent interest in the venue being a home for schools, young people and local creative groups, particularly those who currently struggle to access space locally. Many felt that regular comedy, jazz and cultural programming would attract audiences back in, but that this needs to be supported by a café/bar that is consistently open and a programme that is active throughout the week rather than sporadic. People were clear that the venue should have consistent programming.

Many felt that a consortium model would be more sustainable than having a single organisation responsible for everything, ensuring a mix of skills and a wider range of activity and attracting diverse and new audiences. Participants emphasised the need for the space to feel genuinely accessible by the community, with a particular focus on ambitious work for and with young people, nurturing their sense of ownership and belonging.

There was enthusiasm for book events, author talks and readings, alongside workshops and classes that would draw people in during the day. Several people noted that the space could operate differently across the day (hosting educational or community activity earlier on) and cultural or nightlife-focused events in the evenings. The flexibility of the building was repeatedly highlighted, with participants saying it has the potential to run multiple activities at once, and that with relatively small improvements it could support a wide range of uses.

How the venue could reflect the local Streatham community

Participants felt the space should be inspiring, community-led and used by groups who are not usually represented. Participants referenced successful models like the Bush Theatre and felt this venue should similarly reflect its local community, particularly through new writing, partnerships with local artists and events that showcase Streatham's diversity. People wanted to see local writers, festivals, artists and cultural groups represented, including food-based activity that celebrates different communities. Several noted that organisations such as the Streatham Society could use the space for historical talks, and that intergenerational work, especially for older residents, would be welcomed.

A recurring theme was the importance of ongoing dialogue with residents about what they want from the venue. Suggestions included regular community meetings and a liaison role that maintains open communication. There was also a strong emphasis on ensuring that the space is not shaped by any one group; participants stressed the need for a balanced mix that reflects the area's communities without being defined by any single demographic.

People wanted the venue to celebrate Streatham's diversity through festivals, cultural days and events that acknowledge the area's global communities, including Polish, Jamaican, Somali,

asylum seeker and refugee groups. There was strong support for youth-focused work, including youth festivals and opportunities for young people to create, lead and perform.

What would make the space welcoming or accessible

Participants felt the venue currently lacks street appeal and that the name does not clearly communicate what the space is or does. They felt strongly that the venue needs a public identity and personality, supported by clear signage, billboards and a visible presence in the area. Many wanted the space to feel vibrant and welcoming, with music, live performances, exhibitions and displays of work by local people of all ages.

Accessibility was discussed in terms of both physical access and cultural openness. Suggestions included accessible and signed performances, gallery or exhibition use, immersive experiences and opportunities for local artists to exhibit regularly. People were enthusiastic about the space surprising and exciting audiences by offering a mix of high-quality theatre, music, comedy, opera, dance, magic and other art forms. There was appetite for programming that brings different generations together and for workshops for children and families.

Participants highlighted practical factors too, including improving acoustics, transparency around costs and ensuring community activities are affordable (though not necessarily free). There was also interest in partnerships with other local buildings and organisations to strengthen the venue's role in the area.

Any other ideas for how the space could serve the community

People suggested a wide range of additional ideas, from singing groups to affordable meeting spaces and apprenticeships for young people and those not currently in work. There was strong interest in food-based activity, including cafés, community kitchens, pop-up restaurants and collaborations with local restaurants. Participants also suggested improving the venue's external visibility, such as putting photographs or children's artwork on the outside of the building.

Balancing financial sustainability and community use

People shared wide-ranging ambitions for the venue, reflecting a strong attachment to the space and a genuine desire for it to thrive. Ideas and expectations will require careful, realistic conversations as we move forward. The hope that community groups can access the space for free, or at very low cost, came up repeatedly. Affordability and equitable access are important; however, there is an understanding that this must be balanced with the needs of the future tenant to operate with a sustainable business plan and financial model. Similarly, some expectations for constant activity, highly varied programming and multiple simultaneous uses will need to be shaped through practical discussions about staffing, licensing, operating hours and the physical limits of the building and local infrastructure.

Transparency about what is financially and operationally viable was felt to be key - honest conversations with residents and partners about what can be offered for free, what may need to be discounted, and what must be paid for in full to ensure the long-term sustainability of the venue. Setting this expectation early will help create a collaborative relationship built on mutual understanding, where the community continues to contribute to the vision, and the operator is empowered to deliver a balanced, resilient programme that benefits Streatham for years to come.