

SAVE STRATFORD'S THEATRES!

● **Save Stratford Circus arts centre**

stop the council cutting professional shows and jobs

● **Save Theatre Royal Stratford East**

stop the council cutting its entire £256,000 grant to the venue

● **Professional arts and youth services for everyone**

don't cut one to pay for the other – fully fund culture for all!



JOIN THE PROTEST: SATURDAY 28 AUGUST, 1PM THEATRE SQUARE, STRATFORD E15 1BN

Newham Council wants to cut your local arts venues

Theatre Square in Stratford is a vibrant cultural hub for east London. We believe the local community deserves the best when it comes to both professional shows and youth services.

Newham Council disagrees. Under cover of the pandemic lockdown, the mayor used legal threats to force out and close down the nationally recognised and funded arts centre at Stratford Circus.

Now the council is tendering for a new management to run it solely as a “Youth Zone” – with no remit or funding for its previous lively range of professional arts.

This attack actually *lost* the borough £300,000 a year in national funding from Arts Council England! On top of this, Newham Council plans to cut its quarter-million funding to next-door Theatre Royal Stratford East entirely.

Does the mayor think residents and workers in Newham don't deserve their own cultural spaces?

Youth arts services need professional arts support

We all support more youth services in Newham. The real question is why the council has taken this long to invest in them!

But Stratford Circus already ran youth drama. The council could have built a youth centre in an empty retail unit with full access to Stratford Circus facilities.

Instead, the mayor is robbing Peter to pay Paul: destroying local arts jobs to (re)create a youth arts service. This is short-sighted to say the least.

As well as reducing overall employment in the borough, it robs young people of the future jobs this service would prepare them for. It also shrinks the professional

talent pool that could help run the service.

The Circus has room for both. We say Newham Council must commit to full-spectrum professional arts alongside the youth service.

continued overleaf >>>



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Attacks on your rights to democracy and inclusion

The council claims it carried out a 'consultation' before the change to Stratford Circus. But it has not been able to provide any evidence.

No users we have spoken to knew anything about it – in fact, the council refused to answer their desperate emails!

Meanwhile, the council did not seek any input from Equity, the performing arts union. After Equity finally got talks and explained our demands, the council broke its promise of continuing discussions!

Is democracy an optional extra for this Labour council?

The council's current plans are dressed up as increasing arts provision, but in effect *reduce* community access to the arts. They especially reduce access for the working class, and black, Asian and minority ethnic people.

On top of this, they leave disabled adults high and dry. Blue Sky Actors is a professional theatre company for adult artists with learning disabilities.

They are now homeless and struggling for funds. There is currently no firm commitment from the council to rehouse them in their previous professional residence – Stratford Circus.

The council can afford it!

This is a council which has actually *increased* its 'usable' reserves during the pandemic - to a whopping £616 million. Its balance sheet exceeds £1 billion. (*Newham Audit Committee Report, 30 June 2021, para 5.1.*)

Newham has just pledged £4.5 million for new youth workers. This is overdue and welcome – and shows that money is available.

Replacing full funding for both Stratford venues only means around £1.25 million a year. This would represent a meaningful investment to the impoverished people of Newham – and peanuts to the borough council.

Theatre Royal Stratford East is now interim management at Stratford Circus, and in a good position to make that permanent. But if the council's cuts go through, the future viability of Stratford East could end up at risk too – potentially threatening *another £1 million* in outside funding from Arts Council England. Can Newham Council afford *not* to restore local authority funding?

We say: Newham Council must act as guarantor for fully funded professional arts alongside youth services in Theatre Square. Use reserves or borrowing if you have to – and send the bill to the U-turn Tory government!

Can't arts organisations move elsewhere, though?

Stratford Circus is a specially designed and outfitted facility which has entertained and educated the community for decades. Considerable capital and skilled labour have gone into establishing the Circus (and Stratford East).

Often, moving really means closing. As proof, the ousted arts centre management at Stratford Circus has tragically had to wind up operations after the council forced it to 'move'.

We say the council has a duty to defend these community investments

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

1 Join the protest on 28 August!

Come to Theatre Square, Stratford E15 1BN, at 1pm on Saturday 28 August 2021. Transport:

- *Stratford station* (Central, DLR, Overground, rail, buses)
- *Stratford multi-storey car park* (E15 1BB, £2.30/hr)
- *Stratford Westfield car parks* (E20 1EJ, £3/hr)

Tell your friends and anyone who might be interested!

2 Sign the petition.

Visit change.org/p/save-stratford-theatres

– and pass onto anyone who may be interested

3 Send messages of protest.

Email Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz on mayor@newham.gov.uk, and 'Brighter Futures' lead Carleene Lee-Phakoe on carleene.lee-phakoe@newham.gov.uk

for future generations. Arts workers have a right to make a living, and local audiences of all ages have the right to professional entertainment and community arts services.

What the council can do to sort it all out

Newham Council owns the Stratford Circus building and is tendering for a new permanent management. It should make a fully functioning arts centre with a broad spectrum of professional, community and youth arts part of the official bid requirements.

It also has £616 million in 'usable' reserves. It should act as guarantor for full funding to reopen Stratford Circus on the above basis. Revoke the cut to Stratford East promised for 2023/24.

Then campaign to find all this funding from the government, not from local arts and services!

All the local arts projects displaced by the attack on Stratford Circus must also be rehomed - at the Circus where possible. Blue Sky Actors must be reinstalled.

Stop the abuse of democracy! Show us the evidence of the 'consultation'. And re-enter meaningful talks with Equity immediately.

We also propose that the council convene a conference of Equity, other arts unions, other unions in the borough, and the local working class, youth and other residents. This should set the agenda for management and programming in Theatre Square.

WHO WE ARE

This leaflet was produced by the North and East London General Branch of Equity, the trade union for performing arts professionals.

We are seeking contact with any and all users of Stratford Circus, other trade unionists, community campaigners, and anyone interested, to join the struggle to save Stratford theatres.

Following a decade of austerity and a devastating pandemic, Equity says a new model is needed for the arts - based on increased funding, public investment and ownership, and democratic oversight by communities and practitioners. Read more: search 'Performance for All' and 'Four Pillar Plan' at equity.org.uk.

To contact us, email

north-east-london-general@equitybranches.org.uk