



Protesters vow to fight council theatre closure Free 311224

Description



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Protesters have vowed to continue to fight against the closure of a west London theatre.

The Beck Theatre in Hayes will close on 13 January next year following a dispute over its lease between owner Hillingdon Council and operator Trafalgar Theatres.

At a demonstration on Saturday, protesters highlighted the sense of community the theatre brought to the area.

Hillingdon Council said it was seeking new management for the venue.

The local authority said it had offered to renew Trafalgar's lease at a "peppercorn rent" and to continue being responsible for building repairs, but it would not continue to pay a subsidy.

It said it was "no longer appropriate with public finances under such pressure" and noted Trafalgar Theatres was owned by a profit-making organisation that paid dividends.

In absence of an agreement, Trafalgar's contract would cease in January and the theatre would close while commercial theatre consultants found new management, the council said.

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But pressure group Back the Beck accused the council of refusing to accept Trafalgar's offer of a zero-subsidy deal on a three-year trial.

The local authority denies this.

Trafalgar has regularly disputed claims made by the council, and insists it offered to operate on a subsidy-free basis.

Back the Beck also said it was worried the land would be sold to make way for flats.

Speaking outside Uxbridge Underground Station, Back the Beck campaigner Jonathan Haynes told BBC London: "We have so many people that come to the Beck, many of which are disabled.

"The tickets are affordable; there's good car parking.

"It really brings a sense of community, and in an area where there is a lot of ethnic diversity, this venue brings people together."

John McDonnell, independent MP for Hayes and Harlington, told the BBC: "They feel that the council has another agenda, which is possibly to let the theatre close and then sell of the land for development.

"What we hear, the current operator has offered to run the Beck Theatre without subsidy. Any other council in the country would grab their hand for that deal."

Ian Edwards, Conservative leader of Hillingdon Council, denied the local authority refused to accept a new zero-subsidy lease.

He told BBC London: "That's not true. If they [Trafalgar] wish to make that offer to me, I will take that tomorrow.

"The council is prepared to lease this property at a peppercorn rent, with the council responsible for external repair and structural repair but without an operating subsidy."

The council added it would work tirelessly to secure the venue's long-term stability as a commercial theatre.

The Beck Theatre was built by the council in 1977.

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