

London Borough of Bexley

News Release

For Immediate Release

26 March 2018 / PR 10720

Hopes high for planned cinema and library in Sidcup

Eighteen years after the town lost its cinema, hopes are high that Sidcup is on track to gain a new cinema and see a landmark site back in use.

The Council is working with ArtHouse, an established operator of a popular small cinema, on a proposal for a three-screen cinema that could be co-located with a modern library on the site of the town's former Blockbuster store. Based on experience in Blackfen, usage of the library is likely to increase significantly if it moves to such a prime high street location.

Bexley bought the vacant Blockbuster building late last year, after it had been standing empty for several years.

Co-location would lead to the creation of a state-of-the-art library, in line with the Council's commitment to invest in modern and improved facilities for frontline public services. Bexley and ArtHouse will be looking at design solutions that maximise the benefits of locating the two activities on the same site.

There would also be opportunities for the two operations to collaborate, with complementary programmes and marketing. The cinema's programme would reflect the local market and demographics and is expected to include extra cultural activities, such as music and comedy events, which will boost the town's evening economy.

"If it's approved, the scheme will revive the site, bring more people into the town, support existing businesses and help attract complementary activities to improve the high street," explained Cllr Linda Bailey, Bexley's Cabinet member for Regeneration & Growth. "The growth of online shopping and expansion of major centres like Bluewater means the traditional role of high streets is changing. The scheme is another element in our plan to ensure the town prospers in the future."

"We're excited to be able to bring people up-to-date with our plans, which are the best possible news for the town," says Cabinet member and Sidcup resident Cllr Peter Craske. "Not only will they mean new life for a vacant building at a key location, but they will see Sidcup regain a cinema and a modernised library!"

"The relocated library will continue to provide the wide range of existing programmes and events alongside its core services, including its book selection, PCs and meeting

rooms. Co-location with the cinema will also provide the opportunity to explore a variety of new collaborative cultural opportunities and programmes.”

The scheme is also part of the Council’s drive to expand the town as a centre for the performing arts.

Sidcup’s theatre and performing arts Further and Higher Education Institutes, Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance and Bird College, strongly welcome the plans for new cultural and leisure provision.

Shirley Coen, Principal of Bird College said: “An art house cinema is an exciting proposition for the residents of Sidcup, and for our students. It represents further recognition of the significance of culture and the performing arts in Sidcup and clearly puts down a marker for our ambitions to build on the strong cultural foundation created by the two colleges. Having the cinema and a library on the same site provides lots of collaborative opportunities.”

Clarie Middleton, Rose Bruford’s new Principal, added: “The cinema is a welcome addition for current and prospective students and will further enhance Sidcup’s reputation as a creative and cultural hub where people choose to live and study.”

If Sidcup Library is co-located with the cinema, the current library site would be available for redevelopment. Given the location, it is most likely this would be for residential use.

Both proposals will require planning approval, with full details shared with interested parties and public consultation before any work begins.

The old ABC Cinema in Sidcup High Street closed in August 2000 and was demolished in February 2003.

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