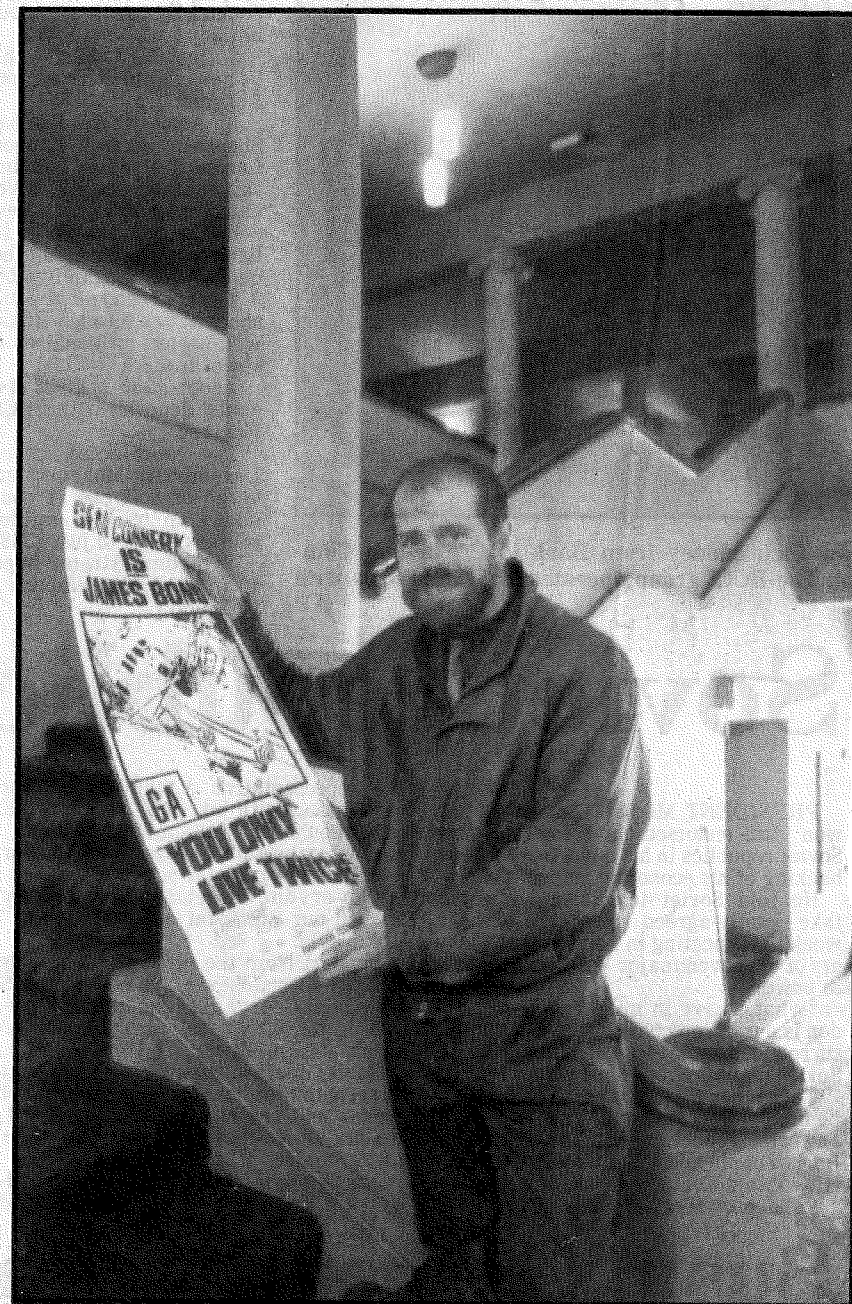


# Theatre may stage a comeback



Stratford Theatre Trust publicity officer Stuart Perry in the foyer of the Regent Theatre with a poster which says it all ... a second chance for the Stratford theatre. Falling attendances forced the theatre's closure four years ago.

Photo: ADRIAN MALLOCH

By AVALON WILLING DN 10.7.91

THE curtain could go up yet again in Stratford's abandoned Regent Theatre.

The theatre has stood idle since owner Pacer Kerridge Corporation decided to close it more than four years ago after falling attendances made it unprofitable to keep it operating.

However, after more than 12 months' planning by a group of local people a steering committee has been established to negotiate the purchase and renovation of the 70-year-old theatre.

"It has been a very careful and thorough investigation and although there are still a number of loose ends to be tied up it is hoped the theatre will be operating later this year," said Stratford Theatre Trust publicity officer Stuart Perry. "The purchase price is still being negotiated."

The establishment of a new theatre group in Stratford and the efforts of the Shakespeare Society to stage live Shakespeare performances meant setting up a performing arts venue in the town had become very important.

"The plans for the development of the theatre are very extensive with the intention of initially reopening the theatre for movie screenings followed closely by the construction of a full stage, dressing rooms and orchestra pit to enable the theatre to stage live productions," said Mr Perry.

The steering committee would establish an incorporated society and hoped to raise about \$90,000 in the community. This would be supported by grants from the Lotteries Commission and other charitable trusts to establish a totally debt-free facility for the community, said Mr Perry.

With the increased interest in going to the movies and the need for entertainment aimed at family groups and young people the steering committee held high hopes that a locally owned and operated theatre would be successful.

Stratford District Mayor David Walter has greeted the news of the theatre's planned revival enthusiastically. "The concept is certainly exciting. Since the Town Hall ceased to be used as a performing centre there has always been that gap. And it's timely to take advantage of a facility which would be much more economical to develop than starting from scratch."

Former theatre manageress and Stratford Theatre Group member Gwelfa Burgess is delighted the theatre will be saved. She had often wondered why local people could not band together and raise enough money to get the theatre up and running again.

After 18 years working in the theatre, Mrs Burgess said she still regularly goes down to the Regent to feed the resident feline Precious and tidy up.

"It's really great news. People are finally realising you need a picture theatre and venue for shows. Apart from being interested myself it'll be really good for the town."

Mr Perry said many local service clubs and tradespeople had already offered their expertise and labour to undertake the alterations and renovations.

A public meeting will be held on Monday night to establish a committee to oversee the purchase and organise fundraising during the next few months.

# \$30,000 boost for theatre causes debate

D.N  
18.12.91

By JANE WYNYARD

THE renovation of Stratford's Regent Theatre has been given a massive boost with a \$30,000 donation from the Stratford District Council.

Despite disapproval from some councillors regarding the timing of the grant, the council yesterday agreed to make the cash donation with money from the general purpose civic account.

The account, which contains \$145,114, is funded from the sale of land in the cultural and community zone.

As the Regent Theatre renovations relate to both cultural and community aspects, it was considered to be the appropriate funding source, general manager Kemp Broughton said at a full council meeting yesterday.

A total of \$30,000 has already been raised from fundraising activities and cash donations from the community towards the renovation of the theatre. The budget required to purchase and restore the theatre and to build dressing rooms and full stage facilities totals \$130,000.

While all councillors agreed to the grant in principle and pledged their support for the

theatre, some felt the donation was made at a bad time.

"I fully support the theatre and I have agonised over a decision, but I am concerned at the timing of the approach," said councillor Anne-Marie Rocard. "Firstly, it's Christmas and I don't think it's right for the council to be seen giving a gift of \$30,000 while members of our economically deprived community struggle to provide a Christmas for their families. I am also concerned that the grant might jeopardise future options for the Stratford Hospital."

Councillor Ron Martin asked the council whether it would be best to grant the funding but wait until February before handing it over to the Stratford Theatre Trust.

Stratford District Mayor David Walter said the general purpose civic account had been set up specifically for an issue such as the Regent Theatre and would not take money away from the future of Stratford Hospital.

Stratford Theatre Trust's publicity officer Stuart Perry said he hoped the council's donation might inspire other community groups or organisations to assist in the theatre fundraising.

# Go-ahead for project

THE PROJECT to reopen Stratford's Regent Theatre was given the green light last night at a public meeting attended by about 40 people.

Steering committee chairman Murray Herbert said that although negotiations were far from complete, it was believed a satisfactory price for both parties could be agreed upon in the near future.

A fundraising committee, to be headed by Gary Sturgess, was elected for the \$100,000-\$130,000 project.

It was expected the project would be subsidised by community and Lotteries Commission grants.

DN 16.7.91

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