

## Appendix 2f - Irish Cultural Centre



### Summary of H&F Buildings Consultation responses regarding the Irish Centre

#### Key themes:

**Consultation document and process**  
**Impact on local residents**  
**Financial / property issues**  
**Relocation issues**

From consultation responses	LBHF comments
<b>Financial / property issues</b>	
1. We feel there is a strong case for making an exception for the Irish Cultural Centre. We feel council has an obligation to be faithful to its original agreement to extend the lease to ICCH as previously agreed until October 2017.	The council (like all other councils) is under serious financial pressure. This has been further increased by the Comprehensive Spending Review announcement made in October 2010. The council must therefore consider all available options to reduce our corporate debt in order to preserve as much funding as possible for vital services.
2. The Irish Government has been providing a generous grant to support the Irish Cultural Centre, since the council withdrew its funding in 2007. Due to the state of the Irish economy, the Irish Government is in no position to finance a purchase of the building. Therefore we would ask that you provide us with a further lease extension of three years, in order to enable us to raise the funds for purchase.	The council's difficult financial position has been worsened by the CSR, with significant savings needing to be found within the next three years. Unfortunately, the council has to prioritise this in order to preserve as much funding as possible for key front line services. However, the council recognises the value of the centre to all local residents, and will explore, in the first instance, the possibility for selling this building to its current tenants.
3. It is a very accessible Centre. Could it be shared? Could outreach health services be provided there?	The building is excellent in terms of access, and the council is keen to support the current occupants to be able to purchase the site. If this is successful, the centre will continue to be available to a range of organisations to use.
4. Has an impact assessment been carried out?	Yes – please refer to appendix 3h
5. Is it the council's vision to privatise all services?	The council is keen to ensure that all services deliver value for money – and therefore a large number of services are "market tested" to explore whether they could be provided better by external providers.
6. If the Irish Centre were self supporting and self funded would the council still persist in selling it?	The current tenant; Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith Ltd (ICCH) will be offered first refusal when the current lease expires in March 2012 and will have the opportunity to continue on a self supporting and self funding basis at a

From consultation responses	LBHF comments
	market value.
7. What are the council's reasons for adopting such a short-sighted view to debt reduction? What will happen when the money generated from the sale is sold?	Every £1m of debt costs approximately £100,000 in interest payments each year. Therefore, the council views reducing the £133m debt as a high priority, as money spent on servicing the debt would be better spent on providing services to local residents.
8. The council should lease it on a repairing lease for a continuous income and dedicate the income to reducing the debt.	The council wishes to achieve a capital receipt rather than a rental income able to reduce the council's debt in this manner.
9. Does the council own the freehold or is it leasing it and leasing on.	The council owns the freehold title to this property.
10. This would make an ideal hub.	The council hopes that the current tenant of the building will be in a position to purchase the site, therefore continuing its provision as a venue in this part of the borough. However, the building does not meet the council's criteria for a community hub – primarily as it is a building that is suitable for disposal.
<b>Impact on local residents</b>	
11. The sale of the property will severely impact Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann community group and likely cause its West London branch to be closed.	The council will provide details of other halls and venues available for hire, and believes that there is sufficient alternative sites available to local groups to enable them to continue to deliver their services and activities locally.
12. Important educational, social and cultural services will have to be terminated if the property is sold, which will severely impact borough residents.	The council hopes that the current tenant of the building will be in a position to purchase the site, therefore continuing its provision as a venue in this part of the borough. However, should this not be achievable, the council will provide details of other halls and venues available for hire, and believes that there is sufficient alternative sites available to local groups to enable them to continue to deliver their services and activities locally.
13. The services are not solely for the Irish community and are used by borough residents of many communities as well as people from outside of the borough who travel many miles. This shows how valuable the services are and that they are certainly not underused or surplus to requirements.	There are alternative cultural and support services for the Irish community, including the London Irish Centre Camden, Irish in Greenwich, Irish in Britain, Irish Abroad, Lewisham Irish Centre, The South London Irish Club, The Irish Club EC4, The London Irish Women's Centre and London Irish Network.
14. We request that you do everything in your power to reconsider the future of this building and its people. Help to preserve their excellent Cultural Programme, the broad spectrum of support and services it provides, and to maintain a centre for both the Irish in London, and the large number of users from all other backgrounds".	
15. If the Irish Government pays for the centre will there be an impact on Northern Irish residents?	As far as we are aware, the current services and activities held at the Irish Centre do not discriminate between Northern and Southern Irish residents, and we would expect this position to continue.
16. Why has the Irish community been targeted in particular?	The Irish Community as not been targeted in particular. The centre is only one of a number of properties being considered for disposal.

From consultation responses	LBHF comments
	<p>ICCH is not funded by the Council (other than through a rent subsidy) nor does it provide statutory service. Should the centre no longer be available for community use there are a number of other locations that could be hired locally to continue to provide their cultural activities.</p> <p>The POSK Polish Centre, located in King Street also offers a cultural centre for a single community in the borough, however this centre is not resourced by the council and has proved very successful in independently establishing, developing and sustaining the centre.</p>
<b>Relocation issues</b>	
17. Where would the services be relocated to?	Should the centre not be sold to the current tenants and maintained as a local community centre, the council will provide details of other venues/halls for hire to groups who use the building, and support the support services who are based at the building to identify a suitable alternative location.
<b>Consultation document and process</b>	
18. The Centre is not called "The Irish Centre", but the Irish Cultural Centre. If the council does not even know its name how can it assume it knows its use and value to the community.	The building is commonly known as "The Irish Centre", however the council acknowledges the full title of The Irish Cultural Centre and has amended where necessary.
19. What right does a non-resident have to comment on the council's proposals?	The council's main priority in the consultation was to elicit the views of local residents, as these are the people that the council serves. It is expected that a number of people, who are not residents of the borough, but who may use services in buildings included in the consultation may also wish to give their views.
20. How much does the centre actually cost to the council? The centre pays rent and much of its activity is supported by the Irish government. The way the council presents these questions suggests that it would be getting rid of a cost to the council. The council needs to give a much fuller presentation of the facts.	The current tenant does not pay any rent but we estimate the market rent of the property to be in the region of £137,000. As the tenant is responsible for repairs and maintenance and rates the full cost to the council is the loss of rent which it is not receiving.