

Appendix 2h – 20 Hammersmith Broadway



Summary of H&F Buildings Consultation responses regarding the Information Centre

Key themes:

- Impact on local residents
- Financial / property issues
- Relocation issues

From response	LBHF rebuttal/comments
Impact on local residents	
1. The Information Centre is a key resource in the borough, and its sale will mean a loss of vital services and support to many people and businesses.	With Hammersmith Town Hall located nearby, together with the increased availability of information through the internet, the use of this space for an information centre is not considered a sufficiently high priority to continue to provide the space under the current terms.
2. The Council makes a very weak case for the closure of this centre. How many people use the service? Why is the council letting it at a rate that does not recoup the costs? Can residents really get this information easily elsewhere? The internet and the town hall would be highly unlikely to improve accessibility of services to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Visitors on holiday or otherwise want immediate information, maps, ideas on what to see etc	LBHF provides town centre maps and guides. These are primarily provided through local venues such as hotels, restaurants, libraries, retail outlets and other visitor attractions provided by the businesses themselves. The council also provides an on-line presence with the three 'visit' websites: www.visitfulham.co.uk ; www.visithammersmith.co.uk ; www.visitshepherdsbush.co.uk . Information is also available to visitors through the council's website: www.lbhf.gov.uk .
3. The services provided at the Information Centre are essential for vulnerable members of the community who cannot afford to pay for some services, such as legal advice.	The centre is primarily a visitor and public information centre. Benefits and legal advice is provided by specialist services in the borough, and will continue, irrespective of the future provision of this site.
Financial / Property issues	
4. The Council should consider an agreement to share the space effectively with a small business or voluntary group, such as a coffee shop or nursery?	The council is likely to seek to re-let the site. Organisations interested in using the space will be able to apply, however the use of the space may restrict some activities. The priority for the council will be to ensure this space is cost neutral.
5. This is a well used centre run by unpaid volunteers that provides free advice to visitors and is used by many community groups for meetings	Visitor advice is available through other sites and through other media. The council will provide information on other halls and venues available for hire.

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<p>6. Your officers have informed me that the total costs to the council for this centre are approximately £50,000 p.a. broken down as follows;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insurance premium - £4,487.96 inc vat • Service Charge (inc water charges) - approx £24,000 inc vat • Business Rates - £21,014 <p>These costs could be reduced by negotiating a reduction in the insurance premium.</p> <p>It is strange that a business rate is applied where this shop unit is a planning gain and forbidden to trade. If it were rated as a community centre, a significant rate reduction would be achieved. Further reductions could be achieved through either the council applying a discretionary waiver, or by passing the licence on to a local registered charity.</p>	<p>The insurance payment does not form part of the council's insurance premium. The landlords of this unit insure the whole shopping centre and pass on a proportion of this premium to the council for this particular unit.</p> <p>With regard to the Rates payable the council has recently concluded negotiations with the Valuation Office Agency which have resulted in the Rateable value for the premises being reduced from £46,000 to £19,000.</p> <p>Should a registered Charity lease the space, they would be eligible for a mandatory 80% reduction in business rates payable.</p>
<p>7. The Conservative Government is committed to 'The Big Society' and the role of the voluntary sector is a fundamental cornerstone of that philosophy. It is therefore counter intuitive to close a centre organised and run by unpaid volunteers for the benefit of Hammersmith residents and visitors to our borough</p>	<p>The Big Society agenda focuses on encouraging and enabling community participation and involvement and also includes strengthening the voluntary sector. However, the provision of a particular building is not considered by the council to be the starting point for this. There a large number of buildings, venues and halls available for local groups and activities, plus innovative and creative ways of working are needed to reach wider communities and enable their participation.</p>
<p>8. Given that we offer no other visitor guidance currently, there will be an Olympic event in Earls Court in 2012 and the desire to attract more businesses and visitors to the borough, I ask that you reconsider and that you extend the lease.</p>	<p>Extensive visitor information is provided through the website, including 3 "visit" websites for each of the town centres. Visitor information regarding the Olympics is being delivered nationally, and it is anticipated that information will be available widely.</p>
<p>9. The Information Centre is far from being badly located. It is situated in the heart of the borough by bus and underground stations and close to attractions.</p>	<p>The information centre is a stand alone service which is located away from the main public concourse in the Broadway shopping centre – consequently the public does not pass its doors as a thorough-fare and the majority are unaware that it is there. We received a number of consultation responses that agreed that the Centre was badly located. If the service relocated to a hub or shared venue it could benefit from increase and diversity in walk-in visitors and partnership working alongside organisations promoting good equal opportunities.</p>
Relocation issues	
<p>10. Has the Council considered relocating the Information Centre to the Lyric or the Hammersmith Library and supporting such a relocation with clear signposting?</p>	<p>The council will explore what other options may be available. Hammersmith Library already provides extensive public information resources to both residents and visitors, including providing internet access and printed media.</p>

From response	LBHF rebuttal/comments
<p>11. The Centre is home of the Hammersmith Community Trust which hosts a number of exhibitions of local interest. It is the delivery address and storage site for the H&F Fairtrade Steering group, similarly for the H&F Local Agenda 21 Forum, which holds its meetings there. Various other local community groups also meet on the premises. It is a popular pick up point for recycling sacks and Age Concern's Fifty Plus newspaper. I would say the Centre is well-used.</p>	<p>No other west London borough invests in a Visitor Centre of this nature – they are reliant on distributing physical leaflets and information via town halls, libraries, hotels, restaurants, retail outlets and other visitor attractions provided by the businesses themselves and on-line information through visitor and local websites. In general there has been a decrease in reliance on printed literature due to the cost, difficulty to update and increased on-line access. There are sufficient alternative meeting, exhibition and storage space for hire in the area.</p> <p>Smart sacks are delivered to all households participating in the Smart Sack Kerbside Recycling scheme four times a year. Additional sacks can be collected from numerous locations across the borough listed on the council web-site.</p> <p>Elderly and registered disabled residents, unable to collect, may order Smart Sacks by calling the Cleaner Greener hotline on 020 8753 1100.</p> <p>Age Concern no longer produce the Fifty Plus newspaper or any similar printed newspaper.</p> <p>The consultation responses for the information centre were 81% neutral or in favour of re-leasing.</p>