**EALING PERFORMING**

**ARTS CENTRE**

**Development Review**

**& Feasibility Study**

**April 2015**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Ealing has a large and active arts and media sector, is a culturally aware Borough, and the resident population has a high propensity to attend live arts events. There is some excellent cultural provision. Ealing town centre is home to two important arts organisations: the Pitzhanger Musuem and Gallery; and Questors Theatre. It also has a number of other cultural institutions and creative businesses including Ealing Studios and the University of West London which has several performance spaces. A successful festivals programme is run by the Council and there is live music in some churches.

2. Despite this, the arts and creative industries could play a much greater role in the revitalisation of Ealing town centre. At present there are no dedicated arts venues presenting regular programmes of live professional theatre, dance, comedy or music. CEPAC was formed to lead the campaign to address the ambition of the arts sector for a purpose-built performing arts centre in central Ealing to provide a venue for live professional arts and a resource for the large local arts community.

3. Notwithstanding the above, it is unlikely to prove possible in the current economic climate to secure public sector money for a capital fundraising campaign for a new arts building. Any project to create an arts facility within a commercial development scheme in central Ealing would almost certainly need Council support and access to Section 106 or CIL funding; this has not been evident so far. Without this, it would be necessary to persuade a developer to take on the financing and construction of a new building.

4. While there are several suitable town centre commercial development sites, there is no public commitment at present from any developer or the Council to include a performing arts centre within any scheme. We understand that some community space originally provided as an option within the Land Securities site, which will include a new cinema, was not included in the final scheme approved by the Council’s Planning Committee, and that no Section 106 funding has been allocated specifically for this purpose.

5. Over 70 arts and community groups responded to our online survey. It confirmed that the local arts sector is concerned that existing facilities have either very limited availability; are unaffordable; or are unsuitable for use by many local arts and community organisations. A great deal of work has been undertaken over many years by the arts sector to assess demand for a performing arts centre and to make the case for a centre in terms of its benefits and wider social and economic impact.

6. The town centre is undergoing a major transition. Crossrail will place Ealing Broadway within 20-30 minutes of central and east London. Other significant changes will include a large increase in the number of hotels and beds; more contemporary housing and apartments bringing in young professionals; more people living in the town centre; a greatly improved retail and leisure offer; and associated improvements to the night time economy with better cinema provision, more restaurants and high quality bars.

7. Ealing Council’s Arts Strategy includes plans for creating a Cultural Quarter in Ealing town centre and Ealing High Street and to build on the already diverse and creative mix of uses to help the night time economy and extend the range of reasons for people to visit the town centre. Ealing Business Improvement District (BID) has a commitment to developing Ealing's role as a cultural focus for West London and diversifying the evening economy, and the Central Ealing Neighbourhood Forum supports the CEPAC idea for a facility dedicated to the performance arts. However the Council is not so far convinced that such a facility is needed and could operate without public subsidy.

8. Arts centres offer something distinctly different to the live arts that are available in major national theatres and on the West End. They are generally multi-artform; provide facilities and opportunities for people of all ages and tastes to engage in the arts; accommodate a variety of users including amateur and community groups; and they provide a clear focus and resource for all the arts in an area. Arts centres are rooted generally in their local communities and respond to local needs as well as providing access to a range of professional arts experiences.

9. A performing arts centre in Ealing would present an alternative professional programme to that available in central London with a wide variety of live dance, music, drama, comedy and entertainment. This could include work by touring contemporary companies and performers; work created by London-based small to medium scale companies; emerging performers; new music groups and bands; and a wide range of smaller-scaled music, comedy and dance not available in central London or the West End. A local venue would have some strong market advantages including more competitive ticket pricing, ease of access, and a range of opportunities for people to participate in the arts.

10. The vision is of a building that is an integral part of the cultural infrastructure and economy of central Ealing and a contributor to the night-time economy, as well as being a vital resource for the arts and community sectors and local businesses. It would have a social and commercial ethos and to be located close to other amenities and businesses. The bistro-style cafe/bar would be open in the daytime and evenings and would make a significant financial contribution to the venue.

11. The main auditorium would be used for a regular programme of live professional performances; amateur and community performances; commercial and other activities including conferences, launches and trade fairs. It would have a flexible performance space seating around 300; a dance/rehearsal studio; a meeting room and space for social functions; and a bistro-styled cafe/bar operating both in daytime and in the evenings. The programme would aim to appeal to a broad range of people with a mix of traditional established arts events, South Asian and other culturally diverse work and popular entertainment, including regular comedy, jazz and blues nights.

12. To avoid competition with Questors, it would not necessarily have backstage facilities with a high specification, but would have a good acoustic for music. Some spaces would have dual functions including a single dance/rehearsal studio providing a quality space for dance and second small performance space. The venue would be run by a small staff team supported by a large core of volunteers who would undertake many of the front of house and support functions.

13. A performing arts centre would have annual expenditure in excess of £500,000 a significant proportion of which would be spent on local services and suppliers. In addition its catering operation should have a turnover in excess of £100,000 involving considerable expenditure in the area. The management Trust would employ two full-time staff and 15-20 part-time and casual staff. An estimated 72,400 people would use the facility each year and it would be a valuable cultural, social, educational and commercial resource.

14. Though the aspiration to create a performing arts centre in central Ealing has a strong case, it would be very difficult to achieve in the current circumstances. CEPAC may therefore have to consider alternative approaches including: taking on management of the small community facility within the cinema site development and running a programme of events and participatory activities there; developing a programme of live arts and festivals at other venues in Ealing including at UWL; working to coordinate the local arts sector through a new arts festival; abandoning the idea of a new performing arts facility; or re-visiting the arts centre vision and working to find a more modest building that can be converted into a centre for local arts.