

Victoria Hall Trust – HAVE YOUR SAY

The Memorial Hall building containing the Victoria Hall, the Princes Hall and their ancillary rooms was built on surplus council land at the rear of the Ealing Town Hall site to commemorate Queen Victoria's 1887 Golden Jubilee.

Building was paid for by public donations and in 1893 a charitable trust covering the building was established to manage the halls and rooms for public hire for meetings and social events. This was to be operated completely separately from the other town hall buildings and any surplus funds after providing for operating costs and maintenance were to be distributed to local charities.

The original trustees were the members of the Ealing Local Board - the predecessor of Ealing Council. Subsequently the duties of trustees have passed to the members of the full Council.

The Council has failed to manage the trust correctly. Operation and maintenance of the trust property and income generated from it became merged with that of the town hall. There are no separate accounts for the trust which makes it impossible to understand the true financial position.

Claiming that the Trust is no longer financially viable, the Council has asked the Charity Commission if it can change the trust wording to allow it to hand over the halls to a commercial hotel operator on a 250 year lease along with the remainder of the town hall site. Public access to the halls will be much more limited than presently and the hotel operator will seek to make profit from them. The Charity Commission has told the Council to consult stakeholders first.

There is much concern that the Council has no right to dispose of the Halls as it wants to do. Grounds for objecting to the Council's proposal include the following:

1. Managed separately from the Town Hall the Trust could remain viable as it is. The Town Hall complex has been managed for many years as a single entity without separate accounts. However, evidence suggests that income from the halls has been used to subsidise other parts of the Town Hall, including the Council Chamber. If the Trust were run as it was intended to, the terms of the trust would remain perfectly viable. Annual income from lettings is likely to amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds which would be enough to cover their costs.
2. The Trust is not being compensated for the loss of its assets. The Halls, rooms and offices that belong to the trust have a capital value of millions of pounds. The Council does not propose to compensate the trust for their disposal.
3. The current purpose of the trust remains relevant today. With the borough's increasingly diverse population planned to grow by 25% over the next 10 years, the trust's role is as necessary now as it has ever been. Loss of the Halls as places for meetings and gatherings would deprive the borough of a facility that should be bringing together Ealing's new residents.
4. The wording of the public consultation is seriously misleading:
 - it does not explain fully the original terms of the trust
 - it makes no reference to the Council's deal to dispose of the Trust's buildings
 - its suggestion that 'doubts have arisen as to the validity of the charitable purposes' is not explained or justified
 - it understates the effects of the changes proposed
5. Ealing councillors who are the current trustees and will determine the trust's future have little understanding of the nature of the trust, their fiduciary responsibilities as trustees or their liabilities as individuals. Recently, without any discussion of the implications for them individually, they resolved to devolve their responsibilities for the trust's management to a Council sub-committee.

The consultation ends on **12 January 2018**. To respond email David Moore - MooreD@Ealing.gov.uk - at Ealing Council, citing **Victoria Hall Trust, Ealing – NM C-462805** in the title line.