

18 February 2018



## Victoria Hall Trust: Second Consultation

As you may have heard, the Council has issued [a second consultation on the Victoria Hall Trust](#). The closing date is March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

It is unclear how this consultation relates to the first. Many who had responded to the first consultation have asked Ealing Voice whether they should respond again. The Council tell us they will report on the two consultations together after the second one closes and will:

*'take into account any representations we receive relevant to the first consultation that we happen to receive in response to the second consultation and vice versa.'*

In short, if you feel you commented sufficiently in your response to the first consultation you **DO NOT** need to repeat your comments.

However, the second consultation invites the public's opinion about its plans to dispose of the Victoria Hall and gives a bit more detail than the first one did about the Victoria Hall and the charitable trust that runs it. You may therefore wish to offer further views and therefore be interested to know what Ealing Voice thinks. Here are our thoughts

1. Unfortunately, some information Ealing Voice thinks is needed is still unavailable. Three months after we first asked we still do not know:
  - what assets the trust owns,
  - the trust accounts when separated from the rest of the Town Hall,
  - the full terms of the disposal of the assets or
  - what compensation the trust would receive from their disposal.
2. This missing information confirms that the trust has been mismanaged for decades. This second consultation shows the Council at least acknowledges the problems and is trying to resolve them.
3. But history shows there are too many conflicts of interest between the Council's role as a local authority and that of Charity trustee. The trust's interests have been the last thing in the Council's mind as it tries to dispose of its assets. By assigning the rights to the Victoria Hall to a private company for the next 250 years the Council would turn its back on the philanthropic and public-spirited vision of the original trustees.
4. Disposal would be at total odds with the intentions of those whose vision lay behind the Hall's construction. Using funds raised from public subscription they created a place for public gatherings and entertainment in Ealing that private enterprise would never provide. They then established the Trust to uphold their principles and ensure the building operated in the public good. Any surpluses that arose were to be used for charitable purposes and not for private profit. The founding trustees' vision is demonstrated by the fact that no private enterprise has ever provided a similar space in Ealing. The Trust's objectives remain as valid today, and are arguably even more important, than when it was set up in 1893.

5. [Guidance published by the Charity Commission and the Local Government Association](#) suggests it would be in the best interests of the trust for the Council to remove itself as the trustee. Ealing Voice plans to propose to the Charity Commission that it should require an alternative to the trust to be established under what is called a 'cy pres' scheme.
6. The second consultation raises many detailed concerns about the disposal plans and the justification of them. In particular:
- i. The consultation says that community access to the Victoria Hall will be retained with 10 free days use reserved to the Council each year. This assurance cannot be accepted as the Council has no right to reserve the premises for itself. The whole basis of the trust is that it separates these community's facilities from the Council which should pay the trust a rental every time it uses the hall.
  - ii. We are told that community access to the Victoria Hall will also be assured because community groups would pay reduced off-peak hire rates. However, the terms of the deal show these rates will increase by 10% immediately and rise annually for the next 10 years. Thereafter they will be 60% of whatever the commercial hire rate is. But commercial operators of the hall can be expected to raise their hire rates much faster than the rate of inflation so the rate will rise in the same way for community users and price then out - just like so called "affordable" housing has turned out affordable to so few when it is set as a percentage of the market value.
  - iii. The Council says a backlog of repairs and essential maintenance has built up over the years that the trust cannot afford. The information now provided suggests this is not accurate as the backlog concerns the entire town hall, and not just the Victoria Hall. It has built up because the town hall as a whole has not been properly maintained.
  - iv. The consultation recognises that alternative sources of funding maintenance could be found including from 'external grants and other income sources' or by raising commercial hire rates. These sources should have been fully investigated before the trust's assets were put up for sale.
  - v. The accounts we have seen show that the Victoria Hall is the one part of the town hall complex that does generate revenue. The trust's terms say that the first use of its income must go on maintaining its assets, but income from the halls have never been put into their maintenance. For decades the Council has used it for its own purposes.

We think these are all strong reasons to object to the second consultation. If you agree with us please email David Moore - [MooreD@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:MooreD@ealing.gov.uk) - in Ealing Council to say so.

Then, if you haven't already done so, sign [Ol Rappaport's petition](#) to save the town hall. The petition already has over 1000 supporters. Let's get it to 2000 by sharing it with your friends and on social media.

Thank you for your support

Julian Smith and Will French  
Ealing Voice

<http://www.ealingvoice.com/>