

THE VISION FOR WILLESDEN GREEN CULTURAL CENTRE

Willesden Green Cultural Centre will be a building at the heart of its community, in every sense. Actively welcoming people in all their diversity, it will be a social space: a place full of life, energy and fun that will support and celebrate creativity and imagination, and allow knowledge and ideas to be accessed, produced and shared. Efficient to run, and easy to maintain, the Cultural Centre will be a really useful local landmark: a thing of beauty that is able to respond to changing aspirations, offering the spaces and services that its community needs, now and in the future.

Introduction

What Brent Council does and what our residents want is changing. In challenging times, we are striving to transform our services in innovative ways that make them more efficient to run, easier to engage with, and more responsive to the diverse needs of the people of Brent.

Understanding and using our buildings as true community assets is one way to do this. We want to bring together valued services and facilities in well-located, well-designed and well-managed spaces where the Council, and the community it serves, can communicate and work alongside each other for the benefit of individual residents, their families, and the wider local area.

A redeveloped Willesden Green Library Centre will be a building of value for the people of south Brent, equivalent in quality to the new Civic Centre in the north.

A cultural hub, it will not only allow community members to access the information, support and advice they need now, but will look towards the future, and its challenges, by providing the spaces and the technology for residents old and new to come together to learn, to share, and to innovate.

What will a new building offer?

Although the library centre at Willesden Green is already a valued local asset, it is not fit-for purpose. Expensive and inefficient to run, many of its components are failing – challenges that refurbishment alone would struggle to address.

Working with a private sector partner, we aim to deliver a completely new building at no net capital cost to the Council. Set within a wider development, including housing and high-quality public realm, the building would offer a new and useful local landmark that both draws upon and enhances the changing identity of Willesden Green.

Alongside an improved library – less about warehousing books and more about supporting learning and community capacity - the building will contain:

- a careful replacement of the much-loved Brent Museum – we are not only committed, but also required by the terms of our funding, to replace it at the identical size and quality as the present facility;
- flexible spaces for performance, arts and community meeting;
- a café;
- the Brent Archive;
- some office space for Brent officers and councillors
- an expanded customer-contact centre – although people are making increasing use of improved internet and telephone services, it is vital that we provide a high-quality face-to-face service for those who want or need to talk to a real person.

The Vision in detail: four big aspirations

The Council aspires to a building that has culture and community at its heart. That sits in turn at the heart of a lively and inventive community. It will bring together the best of existing services in a way that allows for: (a) ease of access, (b) increased efficiency, (c) less compartmentalisation and (d) more potential for productive and surprising cross-fertilisation.

1. A WELCOMING SPACE

The new cultural centre will be a building with an open, attractive and friendly face that draws people in, provokes their curiosity, and encourages them to stay. It will feel be “an ok place to come” for people of a wide range of backgrounds, for different reasons and at different stages of their lives. It will achieve this by:

- **Offering a clear and fully accessible entrance:** with a strong presence on the High Road, the way in will be easy to find and effortless to enter for people of all abilities;
- **Providing a seamless relationship between inside and outside:** the building will be carefully and confidently connected to the space around it, both to its immediate environment and to Willesden Green as a whole, generating a positive sense of place through well-considered urban design;
- **Making a strong yet warm impression:** once inside, the building will strike the visitor as an exciting and even surprising space, and yet at the same time appear reassuring, friendly and informal;
- **Expressing openness and transparency in its design:** the building will allow clear views in from the outside to its animated ground floor, and clear views through and around the building, raising awareness of possibilities and expressing Brent Council’s commitment to a new way of doing things;
- **Blurring boundaries between services:** wherever possible intimidating thresholds will be removed, encouraging people to move freely and to discover new activities and possibilities.

2. A SOCIAL SPACE

The new cultural centre will be an animated building that celebrates and expresses local culture and community – a space of congregation and creativity. In its design and services it will reflect and support a diverse and transient population, prioritising what local people value, and facilitating a variety of activity, both serious and fun, traditional and exploratory. It will achieve this by:

- **Delivering well-equipped flexible spaces:** the building will provide carefully planned characterful spaces of a range of sizes, that can accommodate a broad spread of gatherings and activities, formal and informal, serious and fun;
- **Providing an ‘infrastructure of possibilities’:** spaces will be equipped with the services and support structure – from power points to water access, acoustics to lighting - to make it easy for community groups to stage the events and activities they want at a reasonable cost;
- **Offering excellent public space:** the design will make the best use of the site to offer an inventive solution to local desire for good quality outside space, capable of hosting events and activities, but also simply nice place to eat your sandwich;
- **Being able to evolve day-to-day and over the years:** communities and their needs change, as do the ways in which Councils provide services. In its structure and fit-out, the building will be able to respond to changes in culture, management and technology, with future-proofing a priority from the start.

3. A CONNECTED SPACE

The new cultural centre will be a building that is committed to, and expressive of, our digital age. It will be a place where information is freely created and shared, and where knowledge can be experienced and produced in social and collaborative ways. It will achieve this by:

- **Making use of the most up-to-date and user-friendly technology:** equipment of a high specification – yet easy to access and to use – will be installed, and used to its full potential for all services and spaces, enhancing the centre’s activities. A generous free wireless cone, and provision of power sockets, will allow connection throughout the building, through both shared and personal devices;
- **Offering excellent connectivity:** equal emphasis will be placed on basic human interaction, with a building that makes it easy for visitors to move through its spaces, to find who and what they need, and to encounter new ideas and opportunities.
- **Being animated by day and after dark:** the building will be open and energised from early in the morning till late at night, seven days a week, allowing people to access spaces and services in the way that works best for them.

4. A SPACE THAT CAN TAKE EVERYTHING THAT WE THROW AT IT...AND KEEPS ON WORKING

The new cultural centre will be a useful and practical building, straightforward and cost-effective to use and run. It will achieve this through:

- **Being easy to manage:** the spaces will be organised to facilitate straightforward supervision and security, with features such as internal lock-downs that allow key areas to be open and active when others are closed, meaning that we don’t need to keep the whole building staffed and fired up unnecessarily, at cost to the taxpayer;
- **Being easy to maintain and keep clean:** the building will be made of high-quality, robust yet attractive materials that will be able to take what is thrown at them, and wear well, without becoming tatty. Building components will be straightforward to repair and replace;
- **Offering a pleasant environment:** careful attention will be paid to issues such as ventilation, heating, lighting and acoustics to ensure that the building feels a healthy and comfortable place to be, with users having the power to adjust that environment as necessary – you should be able to open windows, or turn out lights, without having to track down help;
- **Being an exemplar of sustainability:** by using the latest approaches to saving energy and minimising waste, the building’s running costs will be kept low, allowing available funds to be focused on what goes on inside. Not to mention the benefits to the wider environment.

The new cultural centre will be a building that catches the eye, without being flashy or gimmicky. Contemporary in style, looking to the future rather than mimicking the past, it will be a building of high architectural quality that respects, and is specific to, the character of the local area – not the standard box you see everywhere.

In summary, in its culture and architecture, this new building will be a place for both the Willesden Green of today, and that of the years to come: a place that draws you in and encourages you to stick around, and a local landmark of positive change and opportunity.