

Brent Civic Centre – Strategic Brief

Rev.C1	Extract
04.01.08	Part A – the vision

Key Heading	Sub-Heading	Individual sub bullets
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1.0 Brent Civic Centre Vision Statement

1.1 Introduction

In November 2002 the Leader of Brent Council together with the Mayor of London launched 'Our Vision for a New Wembley'. The vision document describes how the Council has a once in a lifetime opportunity to maximise the national stadiums impact as a catalyst for regeneration of the area. At the core of and integral to this vision is a new civic building to be the centrepiece of the community in Brent; a new "heart" for Brent. A building that should have exceptional levels of public access to a wide range of public services, including council services, a building that blurs the boundaries of public and private space. A building that will be state of the art for the 21st Century and that will be an asset for the residents of Brent.

The concept underpinning the proposal for a new civic facility goes beyond the traditional model of a Town Hall, rather it proposes a physical focal point for a range of public services which will function as a new service centre for residents. This would improve immeasurably the quality of service offered to local people, renewing public interest and confidence in democratic local governance and enabling easy access to a set of additional services for residents (extract from 'business case 061211').

The role of local government has changed significantly since the building of Brent Town Hall and its spread portfolio of buildings is no longer relevant to how services are delivered or to local democracy in the 21st Century. Modern local government is striving to be more outward looking and responsive, to do more to engage with citizens, local groups and community leaders. Town halls need to be re-invented as centres of active, public political life. They need to attract as many visitors as possible and present the Council in an open, participatory and positive light. They need to be places where people want to go.

1.2 Local Democracy

Increasingly local democracy is not just conducted through formal council meetings. Engaging local people in debate, discussion and consultation on local choices and priorities is critical to the process of local democracy. The formation of member-led scrutiny groups, citizens' juries and neighbourhood initiatives requires an accessible building with high quality public spaces that can be used in a flexible and welcoming manner. This is a central element in bringing the democratic process closer to the public and improving trust and confidence in local decision-making and elected Members.

1.3 Developments in local Governance

The introduction of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) model places the local authority at the centre of a network of partnerships that stretches across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The aim of the LAA model is to generate a broad-based consensus on local priorities and an integrated partnership response to those issues. The Council's role as community leader, facilitating innovative and effective partnership solutions is central to the LAA model. It is the Government's intention that the LAA framework will be the future way in which authorities set their local agenda, receive funding and are assessed on their delivery. Responding to these changes in local governance requires co-location of critical joint services in a suitable modern building.

1.4 New ways of working

The new civic centre must provide:

- exceptional interactivity with service users, citizens, community groups and partners;
- excellent public spaces to bring people face-to-face with local government;
- productive modern working environments that are inherently flexible, meeting the needs of an evolving Council and Administration well into the 21st century;
- improvements to environmental performance;
- facilities that encourage optimum levels of performance from staff;

- flexible working practices to improve service provision;
- a well connected administration that breaks-down departmental silos;
- reduced travel time and non-productive working time;
- improvements in staff interaction and interdepartmental working;
- efficiencies from public expenditure across the service providers; and
- a quality environment that engenders pride from the public that use the building and the staff that serve from it.

1.5 The Efficiency Agenda

The need to provide efficiencies from public expenditure cuts across all providers. The similarity of many back office functions clearly lends itself to efficiencies not just across co-located council services but across other public service providers.

Economic Benefits

The provision of a new civic centre will:

- lead the regeneration of the borough;
- provide sustainable public services;
- put the operation of local democracy where it belongs, in a quality setting accessible to the public;
- improve the links to the community through location and ease of access and by investing in the long-term learning of the community through state of the art facilities;
- provide customer first service centres;
- transparent democracy;
- demonstrate community leadership;
- underpin regeneration policies;
- reduce ecological impacts;
- lower carbon emissions;
- demonstrate the Council 'investing to save'; and
- improve productivity by creating excellent service environments.

1.6 Sustainability

The Council's current portfolio of buildings prevents the Council from becoming a leader in sustainability and meeting its aspiration to "*live today and use resources so as to allow future generations our quality of life*" (*Corporate Environmental Policy, 2005*). Due to their age and condition the buildings the Council owns or occupies waste energy and water resources, and are unequipped to enable a number of cost effective environmental initiatives such as recycling and temperature management. The location of some of the buildings promotes car travel adding to the congestion of the borough's roads and reducing air quality. Together these buildings do not showcase a council committed to improving the environmental quality of the borough.

1.7 Enhancing Council Performance

The Council's commitment to providing excellent public services is still at the centre of its policy agenda. This commitment means providing the right facilities such as better Library spaces, community spaces for people to meet, a place that welcomes and encourages young people to participate in local democracy. A new civic centre will provide these spaces and will dramatically improve our ability to interact with the public and enhance our performance in response to their needs.

1.8 Diversity implications

There are many diversity implications for a new civic centre. Improving access to the Council's facilities is a key principle behind this project. This will mean that all sections of Brent's community and all staff will both be welcome and comfortable in the new building and will be able to physically enter the new facilities regardless of any physical disabilities. Before and during the building design stage, there will be

extensive consultation with Brent's residents and staff to ensure their ideas are included and incorporated. A new civic centre will create opportunities to offer Brent's diverse community and staff a facility that better meets their needs and of which they can all be proud.

A new civic centre will offer Brent's residents a better service and it will deliver better value for money.

Wembley is the obvious centre for Brent as it is geographically central and is equally accessible from all parts of the borough. It is neutral ground politically and links the diverse north and south of the borough.

1.9 Excellent Services delivered from an excellent building

1.9.1 The potential benefits to service performance from the creation of a purpose-built civic centre are immense. The nature of the building proposed will both enable greater public interaction with the work of the Council and enhance integration across services leading to better understanding, co-ordination and implementation. Our current property arrangements provide no such opportunities. They are largely office space accommodation, with limited public access, few meeting rooms or spaces suitable for holding public events and much of the space is under-utilised due to its inappropriate nature.

1.9.2 A new civic centre creates the opportunity to offer many services from a single point. This will suit the needs of residents better as they will only have to make one trip to carry out most of their business. The first impressions people get when entering a building significantly influence their experiences once inside. If the environment is a pleasant space to be in, Brent Council will instantly seem like a more trustworthy, organised, efficient and professional organisation. This will help Brent's customers feel valued and that their situation and problems are taken seriously. Currently, there is a huge variety in the quality of experience customers receive. Some customers are greeted by an intercom facility instead of a reception. Some are unsure which building to go to for each specific service they require.

1.9.3 As well as enabling the Council to deliver its services in one place, co-locating services will also help to plan services in a more cohesive way. For example, the Children Bill has put the onus onto local government to provide joined-up services for children. This will require education and social services to work closer together. With other services so much of what the Council does is now cross-cutting and undertaken in cross-council partnerships, locating together can only be a major boost to this. Brent will also need to jointly deliver services with other partners and there will be opportunities to co-locate.

1.9.4 A new civic centre will ensure the Council attracts and keeps the best staff. There is an extensive body of evidence outlining the significance that working environments have on recruitment and retention of staff. If people work in an enjoyable space, with good facilities and amenities, they feel cared for by their employers and are more likely to remain in their job. This results in improved motivation, attendance at work and a general sense of well-being.

1.10 Co-locating Services

There must be a general principle that many of the Council's services and all of its departmental headquarters will be co-located in the new building. The Council will only reap the benefits of joined-up service delivery if opportunities are created for people to easily work together and for chance encounters.

It is also an important principle, however, for the Council to maintain a real presence in all of its communities. Housing offices and one-stop-shops will be needed. This will be worked through on a principle of what is best in the new centre and what is best delivered at a local or outreach level.

1.10.1 Work undertaken with lead members and officers has highlighted the following facilities as elements for the new centre to contain:

- a substantial new central library for the borough
- high quality space for members to meet and work

- space for our partners – particularly a visible inter-agency presence in delivery
- multi-agency reception and one stop shops
- a welcoming space for community groups to use Festival spaces etc
- spaces for training, courses and seminars
- smaller committee style meeting rooms
- retail space to rent – potentially for café facility
- open public space and display/exhibition areas
- registrar’s services (seven days a week)
- a large capacity assembly hall for 400-800
- all departmental head office located in the same building
- a high quality and accessible council chamber
- flexible office space for 1,250 council staff and partners
- emergency planning control room with CCTV?
- high quality landscaping
- showering and changing facilities
- space for public art
- tourist/visitor information
- external aspect and viewing areas
- an advice shop for young people and/or elderly
- health advice
- ATM and post office box
- electronic screens to advertise what’s on

1.10.2 The civic centre will link up with facilities already on offer in the wider Wembley Regeneration development. Developers are committed to providing public space in the form of two squares and community space. The new civic centre will not duplicate any of these services, but will enhance and complement them.

1.10.3 First and foremost the new civic centre will benefit local people by providing better services jointly with partners and the voluntary sector. It will be a building that residents will want to come into and use.

There are three core components of the civic centre; Public, Democratic and Administrative.

The three core components deliver:

Public functions Multi-purpose meeting, training, conference and assembly room spaces with more community facing service spaces, such as a multi-agency foyer / Council Services Centre, a ‘state of the art’ central library, a café, and the registrars service.

Democratic functions Mayoral and Leader’s offices, Members’ accommodation, and political group offices. The Council chamber and committee rooms are also included in this category but will be flexible, useable and e-enabled.

Administrative functions This will include departmental and partner office spaces, meeting rooms and breakout spaces and other ancillary administrative functions.

1.11 Making it work for the Public – The Vision by Element

The public section of the building must be welcoming, accessible but secure and provide strengthened face-to-face contact with the Council. By delivering the public service components effectively in environments that are congenial and without strong representations of authority, the Council can help build a sense of trust and ownership amongst its citizens.

The public section of the building supports the core democratic services. In new civic centres the inclusion of everyday public uses can bring a more diverse range of people into contact with local government, adding vitality to the building. Such informal use of the building on an everyday level can serve to reduce people’s perception of local government as something that is distanced and

inaccessible to them. These 'softer' services in close proximity to the democratic activities taking place in the committee rooms and council chamber may increase the opportunity for the public to find out about and engage with Brent's decision making processes.

Public spaces need to be located at or as close to the active public ground level as possible. This translates into a significantly greater ground floor 'footprint' for the civic centre than would be the case for a standard council office building like the Town Hall.

1.12 First Impressions – more than just a public foyer

Approximately 1,700 members of the public will enter the civic centre each day, based on a current estimate of 600,000 a year. This figure includes the current library in the Town Hall. A new central library would increase these figures, and the number of visitors could increase to around 1 million. It should be an easy threshold to cross and the place in which Brent Council 'hosts' the public's engagement with services and events and as such should be a welcoming place and not a representation of power and control.

It is necessary to provide a public foyer for the civic centre to operate, but with a sensible increase in the floor area of this space a significantly greater degree of participation may be encouraged. We have estimated that a foyer of approximately (25%) of the ground floor will be required.

Size is not the only important factor in achieving greater public participation. The carefully judged relationship between the foyer, the adjacent public uses and the active external public spaces will help support the more diverse use of the building and create a place that engenders an exchange of views and ideas – a dialogue.

The public foyer should be programmed, managed to establish the conditions that actively cultivate the public's engagement rather than simply waiting for things to happen.

1.13 New State-of-the-Art Central Library

A significant opportunity for the new civic centre is to establish a much needed state of the art central library on the site. There is no such facility in the Borough and other local authorities have developed highly regarded buildings, which provide a wide range of services and attract large numbers of residents and visitors. The use of space will need to be flexible to meet changing needs but it is envisaged that the library would include a children's library; a young people's area; study space; an ICT learning area where classes could be provided; self-service terminals and various other shared spaces. It is anticipated that the library would also be closely linked to café/eating facilities.

1.14 Registrar

This activity is a key service provided by the Council and one that can be seen to be a universal one. As every constituent at some point has some contact or experience of births, deaths and marriages, this service intricately relates the experience of the civic centre to the life of the community. It can provide a celebratory aspect to the daily life of the civic centre if marriage and citizenship ceremonies have some sort of significant relationship to the activities of the centre: either by bringing life to the garden, as is currently the case in the existing Town Hall, or by the location of the wedding room itself.

The wedding garden is a core factor in the success of the current wedding services offered at Brent Town Hall.

Civic activities such as Citizenship Ceremonies provide an opportunity to 'capture' people's longer term interest in democratic activities by virtue of their 'special' personal contact, and heightened collective awareness, throughout the ceremony process.

The new civic centre will support new methods of service delivery in a number of possible ways. It will allow all of the registry services staff to be on site possibly improving the internal efficiency of the registry (there is currently a back of house operation at Kingsbury). It will also encourage greater links with both

the library and the Council Services Centre, allowing efficiencies resulting from the sharing of ancillary spaces and the provision of joined up services where possible.

1.15 Council Services Centre – face-to-face contact

The Council Services Centre is the point of contact between the services provided by the Council and the public. In the new civic centre, it will reflect the increased use in the future of call centres and the internet. It is likely that those people that will be using the One Stop Service will be those not able to access service through these means, either through poverty, language difficulties or other special needs or perhaps people who just want to speak to a human being. The aim of the service is empathy as well as efficiency.

1.16 Flexible Assembly space for the 21st Century

As one of the 'soft spaces' in the new civic centre, it provides a level of community involvement/attachment to the civic centre and the possibility of engagement with the political activities going on within it. It is also important for the Council to provide a place in which large groups from within the local community can gather for major festivals, events, or family/community gatherings.

The current Paul Daisley Hall is fully booked for months ahead and adds a vibrancy to the Town Hall atmosphere. The large civic chamber can provide a degree of activity and vitality to the civic centre.

The 400-800 person hall would need to be in the vicinity of the ground floor, primary and secondary foyers to enable management of the movement of a potentially large number of people engaging in community and democratic activities. It would need to be both visible and highly accessible from the public realm of the civic centre.

1.17 Local Democracy at its heart

The democratic section of the building is its core; without it the civic centre is little more than council offices with a weaker sense of public "ownership". This part of the civic centre comprises: the council chamber, the committee rooms, the political offices, the Mayor's office and their associated foyers and circulation space.

The change to the executive/committee system must be accommodated. This translates as more committee rooms, in a more equal relationship to the full council chamber than previously. The public must be given place as participants rather than spectators in the council chamber and committee rooms, the rooms therefore need to be of varying sizes, with different layouts. They require ease of access, avoiding monumentality and formality while respecting the dignity of the space.

1.18 Committee Rooms

The new civic centre provides an opportunity to reconfigure the committee rooms in recognition of the new cabinet model of local government accountability, which includes the overview and scrutiny functions to encourage a greater public participation in this process. In Brent we also have a civic Mayor. The committee, witnesses and public should be organised in an informal triangular relationship.

The committee rooms need to be easily accessible from the major public space of the civic centre. They also require close proximity to both the political offices of the members and the council chamber. The possibility of overlaps with the meeting spaces required by the officers and for training would also suggest that reasonable proximity to the administrative area of the building would be required. Flexible meeting rooms and spaces have also been factored into the administrative section. A specific area dedicated to training rooms has been an additional consideration within this brief document.

1.19 Council Chamber

Like the committee rooms, the council chamber should be designed to accommodate the new cabinet based system of local government accountability and encourage a greater public participation in this

process. The model is the tri-partite model where there is more equality between the councillors', witnesses (e.g. officers) and the public where all parties face one-another during debate.

The council chamber needs to be easily accessible/visible from the major public space of the civic centre but does not have to be on the ground floor. The first floor would be a most suitable location for this use.

The chamber requires close proximity to both the political offices of the members and the committee rooms. The degree of separation between the public, the members and the council officers for security reasons may also be an issue for the civic centre.

1.20 Staff – Providing the Service

The staff offices of the Council currently occupy approximately 28,500 net square metres of space in the Borough, housing some 2,600 members of staff (excluding teachers and other school based staff) in 25 buildings. This produces an existing desk density of around 10.4 square metres per workstation and, for the most part, each council employee has their own permanently allocated desk.

Consultation with Service Directorates has so far identified that 1,250 staff are required to be located in the new civic centre. A combination of remote, flexible and home working is vital for the future and means that not all staff will need their own desk. This will especially be the case where staff are working with clients in their own homes or are more usually on site rather than at their desks for the majority of their working day. There are several pilot schemes testing these options currently. Under these assumptions, it is envisaged that an average of 4 workstations will be provided for 5 staff. More efficient information technology, paper scanning and storage solutions will also enable a reduced area of 10 square metres per workstation. To support staff who work more remotely adequate meeting spaces will have to be provided.

The latest and most cost effective ICT will be deployed to support and enable more efficient service provision both in the new civic centre and to support remote and flexible working. This will also be an excellent opportunity to showcase to residents and staff the potential of ICT.

1.21 Environmental Efficiency Issues

The new civic centre, if it is a carbon neutral building, will be the single greatest contributor to our internal environmental performance targets on carbon, procurement, recycling and transport. Considerable annual savings could be achieved in terms of electricity and gas usage as well as waste disposal.

By replacing the majority of our old buildings the Council will demonstrate civic leadership by subscribing to a number of sustainability principles:

Cradle to grave approach – planning the whole life cycle of the building, considering the environmental impact at each of these stages:

- Conduct a sustainability appraisal for each civic centre option.
- Design the building for efficiency, sustainability, recyclability, end of life demolition or upgrading.
- Ensure current asset disposal plan accounts for waste, recycling, re-use.
- Ensure contractor uses sustainable materials for build.
- Fit out according to environmental purchasing policy using durable and natural products.

Sustainable procurement – all materials, products services will subscribe to the Council's environmental policy and environmental procurement strategy to help Brent achieve its sustainable procurement vision for 2010.

Sustainable Healthy Transport – the area immediately surrounding the Wembley regeneration area including the Brent House site is a designated Air Quality Management Area. Promoting the new civic centre as a public transport destination will improve health.

Healthy Building – natural spaces will improve air quality and morale, natural materials that are non-toxic, renewable, durable and recyclable. Natural lighting will be maximised to prevent seasonal affective disorder. Eco-décor will help to prevent sick building syndrome.

Temperature tolerant – the building will need to withstand temperatures for -10 to +40 degrees to account for the uncertainty of a changing climate and extremes of temperature using a solution that does not exacerbate the problem.

Zero waste – as a goal - everything can be recycled from paper to batteries. The café or restaurant will not sell food in packaging that cannot be recycled.

Innovative – target and standard achieving BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) excellence for offices.

Open door policy – the Council will remain flexible, adaptable, able to respond to change, anticipating the future for working, energy production, waste. If it is not affordable now, it is not designed out of future possibility.