

May 2009

The Letters Editor

Dear Letters Editor

For publication

Following UCKG's public exhibition on plans for the future of the former cinema at 186 Hoe Street, the feedback has now been collated and analysed. Work continues on proposals for conservation and redevelopment of the building so that a planning application can be submitted, with the feedback properly taken into account.

Specifically we are addressing the need for transparency over the management, pricing and marketing of the proposed Granada Rooms as community space for hire.

A Transport Plan is being prepared, which will respond to local concerns about parking. We recognise the public's call for clear separation between the Granada Rooms and our church activities, which are termed a HelpCentre. Our application will address both points.

Our proposed Training Centre, Delight Café and Youth Centre will be open to all irrespective of any religious affiliations, and all will add to the vitality of the High Street, including its evening economy.

Many local people and groups attended the two day exhibition. In speaking freely, with the development team and me as property manager for the UCKG HelpCentre, they revealed that there is considerable misinformation in circulation.

We accept that a lot of people want a cinema in Walthamstow; but make no mistake; cinema is not a viable option for the former EMD.

The EMD was not a commercial success at the time we bought it. Following the unsuccessful planning appeal in 2003, the property was proactively marketed in 2005 and 2006. Both campaigns, supported by expert reports, clearly showed that cinema use is not a viable option for the property, the stumbling block being the cost of refurbishment.

We believe that our proposals, including a performance space and projection room for showing films is the only realistic solution for the Grade II* listed building. Not only does this guarantee the conservation of the building, it will also ensure that the public can see and use part of the interior, restored to the glory of its heyday.

Importantly we have funds earmarked, and subject to planning are keen to get on with the work.

There has been comment on the location and timing of our public exhibition and the level of engagement. As regards location, our team contacted a total of 16 local venues near to the property, including the Town Hall, Harmony Hall and the YMCA, before St Gabriel's kindly accepted our booking.

The choice of date was influenced by our difficulty in finding a venue. Obviously there is a strong case for additional community space for hire in the area!

We wrote to the 402 addresses considered most likely to be affected by the proposals, plus ward councillors, interested local groups and other stakeholders, inviting them to the exhibition. The display panels were posted on our website at the time of the exhibition and we set up a dedicated free phone information line.

The intention was to provide local people with a variety of ways to find out about our proposals. We remain accessible via free phone on 0800 298 7040 and the Internet.

Finally, in response to concerns about cinema space at the HelpCentre at Catford I would advise that planning consent was granted by the Inspector at appeal on the original proposal, with no compromise built in.

The proposed Granada Rooms are a unique project for the UCKG HelpCentre. All our other premises are straightforward HelpCentres without any areas for hire. In Catford, we offered to retain the first floor space in leisure use and accepted a proposal from a reputable cinema operator willing to run a single screen.

When the property was fully restored the cinema operator, with whom we still have a good relationship, was unable to proceed due to other commitments. The space has been empty ever since despite a lengthy marketing campaign.

Yours sincerely,

Pastor Paul Hill