

HIGHET CONSULTANCY LTD

**Highet Consultancy Ltd
Winchester House
259 -269 Old Marylebone Road
London
NW1 5RA**

The Centre for All Feasibility Study Report

September 2009

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Introduction

Highet Consultancy Ltd was commissioned by Westminster City Council on the 19th May 2008 to complete a feasibility study on *creating a 'Centre for All'*. This project was *'In response to the expressed needs of the local community to progress the provision of new community facilities in the Harrow Road area specifically catering for the local Muslim community'*, as stated in the Council's One City 2008 plan.

The key tasks were:

- To consult with the local community and ascertain the level of support for a new community centre
- Engage with the local Muslim community groups and facilitate a coordinated approach in addressing the demand for community and prayer space
- Obtaining funding pledges for a potential facility from legitimate interested parties

This report outlines the methodology used, the activity undertaken, key findings and the recommendations made by Highet Consultancy Ltd.

Executive Summary

Highet Consultancy sought responses from community groups and individuals across North Westminster in relation to the potential development of a new community facility - the Centre for All.

Key Findings

The level of response from the wider community indicated that there was little to no demand for a new community facility.

Local Muslim communities expressed a need for more prayer and community space. There is interest within the community to take forward a project to develop an independent Muslim facility.

Team building between Muslim community groups to achieve this common aim has been evident, although further work is required.

Funding and Support

Funding pledges totalling nearly £1,000,000 have been made for the development of a facility.

Steering Group

Twelve local people have been identified as potential members of a steering committee to drive forward the creation of an independent organisation.

1. Background

Demography and Geographical Context

- 1.1 Westminster is one of the most diverse boroughs in the country and Muslims represent 12% of Westminster's population. In the North West of the borough this figure rises to 18.4% in the Queens Park ward and 16.2% in the Harrow Road ward. Muslims also represent 23% of the population of 10- 19 year olds in the borough.
- 1.2 The geographical focus for the feasibility study was the Harrow Road, Westbourne and Queens Park wards.

Project Conception

- 1.4 Local Muslim groups have lobbied the Council for facilities to meet demand for prayer and community space. The former leader of Westminster City Council, Sir Simon Milton, stated that he was committed to working in partnership with local Muslim communities to identify a solution. His vision set out in the Council's One City Programme was of a space that could be used as a wider community hub whilst also offering prayer space.

2. Methodology

Highet Consultancy

- 2.1 Westminster City Council selected Highet Consultancy for this project due to their experience in developing a charitable organisation, fundraising and overseeing the development of Al-Manaar - the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre in the neighbouring borough of Kensington & Chelsea. Highet also have extensive fundraising links for projects of this nature.
- 2.2 Highet was given a brief and a timescale to achieve the objectives set. Protocols were agreed from the early stages of the project.

Contact and Communication with the Muslim Community

- 2.3 The initial contact with Muslim communities was based on several strong and long standing relationships between Westminster City Council and community organisations. From this further connections were formed.

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- 2.4 Highet's role in the project was defined as facilitation and ensuring that key messages were imparted to the local community.
- Local groups and organisations were contacted and the concept of the Centre for All was explained
 - A series of 3 open events were held, where local organisations and individuals could attend and take part in a series of round table discussions
 - A number of separate meetings with organisations, community groups and individuals were also held throughout the project. These are listed in Appendix 1
 - Fundraising for a potential facility commenced
 - Fact sheets and a web site were designed to aid communication and encourage participation.

3. Timelines, Actions and Outcomes

Activity Commencing in June 2008

- 3.1 From June 2008 direct contact was made with both Muslim and non Muslim stakeholders within the defined areas of the Harrow Road, Westbourne and Queens Park wards. Other groups in the community were also informed of Highet Consultancy's appointment and remit via email and telephone. There was little interest shown in the concept of a 'Centre for All' in the wider community.
- 3.2 Highet attended a variety of other faith based events and meetings to share the project with other community groups. This included two meetings with the Executive Committee of the Westminster Faith Exchange.
- 3.3 Between June and December a series of fundraising meetings took place between Highet and potential funders, resulting in pledges totalling nearly one million pounds for a future facility.

Activity Commencing in July 2008

- 3.4 Between July and December meetings were held with the cultural attaché and first secretary of the Kuwait Embassy, primarily to establish further contacts and endorsement for funding a potential centre. The Islamic Development Bank and United Arab Emirate embassy were also approached and the two largest pledges totalling £500,000 were obtained through these links.

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- 3.5 Further meetings were also held with local councillors, Local Area Renewal Partnership (LARP) managers and local Housing Associations, to assist with more detailed background information on existing services.
- 3.6 A series of Fact Sheets were produced in July, August and October. The purpose of the fact sheets was to explain the nature of the project and update the community on the progress made.

Activity Commencing in August 2008

- 3.7 Two community meetings were held in August and November and an 'Iftar' breaking of the fast event was held in September during Ramadan. 35 people attended the August and November meetings on each occasion. Attendees included the local MP Karen Buck.

Activity Commencing in September 2008

- 3.8 A design brief for a potential facility was developed, based on the information and views obtained from the public meetings. It should be noted that this was an ideal 'wish list' and any future building specifications would be dependent on a range of practical considerations. A number of those consulted indicated that they would also be satisfied with the purchase of an existing property on the open market if it was suitable for this purpose.
- 3.9 Responses from the Muslim community have indicated that an ideal facility would accommodate up to 1,000 people for special prayers, such as during Ramadan and Eid, and up to 300 people for daily prayers. These numbers are based on current uptake at Lancefield Road plus an estimated further 150 worshippers that currently have to pray at home or travel to other Mosques. There was general agreement that a centre should include the elements listed below:
- Dedicated prayer space to meet Muslim religious & spiritual requirements
 - An education facility
 - A crèche
 - Gymnasium and sports facilities
 - IT facilities
 - Space for community groups and charitable organisations to work from
 - Meeting space
 - Function space (including a large kitchen)
 - Space suitable for conducting marriages and funerals

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- Swing rooms that can be used for multiple purposes Monday – Thursday and then opened up for prayer space on Fridays
 - Space for a luncheon club
 - A library
 - Further space that could be rented out to generate income
 - Ablution facilities and a shower with disabled access
- 3.10 There was significant interest in women only physical exercise, social interaction and education / training facilities. Many Muslim women do not feel able to access mainstream provision as they will be required to mix with men.
- 3.11 During this process the Muslim community also communicated that an independent Muslim facility would be more appropriate for their needs and was preferable to a 'Centre for All'.
- 3.12 A commitment was demonstrated within the local Muslim communities to work together to take forward a project of this nature.

Activity Commencing in March 2009

- 3.13 The brief was shared with an architect who created a set of floor plans that reflect the perceived needs of the communities engaged with the project. The floor plan for a future facility was based on a four storey building with a ground floor footprint of 40 metres x 25 metres. However, in reality the size and layout of a facility would be dependent on the land or existing building available and a number of planning and financial considerations.
- 3.14 Further informal meetings in March and April with women's groups and young people, indicated that the existing specification would also meet their needs.
- 3.15 A fourth fact sheet communicating the activity undertaken was distributed to local mosques, meeting halls and cafes. It was also emailed to over 400 registered groups and individuals.
- 3.16 Members of the local community have been identified as potential candidates for a steering group, however further work will be necessary if a community led project to develop a facility is to progress.

4. Challenges

- 4.1 In exploring the demand and support for a 'Centre for All' Westminster City Council requested that Highet involve interested local groups from the wider community in the project. This was one of the biggest challenges as organisations from the wider community and non-Muslim faith based groups showed little interest in the project. Little to no demand was demonstrated for a 'Centre for All'.
- 4.2 Difficulties were experienced in cascading project updates and information broadly across the local Muslim communities. By issuing fact sheets with contact details, Highet have attempted to provide an opportunity for interested individuals to raise questions directly to Highet and engage with the project.
- 4.3 There have been some difficulties in bringing the local Muslim community groups together under shared terms of reference. Highet has strived to develop an environment in which these groups can work together effectively to achieve a common aim. As the project progressed the community groups worked more closely together and demonstrated that they are committed to adopting a coordinated approach.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 There is little demand in the wider community for a 'Centre for All'. The local Muslim communities have indicated that they would prefer a Muslim centre that meets the need for prayer space and acts as a Muslim community hub. A facility of this nature would be based on the Al-Manaar model where an independent organisation would fund, develop and manage a Muslim facility.
- 5.2 The local Muslim communities involved in the project have demonstrated a commitment to working together to achieve their shared aims.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Highet Consultancy recommends that a new independent Muslim organisation be created with the purpose of taking forward a project to develop a Muslim facility. The organisation should be representative of the interested local Muslim communities and be capable of:

- Securing funding and identifying an appropriate site for a potential facility
- Developing and managing a potential Muslim facility

6.2 Continued interest within the community will be necessary in order to create an independent organisation which is able to take forward a future project to develop a Muslim facility.

Operational Plan

The table below was the original operational plan developed by Highet Consultancy. However the activity and the timeframes were adjusted as the project progressed.

Objective	Activity	Timeframe
Agree project methodology and communication protocols	Develop and agree: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology • Communication protocols • Fundraising approach 	June 2008
Developing strong and positive relationships with the local Muslim communities in the local area	Contact and meet with interested community groups and write to all other identified stakeholders	July 2008
Fundraising	Develop links for identifying both capital and revenue funding	July 2008
Developing strong and positive relationships with the local Muslim communities in the local area	Hold the first workshop exploring community needs and expectations – a wider Community event.	August 2008

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Objective	Activity	Timeframe
Encouraging positive relationships	Hold a series of meetings with local faith organisations	August 2008
Examining the feasibility of potential sites	Exploring available space within the North end of the borough of Westminster	Throughout the project
Encouraging positive relationships	Hold a Ramadan "Iftar" event for the local communities	September 2008
Developing strong and positive relationships with the local Muslim communities	Hold a second work shop exploring Community needs and expectations – a wider community event.	October 2008
Fundraising	Identify both capital and revenue funding for a potential facility	November 2008
Communication	Six Month progress report to Westminster City Council	December 2008
Developing strong and positive relationships with the local Muslim communities	Hold a third work shop exploring Community needs and expectations – a wider community event.	January 2009
Encouraging positive relationships	Feedback the initial findings to the Community	February 2009
Explore models for a multi purpose community facility that offers suitable Muslim prayer space	Use the initial findings to explore models for 'Centre for All' which also offers suitable prayer space for the local Muslim communities	March 2009
Complete a the final report	Complete the final report of the feasibility study	May – June 2009

Meetings and Contacts

Meeting	Representing	Highet Representative	Frequency
Abdul Aziz Toki – Central London Youth Development Trust	Young people	S Di Giosa	1
Al –Khalil Mosque	Muslim worshippers	K Kubica	2
		F Kadri	2
All Stars Gymnasium		K Kubica	1
		F Kadri	1
Arshad Mansour	Charity tax specialist	S Di Giosa	3
		F Kadri	6
		K Kubica	1
Asim Sadeequi – City Circle	Residents	S Di Giosa	1
Assaya Yusuf BARC	Women & men	S Di Giosa	4
		K Kubica	2
		F Kadri	2
		Dr. AK Khalil	1
Bayswater Social & Cultural Association	Bayswater Community	K Kubica	1
		F Kadri	
City Circle Homework Club	Young people	K Kubica	3
Councillor Barry Taylor	Constituents	K Kubica	1

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Meeting	Representing	Highet Representative	Frequency
Dr Hassan Al Jahni	Funding related	Dr. AK Khalil	1
Dr Sami Zamanan – First Secretary of the Kuwait Embassy	Finance related	S Di Giosa	2
Dr. Aldaferi – Kuwait Embassy	Finance related	S Di Giosa K Kubica	7 3
Fouad Shami	Funding related	S Di Giosa	1
Frank Knight Estate Agency	Property related	K Kubica S Di Giosa	1 1
Hakim Mouloud & Bashir Ebrahim Khan	Local community activist & previously Al Manaar Deputy Director	K Kubica	1
Hanson Consultancy		K Kubica S Di Giosa F Kadri	3 8 3
Harrow Road Interfaith Exchange	Faith groups	S Di Giosa	1
Hasim Charif Amal Trust	Young people	K Kubica	1
Imam Adel Benghala	Muslim worshippers	K Kubica S Di Giosa F Kadri Dr. AK Khalil	4 3 3 1
Islamic Development Bank	Finance	Dr A Khalil S Di Giosa	4
Local Area Renewal	Community and	S Di Giosa	4

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Meeting	Representing	Highet Representative	Frequency
Partnership Managers	business		
Linkson Jack – Charity Coordinator	Funding related	S Di Giosa	3
		F Kadri	1
		K Kubica	1
London Tigers - Misbah Ahmed - Jawar Ali	Young people	K Kubica	2
		F Kadri	2
		S Di Giosa	3
Lord Patel of Bradford	Community Cohesion related	K Kubica	1
Manahil Ahmed	African Women's Group	Highet Staff	1
Misbah Uddin	Local residents	K Kubica	2
Mohammed Hamdan Representative of Sheikh Fakieh and Sheikh Abdurrahman	Funding related	K Kubica	3
		F Kadri	4
Mohammed Karjaj – Director of Unitech	Finance	S Di Giosa	1
Mr Ahmed Suleiman – CEO Pioneers group	Finance	S Di Giosa	3
		Dr. A Khalil	4
Mr Memon	Funding & land related	F Kadri	2
Nadira Zwouwi Bangladeshi Elderly & Disabled Association	Bangladeshi elderly & disabled people	Highet Staff	1
North Westminster Muslim Cultural Association (Lancefield Road Mosque)	Worshippers	K Kubica	4
		F Kadri	3

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Meeting	Representing	Highet Representative	Frequency
Papia Hussein The Bangladeshi Young Women's Network	Young Bangladeshi women	Highet Staff	1
Queens Park Bangladeshi Association - Mr Koyser Ahmed	Bangladeshi community and Muslim worshippers	Dr. A Khalil K Kubica	1 1
Queens Park Muslim Council - Mr Mohammed Afzal	Muslim worshippers	K Kubica & Dr Khalil	2
Rabbi Winer	Faith community	S Di Giosa	1
Sean Bailey – My Generation	Young people	K Kubica	1
Sheikh Al Fakieh	Funding related	S Di Giosa	1
Shirin Mamujee	Independent business woman	Highet Staff	1
Silat, Arabic & Somalian interpreters	Communication related (interpreting)	K Kubica F Kadri S Di Giosa	2 1 1
Sofia Roupakia London Lighthouse – Training & Development	London Lighthouse – Training & Development Officer (business start up)	Highet Staff	1
The Karama Group	Women	K Kubica	1
Voluntary Action Westminster - Ahmed Uddin	Voluntary Sector	S Di Giosa	2
Wa'el Internet Designer	Communication (internet)	K Kubica	3

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Meeting	Representing	Highet Representative	Frequency
		S Di Giosa	7
		F Kadri	4
Westminster Faith Exchange & Westminster Faith Exchange Exec Committee	Faith communities and groups in the borough	K Kubica	3
		S Di Giosa	1
Ziaur Rahman, Sufyan, Khalid	Young people	K Kubica	3
		F Kadri	3
		S Di Giosa	5

Please note that meetings held with these contacts were in addition to the main project community events.