

The Africa Centre

Questions & Answers – as at 1 April 2011

Dear Friend,

You may have heard some rumours doing the rounds about the Africa Centre. You may even have been asked to sign a petition opposing a proposal to move premises.

We hope that the Questions & Answers provided below will help dispel some of the confusion.

With kind regards,

The Trustees of the Africa Centre

1. Is the Africa Centre going to close?

The Africa Centre has been in 38 King Street, Covent Garden, since it opened its doors to the public in 1964. If the proposed deal to sell a leasehold interest in 38 King Street goes ahead, the Centre will move premises. We are committed to our new home being in central London. The Africa Centre will most definitely remain open for business in its new home.

2. Why consider moving? And why now?

38 King Street has been our home for many years but it is in poor condition and far from ideal. It is a Grade 2 listed building is costly to modify and is subject to heritage restrictions which limit how it can be used. Since 2004, we have strived to reenergise the Africa Centre by seeking to refurbish its present site, and we have spent substantial sums on redevelopment plans and fundraising studies. Having undertaken the extensive work we do not feel that the current site is viable as the home for a rejuvenated Africa Centre.

Last year an offer to purchase the building was received which Council considers is attractive and at least at “open market” value. Trustees have concluded, after protracted consideration, that the ongoing mission of the Africa Centre will be best served by selling a long leasehold interest in the 38 King Street building, whilst retaining the freehold.

3. If there is a sale, what will done with the proceeds?

The proposed sale offers a golden opportunity to deliver an Africa Centre that is:

- Fit for 2011 and beyond, and able to fully exploit the opportunities offered by the 2012 Olympics, the Cultural Olympiad and the London 2012 Festival.

- Relevant to all our current and potential constituents, including young people for whom the fading 1960s/70s style King Street building has limited relevance.
- More accessible and inviting to all our friends, especially for disabled persons.
- Equipped, funded and able to concentrate on its core objectives and ensure the Africa Centre is at the forefront of African cultural life in the UK.

Some of the sale proceeds will establish a new base in London which is suitable for a wider range of activities and partnerships with other charities and corporate bodies. The rest of the proceeds will establish an Endowment Fund to reinvigorate our programming, enable a wider engagement with the arts community and extend our reach within the African Diaspora community. Establishing a substantial Endowment Fund will also increase our leverage in any fund-raising drive. This model has “in principle” support from our funder, Arts Council England (ACE).

4. So where are you moving to then?

We don't know yet, but we are committed to the new location being in central London and are actively looking at a number of options. It is a major task but the Trustees are committed to making it happen.

5. How much consideration has been given to the options available to the Africa Centre ?

For nearly seven years the Council has been investigating how to put the Africa Centre on a sustainable footing. Until last year the focus was on funding a refurbishment of 38 King Street. Members of Council have come to the conclusion that staying in the 38 King Street site is not the best option. If we do, the Charity will become primarily a property management company, relying on rents from office tenancies to survive. This is not the mission for which we were established.

We feel it is time to move on and consider other options – which we feel is a much more appropriate approach given the global recession.

6. What has been the governance process when considering any decision to sell?

After taking the decision that the offer provides an opportunity to relaunch the Africa Centre, the commercial reality is that this offer will not be on the table forever. Negotiations have been under way for some time, during which we have ensured that all legal, regulatory and contractual requirements are fully complied with. Part of the process has been to ensure that the charity receives the right price for what is being sold. A sub-committee was formed to progress this project, in the usual way. The Council has been able to call on Trustees who have significant relevant experience in the built environment sector on major capital projects.

All proceeds will be property of the Charity and applied in accordance with the Charity's objects in the same way as the Charity currently must use the current property to further its objects. For reference, the Africa Centre (the "Charity") is a registered charity, and is constituted as a company limited by guarantee. Its constitution is its Memorandum and Articles of Association. General management powers are vested in the Trustees, referred to in the Articles as the Council of Management (the "Council"). Informally, this is often referred to as the Board of Trustees (the "Board").

All trustees are volunteers and receive no remuneration for their work with the charity. We have made our decision based solely on what we consider best for the long-term future of the Africa Centre.

7. Has the Africa Centre's Mission changed?

Since its inception in 1961, the Africa Centre's remit has been to bring Africa's cultural diversity to the fore and to promote greater awareness about political and socio-economic developments affecting the continent and its Diaspora. This mission is unchanged.

8. How did this issue arise?

One of the Africa Centre Trustees, Boko Inyundo, does not agree with the decision of the rest of the trustees to pursue the offer for the property. He was involved in the discussions of the Council and has had the opportunity to put his point of view. He has decided to use his position to argue against the in principle decision to move. We have pointed out that his actions have been in breach of his legal obligations and have expressed our disappointment at his intention to interfere with the correct decision-making process of the Africa Centre.

9. I have a question that hasn't been answered. Where can I find out more?

Please E-mail us via our interim managers at info@businessofculture.com.