

*Where once there was Europe's largest women's prison, buildings that locked up the suffragettes, soon there will be London's new...*

# **HOLLOWAY WOMEN'S BUILDING**

Local activist campaigns being endorsed by the council mean the developer is now mandated to build it. **CPFH's Women's Building working group** is a coalition formed to demand it be a landmark institution; an inter-disciplinary hub of facilities and services; accessible, inclusive and welcoming; a beacon for what's possible if we aim high.

## **OUR VISION**

Our vision of the Women's Building is a dynamic, multi-functional, self-sustaining space. An ambitious outlook is vital to achieving this.

Since the great majority of women in prison are tangled up in the criminal justice system due to poverty, injustice, abuse, addiction, and mental health issues, an important focus will be building community and support away from this punitive system. A small, uninspiring, single agency building focusing solely on women who have been in contact with the criminal justice system is potentially damaging. To put women in such a small box is demoralising and alienating - it risks shrinking their ambitions, as well as their view of themselves and what part they can play in life.

The Women's Building we want to see will deliver a range of services for the local community and women from further afield, as well as workspace to support social change, creativity and networking. We support the call for it to be built by women workers, including apprenticeships to train women for work in currently male dominated trades.

## **SAFE SPACES & SUPPORT**

The Women's Building should provide safe spaces and support services for women, as well as affordable workspace for local grass-roots organisations; as outlined in Islington Council's Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). It will also address the need for various non-residential spaces such as facilities for the whole community. Arts provision is important to engage people's creativity and teach skills, as well as for therapeutic benefit.

Our vision recognises the importance of former HMP Holloway as a place that met women's needs which weren't met outside of the prison, but aims instead to fulfil this need within a community setting. We include a variety of organisations that worked both inside and outside the former prison, so have a wealth of knowledge when it comes to services for women. Many of these groups have highly specialised expertise, which as a community we cannot afford to lose.

We also envisage an emergency hostel and supported housing. There has been suggestion that these could be located in another more discreet building, on another part of the site. We are open to this idea. However, the Women's Building must be a stand-alone building: this is the best way to ensure it is a successful, self-sustaining entity and does not get watered down later in the planning process.

## **WHAT SERVICES?**

Based on community feedback and consultation with support providers, we want it to include:

- Education, housing and employment advice services
- Parenting support and a crèche
- Craft spaces for woodworking, textiles and ceramics
- Support for women and children affected by domestic violence
- Community facilities, like spaces for meetings and workshops
- Mental health services, including diverse psychotherapies (art/music/drama/movement)
- An IT and computing suite, including training
- A multi-purpose auditorium
- Drug and alcohol services
- A gallery space for exhibitions
- Athletic amenities, for instance coaching, a gym and a sports hall
- Support for children and young people affected by a family member's imprisonment
- A community run café, selling craft work made on site
- Short stay hostel for women and their children
- Art amenities, such as studios for sculpture, dance, theatre, and painting
- Employment opportunities within the building for women recently released from prison
- A museum commemorating the history of Holloway Prison.

## **GOVERNANCE & FUNDING**

Choosing the right governance structure for the Women's Building is a key issue. We call for an independent arms-length model, which is women-led.

Multiple funding sources will be needed to ensure the vibrancy and sustainability of the building. We encourage creative collaborations and enterprising, innovative models. Some income will need to come from rental of space to social and commercial enterprises that are in line with the building's ethos.

Additionally, a development function will tap personal and commercial donations, as well as support from foundations. Where support services are provided, we believe that government and trust fund should work with voluntary organisations and other statutory organisations to enable this through realistic and unrestrictive grant-based funds.

Potential rentable spaces and their uses should be integrated with the rest of the building so it functions as a cohesive whole. Segregating parts of the building into income-generating spaces which aren't directly tied to the ethos will dilute the presence and transformative potential of the building.

We have been discussing ways to finance the creation of a business plan, feasibility study, and architectural brief. As a campaigning coalition, we do not envisage undertaking these activities ourselves, but will work with others to ensure an open process in line with our vision.