

Text of email sent 23 April 2015

Culture2020@lambeth.gov.uk

Dear Sirs,

Culture 2020 Consultation

Carnegie Library is a hive of activity. Group **activities for children** include:

- Weekly Wriggle & Rhyme sessions for the under fives, which alternate quietly listening to stories with explosions of activity. The children learn to behave in the way appropriate to what is happening while enjoyably developing their language skills.
- Monthly Chatterbooks sessions for children aged 7 to 11, at which they discuss books they have read.
- Monthly Coding Club sessions, starting shortly, at which children will learn elementary programming skills.
- Weekly creative writing classes.
- Weekly art and drama groups.
- Weekly chess club. This is open to all ages but mainly attracts children, who learn to think ahead.
- Every half-term a Musical Adventure.
- Occasional special events. Some of these are for all ages but attract large numbers of children. An Easter event at the library was attended by more than a hundred children.

All of these are obviously of great educational value, as well as providing opportunities to socialise. With the exception of the current creative writing classes, all are provided free of charge.

The group **activities for adults** include:

- Ruskin Readers' adult literacy clubs twice a week. At these people who did not learn to read at school have a second chance to learn with one-to-one help from volunteer tutors. The students gain self-esteem which benefits every aspect of their lives.
- Weekly Book at Breakfast, where a group of people read a book together. Participants have described this very social activity as "therapy," suggesting that it does promote wellbeing.
- Weekly English Conversation Club for non-native speakers which boosts their self-confidence.
- Twice monthly Silver Surfers sessions which provide an enjoyable way for older members of the community to become competent and confident users of computers and the internet.
- Monthly gardening sessions afford an opportunity to appreciate the natural world while achieving results that participants feel are very worthwhile.
- Weekly Bloom yoga classes, where the emphasis is on physical flexibility.
- Weekly Hatha yoga classes, more concerned with building strength.
- Coming soon, weekly Pilates classes.
- Monthly tea with home-made cakes which makes for very pleasant socialising at minimal cost.
- Art exhibitions, which change monthly and offer artists starting their careers the chance of a public exhibition.
- Occasional meetings of the Herne Hill Medical Practice's Patient Participation Group.
- Occasional sessions run by the National Childbirth Trust.
- Daylong events run by the Friends, which publicise the library and what it has to offer.
- Occasional author events, local history and other talks.

Many of these groups have been running for years, some of them for decades. The library is a very successful social and learning space, hosting activities which have proved their success by attracting participants who return regularly session after session. Many of us familiar with the library were surprised by the ignorant suggestions recently that it needs to be transformed into a community hub. **The Carnegie is already well established as a hub of the community.**

The Carnegie is **welcoming to all ages**. It is noticeably successful in making older people feel that they are an integral part of what is happening.

A separate Teen Zone within the adult library has its own furniture and books. It is located so that teenagers can use it without feeling that they are being watched by grownups. The zone is quiet study space for teens who do not have this at home.

At the library children can browse and borrow the books they want free of charge. Many parents cannot afford the time or money for trips to distant libraries.

Once children get into reading they will typically read five junior fiction books a week. The prices new vary between £5 and £9 each. Picture books for younger children tend to be even more expensive and they get through larger quantities. Buying new, few families could afford the minimum cost of £25 a week for each child's books.

Some of these books are available second hand in OXFAM for £2 each but the selection is very limited. Amazon is an alternative source of second hand children's books, at a cost of about £2.25 each, but there is no opportunity to browse before purchase. Even second hand the books would be beyond the reach of many families in Herne Hill.

The Carnegie serves an area which is severely deprived when measured on all the usual indicators. An especially shocking example is that a man in Herne Hill Ward can expect his life to be free from disabilities which restrict day-to-day activities for ten years less than a man in the neighbouring council ward in Southwark, Village. Everyone needs a place to visit from time to time to relax from life's stresses. The library is much used for this, including frequent use by a number of people coping with the more or less permanent emotional distress of schizophrenia and autism spectrum disorders. The library is a trusted safe space available all year round free of charge which fulfils the need for a calm public space. Suggestions that the Carnegie needs to be livelier or more exciting during library hours are fundamentally mistaken.

It should be apparent from all the above that the library does a huge amount to promote both

- **health and wellbeing, and**
- **social inclusion**

as a library-based hub funded by Lambeth.

Access to services is facilitated by information from the professional librarians and assistants, all of whom are well-trained and very helpful. Librarians are highly regarded as a

source of information. The only profession more trusted for advice is the medical profession who, incidentally, recommends patients to read up on managing health conditions using the library's Books on Prescription service.

In addition, the library **advances equality** in other ways. A few examples are:

- A wide choice of books is available to browse and borrow free of charge. Everyone thereby has ready access to reading for learning and leisure. Proficiency in reading is indispensable in the 21st Century and proficiency only comes through enjoyable practice.
- Computers and internet access for those who do not have these at home. People need these now that many services are being made available only online, a notorious example being Universal Credit.
- Perhaps even more important is that the library staff are trained in helping individual library users acquire the basic skills of using computers and the internet. The unhurried atmosphere of a library is the ideal setting for learning these skills.

Its unique character means that **the library complements other local venues**. For example it is well suited to Yoga and Pilates but dance and exercise classes employing music with a heavy bass beat causing vibration can be accommodated in Church halls, of which there are several locally.

The redevelopment of the stable block in Ruskin Park will provide the local community with a hot-food cafe and bar.

The library has recently been refitted. Much of the furniture is on castors enabling more flexible use of the spaces during library hours.

The Carnegie only operates as a library for 31 hours a week. We expect the library hours to be extended somewhat to accommodate more library-based groups and individual use. But there will still be considerable periods during which it will remain available for other community activities.

There have been suggestions that if funding were withdrawn it would be possible for local people to run an all-volunteer library service. We endorse the comments made by the Herne Hill Society in their submission dated 1st April in this and other respects. An all-volunteer library would be completely impractical.

Only by having the core of a professionally provided library service are volunteers in a position to augment this by their many hours of service providing the adult literacy clubs, chess club, events and other activities. It should be noted that the volunteers tend to be from near the library but those they are helping are from a much wider area. The Carnegie is not just a local library. That is its core function but it serves a wider area.

Lambeth's budget figures for libraries do not apportion to each individual library all the expenditure incurred in providing the library. However, it is reasonably clear that the cost of the Carnegie in round terms consists of:

Staffing costs	£125,000
Other costs	<u>75,000</u>
Total	£200,000

Rents from the parts of the building not needed for the library and other income can be expected to be 80,000

The net annual cost is therefore about £120,000

This is an almost trivial sum when compared with the benefits which result for the community and its most needy members.

The layout of the building can be described briefly as a main room on the ground floor from which there are doors off to other rooms. The main room is the adults' library. In the basement there are toilets, storage space and a room occupied by the Home Visit Service. On the first floor there is a large room which was originally a lecture theatre. Outside there are gardens maintained by the Friends, including a tranquil Reading and Wildlife Garden created with funds obtained from the Lottery and the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association.

The first floor room is let to a local organisation, Whirled Arts, for hiring out as desk spaces and similar arrangements are being made for a ground floor room not required for the library. These arrangements are a means for local small

enterprises to grow beyond what the entrepreneurs' homes can accommodate. Other space on the ground floor not needed for the library is to be let for educational or other uses compatible with the library.

The building in its present state is well suited to the proposed uses. Some work would however be desirable and the Friends have identified the following:

1. Although the building complies fully with the access requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, the main entrance is accessed by steps. To make the building more welcoming the steps need to be replaced by a structure designed to harmonise with the shape and materials of the building which offers a ramp and steps as alternative means of access.
2. An advanced keypad entry system is needed so that access to the various parts of the building can be properly controlled when staff are not present. This will enable the fullest possible use outside library hours once users' personnel and practices have been thoroughly assessed and the adequacy of their liability insurance has been checked.
3. The basement storage requires some lining to bring it up to current fire safety standards. It can then be brought into use as storage, saving the Council some of the money it is currently paying to hire storage or bringing in storage hire fees.

A Shadow Trust Board has formed and is proposing that the Carnegie become a community hub in which there would not be a library. The financial information so far disclosed by them indicates that they would need to raise a sum in excess of £75,000 a year towards running costs. If, as they seem to be

hinting, there would not be ongoing revenue funding from Lambeth, they would depend for funding on a combination of:

1. Grants from sources other than Lambeth.
2. Profits of a cafe bar and hire fees from community groups using space in the building.

Grant-making bodies will not fund a public library. They expect local authorities to do so. A grant application for revenue funding of a former library building would be bound to fail if the current group activities were continuing. The funders would see that it is effectively still a library. Those activities would have to end. The only community use feasible would be for non-library activities that can currently be accommodated outside library hours.

Even if Lambeth were willing to provide ongoing revenue instead of the grants the current layout of the building would necessitate the cafe bar use being salient and the building would lose its character as a library. This would preclude effective use for its current role of promoting wellbeing and equality. **The Shadow Trust Board's proposals would not provide what is needed.**

The Friends are aware that Lambeth want to dispose of the building on a long lease and we are putting in an initial expression of interest. We do, however, have doubts about an early asset transfer. It seems quite possible that the new government will want to do something worthwhile for libraries despite tight public finances. Another round of Lottery money for local authority owned libraries is a distinct possibility. The previous round provided 100% of project costs in contrast to the maximum of 50% normal for grants to charities.

In any event, any asset transfer should be to a body democratically controlled, either directly by local people or

indirectly through organisations which local people are entitled to join.

This submission by Friends of Carnegie Library has been prepared by their committee. A separate submission in respect of the Archives aspects of the consultation was emailed to you on 15th April.

Yours faithfully,

Jeff Doorn, Chair