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Culture 2020 Consultation,  
London Borough of Lambeth,  
Freepost RSYJ-KJAK-HUTC,  
Room 113,  
Brixton,  
London  
SW2 1RW

1<sup>st</sup> April 2015

Dear Sirs,

### **Culture 2020**

The following comments relate to parts of the Culture 2020 consultation. They represent the views of the Herne Hill Society and the text of this communication has been considered and agreed by the Society's Committee. We shall be making a separate submission on proposals for the future location of Lambeth Archives, as set out in the consultative document.

A very important aspect so far as Herne Hill is concerned is the plan being formulated to replace the Carnegie Library by a different community facility in the same building. We will not have sufficient information to comment on this proposal until long after the closing date for the consultation. In the meantime, we express our concerns about the impact of the Culture 2020 proposals on volunteering, democratic control of community assets and the housebound.

### **Volunteering**

Herne Hill has a strong record of effective voluntary work. Our local parks and library have been greatly improved by their Friends' groups working in cooperation with the Council. Perhaps less fully appreciated, is the magnificent work done by volunteers who coach sports teams in the parks and the 20 volunteers at the adult literacy clubs in the library, who give weekly one-to-one help to adults determined to learn to read.

There are, however, limits to the numbers of volunteers available and the range of skills they possess. The suggestion that our library could be run by volunteers will not be taken up. Only a little thought and arithmetic is needed to show that it would not be feasible. Lambeth require two staff to be on duty at all times. A day's opening would need six volunteer library assistants working overlapping slots of three to four hours each. Opening only four days a week would require 24 of these volunteers. If they did a stint fortnightly and none were ever ill or took a holiday there would have to be 48 of them. More realistically an initial batch of at least 60 would be needed. Sainly people would be needed to roster this large number of volunteers and ensure there were always enough for each slot. In addition, people with appropriate combinations of library, IT and training skills would be needed to train the assistants. The huge voluntary effort required would be too much even for Herne Hill.

A particular concern about the deep cuts proposed is that we are aware of other authorities levying charges on voluntary groups serving their communities. For example, Hackney has been charging children's football clubs £82 each time they use a pitch. The Royal Parks Agency has been charging for merely kicking a ball around on unmarked areas of grass. Volunteer organisers of clubs in parks and libraries should not be burdened with financial worries or the work involved in grant applications and appeals for donations.

### **Democratic Control**

Herne Hill has plenty of people well able to manage buildings or other community assets. Skills are not a problem.

If and when community assets pass from the Council to new owners the new owners must represent and be accountable to the users of the assets through local organisations run on democratic lines. It has been suggested that the library building be transferred to trustees who would not be accountable to anyone. This paternalism belongs in past centuries and we do not need it in Herne Hill. It is appreciated that the Council wants to dispose of the library building and waiting for democratic arrangements to be put in place could cause a delay, especially if the building were not to continue to be a library. But delay to maintain democratic control would be fully justified.




## Home Visit Service

This service is for the housebound and accounts for 5% of all borrowing from Lambeth's libraries. It is of great value to the users. The proposal to terminate it and explore the possibility of digitisation or arrangements with another authority should not be implemented. The proper approach would be to explore any possible alternatives while continuing the service and only make changes when there are grounds to believe that the changed service will meet users' needs.

The service currently operates from a room in the library building and we see no reason why it should be in any way affected by changes in community use of other parts of the building. If the service were not there the room might be let but the rent achievable would be modest bearing in mind that the room is in the basement and faces north.

Yours faithfully,



Laurence Marsh,  
Vice Chair for the Herne Hill Society