

Carnegie Library



Photographs and Information

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Contents

Group Activities	Page 2
Provision for Everyone	Page 6
Need for Professional Staff	Page 9
Finance	Page 10
The Supposed Alternative	Page 12
Criticism of the Library	Page 14
Criticism of the Building	Page 15
Asset Transfer	Page 16
Appendices	
A. Some of the things Public Librarians and Library Staff Do	
B. Herne Hill Society's Culture 2020 submission	
C. The Competing Proposals	

Group Activities

Many of the 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. There have been suggestions recently that it needs to be transformed into a community hub. **The Carnegie is already well established as a hub of the community.**



Group **activities for children** include:

- Weekly Wiggle & 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 how 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.
- Weekly Pilates classes.
- Weekly conversation circle for non-native speakers of English.
- 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.



Provision for Everyone

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.

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.

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.

A common misconception is that library users are passive consumers of the service. They are not. All are engaging their imaginations; many are learning and actively taking part in building a sense of local community. It should also be appreciated that **the Carnegie is not just a local library**. For example, although the 20 volunteers providing one-to-one tuition at the adult literacy clubs are mostly local the students come from a much wider area of Lambeth.

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 Carnegie only operates as a library for 36 hours a week. This leaves plenty of time for additional community activities. South London Cares have now made a regular booking for one afternoon and evening outside library hours. The whole of Sunday, four other evenings and two mornings outside library hours are still available. **Following the recent refurbishment bookshelves and other furnishings are on castors enabling spaces to be cleared or rearranged to suit almost any activity.**

Need for Professional Staff



There is a huge amount of effective volunteering at the Carnegie. As well as the 20 volunteer tutors, there are volunteers who look after the gardens, run the Chess club, bake cakes and put on a monthly tea for the community, lay on several full-day events each year, do most of the publicising of the library and assist the staff in other ways. But all this valuable voluntary work done at the Carnegie should not mislead anyone into thinking that volunteers could run the library.

Volunteers contribute specific skills and, slotted into specific roles, they can successfully supplement the service provided by professional staff. However, volunteers do not possess the range of skills they would need to be able to substitute for librarians. If this is not apparent from "Provision for Everyone" above, readers

may wish to view the comprehensive list attached hereto as Appendix A. **Only professional staff have the necessary combination of wide-ranging knowledge and skills.**

Besides the insurmountable problem of them lacking necessary skills, there are other serious problems with trying to use volunteers. They have many other calls on their time and they are only available on the days and at the times when they can fit the library in. There is also the task of organising the large number of volunteers who would be needed. This is brought out in the Herne Hill Society's Culture 2020 submission, a copy of which is attached as Appendix B. **Only by having the core of a professionally provided library service are volunteers in a position to augment this** by their many hours of willing service.

Finance

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

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

For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that the above figure of £80,000 is calculated from what the current tenants are paying. The Shadow Trust Board, described in "The Supposed Alternative" below, optimistically assumes a substantially higher rental income from the same spaces.

The Culture 2020 proposals include:

- **Cutting the budget for libraries by £800,000 a year**
- **Providing £400,000 a year from investments**

but the connection, if any, between these is not apparent.

The only specific use for the £400,000 mentioned in Lambeth's brochure is literacy development, for which the borough currently has a budget separate from the budget of any library. The detailed proposals on Lambeth's website contemplate money for volunteers wanting to set up libraries but it is not clear whether this would go beyond financing the purchase from Lambeth of fittings and equipment made redundant by library closures.

Adding to the confusion, there have been suggestions that money would not be available to invest to provide the £400,000 a year because it would be needed to cover a deficit in the budget for adult social care.

Closing libraries to save £800,000 a year, let alone £400,000 a year would be madness when set against the valuable services they provide, especially their services to the disadvantaged.

The Supposed Alternative

An unworkable alternative to the current library-based community hub is being promoted by a Shadow Trust Board and **comprises four main proposals:**

- 1. Close the library.**
- 2. Duplicate existing community provision available locally.**
- 3. Remove the building from democratic control.** Please see "Asset Transfer" for details.
- 4. Knock the building about** in ways which will make it less useful to the community and less attractive to tenants. More information is in "Criticism of the Building."

The **Shadow Trust Board** is a band of eight people. At least five are local Labour activists. They are:

- Fred Taggart, former councillor
- Carol Boucher, former councillor
- Stephen Whaley, former council leader
- Helen Schofield, Stephen's partner in life
- Jack Holborn, current councillor

They work in close cooperation with the Cabinet Member, Cllr Jane Edbrooke. Thus the Board far from being simply a group of individuals as claimed on their website is **a campaign within Lambeth Labour intended to close our library** in the face of determined local opposition. The other three members are two unemployed local people, Frances Lamb and Phil Isaacs, and Laura Wirtz, representing London & Quadrant Housing.

Membership of the Board is by invitation only and it does not include any representatives of local organisations, not even the Ward Labour Party.

The Shadow Trust Board and a majority of the members of its predecessor, the Carnegie Project Group, proposed that Lambeth make a gift of the building to the trustees and then take a commercial lease of the part to be occupied as a library, paying a full market rent and service charge! Lambeth would then have gone from receiving rent to paying it. The net yearly cost of the library would have been increased from £120,000 to £310,000. They must have known that Lambeth could not afford this 150% increase. **Closure of the library has always been an essential element of the proposal.** A summary of this proposal is attached as Appendix C.

The Board's proposals assume that if the library closed the building could continue in community use with running costs being funded by charities or other outside bodies. Even if this assumption is correct, the outside bodies would be aware that the Carnegie is a library building. They would refuse to fund learning and literacy activities which are normal library provision because they rightly regard these as the responsibility of the local authority. To have any hope of grants for running costs **the learning and literacy activities would have to be excluded from the building. The silence about future use avoids disclosing that the learning and literacy work done currently would be excluded.**

The Shadow Trust Board and its predecessor have been in existence since 2012 and the Board set up working groups tasked with trying to formulate possible community uses for the building but **the Board has not come up with any community uses.** If the library closes we are left with Church hall type accommodation but there is plenty of that available locally at Herne Hill United Church and St Saviour's, both of which are only a few minutes' walk from the library. **There is so little demand** for this type of hall that a large one at the United Church can be hired for a whole evening, including use of the kitchen, for a mere £25.

Criticism of the Library

Some of the eight individuals who call themselves the Shadow Trust Board have put a great deal of effort into criticising the continuing existence of the library. **Their criticisms are vaguely expressed but seem to come down to alleging that the library:**

- 1. Is little used and its work is not worthwhile.**
- 2. Prevents use of the building for-non library purposes.**
- 3. Is not a hub of the local community.**
- 4. Is used by many people from outside Lambeth.**

From the foregoing it should be crystal clear that there is no truth in 1, 2 or 3 but 4 calls for further comment.

The most recent comprehensive review of its library service by Lambeth was the Libraries Commission in 2011. The information published at that time included a map of Lambeth indicating by colouring where in borough the users of Lambeth's libraries reside. The more users of Lambeth libraries living in an area the darker it was coloured. There was a broad white band round the inside of the borough boundary reflecting the fact that residents preferred to use libraries in other boroughs whenever possible. The sole exception was Herne Hill. In other words, **Herne Hill is the one area near another borough where Lambeth does not freeload to the extent of having that borough provide all the area's library service.**

When the critics say that many users of the library are not Lambeth residents they obviously mean that those people reside in Southwark. However, Southwark has an excellent library service, with 60,000 volume libraries in Dulwich and Peckham and neighbourhood libraries of similar size to the Carnegie in Camberwell and Grove Vale. **The Southwark users of the Carnegie are from the area immediately adjoining Lambeth and make up a substantial proportion of the volunteers.**

Criticism of the Building

The same eight critics allege that the building requires extensive internal structural works to provide suitable accommodation for community use and renting out. The argument seems to be that the Carnegie is a traditional library building designed 110 years ago and little altered since. We are asked to infer from this that the building is not suitable for current or proposed uses. There is nothing in that roundabout argument. **Whether or not the building needs major alterations is a question to be answered by comparing the current accommodation with the purposes for which it is needed.**

There is nothing wrong with traditional libraries. Southwark have built two new ones in the past fifteen years, at Peckham and Canada Water. The only significant problem with these libraries is that they get very crowded. Southwark are now building a third one, at Camberwell Green. Especially now that the refurbishment has made the use of spaces more flexible, **the Carnegie is well suited to library and other community uses.**

The building suits the current tenants, Whirled Studios, who particularly value their accommodation being well-lit by natural light. It also has accommodation attractive to tenants for a range of other uses.

The critics propose extensive work costing at least £4 million but this would not provide significant extra space for community use and the changes in lettable areas would generate a return of 1% per annum or less. They would never get funding for it. A detailed review of the proposals is on the Friends' website at friendsofcarnegielibrary.org.uk/2015/01/communication-from-the-chair-of-the-friends-to-all-members/

and we will be happy to provide paper copies on request.

Asset Transfer

The Friends are keen to see the main entrance to the building made more welcoming. The basement needs lining so that it can be brought into use as storage and the exterior of the building would benefit from a "wash and brush up." The last round of Lottery funding for public libraries provided 100% of the local authorities' expenditure and we are hopeful that there will be further rounds on the same terms. In contrast, Lottery funding for charities never exceeds 50% of expenditure. **Premature transfer could therefore mean losing out on substantial funding.**

At present day-to-day management of the building is done very satisfactorily by the library manager. There is an excellent working relationship between her and the groups and individuals who use the building. They have the opportunity to make their views known and discuss anything of interest. The Friends naturally want these arrangements to continue.

As Lambeth appear to be keen on an asset transfer the Friends are arranging to put the current arrangements on a more formal basis to produce a representative body which can then receive a transfer of the building and its grounds. Except as above mentioned, the Friends do not have any strong views for or against a transfer but **any transfer must be to a body which is genuinely representative of the building's users and local people.** The body we expect to be formed at the Friends' instigation would be suitable. **Several user groups have agreed to join a Carnegie Users' Consultative Council and the rest are expected to join shortly.**

There are eight individuals who have formed themselves into a Shadow Trust Board. They are promoting a plan to transfer the building to trustees who would be completely independent of any

democratic control by local people, Lambeth or anyone else. So far as we can make out this proposal has the backing of Cllr Edbrooke. The excuse made for this paternalism is that people suitably qualified to manage the building might not be available locally. In fact there are local people with the necessary skills in abundance. We have people locally to take charge of the building and be fully accountable to the local community. **The current outrageous proposal to remove all democratic control should be firmly rejected.**

Friends of

