

Friends of Carnegie Library Bulletin

December 2015

Flourishing but Threatened.

Lambeth will close our library and four others unless we stop them by taking action now.

(Visits are up 50% and Borrowing is up a magnificent 25% when borrowing is down at nearly every library in the country.¹)

Lambeth plan to end funding for these libraries on 31st March. This is part of a wider plan of cuts to libraries, parks and sports facilities called "Culture 2020."²

Carnegie Library is thriving as a hub of the local community. So many groups use it that the manager has difficulty fitting them all in during the 36 hours a week the library opens. For details of the many activities on offer please see under Events on our website www.friendsofcarnegielibrary.org.uk.

To accommodate even more activities the Friends have offered to help establish and run a panel of suitably vetted and trained volunteers, backed by the Friends' liability insurance, who will be able to open the library for use by groups outside library hours.

A particular strength of the library is its **healthy living activities** comprising yoga twice weekly, Pilates, gardening, a good range of books including "Books on Prescription" recommended by local GPs and help from the friendly staff in finding information on the web and elsewhere.

Wasting Millions

Lambeth has two separate plans for rent-free lettings of the Carnegie Library building from 1st April. One is to hand it to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), which runs most of the Council's Leisure Centres.³ The other is to hand it over to the Shadow Trust Board (STB) who appear to be, in effect, Lambeth by another name.⁴ **In either case, the recipient would have to find uses for the building.** GLL originally proposed a gym but this may have been abandoned.⁵ The STB suggest that some of the existing activities could continue provided they were not combined with a library.⁶

GLL would receive two other libraries as well. The total cost of all three as libraries is less than £500,000 a year.⁷ GLL would close them

for most of a year and carry out building works for which **Lambeth has budgeted £3 million.**⁸ The running costs would then be subsidised over the next two years by profits from the leisure centres **plus a further £1 million** from Lambeth.⁹ In other words, **Lambeth plan to spend in three years sums equal to the cost of keeping the libraries open for eight years.**

Lambeth would then require these gyms/non-gyms to break even in their second year of operation (**2018/19**),¹⁰ which includes the next Council elections. Given the previous level of subsidy, it seems unlikely that the buildings would break even. As part of Culture 2020, Lambeth announced an intention to sell other library buildings. **There are therefore grounds to fear** that once the 2018 election was over all public use of the building would end and **the Carnegie would be sold for redevelopment.**¹¹

The STB do not plan building work in the immediate future¹² and have not disclosed any financial information but they would presumably need a similar level of subsidy for the running costs. **Again, there is the danger of the building being sold.**

Ways with Words

Neither GLL nor the STB are offering to set aside a room or even part of a room for use as a library.¹³ The GLL proposal is that the gym/non-gym would include a lounge. In this lounge there would be "a small selection of books,"¹⁴ computers and Wi-Fi access¹⁵. Lambeth call this provision a "Neighbourhood Library" even though they know that it is not a library of any kind. They call the gym/non-gym a "Healthy Living Centre"¹⁶ and the STB' whatever-it-might-be a "Community Hub."¹⁷

The Wider Picture¹⁸

Lambeth currently has ten libraries. Carnegie is one of five it plans to close on 31st March. Another two are being kept open temporarily which leaves only three libraries with a reasonably secure future: Brixton, Clapham and Streatham. Both Brixton and Streatham are operating at capacity. Additional users would mean crowds and staff too busy to provide a proper service.

Carnegie Library is Indispensable

Everyone locally needs Carnegie Library but some of us perhaps need it more than others. A few examples are:

Families with children. Carnegie has the third busiest children's library in Lambeth. We cannot expect parents with young children and buggies in tow to travel to Brixton only to have to cope with a hopelessly overcrowded library when they get there. Once children really get into reading they

typically read five junior fiction books a week. Buying these is beyond the means of most families with children.¹⁹

Autistic young people. Groups from Michael Tippet School visit two or three times a week. They can cope with the calm character of our library. There is nowhere else for them to go.

Elderly local residents. Our library has an exceptionally large proportion of older users, many of whom are lonely. At Carnegie they are welcomed and valued, and the staff find time for them. One in twelve of all users of the Carnegie has mobility issues. The crowds at Brixton would be too much for them even if they could get there.

Adults who cannot read. For more than 40 years the adult literacy clubs have enabled adults to learn to read in a friendly atmosphere as far removed as possible from the schools where they felt they were failures. The students come from all over Lambeth but the volunteers who provide one-to-one tuition are mostly local.

People who find computers a struggle. The friendly staff are often able to help and there is a Silver Surfers group for older users to develop their skills.

Volunteers

Volunteers work almost as many hours for the library as the paid staff.²⁰ This is only possible because the library is run by professionals with the wide range of skills needed to make it a success.

Help to Save our Library

If you have not visited the library recently, please visit and see for yourself how beautiful it is, especially now that it has been sympathetically furnished, and what is on offer. Besides lots of activities there is a really good choice of books to suit all tastes. If you are not a member already, please bring proof of your address so that you can join. You do not have to be resident in Lambeth and there is no charge for joining, borrowing books or using the computers or Wi-Fi.

The **opening hours** are Monday 1pm to 8pm, Wednesday 10am to 6pm, Thursday 1pm to 6pm, Friday 10am to 6pm and Saturday 9am to 5pm.

Please write to Herne Hill Ward councillors: Jim Dickson (JDickson@lambeth.gov.uk) Michelle Agdomar (MAGdomar @lambeth.gov.uk) and Jack Holborn (JHolborn@lambeth.gov.uk).

Include whatever occurs to you that you think appropriate. Telling them why you personally value Carnegie Library could be especially useful. In any event you are entitled to demand that they listen to local people,

especially library users, and keep the Carnegie open as a professionally-staffed library instead of spending a fortune on closing it.

Our MP Helen Hayes (helen.hayes.mp@parliament.uk) is supportive but has accepted some of Lambeth's spin as a substitute for the facts. Please copy her in.

Join the Friends. There are forms in the library. The minimum fee is £1 and if you join now your membership does not need to be renewed until 31st March 2017.

Keep up-to-date. Visit the Friends website and subscribe for updates. www.friendsofcarnegielibrary.org.uk

Working for a Solution

The amounts of the cuts to the Libraries' budget are £458,000 in each of the next two years plus a further £350,000 a year thereafter.²¹ The management of the library service are confident that they can cover these modest amounts and keep all ten libraries open and fully-staffed. They propose setting up a mutual organisation owned one-third by staff and two-thirds by library users which would take leases of the library buildings and run the service.²²

Lambeth have given the management until 1st January to work up the proposal fully. Friends of Carnegie Library are supporting this work. So too are the Friends groups of other Lambeth libraries and UNISON, which represents the staff.

¹ Lambeth Libraries and Archives Cumulative Statistics April to October 2015 compared with the same period in the previous year. The figures have been rounded from 51.01% and 24.14%

² This report is referred to hereafter simply as Report and the page numbers used are those of the copy of the Report on the web at www.lambeth.gov.uk/culture2020

³ Report page

⁴ Cllr Dickson's amendment on page 8 of the minutes of the Cabinet Meeting on 12 October 2015. The minutes are available by following the link to Cabinet Meeting held on Monday 12 October 2015 from www.lambeth.gov.uk/culture2020. "A Future for Carnegie Library" at carnegiehernehill.org.uk

The structure of what is referred to in this bulletin as the STB consists of:

1. A Steering Group recognised by Lambeth and apparently appointed by them. In an email to Stephen Carlill dated 1st December 2014 the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods, Cllr Jane Edbrooke, referred to Fred Taggart, Carol Boucher and Frances Lamb as the steering group for Carnegie. Stephen emailed back the same day saying the Friends were not previously aware of the existence of a steering group. He asked who appointed them and when but never received a reply. Both Mr Taggart and Ms Boucher are former Labour councillors.
2. A Shadow Trust Board comprising the members of the Steering Group plus Steve Whaley, Helen Schofield, Jack Holborn and Phil Isaac. Mr Whaley is a former councillor and Council Leader, Ms Schofield is Whaley's partner in life and Mr Holborn is a current

councillor. Thus at least five of the seven members are Lambeth Labour activists. Membership is by invitation only and in the event of a disagreement the majority can expel the minority (Shadow Trust Memorandum of Understanding available at carnegiehernehill.org.uk/project-documents/)

3. Carnegie Community Trust which the members of the Shadow Trust Board, minus Messrs Whaley and Holborn, have set up with themselves as the trustees and persons entitled to appoint future trustees. This is expected to completely supersede the Shadow Trust Board but it is unclear whether it has done so yet.

⁵ Page 7 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – SECOND DESPATCH – RESPONSE TO CULTURE 2020 available at modern.gov.lambeth.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=113&MIId=9619

⁶ "Preferred Option" on carnegiehernehill.org.uk

⁷ Libraries Budget Comparison 2014/15

⁸ Report page 58

⁹ Report page 54 paragraph 12.4

¹⁰ "Assessment: **Greenwich Leisure Limited: Trust and Healthy Living Centre proposals**

Dates: 15th September 2015

24th September 2015

27th September 2015

Assessment officer: John Kerridge

Summary

Strength: GLL core business model and governance established and strong with good track record in Lambeth, as well as other

parts of the UK. Business is stable and able to absorb risk over the transitional period. GLL are able to facilitate

investment towards the proposals in both revenue and capital terms. This investment could include up to £3m capital and

a one off £1m to support the transitional period. The building based approach may not require additional revenue

funding from the council. This proposal does not seek management of the library service, which underpins the councils

desire to maintain the library service as an in-house service.

Weakness: Length of time buildings may need to close to undertake refurbishment work. Potential risk during the transitional period,

if the model does not generate sufficient revenue by 2018-19.

Opportunities: Increased alignment to the leisure contract, which creates opportunity to manage the risk during the transitional period

across the larger contract and portfolio of buildings. Potential to share costs, generate savings through greater

efficiencies and prevent deeper cuts at point of delivering services. Increased investment, diversify usage of buildings

and reduce risk of buildings closing. Opportunity to explore and develop a future cost neutral option if this model works,

which will help safeguard against further reductions and cuts in public funding.

Threats: Policy environment, if further cuts are required. There remains the threat of legal challenge to the library proposals, which

could result in delays. There may be restrictions around the redevelopment of buildings given planning requirements,

which could include listed buildings consent. The reduction of library service space within the 3 buildings will need good

mitigations.

Next Steps: LBL will need to create the policy framework to enable further development of this proposal."

¹¹ As originally formulated the Culture 2020 proposals included early sales of Waterloo and Minet Libraries in the open market but neither of these is ripe for sale. According to people who know the area well, Waterloo is subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order in favour of Network Rail. Windows of buildings either side of Minet Library face onto the Minet site and the rights to light severely limit development on the site without first acquiring the neighbouring properties. Lambeth relies on property sales for much of its capital expenditure and libraries are some of the few buildings it has not yet sold.

¹² They say that they plan extensive work but this would be dependent on obtaining finance from grant-making bodies. carnegiehernehill.org.uk

¹³ The STB had a number of options which included space set aside for library use but these are not being pursued. The Preferred Option refers to a 21st Century library service and an Enterprise Library, mentioning Carnegie UK Trust in the latter connection. However, such an Enterprise Library is a staffed public library and not what the STB propose www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2014/beyond-books-the-role-of-enterprising-libraries-in

¹⁴ Report page 154

¹⁵ Report page 30 paragraphs 5.21 and 5.22

¹⁶ Report page 45 paragraph 7.9

¹⁷ Report page 33 paragraph 5.35

¹⁸ Report pages 28 to 34 paragraphs 5.12 to 5.40

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ For example Ruskin Readers who run the adult literacy clubs typically have 20 or so volunteers putting in an average of about two hours a week. Similarly, the Friends lay on a monthly tea stall with home-baked cakes, normally put on four or more full-day events each year, publicise the library and raise funds. The hours mount up.

²¹ Report pages

²² City of York Libraries are run on these lines. County of Suffolk Libraries have a similar arrangement and others are being set up around the country.