

Spin or Worse?

The following table sets out assertions made by the Herne Hill Councillors in their circular dated August 2015, which are shown in this typeface, and in their recent standard email, **which are shown in this typeface**. For each assertion we set out the reality and source of information when this is not obvious.

Councillors' Assertion	The Reality
The "context [is] a cut of more than 50% in the Council's budget...with more cuts to come"	Lambeth plans to spend £3 million altering the Carnegie's and two library buildings from libraries ¹ and, after closing them for the best part of a year, to subsidise them over the next two years by an undisclosed amount of profits from Council leisure centres topped up by £1 million from Lambeth's revenue reserve ² . The proposed cost of keeping the three libraries as libraries is about £400,000 a year ³ . In other words, Lambeth plan to spend at least ten times as much as they would if the three libraries continued to be libraries. Far from being a consequence of the cuts the plan aggravates the cuts by taking money which is needed for other purposes.
"The library service has had to take some difficult decisions."	This is where the cuts become relevant. Lambeth's library service, both management and staff, have done a magnificent job in bearing a disproportionate share of the cuts. Staff numbers have been reduced from 120 to 80 ⁴ with little reduction in service quality overall and the Carnegie is flourishing. December was yet another record month for both loans and visitor numbers at our library ⁵ . The "50%" is a gross exaggeration. One of the Council's income streams has been halved but others are increasing. In particular the share of Business Rates Councils are allowed to keep is being doubled ⁶ .
The ward councillors	Under Lambeth's plan there would not be

<p>are "determined to...protect the library as far as possible... Lambeth's plans secure the future of the Carnegie as a library...The alternative is...closing the library completely."</p>	<p>a room or even part of a room set aside for use as a library⁷. The plan requires the building to break even by the end of the 2018/19 financial year, that is, after being open about two years⁸. Given the proposed level of subsidy, this seems almost impossible. Instead of securing the future of the library the plan closes it and then more or less guarantees that the building will cease to have any other public use by 31st March 2019.</p>
<p>There will be "full or partial closure for works to be done to the building."</p>	<p>Lambeth are perfectly clear that the whole building will be closed during the building work⁹. Their estimate of the duration, nine months from 1st April, seems wildly optimistic. We are promised floor plans by the end of January. The necessary Listed Building consents and building contract would take time to be put in place and the builder would be free to do the work whenever it suited the builder¹⁰. But even if the closure were only for nine months this could be expected to kill off all the groups which use the library.</p>
<p>Carnegie Library [is] to stay open - perhaps relocated within ... [the] building.</p>	<p>Under Lambeth's plans there would not be any space allocated for library use, merely a library service of some sort "on site"¹¹."</p>
<p>There would still be "all the things we need to provide a decent quality offer i.e. book stock, computers, desk space,"</p>	<p>There would be "a small selection of books" in a lounge or other room used for non-library purposes plus computers¹². This would be instead of the Children's Library, Teen Zone and Adult Library, with a combined total of 20,000 books, which we have at present. As at present, there would be desk spaces to hire but there is no proposal to replace the quiet study spaces we currently have available for use free of charge.</p>
<p>There would still be "community and inclusion events."</p>	<p>Most language and literacy groups and events, plus some others, are currently accommodated free of charge. If Lambeth's plan goes ahead, funding for</p>

	<p>the library would be withdrawn and hire fees to cover staffing etc would have to be charged. Most of the groups could not afford these.</p>
<p>There won't be librarians permanently based there but there will be staff to assist the public.</p>	<p>We are told that librarians will visit "regularly" but whether this means once a week or at longer intervals we are not told.</p> <p>How often there will be staff in buildings and whether there will be any regular pattern to when they will be present is not known to the Friends or, so far as we can we can make out, anyone else. The original plan was for a budget gym and such gyms are unstaffed most of the time. Entry is gained by inserting a gym membership card in a slot.</p>
<p>"As long as the building is open residents will be able to use the library...The number of hours the...library is open will increase from the current 31 hours a week."</p>	<p>Under 16s could not use the building unaccompanied unless there were arrangements to comply with Lambeth's Safeguarding Policies and there is no sign of this being done.</p> <p>The library is currently open 36 hours a week and it is very intensively used during this time. The rate at which books are lent is 37 an hour, which compares favourably with the rate of 42 an hour at Brixton, which is much larger and has more staff than Carnegie¹³.</p> <p>So many groups use the Carnegie during library hours that the manager struggles to fit them all in. The library spaces are already available for use by groups outside library hours but most local groups cannot afford the hire fees, which include the cost of staffing. The Friends have proposed setting up a panel of suitably vetted and trained volunteers, backed by the Friends' liability insurance, to open the library spaces for use by groups who cannot afford to pay for staffing.</p>
<p>"[S]o what we have going forward is almost as good (albeit I accept not the same) as what we have now.</p>	<p>See above.</p> <p>By restricting group use to those who can pay Lambeth's plan excludes the people most in need of a library, such as the students in the adult literacy clubs.</p>

	<p>Teenagers are the section of the community who most need encouragement to use libraries to develop literacy and other skills but it seems that they also would be excluded.</p>
<p>The building is "currently less than half used"</p>	<p>This is untrue. The current uses of the building are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The local library. 2. The Home Visit Service, which provides a library service to the housebound. 3. Central services for all of Lambeth's libraries. 4. Desk spaces for artists and others. <p>The only unused spaces are an enclosed undercroft and a small room behind the boiler room. The undercroft needs a lining to bring it up to modern fire safety standards. It could then be let as storage for about £5,000 a year. There does not appear to be a worthwhile use for the small room. It contained an oil store in the days when the library's heating was oil fired. Following the recent staff reductions some space allocated for central services can be let.</p>
<p>"They have been working... for some time."</p>	<p>Indeed they have. They and their predecessors have been working since 2012.</p>
<p>They "have [done a] large amount of work teeing up future investment in the building"</p>	<p>But they have not yet come up with a single penny of funding except for the sums, in excess of £50,000, that Lambeth has given them.</p>
<p>They have also done a large amount of work</p>	<p>However, all they have come up with is hiring space out in competition with local</p>

<p>with a view to "identifying viable uses."</p>	<p>church halls¹⁴. There is no money in that. The large hall at Herne Hill United Church a few minutes up the road can be hired for a whole evening for £25, including use of the kitchen.</p>
<p>"The next step is that the Lambeth Cultural Trust (run by GLL the council's leisure services provider) take the lease until the Carnegie Trust are able to take it over. We need them to do some practical and managerial work to ready the building for the other uses"</p>	<p>Having a separate "Lambeth Cultural Trust" within GLL is an attempt by Lambeth to sidle round the legal requirements for tendering before incurring large expenditure, while allowing the Carnegie and other two operations to become insolvent without affecting GLL. Lambeth argue that they can spend millions of pounds without any tendering process because the expenditure is inside GLL which has an existing relationship with the Council. At the same time, however, they insist that the three operations are separate from GLL for accounting purposes and that they could therefore terminate the leases when the operations do not break even by 31st March 2019. The "practical and managerial work" is alterations to the building which would inevitably make it less attractive and reduce its income generating potential.</p>
<p>"GLL have experience across a range of culture and leisure areas (including libraries)"</p>	<p>GLL run leisure centres for local authorities. They have a separate division which runs public libraries but that is not involved in Lambeth. Lambeth insist that their libraries remain in-house because this is a matter of "labour values"¹⁵</p>
<p>GLL "are there to do the bidding of the Carnegie Trust in preparing the building for the expanded range of uses we will be seeing alongside the library."</p>	<p>GLL's relationship with Lambeth is very profitable. Both they and the "Carnegie Trust" can be expected to do whatever Lambeth want. There would not be a library¹⁶.</p>
<p>"This [provision] will supplement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 main town centre libraries (in 	<p>Brixton and Streatham are libraries but they are working near to capacity¹⁷ and could not cope with additional users following closure of other libraries. The use of the Clapham facility,</p>

<p>Brixton, Streatham, Clapham, West Norwood and North Lambeth)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 other neighbourhood libraries (South Lambeth and Minet) and • a new Waterloo library." 	<p>otherwise known as Clapham One Community Hub, constantly diminishes¹⁸. Lambeth claims that it is a library but this is open to doubt because it is a multi-purpose building without, for example, any quiet spaces for studying. Outline planning permission has been granted for a multi-screen cinema, bar and restaurant on the site of West Norwood Library. It is not clear that this will include space set aside for a library. "North Lambeth" captures the vagueness of the proposals for library service in the north of the borough. "Neighbourhood Library" is Lambeth's term for what they propose for the Carnegie, which is not a library of any kind. The new Waterloo Library is a classroom not needed for use as a classroom for the next three years. Lambeth does not have any definite plans for what will happen in three years time.</p>
<p>Lambeth will grant "a long lease on the building to the Carnegie Trust. This would make it much harder for the Council to close or sell the library building in future; it would effectively be ring-fenced, and not dependent upon the Council for its funding."</p>	<p>In other words, Lambeth will grant a lease entitling Lambeth to take back and sell the building when, in the absence of Council funding, the Carnegie Trust's finances inevitably do not work out.</p>
<p>Our aim is to turn Carnegie into a cultural hub with a library at its centre"</p>	<p>The plan is to turn the Carnegie into something which is not a library and can be expected to fail financially. When it fails we can expect to be told that Lambeth did what it could to keep the building in public use. That would not be true. A much cheaper alternative is to keep it as a public library. Lambeth would only gain financially from its present plan if the building is sold and we may therefore reasonably suspect</p>

	that they are intent on selling the building.
--	---

¹ Lambeth's Culture 2020 Report page 58. This Report is available at www.lambeth.gov.uk/culture2020 and is referred to in the subsequent notes simply as "Report."

² Report page 54 paragraph 12.4

³ Libraries Budget Comparison 2014/15 updated from the proposal for a staff and community mutual available at www.defendthe10-lambeth.org.uk

⁴ Information from UNISON

⁵ Lambeth Libraries and Archives Statistics December 2015

⁶ www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8095

⁷ See our website posting on November 2, 2015

⁸ Council Officer's Assessment reproduced as note 10 to our December Bulletin

⁹ Report page 46 paragraph 7.13

¹⁰ As the gym/non-gym is not expected to make a profit it would not as a matter of law be possible to include in the building contract enforceable penalties for late completion.

¹¹ Shadow Trust Board Memorandum of Understanding, October 2014 clause 1.6

¹² See our website posting on November 2, 2015

¹³ Lambeth Libraries and Archives Statistics December 2015

¹⁴ Preferred Option on carnegiehernehill.org.uk

¹⁵ Statement by Cllr Jane Edbrooke, the relevant Lambeth Cabinet Member to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10th November 2015. The reason for keeping library services in-house is stated differently in the official minutes available at modern.gov.lambeth.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=113&MId=9619

¹⁶ See our website posting on November 2, 2015

¹⁷ Information from users of those libraries and UNISON

¹⁸ Lambeth Libraries and Archives Statistics December 2015 and earlier months