

February 2016 Bulletin

Latest News

Congratulations to the management and staff of Lambeth's library service for coping so well with the **recent cuts, including a reduction in staff from 120 to 80¹**.

Despite the resulting strains a good service continues and our own library had another record month for both visits and borrowing in December². This should make us all the more determined to resist Lambeth's plan to close the Carnegie and four other libraries on 31st March. Libraries have already borne a grossly disproportionate share of the cuts.

Many thanks to everyone who wrote to councillors in support of keeping the library, especially those who wrote repeatedly. **The key thing which has emerged is that Lambeth's plans as recorded in the official Council documents are very different from what the local councillors are writing.** A long list of the councillors' spin and the corresponding truths, mostly taken from those official documents, is on our website www.friendsofcarnegielibrary.org.uk

With the support of the staff and their union, UNISON, the management of the library service has made a detailed proposal to Lambeth for a Staff and Community Mutual which will enable all libraries to stay open, even after the further cuts to the budget for libraries planned by Lambeth.

Dulwich and West Norwood Constituency Labour Party, and Herne Hill and Thurlow Park Ward Labour Parties have now passed motions asking Lambeth to keep all of Lambeth's ten libraries open and urged Lambeth to concentrate resources on developing the Mutual.

Please make a note to come to our rally at the library at 2pm on Saturday 6th February.

Details are on the back page.

An excellent short film about the library and the needs it serves has been made by Kaatje Jones and is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrsTC3lKoOo> (n.b. the character after the "3" is an "l" not a "1")

Lambeth's plans have moved on since the film was made. Lambeth appear to be shifting away from the gyms idea but the Carnegie and two other library buildings would still be handed over to the same company, GLL, and **there still would not be a room, or even a part of a room, set aside for library use.** GLL would be left to try to find uses for the buildings.

The Shadow Trust Board and GLL

The Shadow Trust Board now appears to have been replaced by the Carnegie Community Trust CIO. This has five trustees. Two of these have been appointed for two years. The remaining three have been appointed for three years and will be able to reappoint themselves or appoint replacements³. The three are two former Labour councillors and the partner in life of another former Labour councillor. There is no provision for any community input. It is effectively Lambeth by another name.

Lambeth plan to hand the Carnegie and two other library buildings to GLL, which runs most of the council's leisure centres. GLL's relationship with Lambeth is very lucrative. They can be relied on to do whatever Lambeth asks and it is not therefore immediately obvious that Lambeth needs the Trust. The answer seems to be that Lambeth are trying to persuade local people that the Trust is "community-led"⁴ and will be consulted on decisions about the building. In reality, **Lambeth would have complete control throughout and are not proposing any community involvement.**



Do libraries really cost money?

So far as anyone seems to have been able to ascertain, public libraries do not have any effect on local authority finances overall because their work helps reduce expenditure on other services. A couple of examples should make this clear:

- The Rhymes and Stories for the Under 5s prepare children to make the most of school and minimise the number of children needing expensive remedial help: www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-35070985
- Postponing only a few people's need for adult social care saves a fortune. Social isolation is worse for health than just about anything else: www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/threat-to-health/. The Carnegie has many elderly users who walk round to the library regularly because they know they will always be welcome.

What are Lambeth up to?

As stated by Lambeth, the plan to convert Carnegie and two other libraries into gyms/non-gyms does not make any financial sense.

Lambeth have budgeted £3 million for the building work⁵ and £1 million to subsidise running costs up to 31st March 2019⁶. The latter sum is a refund from GLL out of its profits on leisure centres and GLL have promised further subsidy from the same source, though the amount has not been disclosed⁷. £4 million would keep the libraries running as libraries for about ten years⁸.

The most common suggestion about Lambeth's motives is that they are intent on selling the buildings but need to defuse public opposition to the sale of buildings donated for use as libraries. This seems plausible because **selling the buildings is the only way the finances work out to Lambeth's advantage.** The buildings would be transferred to GLL on leases entitling Lambeth to take buildings back if the buildings were still losing money in March 2019. We can be pretty certain they would still be loss-making, given the previous level of subsidy. A possibly relevant consideration is that the next council elections are due in May 2018.

Making full use of the building

The Herne Hill ward councillors have been writing that the building is half empty⁹. This is untrue. The public library spaces are very fully used during the 36 hours a week that the library operates. The Friends have proposed that a panel of suitably vetted and trained volunteers, backed by the Friends' liability insurance, be established to open the library spaces for use by local groups outside library hours. Book cases and other furniture is on castors so the spaces can be arranged however users want.

The accommodation not used for the library is used by a combination of:

- The Library Home Visit Service, which provides a library service to the housebound throughout Lambeth.
- Central services provided to all the borough's libraries.
- Lettings to provide work spaces for artists and small businesses.

Following the recent staff reductions more space is available for letting. There is also an enclosed undercroft which could profitably be brought into use as storage.

The building more than pays for itself and the surplus defrays part of the cost of our library.

Next Steps

Saturday February 6th is National Libraries Day and there will be activities in the library to celebrate this, as well as the regular Chess Club and the Friends' monthly tea stall with delicious home-made cakes. At 2pm the Friends will be holding a rally at the Carnegie in support of our own and other libraries, which should help generate publicity for the campaign. Please come along if you possibly can.

Please take opportunities to counter Lambeth's Spin when chatting to other local people. Key points to make are:

1. Lambeth's pleas of poverty are over done and their plans would not save any money. Instead they would cost millions of pounds.
2. The building is well used and more than pays for itself. It would generate more revenue if Lambeth cooperated with the Friends.
3. The library is a hub of the community where everyone is welcomed and respected. It is especially valuable to the less mobile, such as parents with small children and buggies in tow and the elderly with limited mobility.
4. There are excellent selections of books for adults, teens and children plus a wide range of activities.
5. **We are able to save the library. Councillors realise they have a fight on their hands.** They would not be delivering leaflets or knocking on doors two years before the next election unless they felt a strong need to justify their plans.

If you are a Lambeth resident, and even if you have written previously, please write to councillors complaining about their proposal to waste millions and urging them to support the Staff and Community Mutual instead. A similar scheme is successfully operating in York already. The councillors for Herne Hill Ward are:

Michelle Agdomar, MAgdomar@lambeth.gov.uk
Jim Dickson, jdickson@lambeth.gov.uk
Jack Holborn, JHolborn@lambeth.gov.uk

Those for Thurlow Park are:

Anna Birley, ABirley@lambeth.gov.uk
Fred Cowell, FCowell@lambeth.gov.uk
Max Deckers Dowber, MDeckersDowber@lambeth.gov.uk

Please copy in your MP, Helen Hayes, to give her an idea of the strong opposition to Lambeth's plans. She is broadly sympathetic to our campaign. helen.hayes.mp@parliament.uk (She asks that you include your address so that she can check you are a constituent)

¹ Information from UNISON

² Lambeth Libraries and Archives Statistics December 2015

³ The Carnegie Herne Hill Community Trust CIO Constitution clauses 9(4) and 10.

⁴ Herne Hill Ward councillors' circular "Securing the Future for Carnegie Library" August 2015.

⁵Lambeth's Culture 2020 Report page 58. This Report is available at <http://modern.gov.lambeth.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=225&MIId=9359> and is referred to in the subsequent notes simply as "Report."

⁶Report page 54 paragraph 12.4

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Libraries Budget Comparison 2014/15 updated from the proposal for a staff and community mutual available at www.defendthe10-lambeth.org.uk

⁹ Emails from Herne Hill ward councillors to constituents January 2016