

Letter on Carnegie Library from Village Ward, Dulwich and West Norwood CLP

Dear Lib,

Members of the Village Ward Labour Party are seriously concerned about what is happening with the Carnegie library and discussed the situation at our May meeting. We resolved to send this letter to you to seek clarification of the matters we had discussed, in preparation for a further discussion at our meeting in July. Below is a summary of our concerns and specific questions, which have been numbered and placed in bold for ease of reference.

We would be very grateful if we could have your answers to these questions by Friday 17th June, in time for circulation prior to our 7th July meeting.

The leaflet recently delivered to homes in Herne Hill Ward, "Update on the Carnegie," is completely definite that the building will reopen to the public early next year, which we take to mean by June at the latest. However, the same leaflet is vague about the timing of a planning application and other aspects of excavating the basement to accommodate a gym. It therefore seems to be implied that the ground floor will reopen to the public before the gym is ready.

1. What work to the building will be carried out before the ground floor reopens?

Members were particularly concerned that the library was closed during the time they were campaigning for the Mayoral and Assembly elections and, apparently, before proper plans were available and in the absence of planning permission to carry out any such plans. The closure was raised frequently on the doorstep. We gather that the staff who were employed at the library are still employed by Lambeth and Lambeth is paying for 24 hour security for the building. We are informed that the Home Visit Service, providing books to the housebound, and 20 small businesses, paying £175 a month each for desk spaces, have been locked out. Furthermore, it has been reported in the Guardian newspaper on 22 May that between 31st March and 15 April the council spent £35,392.68 on security for the Carnegie and Minet libraries. Although the security costs were increased due to the occupation of the Carnegie, the security costs at Minet have averaged £677 a day over the 16-day period which is almost double the £386 daily running costs in 2014-15. So the closure appears to be proving expensive.

2. What advance assessments of the cost of closing the libraries did Lambeth carry out, and at

what point did the council become aware that the costs would be as incurred? For how long is it foreseen that security will be maintained, and at what cost?

3. Why did Lambeth choose to close the library during the election campaign, before proper plans or the necessary planning permission were available?

Three things needed for a library are books, accommodation and staff. We are confused about each of these elements. We understand that the closure follows on from a consultation in very general terms with the title Culture 2020 and the Council's subsequent approval of a Report with the same title. The Report indicates that the borough will continue to have as much stock as before but the Carnegie Library building will have only a "neighbourhood library" offering "a small selection of books." The brochure which preceded the consultation mentioned the library service at the Railway Tea Rooms in Streatham Vale as an example of a successful neighbourhood library which already exists. Your statistics for the year to 31st March 2016 disclose that Carnegie Library had 19,795 books when it closed and 67,261 had been lent during the year but Streatham Vale had only 1,164 books and a mere 528 loans for the year.

4. Roughly how many books will the public have access to when the ground floor of the Carnegie Library building reopens? A figure within a thousand or two will suffice for our purposes.

The Report defines "neighbourhood library" as simply books, computers and Wi-Fi access and indicates that in the case of Carnegie and other libraries being converted the books and computers will be in the gym lounge. There is no proposal to set aside space for study or other library uses. Readers of your leaflet are referred to an "initial plan" of the layout proposed by GLL but this does not include a lounge or a reception area. Three of the ground floor rooms are labelled "Neighbourhood Library..." but it is unclear whether the provision would be divided between those rooms or it is just that each of the three is a possible location for the books and computers.

5. Will any space be set aside for library use and, if it will, how much?

The plan indicates rooms available for hire by community groups. However, various voluntary groups used the public areas of the library as an integral part of the library and were not therefore charged for being there. These included Ruskin Readers, providing adult literacy clubs twice a week, where volunteers provided one-to-one tuition in reading and writing, and Carnegie Library Chess Club, where children learnt and practised this hobby of considerable educational value. Neither group could afford to hire space.

6. Will Ruskin Readers and the Chess Club be accommodated without being charged

anything and, if not, will Lambeth reimburse the hire fees?

Your leaflet says the building will be "fully staffed" for 70 or more hours a week but we are informed that you have not responded to queries about complying with Safeguarding requirements to enable under-16s and other vulnerable people to use the ground floor unaccompanied.

7. What CRB checked staff will be provided on the ground floor and will this be throughout the time the building is open to the public?

The leaflet assures us that library staff will visit the building "regularly" but there is no mention of the frequency of the visits or their duration.

8. How often will library staff visit and will they still conduct the Parent and Toddler and the Silver Surfers sessions?

So that we can circulate them in good time before our July meeting we would be grateful if you would let us have your answers to the above questions by Friday 17th June.

Many thanks in advance,

Kind Regards,

Village branch, Dulwich and West Norwood CLP, Labour.