

# Carnegie Library Redevelopment

In 1999 the Leader of Lambeth Council, Cllr Jim Dickson, announced that Carnegie Library would be closed and sold for redevelopment. The location in a wholly residential area indicates that the redevelopment would be as flats.

Shortly before the 2002 Council Elections it was announced that the library would be staying open but judging by what Lambeth has done subsequently the plan still exists. It resurfaced in a report in 2009 required by the Audit Commission and work proposed since then is more consistent with facilitating a lucrative sale for redevelopment than with continuing to provide a library.

The more flats a developer could expect to build on the site the higher the price that the Council could expect to receive. The building is Listed and Historic England could be expected to intervene to prevent it being demolished or its external appearance from the three surrounding roads being drastically altered. The only practical way to maximise the number of flats would be to build an extension on the back garden with the largest area and number of storeys possible. There were three impediments to this:

- The ash trees near the back wall of the building.
- Lambeth Planning Policy Q14 requiring 70% of the garden to be retained.
- The sloping site.

## The Ash Trees

As part of the setting of the Listed Building the trees could not be felled without the permission of Lambeth Council as local planning authority.

The roof gutters at the front of the building overflow and discharge rainwater into the building if those gutters are not cleared of leaves twice a year. Lambeth's property managers tried to persuade us that routine clearing could not be carried out and the solution would instead be to fell the ash trees. As the trees are on the far side of the building from the gutters their argument was obvious nonsense. The library service arranged routine clearing and there was no further ingress of water until Lambeth closed the library and transferred care of the building back to the property managers.

When officers of the Friends were first shown drawings of the proposed excavation and installation of the gym the only area of the garden with construction shown on it was the site of the ash trees. The construction shown was air conditioning equipment which could easily be put elsewhere.

Lambeth were clearly determined to be rid of those trees and they have now been felled.

### **Policy Q14**

The current works include building over 30% of the back garden. When the gym fails a Planning application could be made to replace the existing works and 30% of the remaining garden with an extension for flats. Thus by proceeding in two stages permission could be given for building over half the garden without breaching the policy.

We can be sure that the current works are designed to overcome the policy because on close examination of the drawings included in the Planning application it is apparent that there is no need to build on the garden. Some of that construction is unnecessary and the rest could easily go on the redundant van park or the dead area of garden between the van park and the door facing onto Ferndene Road.

The unnecessary works comprise:

- The extension to provide a plant room. There is already a plant room of adequate size inside the building but the plan is to turn much of this into an accessible shower and accessible toilet. Accessible showers and toilets would normally be integrated with other showers and toilets.
- Lavish quantities of toilets in the basement and on the ground floor, most of which are obviously not needed.
- Storage for the gym staff's cycles separate from the storage for customers' cycles.
- Additional construction on the back garden required by the Planning committee.

The redundant van park is the obvious location for all the cycle storage. A suitably screened refuse store on the dead garden would improve it and hide the ugly gas meter which is there.

## **Sloping Site**

To make the site for the extension the area immediately adjoining the back wall of the building would need to be excavated to make it level. Before this could be done the back wall of the building needs to be underpinned so that the wall does not fall down, entailing similar excavation and levelling of the basement.

Lambeth have implied that the basement is being excavated to provide a gym but this is clearly not the reason because:

- The basement excavation and its depth were a fixed part of the plans for the building years before the gym was suggested by GLL in connection with changes to its contract with Lambeth for providing leisure centres.
- The basement is not deep enough for a gym.

The excavation is however the right depth for the extension.

## **Carnegie Community Trust**

Thousands of specific objections to the Planning application for the excavation and gym were made by more than 300 objectors. The only objection given effect was from the Trust. They objected to construction on the redundant van park, implying that the construction should be on the back garden as proposed by Lambeth.

At a Friends' meeting one of the trustees of the Trust announced that the Trust intends "to open up" the excavated basement. This would no doubt involve excavating the exterior of the back of the building at basement level, reducing the future work needed to provide the site for an extension.

Lambeth say that the Trust has "ambitious plans" for further work to the building at an estimated cost of £5 million. Apart from the vague opening up, the only information disclosed is that the plans include a programme of external repairs and renewal. Work of this kind will indeed be needed in due course. Lambeth say that the work is urgent and back up this claim with a schedule prepared by their estate agents. However, detailed condition reports from architects and professional building surveyors indicate that the work is unlikely to become urgent for the next decade or two.

The external work concerned would comprise erecting scaffolding, recovering the roof and external cleaning and cosmetic repairs. This is all work which would be needed for selling flats in the redeveloped building. There is no other urgency.