

Friends of



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BY EMAIL

Heritage Lottery Fund

Dear Sirs,

**Resilient Heritage Grant
to
Carnegie Community Trust**

Thank you for the copy application and documents lodged in support of it.

The application is seriously misleading about:

- The extent to which the building is and can be expected to remain a public library. The library use is and always has been the main use. The current indications from Lambeth Council are that they will require this to continue for the foreseeable future.
- Past and future activities in the building.
- Supposed community and other support for the Trust.

Each of these is dealt with below under a separate heading.

Public Library

The application says in section 3b that the library operates "for a short period each day." It is open for between five and nine hours a day, making a total of 37 hours a week. These are good opening hours for a public library which is not located near a major transport hub. The full hours are at www.lambeth.gov.uk/places/carnegie-library.

In the same section we are informed that the library is "in one room" and your request for images to be included with the application produced photographs of the front elevation of the building but nothing in respect of the interior. The accompanying plan shows the layout of the ground floor. The library occupies the whole of the main room edged in red.

To explain the likely future situation it is necessary to go into some of the recent history. Lambeth closed the library on 31st March 2016. This was not to carry out building works. Determined campaigning to get the library back resulted in it being reopened in February 2018 after canvassing for the May Council Elections by members of the Labour Party, which controls Lambeth Council, indicated that Labour were likely to lose Herne Hill to the Green Party. In the event, Labour won two of the ward's three seats, with the Greens taking the third.

Seventeen months after Lambeth closed the library work started on converting the basement into a gym and this is still continuing. There is no correlation between the period of those works and the closure of the library. In contrast, the ground floor was closed recently for a month for work to be carried out, comprising the conversion of the kitchen shown on the plan into toilets. If the library were going to be reduced to a minor

element of the building's use that would have been the time to do it. We are 3¹/₂ years away from the next Council elections and supposedly in the course of the Trust taking over in a process that has already been going on for 7 years. However, the ground floor has been reopened with the library occupying the whole of the main room attractively laid out with new library furniture. This is a clear indication that the library will continue to be the primary use.

Although there are funding pressures on the Council these are not immediately relevant. In a meeting on 22nd November the Council's Director of Education, Learning and Skills informed the writer and other supporters of Lambeth Libraries that Libraries "have done their bit" in this respect. The Council's current financial plan does not include any "savings" on libraries over the next four years.

The Trust's original predecessor, the Carnegie Project Group, was set up in 2011 ostensibly for the purpose of replacing all Council funding for the library with grants from outside bodies. Given the difficulties that all kinds of cultural organisations have in obtaining ongoing core funding we may doubt whether this was ever a practical proposal. However, the Project Group pursued the matter and this continued when the Project Group morphed into a Shadow Trust Board and eventually the Trust.

The building being really a public library is an obstacle to obtaining grants of any kind and no deviation round it appears to have been found until the present grant from you. The Project Group proposed that the building be let by Lambeth to the Trust rent-free and Lambeth then rent back one room for use as a library under a commercial lease at twice market rent. Which room was not specified except that it would not be the main

room. The Shadow Trust Board instead proposed that there would merely be a "library facility" of some unspecified kind somewhere "on site." Lambeth ran with this idea for a while, talking of "Neighbourhood Libraries." It even set one up in Streatham Vale consisting of some books in an alcove in the Railway Tea Rooms. However, the Council's recent reopening of our library with improvements in the main room is clear evidence that the idea has been abandoned by the Council.

The Trust tell local people that there will be a proper library while at the same time telling potential funders that there will not be a proper library. Herewith is a copy of recent correspondence with the leader of the trustees, Helen Schofield, which effectively confirms this.

The building is a purpose-built library. As should be apparent from the plan, the layout is basically the main room, always intended to be a library, which serves as the access to the surrounding rooms. If the main room ceases to be a library and is hired out the users are obviously not going to want people from other rooms walking through to get to the toilets, work room or the door to the lift, which provides the only disabled access. Architects paid for by Lambeth have spent many hours working with the Trust's predecessors in an unsuccessful attempt to find a solution. The further Options Appraisal you are paying for sounds suspiciously like more flogging of this long-dead horse. The difficulties are mainly caused by the structure of the building but its heritage character is also an impediment, even though the Listing is Grade II and not Grade II* as claimed in the application.

The right-hand front room was used by the library service for back office services. It is no longer required for this purpose and has therefore become available for public use. This is the only addition to the publicly available space compared with the position in March 2016. The final paragraph of section 2a is incorrect when it says the Trust will make "spaces accessible for the first time in many years."

Past and future activities

Until Lambeth closed it in 2016 Carnegie Library was thriving. Although open for slightly fewer hours than now, it was lending books at the fastest rate of any of the borough's ten libraries and the library manager had difficulty fitting in all the groups who wanted to use the library. There was as much volunteer time going into the library as paid staff hours even though the library was open fully-staffed for 36 hours a week.

A key factor to be borne in mind when considering the uses of the building is that it was designed to provide users with abundant daylight through windows, roof lights and glazed internal partitions and that sound travels through the building easily. Like much else in the application, the list of uses by local groups prior to closure in section 3a is a poor reflection of reality. The only singing groups were occasional visitors brought in by the Friends or the library service to give performances as special events. The only fitness activities, if they can even be called that, were two yoga classes and one Pilates mat work class each week, that is, activities which fit in with the predominantly calm character of a public library.

Following the closure, the groups who had been using the library repeatedly appealed to Lambeth for help in the form of providing or paying for alternative locations but no assistance was forthcoming. Eventually, we were told to stop bothering Councillors about this and instead communicate only with one of the Council's Press Officers. We are in contact with members of these groups. They have not returned since the reopening in February and we would expect few to come back while the library is in danger of being taken over by the Trust.

We had two very successful adult literacy clubs, where students who were determined to learn to read but had not succeeded in this at school learned to read with the help of one-to-one tuition from volunteers. Fortunately, these clubs managed to keep going and have now moved to Bell House in Dulwich. They will not return to the library.

A particular concern about the Trust is that their ideas about future use are so vague as to be fairly described as clueless. An internal Lambeth document we have obtained under the Freedom of Information Act discloses that one of the arguments they advanced for their plans is that libraries are only for the "white elite" and offer nothing for "other communities." This is a cause for concern because most users of the library were working class or lower middle class and a substantial proportion were not white. It is especially relevant to the adult literacy and other clubs because these were drawing in members from all over Lambeth and about half were of African or Afro-Caribbean extraction.

South London Cares does wonderful work. They provided lunch in Carnegie Library twice but as the kitchen has been stripped out and replaced by only a small kitchenette they are unlikely to be able to do any more.

Before closure, Carnegie Creatives occupied 24 desk spaces on the ground and first floors. They are mostly visual artists. The library appealed to them because of the daylight and it including an art gallery. They were locked out of the building on 31st March 2016 in flagrant breach of their legal rights and the gallery was done away with. They will not return while the Trust is still on the scene. Instead of this specialised use, the Trust propose a

general sort of desk hiring to anyone who wants it. However, there is already too much of that sort of space available locally. For example, there is vacant accommodation of this kind available at the end of the road the library fronts onto and Lambeth Council have vacated a large office block nearby, International House, and made it available for desk space rental.

There is no reason to think the gym will ever pay rent. It will be operated on the basis that Lambeth will bear all losses. We have spoken with people who know about gyms and there is a consensus that a gym in its location will never break even.

The two trustees who have formally resigned, Fred Taggart and Carol Boucher, were forthright in telling local people that the Trust would rapidly fail financially unless the Council provided much more subsidy than they have so far offered. Despite both being former Labour councillors they publicised their disenchantment in the Green Party's last leaflet before the Council elections. A copy of the relevant section is attached. The experience at Upper Norwood, referred to in section 3c of the application, supports Fred's and Carol's well-informed view. After some years of trying to become financially self-supporting they appear not to have made any progress. Lambeth and Croydon Councils have agreed to provide some funding for a further three years.

Supporters

The original Project Group was set up at the behest of Lambeth Labour Councillors and the leaders of the Council's Labour Group maintained control throughout the subsequent history of the Shadow Trust Board and the Carnegie Community Trust. The Project Group was dominated by a Steering Group set up with the cooperation of Lambeth Council. Its existence was not initially disclosed to other members of the Project Group. The Board largely consisted of current and former Labour councillors. The Trust was formed with five trustees who appointed themselves. Three of these are stalwarts of Lambeth Labour: Fred Taggart

who is a former councillor, Carol Boucher who is also a former councillor and Helen Schofield who is the partner in life and politics of Steve Whaley. Steve is a former Leader of the Council and currently on a right-wing slate of candidates for the Constituency Labour Party as the Right's candidate for Chair. They were appointed for three years. The other two trustees, Frances Lamb and Phil Isaacs were appointed for two years. These terms of office have all expired. The arrangements for subsequent appointments have not been disclosed but we can infer from the consistent pattern over the years that Labour Group allies will be in control.

The Trust is a Foundation type CIO. Its constitution specifically prohibits it from having any voting members other than the trustees.

The application claims support from the Carnegie UK Trust. The substance is that the Trust wrote to the Carnegie UK Trust saying that Lambeth was terminating support for the library but the Trust was trying to save the situation. The Carnegie UK Trust thanked them for their letter and wished them well. The Carnegie UK Trust makes grants but only for activities in public libraries. The Friends have had two grants from them. The Trust has had nothing.

In the application the Trust claims three kinds of community support:

- Contact with groups which formerly used the library. The Friends are well-connected with the local community and we have not found any trace of this.
- An email list of 300 people. There is no reason to count these as supporters. Many, including the writer, are on the list solely in the largely unfulfilled hope of finding out what the Trust are doing.

- The supposed willingness of the Herne Hill Society and Friends of Ruskin Park to join an advisory group. The Chair of the Herne Hill Society, Colin Wight, was on the Project Group as a representative of the Society. When it transformed itself into the Shadow Trust Board he continued in a personal capacity but the Board published his participation as though he was still representing the Society. When they declined to correct this the writer indicated that he would take the matter up at the Society's AGM. Colin then resigned from the Board. We do not expect the Society to have any substantial further involvement. Similarly, Friends of Ruskin Park used to have a Chair, David Whyte, who is always very keen to cooperate with the Council. However, he is no longer on their committee and its current members do not have any apparent reason to lend substantial support to the Trust.

One of the problems with the Trust is that they are very secretive and controlling. They submitted a three-year Business Plan to the Council but they and the Council have been resolute in refusing to disclose this. The Information Commissioner's Office have now issued a formal decision requiring Lambeth to disclose it.

The Board held what it described as a public meeting four years ago but only admitted people who had first committed themselves to supporting the Board. Neither the Board nor the Trust has held a public meeting since then. There have been some invitation-only meetings but these have not gathered discernible support. The Friends picketed one and only two people attended it, one of whom was the spouse of a trustee. The Trust did lay on wine and mince pies in the library recently and a few local people attended in the hope of finding out about the Trust's plans but they were disappointed.

Lambeth said several months ago that they have abandoned their plan to transfer the building and have for some time been negotiating with the Trust on the basis that the gym operator, GLL, will have a lease of the basement and the Trust will have a lease of the ground and first floor library. This will enable Lambeth and GLL, which is beholden to the Council in respect of other premises, to terminate the basement lease at any time by agreement between them and without the Trust having any say in the matter. We do not know why the application is based on a transfer of the building.

In contrast to the Trust there is an Association type of CIO set up by the Friends and eight other community groups connected with the library. This has over 300 voting members who have elected a diverse body of eight trustees. This is Carnegie Library Association. It put a competing Business Plan into Lambeth and published this. Lambeth concluded that neither CIO met its criteria but decided to continue discussions with the Trust because the Association wanted a library and activities compatible with a library. They said the Trust's plan was "more ambitious" but did not indicate any respect in which this is so. The Association holds public meetings at least once a year and the Friends do so more frequently.

The Head of the Library Service submitted a plan for all ten Lambeth Libraries to be transferred to a mutual in which the community would have two-thirds of the votes and the staff one-third. There is also the possibility of the Council continuing simply to run the library and activities in conjunction with local voluntary groups without involving the Trust. The Association's and the mutual's plans are fully costed and, in a further contrast to the Trust, either body could be confident of covering its costs.

Thus there are at least three feasible alternatives to the Trust's vague and unworkable plan. We are hopeful that one of these will proceed, especially given the recent installation of an improved library in the main room. In view of this, the primary use being a public library and the way the Trust's affairs are conducted we would be grateful if the Heritage Lottery Fund would not provide further money to the Trust whether by way of a Resilience Grant or under any other scheme.

Yours faithfully,

Stephen Carlill

Chair