**Café or Café Bar?**

The public, or supposedly public, rooms in the library building other than the one-room library and basement gym are controlled by Carnegie Community Trust under a temporary arrangement with the Council. The Trust is a small foundation set up and subsidised by Lambeth Council.

The Trust obtained Planning Permission a quarter of the large room on your right as you enter the building to be used as a café (Lambeth Planning reference 20/03449/DET). This was on the basis that the custom would mainly come from people visiting the building for other purposes. The Trust has now made an application for Listed Building consent for the installation of a café. The application (Lambeth Planning reference 23/01520/LB) proposes to use the whole room as a cafe, despite including a denial of this, with custom mainly from outside the building. The Friends will be objecting that this is a breach of Planning control and that the Trust must be required to make a Planning application to enable them to quadruple the size of the café. This would require them to state the hours that the café would operate, which they have not so far disclosed.

The Listed Building application is vague about what is proposed. However, on a close reading it is apparent that the café’s trade would be mainly drinks, with a little food and the operator the Trust has apparently found for the café expects about 200 customers a day, consuming one or more drinks each. We think that this amount of trade must be mainly sales of alcohol in the evening.

The Friends have already objected to a lack of publicity for the application and the substance of what is proposed, which would have a very serious impact on the library and other community use of the building. The objection is set out below. The publicity aspect, point 1., has now been mended and the date for raising objections has been extended to 7th July. To fully understand the remaining points, readers will need to look through the supporting documents lodged with the Trust’s application. These are at <https://planning.lambeth.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=RUGAFTBOGF600> Especially relevant are the Proposed Ground Floor Plan, Proposed Café Counter Plan and pages 11,12 and 13 of the Heritage Statement.

The Friends would welcome a service of hot and cold non-alcoholic drinks compatible with the library. Indeed, we already provide such a service on the first Saturday of each month. However, the Trust’s current proposal is altogether unsatisfactory.

*Stephen Carlill*

Chair of the Friends

foclchair@gmail.com

“The Friends of Carnegie Library object to consent being given on this application for the following reasons:

1. **Lack of appropriate publicity.** Although informal notice was given to residential neighbours, no notice was given to the Friends or, so far as we are aware, to Lambeth Libraries. In the normal course of events this would not have mattered because the Friends would have seen a site notice. However, we have not seen one. Either no notice was posted or it was removed very soon after posting. We think that the most likely explanation is that an agent of Lambeth removed the notice almost immediately it was posted. The agent concerned is the contractor appointed by Lambeth to repaint the railings, to which we assume the notice would have been attached. In the circumstances, we believe that a fresh notice needs to be posted and the expiry date for commenting on the application extended accordingly. Please also correct the postcode recorded for the application. It should be SE24 0AG.
2. **Omission of crucially important details.** At first glance, the application seems to be for work to install a café selling only non-alcoholic drinks and a few snacks, but the length of the counter and amount of shelving seems much more than would be needed for this. The Trust has been trying to make arrangements for a café since 2012 and for the last few years they have been saying that a café would open shortly. There appear to have been several prospective operators of the café before the currently planned operator. The implication is that previous candidates have not expected to make the café financially viable. This is not surprising. As the Trust say in the Management Plan included in the previous application 20/03449/DET, people present in the building for other purposes will be the main customers of the café, with only a small amount of custom coming from outside. No doubt that was on the assumption that alcohol would not be sold. The Heritage Statement included in the present application informs us that the café is expected to draw in custom from the neighbourhood and that the operator’s business plan forecasts 200 covers a day, that is, 200 customers consuming one or several drinks each. Taking this information as a whole suggests that the café is planned to be a café bar serving alcoholic drinks into the late evening. If this is what is planned, then it should be disclosed to the neighbours and other interested parties at this stage. The neighbours should not be left to object subsequently to an application for a licence to sell alcohol, only to be told that they should have objected to the application for Listed Building consent and their objections are too late because the Trust has incurred the cost of installing the bar in reliance on the absence of opposition from neighbours. The Trust and the operator must have discussed whether alcohol will be served and the times that the café will be open. The details need to be disclosed before neighbours can sensibly decide whether to object to the present application.
3. **“Community” is a misleading label.** The Trust was set up to generate income from the building to cover the outgoings of the building, including maintenance costs. The café is proposed as a commercial operation. Similarly, Rooms 1,2,3 and 4 are for commercial use. They are hired to community organisations at a reduced rate but only when there is no commercial occupier. Room 3 and the first floor of the building were furnished as a total of 28 desk spaces, of which 24 were occupied. The users were willing to pay £200 a month each, providing a core income stream for the building of £57,600 a year. Unfortunately, the Trust and the users fell out while the Trust was making plans to take over the building and the users became adamant that they would not remain when the Trust took over. The Trust has subsequently tried to replace the users but with little success. Without that core income, the Trust cannot fulfil its financial objective. Its income at present is mostly just fees for hiring rooms for a couple of hours at a time. It does not bring in enough money to cover its own expenses and there is no prospect of the Trust contributing to the outgoings of the building. The Trust is only present under a temporary arrangement with Lambeth and it is hoped that they will soon be gone. It should then be possible to get desk space users for both the first floor and Room 3, with the consequence that Room 3 will not be available for community use.
4. **Loss of community space.** To anyone who knows the building currently but not its history, concerns about a lack of community space must seem perfectly ludicrous because Rooms 1,2 3 and 4 are empty and unused very nearly all the time. However, the use of the library is increasing, and we can expect it soon to need more space. In practice this would mean moving the Children’s section into Room 1 and stationing staff near the door between Room 1 and the main library so that they can keep an eye on both rooms. Some of Room 1 could be separated off but that and Room 4 would hardly be adequate space for commercial and community use after the departure of the Trust. Room 2 would also be needed. The application suggests that Room 2 would be available to people who are not using the café but this is not plausible. The “soft screening” shown in the images on pages 12 and 13 of the Heritage Statement would obviously not be adequate to delineate the café as separate from the rest of the room and the area between the screen and the counter could not possibly accommodate the 200 covers forecast in the Statement. In effect, the café would occupy the whole room and not just 25% as contemplated by 20/03449/DET. That is the situation when the café is open. When it is closed the whole room would have to be locked out of use because there would be no way of isolating the staff-only area of the café from the rest of the room. How serious this would be would depend on the opening hours of the café and is another reason the hours should be disclosed.
5. **Interference with the library.** The Counter Plan appears to show that there would be a standard commercial expresso machine on the counter and a metal bin underneath the counter for used coffee grains. Using this equipment would create noises which, even if not especially loud, would be very intrusive. The room is separated from the library only by a thin part-glazed partition. The noises concerned are the grinding of the coffee, the machine pushing hot water through the grains and metal filter, steaming milk and binning the used grains by banging the filter on the edge of the bin. Alternatives to these nuisances would need to be identified and implemented. Ventilation would also be needed to deal with condensation from the coffee machine and smells from heating food.”