



The Carnegie Library Shadow Trust Board

<http://carnegiehernehill.org.uk/>

Open Letter to The Friends of Carnegie Library

10th February 2015

Dear Friends of Carnegie Library

I am writing on behalf of the Carnegie Library Shadow Trust Board about Lambeth Council's proposals for the future of its Library Service. Your Membership Secretary has circulated the web link to the relevant Council consultation document to your membership and copies are available in the Carnegie Library. Your officers have also been briefed directly by Councillor Jane Edbrooke, the Cabinet member responsible for the service.

As you know, the Carnegie Library Project Group was an ad hoc group set up in response to Lambeth's decision to declare the Carnegie Library building as a Community Hub and its remit was to develop Options for adapting the building and to get these out to public consultation. This task has been accomplished and the responses to the consultation are now being evaluated by an independent consultant. The Project Group has done its job and as the Project seems viable it now wishes to hand responsibility to a legal Charitable Trust with the authority to take the necessary decisions. Lambeth Council, as the democratically elected and accountable body, has been asked to create such a Trust and appoint its members. Local organisations will be asked to put forward names for consideration.

As this process will take some time there was concern that the Community Hub Project may stall and so Lambeth asked the Project Group to create a Shadow Trust Board to continue the project development until a Charitable Trust is in place and can take over later this year. We have done this and posted the arrangements on our website.

The Shadow Trust Board met last week and the meeting was observed by a number of members of the public who are also Friends. We considered the Council's proposals for the future of Cultural Services, including the Library Service, which are now out for public consultation. We were very concerned to see that Lambeth proposes to focus its library service on the town centre libraries of Clapham, Brixton, West Norwood and Streatham, close two libraries and cease providing a service at the Carnegie, Upper Norwood and Durning libraries. This is dismal news for Carnegie.

However, the Council will welcome bids from community organisations willing to run a library service at any of these three buildings. They can bid for revenue funding from an Endowment Fund to be created from the money raised by the sale of the libraries to be closed and other council properties. This will generate £350k-450k a year against which bids can be submitted.

The Shadow Trust Board took the view that the Carnegie Library Project Group had developed proposals to make the Carnegie building into a Community Hub and, which, critically, includes the library as an integral component. The Friends of Carnegie Library will

be aware that the Project Group always envisaged that the library would continue to be operated by Lambeth Council as a tenant of the new Charitable Trust that would take transfer of the building from Lambeth. At no time was it ever considered that the new charitable trust would assume responsibility for operating the library service. Now we know that Lambeth no longer wishes to operate the library the situation has fundamentally changed.

We must await the outcome of the Council's public consultation but it is fair to assume its final plan will be unlikely to differ significantly from what is now suggested. So it is sensible to start planning on that basis.

Notwithstanding this new situation, the Shadow Trust Board believes that it has a massive job to do in delivering the Community Hub proposals and should therefore adhere to the assumptions adopted by the Project Group in developing the Options. However, the Shadow Board recognises that should a community-led bid for a library in the Carnegie not be forthcoming then it will close in little more than a year's time. That would be a disaster for Herne Hill.

Accordingly, the Shadow Trust Board agreed that, in view of the Friends' longstanding involvement with the library and their knowledge of the service, The Friends of Carnegie Library is the obvious community organisation to bid to operate the library on the terms outlined in the Council proposals. I have been asked to convey that position to you.

The Shadow Trust Board also wants you to know that it will support the Friends in any way it can. We would be willing, if it would be helpful, to assist in the preparation of a bid. The new Charitable Trust, as owner of the building, will be the landlord for the future library and will, hopefully, be able to put some additional resources behind that service. The Shadow Trust Board realises that if the library is to be saved a bid must be submitted to Lambeth and the new arrangements be in place by the end of the financial year 2015-16. There is not much time to do all that is necessary.

If, having considered the situation, the Friends decide that they will not submit a bid the Shadow Trust Board would appreciate an early opportunity to discuss with you arrangements for identifying potential alternative providers.

In the meantime, the Shadow Trust Board will continue its work to secure the transfer of the building to a new Charitable Trust and the funding necessary to operate it as a Community Hub. It will proceed on the basis that a library will continue to operate in the building.

As the Shadow Trust Board found the advice and guidance received at its meeting from Chris Sipidias, Lambeth's Head of Community Hubs, to be really helpful I suggest that the Friends invite her to address them on the Council's proposals and answer the many questions that will now arise.

Yours sincerely,

Fred Taggart

Hon Secretary
Carnegie Library Shadow Trust Board