



CARNEGIE COMMUNITY TRUST CIO

FACTS ABOUT THE CARNEGIE COMMUNITY HUB ASSET TRANSFER PROJECT

The predecessor to Carnegie Community Trust (the Trust) was set up in 2012 to see if the vision of converting the Carnegie Library building into a self-financing Community Hub was viable and sustainable. This was a technical exercise and could have concluded that it was not. However, the Trust has now demonstrated to Lambeth that such a project is indeed viable and has, applied to have the building transferred into community ownership. That process will still take more time and the community will have an input into the shape and format of the final proposals.

We are looking at a project that will cost in excess of £3 million. The roof alone needs to be replaced, the exterior is in poor shape, the lift is old and the services are in need of upgrade and rationalising. And that is on top of any changes to accommodate the uses. But after a lot of homework we think this can be done.

Here are some of the uses proposed:

- Secure library area providing existing library services
- Workplaces for local people (the Trust introduced the desk tenants idea to Lambeth)
- Training opportunities and courses
- Multi-purpose performance space for music, arts and drama
- Space for events and celebrations
- Community meeting rooms
- Gallery space
- Dedicated space for youth activities (and youth workers if we can raise the money)
- Café
- Re-designed gardens and conservatory
- Music studio

For some months now, the 'Defend the 10' Libraries campaign, which includes the Friends of Carnegie Library, has made a number of assertions, erroneously presented as facts, about the work of the Trust.

Set out below is the correct information about the project and what we see as the current position in relation to Lambeth Council's Culture 2020 decision to give a lease of the Carnegie to Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL).

BACKGROUND

- **The Carnegie Project Group – the Trust's predecessor**

In 2012, following its library review, Lambeth Council decided that given the likely budget situation the status quo in the Carnegie could not continue. It did **not** propose closure of the library but took the view that broadly the same service could be provided in less space, so releasing more to be used for additional community uses and for generating income. It declared the building a potential **Community Hub**. If local people could demonstrate that such a Hub was viable they would gift the building to a charity created for the purpose and keep a Council-run library in part of it.

So, a Project Group of long-standing Herne Hill residents with relevant professional and other experience was set up to see if such a Hub and Charitable Trust were viable.

It defined its task as:

“to protect and enhance the historical and architectural fabric of the Carnegie Library and its setting; to facilitate the continued operation of a Lambeth Council library; to bring vacant or under-used space in the building into appropriate new uses; create new entrepreneurial opportunities; and, primarily, to promote the use of the building for wider public access and community uses, particularly for activities that complement the literary and cultural ethos originally envisaged in Andrew Carnegie’s endowment. The project is intended also to contribute to and promote the social infrastructure of the locality within which it is situated.”

As the first step towards achieving this task the Project Group successfully bid to the **Lambeth Co-operative Borough Fund** for money to undertake this work, mainly the fees for architects and consultants, and the public consultation. All local community groups were contacted about the project and asked, **by questionnaire**, if they would like to be represented and take part in this work. Whilst we received many expressions of support, it proved difficult for most of these voluntary bodies to commit to one of their number having the time to participate fully in the project. Those that did join the group were the Herne Hill Society, London & Quadrant Housing and the Friends of Carnegie Library. The Friends were represented by Jeff Doorn, and two other members of the project group have been Friends of Carnegie Library for many years. The Project Group did not present itself as representative; it was a working group undertaking the early stages of the project development.

Over the three and a bit years we have worked on this it became clear that **the current library provision, at least in terms of floor space, was unfundable**, but it was also clear that broadly the same service could indeed be provided in a consolidated and more efficiently used space, with the rest of the building to be used for both existing and new activities. All this is set out on our website. The public consultation, which understandably wanted to keep the library as it is, did recognise the implications of the cuts in local government and supported the transfer of the building to a Charitable Trust for community purposes.

The Friends, though, simply **would not accept that the library had to reduce its footprint** within the building and refused to support the majority view for a different kind of building with a library in it, but not occupying all the same space as before. The proposed Community Hub would continue to serve the existing users and offer new services and activities to draw in the other 45,000 people who live in the three wards it serves (25,000 of whom live within a 20 minute walk). This Vision of an **educational and cultural community building** was not acceptable: the Friends wanted a library and only a library. They said a campaign would compel Lambeth to back down and maintain the existing arrangements. On the Project Group it was only the Friends’ representative who took that view. The other Project Group members did not agree. So we parted company with the Friends in the autumn of 2014.

REBUTTAL

- **Existing user groups**

The Friends have told **the groups who currently use the building that we would exclude them or ask them to pay for space they get now for free**. All our documents recognise community use of the building, which, after all, is what this project is all about. There was no reason to think that all existing user organisations of the Carnegie could not continue to use the building. For some unfathomable reason the Friends misrepresent us as excluding all existing user groups. This is just not true and is a **nonsense** in the context of a Community Hub operating in a community-owned building!

- **‘The Trust is not representative of Herne Hill’**

The current Trustees never claimed to be the people who will continue to deliver this project. We are certainly self-appointed but our **mission was only to see if the project was viable** given the

Council's early warning around future funding. If, after undertaking the technical work, it was judged to be viable, the plan was to go ahead and apply for the building to be transferred to a Charitable Trust. We have done this.

A **membership group** has not yet been set up because, until we know the project is going ahead and can be assured that the building will be transferred out of Council ownership, there is no point. If the project is not a runner then we shut up shop, but if it is on, then several things will happen:

1. An independently chaired recruitment panel (including a recognised community adviser and other experts) will interview applicants and make recommendations for a **new Trustee Board**. A list of Trustee responsibilities, together with a Person Specification for potential Trustees, will be published and anyone can apply to be interviewed and appointed.

2. Lambeth told us that they would only accept an application for the transfer of a public asset **from a lawfully-established body** (that is in the legislation). So, rather than wait, and with advice from Community Matters, we set up the Carnegie Community Trust CIO in October 2015 and applied for transfer of the building.

3. The current Board of Trustees is five local people who have publicly said **we are progressing the project development work** until the above arrangements can come into effect. There is no indication that any of the five of us will put our names forward to the Trustee recruitment panel. But the project needed a legal body **now** in order to start the transfer application process with Lambeth and make the necessary grant applications. The enhanced Board of Trustees will be responsible for receiving any successful grant funding and the building itself, which is still some way down the line.

4. Once the Trust knows that it can get the building and the grants needed to proceed, the new Trustees will start recruiting membership; there will then be something to join. But, for the present, it is a work in progress. Once the Trust has a membership in place its governing document will provide for future Trustees to be elected by that membership. We think that is **both democratic and practical**. This is all on our website and in letters to Lambeth outlining these next steps towards becoming a membership organisation. The aim is to get 2,000 members from across different sections of our community - not just existing library users - in the first couple of years. We do not consider the Friends, who represent library users, to be representative of the wider community who may never use a library, but who are potential users of the wider services and activities that will be on offer in a new Community Hub.

- **'The Trust doesn't know what the Community wants'**

In August, 2014 we launched the 'Next Chapter' project with a Newsletter distribution throughout Herne Hill, the setting up of a website and an email announcement to all local community groups and other local stakeholders.

There was then a significant consultation on various Options for the building, developed by our architects, which ran for six weeks with an exhibition and meetings held in the Carnegie as well as local events and discussions with several local groups.

All responses from the consultation questionnaires were received and evaluated by an **independent consultant** appointed by Lambeth and the community support organisation 'Locality'. The final Report is their work. We have published on our website all responses received, as well as our response to the Options Appraisal. Our **Preferred Option** for the use of the building has been developed in light of the responses and is also available on the website. It reflects as much as is reasonably possible of what the consultation asked for and is compatible with the building and the money. Our architects will present their final report shortly giving their professional advice on how to fit our Preferred Option into the building and also to give outline costs. We will put that on our website. So, we continue to develop the project for the time being. But **it will change** as we go along when the architects start coming up with detailed design proposals and we get more information.

There is **ongoing communication** with local people through our website and we currently have just under 300 subscribers with around 50 people offering their help to the project. But until we know whether the project can continue, given the current GLL proposal, we have not taken up these offers of help as this could be wasting volunteer time.

- **'The Trust is a Council Front'**

The Trustees have no idea why the Friends and 'Defend the 10' keep accusing us of being stooges set up to "save face for Lambeth Labour". The only Trustee whose politics are known is the recent Ward Councillor, Carol Boucher. No-one knows if or how the rest of us vote, or what parties we are or may be members of. And what does it matter? **The Trust will work with anyone** who is committed to achieving the vision of the project, be they Conservative, Green, Labour, Lib Dem or flat earth. Why would we want to "save face" for Lambeth Labour? The 56% budget cuts are imposed by the Conservative Government. It is **inconceivable** that the Library service can be unaffected by these cuts. Lambeth could have just closed the building, sold it and directed all the anger to George Osborne. They did not do that. They said they would transfer the Carnegie building to a Charitable Trust if the **community would work with them** to achieve this. So we took up the challenge. Anyone else could have done that, but despite the hot air no-one did. Much rather have a 'no change' campaign that was doomed to fail.

- **'The Trust favours removing a professionally run library'**

This is an untrue statement. When our project started in 2012 it was our understanding that Lambeth would continue to run a library, albeit in a reduced floor space, in the building and be a tenant of the new Trust. So it came as a shock early last year - the Culture 2020 consultation document - when they said they would not do this; they would withdraw from staffing the library.

It is important to recall, though, that in their spring 2015 consultation, when Carnegie was listed as ceasing to be staffed, Lambeth confirmed that, had the Trust not been doing our work, they would have marked the entire building for immediate closure.

The Council also devised a "Get out of Jail card", saying it would set up a **Community Endowment Fund to fund community libraries**. The Council would continue to provide books and all the other back-up. The Trust wrote to the Friends and asked them to consider applying to the Fund for money to run a community library in the Carnegie. The Trust said that we would support them and, when the Trust got the building, do our best to help out on operational space and running costs. That way the community could have kept a library in part of the building and, crucially, it would have some paid staff.

The Trust was informally advised that a successful bid to the Endowment Fund would likely have secured a sum that would largely cover the existing salaries. The Friends refused to bid and did not reply to our offer. Worse still, no bid was submitted by any Friends group across the Borough so, in the absence of any interest, Lambeth has deferred the Endowment Fund into the future. They then produced the Greenwich Leisure proposal.

So, in the Carnegie, we now face Greenwich Leisure, a room of books and no library staff! This is a disaster for Herne Hill and responsibility for this lies totally with the Friends and the 'Defend the 10' Libraries Campaign. We could have done so much better.

This rejection by the Friends of the Endowment Fund proposal meant that the Trust had to adapt its thinking to **now include library provision** within its Preferred Option. It will be noted that the proposed Enterprise Library model is that which is supported by the Carnegie UK Trust in other parts of the country where cuts to local government budgets have necessitated a new approach to providing library services and the Carnegie UK Trust has confirmed its support for the Carnegie Enterprise Library and Community Hub project.

As the explanation above makes clear, and given that the Staff Mutual bid has been rejected by the Council, the Trust will now incorporate library provision within its plans and will aim for that library service to be professionally staffed if the resources can be found to do this.

THE TRUST'S PRESENT POSITION

The Trust had no advance notice of the proposal by Lambeth last October to hand the building to Greenwich Leisure Ltd and were as shocked by this as everyone else in Herne Hill. For some **unexplained** reason, Lambeth is wedded to the idea of a Healthy Living Centre with a **gym** in the building, despite there being other gyms already in the vicinity.

We have stated our total and unreserved **opposition** to the GLL decision and, in particular the transfer of the Carnegie building to a commercial operator for 25 years at a peppercorn rent. We still have no details of the proposed terms beyond what was published in the October 2015 Cabinet report, and, therefore, we cannot comment on whether the full terms might represent financial good value for the Lambeth taxpayer. We do know for certain, though, that if our much-used and only civic building is passed into the hands of any profit-driven business, that will represent a massively bad deal for the community of Herne Hill. Why would a 'Co-op Council' go down that path when there is a viable and fundable proposal by a community organisation to take over the building and run it for services and activities that people actually do want?

So, we will continue to progress, for the time being, our application to have the building **transferred to a charitable community trust**.

Gym in basement

We had already obtained expert engineering advice to say that the basement could be dug out, as part of the Preferred Option work with our architects. We wanted to expand the amount of usable space in the building. Obviously we would have to raise the money to do this as part of the overall funding package.

A quick re-think, using this information, suggests that a gym might be located in the basement rather than in the Main Hall. We put this idea to Lambeth and they agreed that if the idea could work and was fundable they would go with it.

If this is a runner then there is the alternative that the building comes to the Community Trust and the gym is a tenant in the basement. **Not** what we set out to do, but, if we can do a deal with Lambeth, then this would give us the present building with all the existing floor space. We would have lost nothing. And will still be on track to get Carnegie into **community ownership**; open and free for everyone in Herne Hill. Everything else is negotiable and there is still a long way to go, but the Trust believes that this is achievable. We would urge local people to get behind it.

To sign up to support the project and for the complete picture of the Trust's work from 2012 to date please go to our website – www.carnegiehernehill.org.uk – where all documents related to our work are available.

If you wish to know more about becoming a Trustee please email us at getinvolved@carnegiehernehill.org.uk and we will send you the Trustee information pack.