



Facts about the Carnegie Community Trust and the Carnegie Community Hub Asset Transfer Project

We have always accepted that there is room for more than one view on the future of the Carnegie. But those who disagree with our proposal have not criticised it, but have, instead, attacked us as individuals. Through a persistent stream of untruths, smears and innuendoes they have created a narrative that we are in a corrupt and politically-driven relationship with Lambeth Council, and they have aimed to cast serious doubt on our personal integrity.

In June last year we felt it necessary to produce a document to correct a number of these erroneous, misleading and untrue statements about the Carnegie Community Trust (CCT) and its work. Recently some new misinformation has been circulating so it is time, once more, to set the record straight.

1. The Genesis of the Project

The Accusation:

“She [Cabinet Member Cllr Winifred] may not be aware of it but the organisation now known as the Carnegie Community Trust had been holding secret meetings with Lambeth council since sometime in 2012.

Council officers attended these meetings. At least two Labour councillors – Paul Gadsby and Jack Holborn – were, at various stages, members.

The Friends of Carnegie Library, who would have been the obvious organisation for Lambeth council to sit down and have discussions with, were never even asked.

They never even knew about the existence of the organisation until one of her predecessors, Cllr Jane Edbrooke, let the cat out of the bag in December 2014 – two or three years after the secret group had begun.” – News from Crystal Palace website, July 26th

“Even the Friends of Carnegie Library did not know of your [CCT] existence until two to three YEARS later when the then cabinet member for culture Cllr Jane Edbrooke let the proverbial cat out of the bag.” – News from Crystal Palace website, July 26th

The Facts:

In 2012 Lambeth decided that it could no longer afford to maintain the Carnegie building in the long term or support its library, which occupied only part of the building. Rather than close the library and sell the building they asked if a community group could develop a proposal to adapt it for wider uses and, crucially, with a council-run library in it; if so they would then transfer the building to a charitable trust.

As an elected Herne Hill Councillor, Carol Boucher called together an informal Project Group, including the Friends of Carnegie Library, to see if this could be done. The Group developed options and ran a public consultation. **The Friends of Carnegie Library were represented on this Project Group by its Chair, Jeff Doorn, from 2012 until the autumn of 2014.** We have published everything about our work on our website since that point and it is simply untrue to state that we are somehow “a secret organisation”. The website currently has 270 subscribers.

Some in the Friends of Carnegie Library wanted “no change” in the Carnegie building and to campaign to get Lambeth to maintain the status quo. The Project Group, bar one member, considered, after exhaustive technical work by independent consultants, that in order for the building to be viable and fundable in the future, we had to let go of the past and re-purpose the Carnegie for both a library and a number of new uses. So we parted company with the Friends in 2014. They ran their campaign and the Project Group continued to develop a proposal and eventually became the CCT.

Unlike our critics we took the view that the best interests of Herne Hill would be served by engaging in a dialogue with Lambeth Council and to reach agreement on a viable and sustainable proposal that would enable Lambeth to Asset Transfer the building to a community-led charitable trust. Of course, we talked to officers and councillors. But these meetings were not secret and there was never any question, as our critics allege, of a “political deal”. The latest posting on our website clearly demonstrates the robust nature of our discussions with Lambeth; we think we have gained more by continuing dialogue with rather than attacking Lambeth.

It is depressing to see our critics putting so much energy going into this sort of thing when, in fact, the reality is that there is going to have to be change at the Carnegie as a consequence of the Council’s decision to install GLL’s gym.

So, surely shouldn’t the priority be for all interested parties to work together to ensure that a library service is re-instated in the Carnegie and that the building is transferred into community ownership so that local residents have control of it well into the future?

2. CCT and The Friends of Carnegie Library (FoCL)

We have no problem with the Friends of Carnegie Library, but we have always considered that any campaign to keep the Carnegie as it was, in light of cuts in public expenditure, is bound to fail. The public expenditure cuts were just too great. Of course, it was right to **protest**; people should protest the loss of public facilities. But it was wrong of them to personally **abuse** the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet member for Libraries and our local ward councillors. On the other hand, we maintained a **dialogue** with the Council to develop a Plan B.

We made **efforts to reach out** to the Friends of Carnegie to meet, bring the community together and talk about opportunities to work together. At one point Lambeth had asked community groups to

run the Carnegie library as a community library. They said they would provide up to £100k from a **Community Endowment Fund** to help meet costs. We sent an **Open Letter** inviting the Friends to take the lead on this and we would plough ahead with the building plans. That way we would keep a library presence going and probably keep the whole building open to the community. Also, London Arts Base could have kept its work spaces there. But the Friends never replied. The building closed. That was a massive **missed opportunity** for Herne Hill.

We then wrote saying that we should meet with an **external community mediator** to seek to resolve differences, and finally wrote to suggest that we present a **joint Asset Transfer bid** to Lambeth. None of these invitations were taken up and the Friends have made no attempt to approach us.

We also wrote to **Unison** inviting discussions about working with the library staff and the trade union to run the library as a Mutual but we received no reply. They probably thought it easier and more politically expedient to continue to bash Lambeth rather than make the compromises and undertake the hard work needed to get things done in the real world.

3. The involvement of the Community

The Accusation:

“Lambeth propose to transfer the Carnegie to the 'Carnegie Community Trust' (CCT), a small group of self-appointed individuals without widespread community support.” - FoCL website 2nd August 2017

The Facts:

We have never presented ourselves as representing the thousands of people in the area served by the Carnegie. We started as a technical group trying to see if the Community Hub idea was viable and only formed a legal trust as that was a Lambeth requirement for any group wishing to submit a legal application for Asset Transfer.

We make no apologies for including ‘Community’ in the title of the organisation; the project is about creating a community-owned place for everyone in Herne Hill to use. If our application to Lambeth was to fail we would just wind-up the Trust. Our website makes clear that if we were to succeed in our application for Asset Transfer we will open membership to everyone in Herne Hill and move to a democratic structure. No point in having a mass membership and no Carnegie...a cart before the horse scenario.

From the start in 2012 the project has consistently sought to engage with the community by means of regular information bulletins, mass newsletter distributions to homes in Herne Hill, invitations to volunteers, as well as the three-month consultation on the Architect's Options Report in 2014/15. We have a website that is updated regularly at www.carnegiehernehill.org.uk and a subscriber list of 270, many of whom have offered to volunteer with the project.

Our final Preferred Option for the bundle of uses we want to see in addition to the library is based on what the community told us it wanted in the buildings in as far as was possible to balance with the financial realities.

It is ludicrous and dishonest to describe these actions as “secretive”.

The purpose of this project is to get the Carnegie Library and building into community ownership and management. All documents reflect the fact that **it is essential that the Carnegie Community Hub is community-led and run.**

The vision and plan is to recruit new Trustees, open up membership to the whole community and move to an Association Model of governance once an outline agreement has been reached with Lambeth Council for the Asset Transfer. We aim for 2000 members for a start (the Dulwich Picture Gallery has 8,000 so that is a modest aspiration). Then we can step back. In the meantime, once we get the building there will be a Management Committee of local people to oversee the day-to-day running - plenty of scope for local involvement at all levels.

4. Our Connections with the Council

The Accusation:

“The Trust is controlled by three activists from the local Labour Party close to the current Administration. They are: ...” - FoCL leaflet delivered 13th August

The Facts:

The constitution of this charitable trust specifically states that the Trust is non-political and, therefore, its Trustees must conduct the business of the Trust in this manner.

Because our critics have been unable to refute our proposals (after all it includes proposals to maintain the library) they have, instead, conducted a pernicious and persistent campaign to **denigrate us as individuals.**

It has been a difficult experience for us and utterly unworthy of our opponents. Some people who know us, but do not agree with the project, tell us that they cringe when they hear and read these personal attacks on us. They know us better.

At the last election in this constituency 70% of the electors voted Labour. In Herne Hill Ward it was higher. So any community group here will have more than a smattering of Labour sympathisers. Only three of us have ever at any time had any connection with the Labour Party, one as a recent ward Councillor. One of us ceased contact with Labour Party decades ago!

It is absolutely untrue to allege that we are a front for that party. There is no evidence to support that assertion. **It is simply a smear that our opponents, particularly in other political parties, have ruthlessly repeated.**

The truth is for three years we have spent most of our time arguing with Lambeth Council. It should also be pointed out that the Chair and Vice Chair of FoCL are members of the Labour Party and other people involved in these spurious accusations are members of other political parties too. But, this is **not** important.

What **is** important is that all the Trustees are long-term Herne Hill residents, with records of service to local organisations, who have been prepared to take on the hard work involved in getting an

Asset Transfer from Lambeth Council to secure the long-term future of the Carnegie Library building for future generations.

5. The Library and Staffing of the building

The Trust's Business Plan includes a provision for a Community Hub Manager, a Library Manager and evening cover. Lambeth have set out their support, which is to provide the books for the library, staff for two hours per day and to supply the IT equipment and infrastructure.

Negative assumptions about the scale of the library have been made, but the nature of libraries and the way that people use them is changing. It is not just about space for books. We are clear that the same library service as existed could be provided in a better organised consolidated floor area, so freeing up room for other activities. The Trust will be collaborative and innovative in our approach to resources for the library, including fundraising, use of volunteers, uses of technology and working with schools.

6. GLL and the Gym

The Architects' Options that the Trust consulted the community on included an option for a gym in the building. That option was rejected by the public and we have consistently opposed the introduction of a gym.

Our **Preferred Option includes** excavating the basement for uses such as the cafe, music studios and workshops as necessary in order to generate the income the Trust will need to support the library (which will not be paying for the space it occupies or the utilities it receives) and the other community activities: all ideas that came from the consultation on the Architects' Options for the Community Hub.

When it became clear that Lambeth Council's decision to put a GLL gym on the main floor would not be reversed - despite the community opposition to it - we negotiated with them and persuaded them that it should go in the basement. The Council have made it clear that the gym will be installed as part of its wider Leisure plans for the Borough and is non-negotiable in principle. So, what we see as a priority now is to ensure that the community gets an income stream from this space to invest in the Carnegie Community Hub.

If the Trust is to secure the money needed to conserve and refurbish the building we need ownership of all of it. Whoever is in the basement will be a tenant.

7. The Trust's present position

We have been very disappointed by the slow pace of progress by Lambeth Council, they have not prioritised the community bids over the GLL deal and this has severely impeded this project's progress.

Discussions have now commenced with Lambeth about the structure and terms of the Asset Transfer, the financial arrangements with GLL, and the details of the current building works. Whilst we recognise the need to get the building and the library back in to use quickly, the Trust can only

proceed if the terms to be agreed with Lambeth are viable and sustainable in the long-term, and if their building works are compatible with a Heritage Regeneration Project.

Lambeth Councillors are keen to see the library re-open as soon as possible, 'hosted' by GLL.

The CCT position is that Lambeth needs to slow down this process and consider a holistic scheme which, although incorporating GLL, also ensures the long-term future of the building.

Unfortunately, we fear this outcome is far from certain.

Carnegie Community Trust CIO

September, 2017.