

The Future of Carnegie Library: Concerns

Please turn over for suggested Questions to Ask



Timing: Lambeth closed the Carnegie Library on 31st March, and states confidently that the building will re-open in 'early 2017'. In contrast they have been vague about when applications will be made for planning permission and listed building consent for major works on this Grade II listed building. A recent Freedom of Information request established that Lambeth has been spending more on security for the closed libraries (over £2000/day in April for Carnegie and Minet) than it would cost them to keep them open (£874/day for both libraries in 2014/15). Whichever future plans go ahead, there is no apparent reason for the library to stand closed in the meantime, given Lambeth says the closures are to cut costs.

Space allocated to the Library: Lambeth plans this to be a 'neighbourhood library', a term defined in their Culture 2020 Report as 'a small selection of books', including 'a children's book offer', computers & Wi-Fi. Under this definition there would not be any dedicated space for library use, which instead would share space with commercial activities, including GLL-run classes, hired space & other paid-for activities.

Number of books: Before it closed there were just under 20,000 books in the Carnegie Library, which is about the minimum stock needed for a small library. 'Neighbourhood libraries' in Lambeth have far fewer: One has 1,164 books and the other 863. The Culture 2020 Report does not mention teenage stock.

Librarians: Without library staff, a stock of books is not a library. Library staff comprise a mix of professionally qualified librarians and trained library assistants. 'Neighbourhood libraries' do not have library staff. Lambeth has indicated that the re-opened Carnegie Library will be staffed by GLL. One leaflet said that librarians would visit on a 'regular' basis without specifying how often nor for how many hours.

User groups: Many user groups met in the library, such as Ruskin Readers literacy clubs, Silver Surfers (internet support for older users), Chess Club, Parents and Toddlers, Book at Breakfast and the Book Group. It is not clear whether these groups - an essential part of the library service provided for free to the community - would have to compete with commercial uses for space to meet. Would GLL start charging these groups to cover commercial hire costs? What would be the impact on access to these services?

Control of the building: Currently Lambeth is planning to transfer the building to GLL on long lease. They have also said they are considering an asset transfer to an eligible community organisation (these include the Carnegie Library Association, which is associated with the Friends of Carnegie Library and the library user groups, and the Carnegie Community Trust, which is not). It is not yet clear how Lambeth envisage the GLL plan and an asset transfer would fit together.

Car parking: The Carnegie Library is in a controlled parking zone with restricted parking only from 12-2 Mon-Fri. Traffic movement in the surrounding area could change significantly. The Library has a small parking area, which fits about three cars and is used by the Home Delivery service.

Safe access for children: It is not so far clear whether staff with the required safeguarding checks and training will be present in the building to enable access for unaccompanied under 16s.

Costs: The Healthy Living Centres are to be subsidised from profits made by GLL on leisure centres. The Culture 2020 Report mentions that £1 million of these profits previously paid to Lambeth will be refunded to GLL as a contribution towards the subsidy, but does not specify the total amount of the subsidy. A community/staff mutual proposal for all 10 of Lambeth's libraries was rejected by Lambeth on the basis that it wouldn't make the required savings by 1st April 2016.

Lambeth's Plan B? Lambeth first tried to close the Carnegie Library in 1999 and has a track record of closing libraries in the borough, long before the current cuts were implemented. It's a well-located, attractive building. In the past Lambeth has made statements indicating that one option would be to sell off the building for redevelopment as flats. It is not clear what their intention would be, if the gym plan doesn't break even.