

Supporter Context Information about the Carnegie Library Hub

As of September 2024, in light of the fact we believe we have hit an impasse with our primary stakeholder, Lambeth local authority, it is important and the right time to inform our partners, the community and neighbours that we no longer seem to have a working partnership with Lambeth and therefore have a set a timetable for an orderly close of trading unless sufficient community support facilitates a meaningful improvement to the partnership and shared aims.

What is the situation?

As a community Hub, our principal assets are the wonderful building and a lovely team to facilitate leveraging that building for the Hub. Without either, we are impotent. Thus, we are beholden to Lambeth, as the freeholder, for the security of the premises which we were invited by them to support. The long-standing strategy was that the Hub was to move from a licensed tenant to leased tenant, however the proposed lease terms have been drastically downgraded and prohibit success. Please read our [news article](#) which introduces the core issues, and which is also copied to the end of this FAQ document.

So, what is happening?

As we observe and interpret it, Lambeth have largely withdrawn support for the Carnegie Library Hub, a Hub setup by invitation from Lambeth on behalf of their own Culture 2020 vision. The Trustees and Team of the Carnegie Library Hub have concluded that we have exhausted all possible avenues and have no option other than be transparent with the community about the current impasse and plan for an orderly wind down of the community business. Lambeth have indicated it will refuse to allocate us an extension to our current license to occupy if we do not accept their new lease terms, this means **we will stop trading by the end of December 2024** and we will not accept bookings for past this date.

This decision was not made easily, we have tried everything possible to come to an agreement with Lambeth, providing significant documentation, lobbying of councillors and our MP, asking for meetings with the relevant councillors and officers, none of which has changed the revised conditions offered.

We imagine this is especially disappointing news for our partners who have supported our growth by running lovely, community centred, events at the Hub for many years since we started trading in 2021. This disappointment does not need to be limited to partners, the community might also be upset, especially those who enjoy the juxtaposition of Hub and library and who recognise the effort that's been put in to develop something really positive and lovely, frequently in challenging circumstances.

Who is the Trust and the Carnegie Library Hub?

The trust is the Carnegie Herne Hill Community Trust CIO a registered charity constituted in 2016 to formalise an organisation to facilitate the partnership awarded by Lambeth. The working group of community members were successfully invited by Lambeth to form a community partnership to secure the future of the building and make more public use of its beautiful rooms. That trust is governed by a board of trustees who employ local people as an employed team to run the Hub.

The Carnegie Library Hub is our trading name for the Hub, which is managed by the trust. The trust submits its accounts annually as it is obliged to do so by law. The trustees are all local people who give time that aligns with their interests and experience and to provide governance and support the strategic direction.

Is the Hub successful, I heard all sorts of things about it?

There is no point in pretending that the birth of the trust wasn't a difficult time for many people. There was significant concern in the community that the library would be shut, ambitious plans for asset transfer, heritage funding and structural remodelling were shelved, there was an occupation when Lambeth closed the library for excavation works, and there continued to be a noisy minority of the community who remained hostile to the concept of the trust sharing the building.

However time has passed, we built a team after Covid eased, and completely "lucked out" with those employees in terms of experience and attitude. Since re-opening after Covid we have a new board, a lovely team, a sense of purpose and a functioning organisation with sales.

Whilst the rooms are far from full capacity in terms of community and private use, we have built an operational and functioning community business that covers our direct costs and occupies the rooms by about 10% utilisation. This is an incredible achievement over a short period, with credit owed to our amazing, but small, team. The core financial sustainability plan we presented to Lambeth was that we plan to triple utilisation, which is something we see as achievable, and which would open up more financial independence and self-investment. These plans were based on a track record and experience therefore more concrete than the hypothetical numbers proposed when the partnership was awarded.

An important point to note in the current funding landscape is that funding bodies won't fund charities like ours to pay substantial rent directly to Lambeth. Paying overheads is not at all interesting for funding trusts, they understandably like to see their money invested directly in community facing initiatives. Thus, our core focus for the last few years has been on establishing ourselves operationally as cost positive, and then be in a position to identify and sponsor (funding bids take considerable resources and expertise) core funding partnerships that we can facilitate on-top. In fact, we ran our first such funding partnership recently acting as an umbrella organisation for [BA Theatre who pitched successfully for funding](#) to run wellbeing events free for the community at the Hub. Without a charity with security of premises as a funding vehicle, Lambeth won't be eligible for any external funding that could otherwise come into the local community.

Why is this coming out now?

Lambeth had pledged to fix the substantial leaks and damage into our rooms, which was budgeted as Capital Works. This stands to reason; we could not develop a community business to use rooms which were badly damaged by water ingress. These works were substantially delayed, partly due to Covid, and thus only started early last year and was completed in the summer 23. It was long established with Lambeth, in writing, that once the rooms no longer leaked, we would roll onto a longer-term lease agreement.

However, for some unexplained reason, and after considerable delays in communication, Lambeth withdrew all previous offers formally in September 23 without any indication of what was planned. It was not until February 24, after considerable chasing, that an offer was made, however that offer was poorly prepared, confusing, and drastically different. We asked for immediate clarification which only came in June 24. After some more lobbying and requests for meetings it became clear that Lambeth were not interested in negotiation nor even a dialogue. Hence the Team and Trustees have reached the decision that it is necessary to offer transparency to our partners and the community now of the impasse that has materialised.

Why can't you compromise and accept Lambeth's offer?

Lambeth's latest June 2024 offer is unworkable and, were we to accept, the venture would likely fail anyway. They have insisted on high financial targets, whilst reducing the rooms we use to earn money by half.

Additionally, the Trustees and Team are interested in developing a Community Hub, which requires an integrated approach of innovative room uses alongside the library with a leading voice in the building. Lambeth's offer effectively removes the ability for us to do fundraising, safeguard the heritage of the building, or innovate in any way. A Hub cannot be nurtured if it is partitioned from the rest of the building and structurally disconnected from the library as proposed.

We interpret their offer as Lambeth wanting us to run a profitable room hire business on their behalf, in a reduced number of rooms, without access to the office and toilets, with no Hub "heart", and pass on all the proceeds to them. This they may as well do themselves; the Trustees and Team are involved and invested to develop a Hub for the community, not provide a free room hire operation on their behalf. Lambeth's objectives no longer align with their own [Culture 2020 Strategy](#), nor with the charitable objectives we constituted at founding.

Is there anything I can do?

Yes, please read our [news article](#) on this and follow the suggestions to indicate your support for the continuation of the Hub and retaining our full access across the building.

Are you in competition with the Libraries Service or the Friends of Carnegie Library?

No. Our team have worked hard over 3 years to enjoy a very cordial and productive working relationship with all of the librarians and there are many examples of where we have been able to support each other on building and operational matters. We have extremely high regard for all the librarians who work on rotation at the Carnegie, and we believe they also respect our team. It is also a joy to co-work together in the office which makes it a really nice place to work.

The Friends of Carnegie Library are a lovely friend's group who support the library service and frequently run library centred events, such as fairs and author talks, which are well attended and very interesting.

The Hub, run by a trust, have completely different objectives, we exist to run a community Hub alongside the library, and to safeguard the heritage of the building for community use. These organisations are completely compatible to work alongside each other, and whose different objectives do not compete nor contradict.

I heard about the [popup café](#) and plans for a community café, what happened to that?

The Hub executed a [long-discussed plan to prepare for a café](#), which is complicated, even when factoring out the very many opinions there are on the matter. The building is not well laid out for catering however, during the gym dig out, provision was made for water and waste in the north corner of the building. We were awarded planning permission for a community café, [listed building consent](#), ran a tender for local businesses and attracted the best offer with a proposal to invest in the fit out. During this process, and before awarding an operator, we met with the Chief Executive of Lambeth to check we had their support to continue, which we were assured we did.

For months we discussed and specified what we needed Lambeth to enable for us to fit out the café. Lambeth were fully informed and involved throughout all of this planning and preparation. We had the work surveyed by several builders and wrote up the specification which we shared with Lambeth. The work is not difficult; namely the electrics in the room need to be prepared and water and waste brought up from the basement. This would essentially provide a point from which a fit out could happen, funded by our operator. However, Lambeth refused, citing spurious reasons, even though we asked them to do it on our behalf as landlords and which we offered to pay for. They said that we needed to be on a lease before starting work, although ironically simultaneously stalling the lease. Thus, the café became blocked. This took momentum away from the [benefit of the popup](#) as well delays our ability to develop the market for the café which will take time to build, which would inevitably bring more partners and the community into the Hub. Additionally, it has compromised our credibility with our community partners and café operator who we assured we had the correct arrangements and relationship with Lambeth.

A café and [lounge](#) would be an amazing resource for the Hub and the community, and we know it would be the heart of the hub and the catalyst of many community and fund raising opportunities. Also alongside the library would be pure joy for all ages; it's a well tested format, coffee and books!

I want to hire a room in 2025

We do not yet have details from Lambeth of what they would like to do in the case of an orderly close. For now, please contact the library directly using CarnegieLibrary@lambeth.gov.uk for any events **after December 2024**. For events before that date, please continue to contact us via our website. We will update our website when we know more.

What is Lambeth's Culture 2020 Strategy?

Commissioned last decade, this strategy was formed to shape many things, including community spaces. It is introduced here [Cultural services by 2020 | Lambeth Council](#). If you read their detailed report [cultural-services-by-2020.pdf \(lambeth.gov.uk\)](#) on page 7, for example, the Hub was a response, by invitation to community groups, to help them deliver item 2 "Safe and Interesting Spaces".

What is Lambeth's VCS Strategy?

Lambeth's VCS strategy describes how it wishes to partner and support community groups [VCS Strategy \(lambeth.gov.uk\)](#). Our experience to date is, frankly, a complete contradiction to much

of the sentiment of this content. We thought that our hard work and a track record in setting up a Hub would speak for itself, but it doesn't seem to have made an impact, in fact quite the opposite, they seem to be more nervous and hostile as we show increasing initiative, leadership in the building and make progress.

What will happen to the Carnegie rooms after December 2024?

The honest answer is we don't know. We will work with Lambeth for an orderly wind down if they are able to indicate how they would like us to close things out. We expect that Lambeth will list the Carnegie rooms for hire as with other libraries, which may have been their intention all along. The reality is that room hire is not a lucrative business; room hire we facilitated with a lovely team in order to foster a Hub mentality and cover our costs. Lambeth running room hire themselves won't generate any more meaningful income for the council and probably won't evolve into a Hub and definitely not a community Hub.

The Carnegie Library is a uniquely difficult building to monetise, something we have direct experience, and a track record, of. The internal glass partitions make noise and privacy concerns important with regards to the library and its opening hours, and accessibility and security are difficult to manage. We have invited Lambeth officers onsite to see first hand the significant constraints there are in the building, but as far as we know a number of directors and decision makers have not visited at all to visualise what we are working with. We love the building and library, but as it is right now and without a very significant investment, income potential is constrained in a unique way.

We suspect the building will continue to muddle along without a clear direction. Of course, the community will remain nervous about Lambeth closing the library and / or selling the building. We have no view on the likelihood of these outcomes, and suspect Lambeth don't either. The problem of the Carnegie has been unaddressed for decades and will probably continue to be. Of course, the Hub was an effort to respond in kind to a sustainable future, but it appears that this approach is no longer in fashion or, despite our considerable investment in online communication, they don't like what they see in the Hub.

What were the 2023 Capital Works about?

It's long been known that the building is in a poor state. Surveys, paid for by Lambeth, show that the roof has failed and needs replacing, which is a multi-million project, especially as the building is listed. There are significant other building problems, add to the fact that the building looks tired and institutional inside and out. The Capital Works were proposed to stem the most urgent problems; namely the front rooms leaked substantially inside, the floors were damaged, and the brick walls soaking. It stands to reason that we could not develop a Hub where our main function rooms leak and are damaged.

The works commenced in 2023 at a cost of around £650k. We were not involved in the scoping of the works, despite on numerous occasions asking for that scope. When the work commenced, we immediately identified that the scope was flawed, although Lambeth remained extremely guarded about sharing documentation, citing that as licensed tenants we did not have a right to see them. We escalated these scope flaws as high as we could, but nothing could be done, as a public contract had already been awarded and there was too much vested interest in continuation as planned.

To be fair to Lambeth they did afford us a monthly meeting at the time where they allowed us to air our thoughts and priorities, some of which were actioned. Fundamentally, though, this monthly forum was tweaking the edges and more about keeping good communication with the team in terms of building works disruption to our business rather than fundamental prioritisation or offer us a chair at the table.

By observing what work was completed we estimate a significant portion, up to 50% of the contract, was wasted on non-priority or pointless work that did nothing for keeping the rain out. The sorry conclusion of all this is that the rooms still leak when it rains, and one year on in the summer of 2024 another contractor was appointed, at unknown expense, to re-decorate some rooms due to water damage. We expect this state of affairs to continue as this grade II listed building is still fundamentally not watertight and not robust.

Are you sad?

Yes, we are really sad that it has come to this, nobody joins an organisation to plan its failure or demise. The sustained uncertainty over a prolonged period has taken its toll, and a fair amount of enthusiasm, out of those involved so it's a small relief to be open and honest about this at last. Although the project clearly had risks, it's disappointing that there was not more political will to sort this out **as well as** a constructive dialogue with the majority of council officers we interface with who could offer their support and want us to succeed. We believe the lack of both these elements have led us to the place where we are currently. The Carnegie must be, probably rightly, near the bottom of a significant list of priorities for the borough, but the way we see it, by obstructing us to help them many times over in return, they are committing an astonishing act of self-harm. Lambeth is a multi-headed animal and when it comes to the Carnegie, not enough of those heads agree.

Do lend us your support!

Team and Trustees of the Carnegie Library Hub

September 2024

The Carnegie Library Hub is at a difficult juncture and is likely to close by December 2024

- 18 September 2024



As we hope you have noticed over the last years, the Carnegie Library Hub is growing with more [regular classes and community events](#). We had an [eventful, productive and successful 2023](#) and we are continuing to work hard building [a team](#), growing partnerships, delivering social value, and facilitating the Carnegie rooms for the community. We have been [recognised locally for our efforts](#) and are grateful for the growing and ongoing support. Additionally, we have put in significant [groundwork for opening a community café and lounge](#). We trailed these plans last December by running a [successful pop-up café and gained valuable experience and feedback](#).

We have come a long way in establishing a successful and functioning community business, and with proper backing and support from Lambeth, we can continue to develop the Hub as planned. The long-standing agreement with Lambeth, the freeholder of the building, was that once the summer 2023 capital works were finished the Hub would move over from a license agreement to a longer-term lease that offered more control, community business growth and facilitate capital fundraising capabilities.

Unfortunately, last September, after considerable chasing and delays, Lambeth informed us that they are reviewing this position which led them to eventually withdraw all previous offers. It wasn't until February this year after many months of lobbying and limbo that Lambeth came back with their revised offer. This was finally simplified and clarified in June this year. Their new offer is significantly different and alters our entire vision and premise for operating. We have had to put our business development and earning potential on hold for the last 12 months whilst waiting for Lambeth to come back to us with a lease that is unworkable and with no clear explanation for the change of direction nor their strategic objectives for the building (other than financial hurdles).

Lambeth's proposed terms fall short in the following key areas:

1. **Reduced demise within the building.** The current partnership business model, and long-established plans, depended on developing a Community Hub leveraging all of the available rooms in the building that the library and gym were not using. It was agreed, in writing, that we would benefit from demise of the gym as both support income and to increase our floor area and thus facilitate external heritage funding badly needed by the building. Instead, Lambeth has removed 3 usable rooms, thus 50% of the rooms we currently use and restricted our movement through the library within their proposals. This fundamentally undermines the Hub project and means that we do not have a mandate to develop a Hub within a wonderful building complementing the library within. It restricts the programmes that we have made such steady successful progress with and as the trustees see it there is no strategy nor ambition embedded in an alternative plan. Nor does it follow through on their own [Culture 2020 Strategy](#) that initiated the project. In effect the CLH is reduced to a room rental business with no means for innovation and growth and all profits returned to Lambeth. This is an unattractive offer and is a disappointing waste of all the energy, effort and community goodwill, not to mention many hours of high value time and expertise, offered up by dedicated team and trustees.
2. **No stake or influence in the building.** One of the original objectives of the partnership with Lambeth was to support safeguarding the heritage building. This is constituted in our charitable governing documents. All agreements and clarifications sought on the basement, circulation spaces and external spaces have been ignored, eliminating our ability to support the heritage. Lambeth proposals place restrictions on any freedoms we have in the building to innovate, install, lead or do heritage fundraising.
3. **Inability to operate a community cafe.** We executed a long-agreed plan to seek planning permission, listed building consent and found an experienced local operator willing to put time and money into a community cafe. We did everything agreed we would with Lambeth in full transparency to them proposing to use infrastructure provided by Lambeth themselves when they dug out the basement. The idea was discussed for many years, and we set out fixing the conditions to actually make it a reality rather than just a talking point. When we met with Lambeth's Chief Executive in December 2022 at the town hall, the cafe was one of our agenda items. He confirmed their support for the project and even suggested that the next time we meet him should be in our cafe. The conditions imposed around the provision of a community cafe within Lambeth's tenancy terms are unworkable.

The team and trustees have experienced repeated and frustrating delays, evasions and difficulties in communication with key decision makers who remain elusive. We've provided substantial written material, most recently a multi document bundle in May with significant information asked for, but we have no evidence that this has been read as no subsequent responses reference anything provided then. Our experience has been the opposite of that stated in [Lambeth's own VCS strategy](#). We are local residents who offer transparency, via our website and social media, and clearly work hard running a service for the benefit of the community. We have shown extreme patience since September 23. This has not been valued and respected. Lambeth have provided no transparency, in writing or otherwise, over their strategic objectives for the building, and given no explanation as to why they have changed long established plans and why they are not following through on the original ideas of a partnership originating from their [Culture 2020 Strategy](#).

Consequently, the trustees and team have decided that, with Lambeth as a principal stakeholder and with the new restricted terms of tenancy which Lambeth appears unwilling to materially negotiate on, we are not able to fulfil our charitable objectives and have no choice than to set a timetable for an orderly close.

We have informed all of our partners that we no longer have secure tenancy and will be **closing by the end of December 2024** unless we can urgently agree terms that foster success for community use aligning with our charitable objectives.

We urgently request voices within the community, and our partners, to let Lambeth know that we have strong support from our local community who like what they see at the Hub and recognise how hard we've worked to develop a wide range of activities and support the continuation of this positive development and growth.

Here's how you can help:

1. Write an email [to the relevant Lambeth councillors](#) to express your support for the Hub project. Please include what you like about the Hub and would like to see in this public building. We have added some suggested text pieces for ease, please use relevant text as you see fit. If the previous link does not open a draft email for you [here is a letter that you are free to use](#).
2. Our MP, Helen Heyes, has been kind enough to meet with us a number of times to understand the situation and make representations for us directly to Lambeth. You may want to write to Helen Heyes (helen.hayes.mp@parliament.uk) with a similar letter indicating your own views on the matter.
3. Sign our [petition](#) supporting a motion to ask Lambeth what their strategic vision is for the building.
4. Share this page with your local contacts in the areas the Hub serves: Brixton, Loughborough Junction, Camberwell, Dulwich, and Herne Hill.

Your voices of support will demonstrate and amplify to Lambeth the widespread backing for the Hub's vision that we have worked hard to earn in the last couple of years. Our future success depends on Lambeth lending us the support we've made clear we need so that we can, in turn, help them many times over.



For those that want more detail or have further questions we have compiled an FAQ [here](#).