

CULTURAL SERVICES BY 2020 CONSULTATION RESPONSE

THE CLAPHAM SOCIETY

Introduction

The Clapham Society fully recognises the pressures which Lambeth Council faces, caused by a rapidly increasing population and a greatly decreased budget from central government. We remain committed to working closely with Lambeth Council to ensure that all residents continue to have access to a range of affordable, relevant and accessible cultural facilities.

Our members have been given information on where to find the Lambeth Council generated questionnaire, supporting documents and related papers. We have formed small working groups to look in more detail at the options tabled, and this document is our first response to the 2020 Cultural Services Consultation. We are keen to stay involved in the debate as it moves on to more specific proposals.

Scope

We reviewed the options for funding, future investment and management of:

- Clapham Common and Open Spaces in Clapham
- Outdoor Sports facilities
- Events Strategy
- Libraries and Archives

and we looked at these against the three proposed management levels:

1. Council-led
2. Co-operative
3. Community-led.

In our working groups, we have been mindful of:

- the obligations which Lambeth has for Clapham Common as a legal entity
- the skills, expertise and willingness to engage with local people
- the importance of democratic accountability.

The various documents written by Lambeth and available on the website sometimes appeared to be contradictory, and contain different views on the same topic, which we found confusing. For instance, the word co-operative is used both loosely and in association with one management model; similarly one management model is described as Community led, but elsewhere it is ascribed the word Pioneer. It was not always clear how each document relates to others or indeed how funding gaps would be managed.

We would appreciate the opportunity to stay involved in the debate as it moves to more specific proposals in the future. We would greatly welcome the chance to understand better the investment criteria and how funding gaps would be filled.

Summary of our views

1. We **support and agree with your aims** that ‘all residents have access to a range of affordable, excellent facilities where they can engage in cultural, sports and physical activities’.
2. The Clapham Society is sympathetic to the difficult funding reduction decisions that need to be made. However, our first reaction is that **Lambeth needs to take an initial hard-headed view on what is affordable and deliver it in line with current strategy**, rather than create a new delivery model which could dissipate resources and accountability at the worst possible time.
3. Our clear preference for Clapham Common, and Clapham’s Open Spaces is to proceed on a **Council-led maintained and managed basis** that both guarantees democratic accountability and retains expertise.

We cannot see how one could ensure that any community group to whom responsibility is delegated is genuinely representative of its locale and/or takes all interests into account. Neither do we believe that the community has any appetite for participating in contract management and delivery.

4. We do however envisage some **limited areas where co-operative schemes could be workable and achievable** given local expertise, interest and experience, within the Clapham Society and other interested groups. This could include limited fundraising against specific projects.
 - Developing a lower cost revised Tree Action Plan
 - Supporting Growing beds and street planting
 - Assisting with planning and fundraising for a new Sports Pavilion
 - Outsourcing Tennis, Bowling, Table Tennis, etc
 - Co-ordinating various sports groups, and other users of the Common
 - Remaining realistic and knowledgeable Planning partners for Lambeth.
5. We are particularly keen that the cuts do not mean that **Lambeth loses its professionally experienced Parks Managers and Tree/Parks specialists**.
6. Thus, in essence, we would recommend **an amalgam of the proposed Council-led and Co-operative management models to suit the particularities of the Common**, the very size and status of which makes it a special case compared with other parks and open spaces in the Borough.
7. We welcome the **new Events strategy with the intention to put two-thirds of events income back into the parks to improve facilities and infrastructure**. We also welcome the identification of a **Sports Pavilion and associated facilities as a major priority for the Common, with committed Borough Funding**.
8. We ask for **reconsideration of the proposal to seek a blanket licence covering all Clapham Common events**, in order that The Clapham Society and all local residents can continue to exercise our rights to attend licence hearings on an individual event basis.

Furthermore, we note that the proposed Live Nation event will occupy the enlarged event site for a period including three consecutive weekends in mid-Summer. This represents a major loss of amenity to local people. Could consideration being given to faster put up and take down?

9. We believe that there are some **new opportunities for income generation** on Clapham Common that could be organised in a co-operative way. These include:
- Charging a **greater deposit to Event holders** to ensure they return the Common to its pre-event state;
 - Issuing a **fee-based sports licence** to all commercial trainers using the Common, including military fitness and other trainers with more than one to one clients. Enforcement is important, and Policing this could be a co-operative initiative; or Lambeth could employ an enforcement officer.
 - **Charging the 4 or 5 private schools** (most in Wandsworth Borough) for their extensive use of the Common as playing fields;
 - **Encouraging more film units** to use the Common, as they make minimal damage to the infrastructure.
10. Clapham Society members are regular and enthusiastic users of Lambeth Archives as are historians from all over the world, and we believe that Lambeth Council has a duty to ensure that these documents remain readily available to all users. One of the **most valuable things about the Archives is the experience and knowledge of the staff**. This would make it hard to envisage anything other than it being Council-led.

We are most concerned to note that the Council has a firm intention of selling the Minet site **without first having a fully costed plan for relocating the Archives in a suitable long-term location**. The worst option would be that, following the closure of the Minet Library the Archives would be put into temporary, inaccessible storage with the possible loss of the qualified, experienced archivists and irreparable damage to documents, photographs and maps etc.

10. Libraries are **an essential part of our cultural and social health and on a par with our physical health and general well-being**. Notwithstanding the fact that money needs to be saved, the loss of any library is to be regretted. Any site that is sold is lost for ever. The Council notes the Borough's population is steadily increasing (latest GLA projection is 5.8% increase 2014-2020) yet it is planning to significantly reduce the funding for, and number of, libraries.

Libraries fulfil many functions and bring the local population of all ages together, e.g. for digital access, study, reading sessions, and neutral meeting space. We are concerned that these social community hubs should not be threatened by such site reductions.

Annabel Allott
Chairman, The Clapham Society