

AGE EXCHANGE (AE)

PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE BLACKHEATH VILLAGE LIBRARY AT THE REMINISCENCE CENTRE (RC)

In July, Lewisham invited AE to look at the possibility of the village library being relocated at the RC

Following an AE-funded feasibility study, in early September my Trust reported to Lewisham that this would be possible and put forward proposals as to how it could be done

Over the last five weeks, those proposals have been scrutinised by Lewisham and by leaders of the Blackheath Library Users Group and other local community groups

If implemented, the proposals would:

- create an attractive and sustainable Community Centre in the heart of the village and in the process guarantee local residents a continuing and very good library and secure the future of the RC which will otherwise be under threat of closure
- bring large numbers of older residents who regularly visit the RC but have lost the habit of using libraries back in touch with such facilities and, as a result, increase the local use of library services
- save the taxpayer (Lewisham residents) £156,000 in annual costs compared with present village library and provide what, in most respects, would be an improved library service

The new Community Centre would:

- provide on three readily accessible floors a comprehensive adult and children's library and be open six days a week, seven hours a day
- be professionally managed by AE and staffed by trained and effectively supervised volunteers
- facilitate ready access to Lewisham's large book-bank as well as having 7,000 books on shelves
- incorporate a Family Centre for internet research, state-of-the-art information services and reference library and a reminiscence lounge and coffee shop
- maintain and enhance all existing services provided at the RC for AE visitors

- incorporate an upgraded and attractive patio for fair-weather eating and drinking
- provide easy access to the Bakehouse and all its facilities and activities
- and enable additional community services and facilities to be added over time in currently unused parts of the RC.

The required upgrade of the RC could be completed in 18 months and, by phasing the building work and by AE entering into a bridging arrangement with Lewisham at the present library, be managed in a manner which would avoid any break in the continuity of either library or reminiscence services.

If AE's proposal is adopted by Lewisham, it would attract £500,000 of investment into Blackheath at a time of disinvestment in many of our local communities. Better still, the village would acquire a Community Centre which could rapidly become a new and natural focus for the cultural, social and commercial life of the village.

Around the walls of this Hall you will see a small exhibition illustrating the AE proposal. Everyone is invited to view this exhibition tonight and to see it in the coming weeks at the RC. An AE team will also be available to answer your questions. Currently, the village is in serious danger of losing both its library and its RC. This proposal would save them both.

Ian Mills
Chair, AE
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