

The Lodge – FAQs – updated end Nov 2016

Question	Answer
What is EcoLocal?	EcoLocal is the 'working name' of the Centre for Environmental Initiatives (CEI). Originally established in 1987, it is a charity run by local residents, based in Carshalton. It runs the Carshalton Environmental Fair, the Carshalton Frost Fair, Wallington Farmers' Market, regular inclusive cycling sessions, Carshalton Community Allotment, school eco lessons, home energy saving projects, and more. Annually we now work with over 350 organisations locally, interact with 20,000 individuals and enable over 200 people to volunteer 14,000 hours of time towards a variety of local projects and services in our local communities.
Is it a campaign group?	No. EcoLocal is not a pressure group or campaigning organisation and never has been. Such activity is for others. Our focus is on the delivery of local events, projects, services and educational activities. See www.ecolocal.org.uk for more information and links to what we do.
Which building is it?	It's called The Lodge. It is not Honeywood Museum, or The Old Rectory or The Grove.
Where is it?	It is in the middle of the Ecology Centre nature reserve – a site of interest for nature conservation. The building is identified as being positive to the character of the area in the Carshalton Village Conservation Area Character Appraisal.
Who owns The Lodge?	Carshalton Urban District Council bought the site in 1946 as part of their policy of protecting the ponds and their environment and to ensure that "any future use of the land would not be prejudicial to the amenities and the preservation of the picturesque scenery in Carshalton - which has at all times during the history of the Council been regarded as of vital importance". Sutton Council took over ownership of the building and have used it to house children's social services offices. In this sense the building has been used and maintained for public benefit. Due to shrinking budgets they now no longer have a use for the building.
Why the Lodge?	In 2011 the Council publicly raised the possibility that the building might become surplus to their needs and that they would not have funds to keep and maintain it. They put out a public appeal for ideas on how the building could be used in future.
Why EcoLocal?	EcoLocal responded to the Council's public appeal for ideas.
What has the process been?	A special local area committee meeting was held in Carshalton in Sept 2011. This meeting was very well attended by local residents with over 100 people present. EcoLocal's proposal for The Lodge was circulated by the Council with the papers for the meeting. It was discussed at the meeting, which included a presentation made by EcoLocal, and was overwhelmingly supported by almost all of those present. <u>No other proposals were tabled.</u>
Was it publicly transparent?	In Sept 2013 Sutton Council's Strategy and Resources Committee resolved (publicly) that "Ecolocal is notified of the Council's intention to <u>transfer the Lodge for their use</u> , subject to agreement of terms and viable proposals and business plan being developed and approved by the Council". In Oct 2014 EcoLocal's Feasibility Study was reported to Sutton Council's Strategy and Resources Committee. It resolved (publicly) that "Ecolocal should progress to the next stage of developing their proposal ... and that Ecolocal consults local residents and Friends Groups on their proposal ..." Progress was reported on again to the local area committee in early 2015, and again to Strategy and Resources Committee in September of 2015 – both publicly open meetings. Finally the project was given the go-ahead by a full Council meeting in November 2015.

<p>How did residents get to have their say on the future of The Lodge?</p>	<p>EcoLocal publicly consulted residents and local groups in 2011, as above.</p> <p>And again EcoLocal consulted residents and local groups in detail over the winter of 2014/15. This was done very publicly, to a mixed audience at community events, by posting the consultation on line, via social media sites, via email and by giving talks to local groups. The consultation was also advertised in the Carshalton Beeches Directory and in a competition taken home by primary school children attending schools in the Carshalton area. The story was covered by Sutton Guardian.</p> <p>699 detailed community surveys were completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 97% of respondents supported the proposals. - and 97% supported in principle, the transfer of the building to the EcoLocal charity, at less than full market value. <p>The survey provided <u>the opportunity to register a different reply</u> both quantitatively and qualitatively to both the above points.</p> <p>Further surveys were carried out with over 60 local groups and many potential volunteers, to get more information on their needs, and this data was included in the community benefits analysis and the business plan produced for Council Officers.</p>
<p>Was there a political involvement?</p> <p>Is the local MP a Trustee?</p>	<p>EcoLocal is a local community run charity. It is not a political organisation. EcoLocal developed its Lodge proposal entirely in response to the Council’s public request for ideas in 2011. Given the positive feedback from the overwhelming majority of local residents, the Council took the decision to give the charity the scope to develop the project further – as explained above.</p> <p>The decision on whether or not to work with the charity’s proposal was made publicly at several meetings, by elected Councillors, over a 4 year timeline. Senior Officers from various disciplines within the local authority thoroughly examined EcoLocal’s plans, assessed the community benefit to be derived, and reported back to Councillors.</p> <p>One of EcoLocal’s Trustees is now the local MP. He was invited to become a Trustee of the charity when he was a local Councillor in the mid 1990’s as he has an interest in the environment and human rights. He has had no specific role in the development of the Lodge project, in any of the Lodge project publicity or in discussions with Council Officers. By law none of the Trustees can benefit financially from the activities of the charity.</p>
<p>Is EcoLocal (CEI) a limited Company?</p> <p>Is a Director the same thing as a Trustee?</p> <p>What is EcoLocal Services Ltd?</p>	<p>Yes. These days many charities have converted from the old style charitable trust type constitution to a limited company which is also registered as a charity. EcoLocal is a company limited by guarantee (no share capital) also registered as a charity.</p> <p>EcoLocal’s charity Trustees are also the Directors, i.e. Director = Trustee. All of the Trustees carry out their duties voluntarily for public benefit. So none of the Trustees will gain financially from the Lodge project.</p> <p>EcoLocal Services Ltd (ESL) is a separate social enterprise company that donates all profits it makes to the EcoLocal charity under gift aid. ESL will not be holding the lease for the Lodge.</p>
<p>What is ‘asset transfer’</p>	<p>Asset transfer is established by an Act of Parliament as a mechanism to facilitate the community ownership and management of publicly owned land and buildings. The General Disposal Consent allows public bodies such as Councils to transfer the ownership and management of land and buildings they own to local communities at ‘less than best consideration’ – at less than full market value.</p> <p>Communities can enter into discussions with public bodies about Community Asset Transfer where it is their intention to promote social, economic and environmental well-being (the Triple Bottom Line). This is what EcoLocal has done with Sutton Council in regard to the Lodge. The ultimate aim of Community Asset Transfer is community empowerment – that is, to ensure</p>

	<p>that land and buildings are retained or transformed and then operated for public benefit through community asset ownership and management. Most local authorities (of all political persuasions) have experience of Community Asset Transfer and this has happened before in Sutton.</p> <p>‘Asset Transfer’ is sometimes confused with the ‘Community Right To Bid’ process. Community Asset Transfer is a voluntary process entered into proactively by public bodies. Community Right to Bid is a pre-emptive legal right pertaining to communities - but is risky to use in the sense that communities are less likely to be able to compete with the private sector, so is not always appropriate.</p>
<p>Why have EcoLocal been offered a leasehold on The Lodge at less than full market value?</p>	<p>The charity had to carry out an extensive ‘social benefits analysis’. Council Officers specified a process for the charity to follow. This resulted in the production of a 65 page report including a detailed Triple Bottom Line spreadsheet itemising all the calculations used to define the value of the social benefit to be generated by the Lodge project. It evidenced that the proposal would be worth £3.4million per year to the local community (twice the social benefit value of EcoLocal’s current work).</p> <p>At a time when Council budgets are shrinking dramatically as a result of central government policy, EcoLocal’s proposal showed how services could be provided to the local community at zero cost to the Council, on an ongoing basis annually. In other words, the transfer of the asset at less than market value would be more than made up for, in future years, by the charity delivering / and enabling a wide range of needed services and activities which the Council will not be able to afford to provide. The building and the use of grounds would also be protected for at least 125 years – without future interference. This is what the overwhelming majority of residents said they wanted when asked.</p> <p>Nobody is losing out on anything as the asset would be transferred to the EcoLocal charity which exists for public benefit - not private gain. This is exactly the kind of thing envisaged by the Act of Parliament enabling asset transfer at less than full market value.</p>
<p>Why are EcoLocal going to convert part of the building into flats?</p>	<p>The charity needs to raise funds to buy the leasehold from the Council (£600k) and to pay for the refurbishment works to community areas and convert parts of the building into flats. 9 flats will be developed and 7 long leases sold on the open market. 2 flats will be retained by the charity to rent in order to generate revenue to cover ongoing building maintenance costs. So the sale of flats will pay for both the purchase and development of the site. If there is a surplus of funds remaining, these will be put back into further improvements to the community areas and the charitable purposes proposed.</p>
<p>Does EcoLocal have the expertise to carry out a development like this?</p>	<p>EcoLocal have put together a project team whose experience includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - significant previous experience of managing heritage/listed building development projects including the successful renovation of Strawberry Lodge Conference Centre in Carshalton in the mid 1990’s and the equally successful renovation of Honeywood Museum. - senior management expertise as head of finance for a government ministry - experience in project management on diverse projects for over 20 years - clerk of works on major multi-site engineering projects. <p>EcoLocal has also engaged Robinson Kenning and Gallagher Architects and Surveyors to advise on the development. They have successfully managed heritage projects in the borough and have the size and scope to bring a high degree of professionalism to the project. We have used 4 lawyers from different disciplines at Russell-Cooke Solicitors to advise on legal aspects of the project – and this work continues. We have taken advice from Sayer Vincent Charity Accountants. None of this work has been carried out at tax payers’ expense as they have used funds from a legacy to pay for the costs involved.</p>

<p>What facilities will be available?</p>	<p>EcoLocal plans to create community hall, meeting room, office facilities/desk space, storage, workshop and classroom space. The visible amenity of the building will be improved.</p>
<p>Who will benefit from EcoLocal using The Lodge</p>	<p>EcoLocal will make facilities available to 60+ local groups and hundreds of individuals at affordable rates. We will support the activities of existing groups on site. We will also open up the space for more activities and events, appropriate to the location. Volunteering valued (using the London Living Wage) at over £1.4m per year has been offered by local residents. The project will provide facilities for a wide range of people of all ages, and in a variety of ways.</p> <p>EcoLocal is a charity established for community benefit. The charity will benefit from the project by having secure accommodation and greater scope to expand its activities and related social enterprise services. The project will enable the charity to diversify its funding base – a key strategic objective for many charities in the current economic climate. This approach is also recommended by government as grants are now much harder to source. By being able to manage this property in a socially entrepreneurial way, the charity will be able to use its dynamism and community experience to bring the spaces created alive, and improve the amenity value to all, with a wide range of outcomes.</p>
<p>How will EcoLocal raise the funds?</p> <p>When will The Lodge be available for community use?</p> <p>How will the project be maintained?</p>	<p>The charity has formally applied for development funding via a leading social Bank. As at the end of Nov 2016 we have raised over £2m of funding and are now in the process of finalising financing of the project. The loan finance will cover the cost of planned building works and the initial purchase of the asset from Sutton Council. Detailed design and subsequent building works will take approximately 14 months to complete.</p> <p>Some facilities will be available for use almost immediately upon EcoLocal acquiring the property although works will require areas are handed to the builders at certain points. Full use will be possible at the end of the development period.</p> <p>The business plan has been developed with a view to the entire enterprise being self-financing for the long term. This means that the cost of maintenance of the buildings and operation of activities at the site is included.</p>
<p>Wouldn't it make more sense for Sutton Council to do the housing development and rent the building to EcoLocal?</p>	<p>EcoLocal would prefer to carry out the development and operate the site itself. By doing so, EcoLocal will take this burden off the public purse, generate income for community activities and deliver social benefits for the long term.</p> <p>Because the lease will be for at 125 years, the site will be protected from unwanted development and interference for the long term. In the unlikely event that EcoLocal were to reassign the lease to another organisation at some point in the future, the lease requires that any incoming organisation would have to deliver the same charitable uses that EcoLocal is required to deliver.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Council considers that the EcoLocal plan currently provides better value for money and benefit to the community in the long term than other suggested alternatives.</p>