

The Lodge – FAQs – updated February 2018

We previously consulted widely on our plans to create a thriving focal point for the local community for years to come at the Lodge in Carshalton. In response to the wishes of the local community, and to keep as many of Carshalton's buildings in community use, local charity EcoLocal is now rejuvenating and reviving the existing Lodge buildings and carrying out a mixed use development with plans to include:

- Community Hall and Kitchen
- Rejuvenated Victorian Walled Garden
- Straw Bale Classroom Suite (eventually replacing the old pre-fab building at the front)
- Office & Meetings Centre Hub to support community enterprise
- Workshop facilities in the old stables / outbuildings
- Storage for local groups and projects

The development will be carried out in three phases:

- Phase 1 will see us make minor changes to enable us to relocate to part of the Lodge building. Phase 2 will cover the conversion of the main building and outbuildings to community use, offices and the provision of 9 flats, 7 for sale and 2 for short term let. This work has started at the end of February 2018 and take approximately 10 months
- Phase 3 will cover additional improvements to the buildings, to construct a straw bale classroom, kitchen and new link /entrance for the community hall, and other improvements such as installation of a glazed roof to the central courtyard and works to the Victorian Walled Garden as funds allow. All social value benefits expected from the development will be secured by the facilities provided by Phases 1 and 2.

Works are being carried out sustainably and sensitively to enhance and preserve the key characteristics of The Lodge and its outbuildings. We have consulted local heritage experts both in the community and Council (one member of our project team has recently been a volunteer heritage advisor to the Council). None of the planned works will raise heritage problems or archaeological issues.

Here we answer questions which have been frequently asked:

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 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?	Note. 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 and in helping people develop their own resourcefulness and contribute locally. 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.
History of 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 the Council no longer have a use for the building.

<p>Why the Lodge?</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Why EcoLocal?</p>	<p>EcoLocal responded to the Council’s public appeal for ideas.</p>
<p>Local support?</p>	<p>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. A presentation was made by EcoLocal on their ideas for the Lodge, and these were overwhelmingly supported by almost all of those residents present. <u>No other proposals were tabled.</u></p>
<p>Was the process of selling a lease to EcoLocal publicly transparent?</p>	<p>Yes. 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”.</p> <p>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 further consults local residents and Friends Groups on their proposal ...”</p> <p>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>
<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. <u>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.</u></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, so that the building could be used for community use and benefit <p>The survey provided the opportunity to register a different reply 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>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 <u>publicly</u> 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>Is the local MP a Trustee?</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</p>

Other Trustees	<p>none of the Trustees can benefit financially from the activities of the charity.</p> <p>EcoLocal's Trustees have all been involved in various community organisations / volunteering activities <u>and have a variety of political views spanning the spectrum of political debate</u>. The organisation itself has no party political affiliations whatsoever. We see such affiliations as relevant to political parties and campaign organisations, and we are not one of these.</p>
Is EcoLocal a limited Company?	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. So EcoLocal is a company limited by guarantee (with no share capital) but is also a registered charity.
Is a Director the same thing as a Trustee?	EcoLocal's charity Trustees are therefore also the Directors, i.e. Director = Trustee. All of the Trustees carry out their duties voluntarily for public benefit. None of the Trustees gain financially from their involvement with the charity or in relation to the Lodge project.
'Social Benefits Analysis'	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.
Why have EcoLocal been offered a leasehold on The Lodge at less than full market value?	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. There are also significant costs in developing the community facilities envisaged by EcoLocal. Furthermore, the building and the use of grounds will also be protected for at least 125 years – without future interference. The overwhelming majority of residents responding to our community consultation (see above) indicated that they understood these issues and wanted the project to go ahead.
Who benefits?	The community. Nobody is losing out on anything as the community asset is being held under a long lease to generate public benefit. 7 of the flats which are created will be sold to pay for the purchase from LBS and to cover development costs.
Why are EcoLocal going to convert part of the building into flats?	<p>The charity needed 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.</p> <p>The project is split into two 125 year leases with The Centre for Environmental Initiatives, trading as Ecolocal as the main leaseholder. Our wholly owned subsidiary company Ecolocal Lodge Development Limited (ELD) has taken a lease over the areas to be converted to 7 residential flats for sale, with proceeds legally ring fenced to cover development costs, and asset purchase costs for both ELD and the charity. If there is a surplus of funds remaining after this, the charity is required to put these back into further improvements to the community areas of the building and then after this, toward the charitable purposes proposed on site for the benefit of local people.</p>
Does EcoLocal have the expertise to carry out a development like this?	<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 - various people in the community with specific skills / professional knowledge <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</p>

	<p>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 detailed legal aspects of the project. We have taken advice from Sayer Vincent Charity Accountants. None of this work has been carried out at tax payers' expense as we have used funds from a legacy and other donations to pay for the costs involved.</p> <p>We have taken detailed legal advice in order to ensure that the legal structure complies with charity and corporate law, is in line with the Heads of Terms agreed with LBS and so that safeguards are in place to ensure community benefits for the long term.</p>
What facilities will be available?	EcoLocal plans to create a community hall, meeting room, office facilities/desk space, storage, workshop and classroom space. The visible amenity of the building will be improved.
Who will benefit from EcoLocal using The Lodge	<p>EcoLocal will make facilities available to many 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>
How has EcoLocal raised the funds and when will works start?	EcoLocal has agreed development funding via a leading social Bank who have carefully assessed the project. The loan finance is covering the cost of planned building works, professional advice and the purchase of the lease from Sutton Council. Building works will take approximately 10 months to complete and started in late Feb 2018.
When will The Lodge be available for community use?	Some facilities will be available for use almost immediately upon EcoLocal acquiring the property although obviously the planned works will require areas are handed to the builders at certain points. Full use will be possible at the end of the phase 2 development period.
How will the project be maintained?	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 in the business plan.
Wouldn't it make more sense for Sutton Council to do the housing development and rent the building to EcoLocal?	<p>EcoLocal prefers 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. We will also ensure that one of Carshalton's heritage landmarks remains in significant community use. We want to be socially entrepreneurial.</p> <p>Because the lease is for 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 / community benefit uses that EcoLocal is required to deliver.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Council considered that the EcoLocal plan provided better value for money and benefit to the community in the long term than other alternatives suggested very recently.</p>