

The Lodge – FAQs – updated December 2021

In response to the wishes of the local residents, and to keep as many of Carshalton’s buildings protected and in community use, local charity EcoLocal has been converting the Lodge buildings located in the Ecology Centre grounds into a thriving focal point for the local community for years to come. This NOT-FOR-PROFIT mixed use project is self-financing and includes:

- 7 flats for sale to pay for the scheme (currently 2 sold and 2 under offer since practical completion of works achieved in Sept 2021)
- 2 rental flats in The Old Stable / Hayloft building at the rear of the site (now occupied)
- Community Hall and Kitchen
- Rejuvenated Victorian Walled Garden, Office & Meetings Centre Hub to support community and charity enterprise, Workshop facilities in the outbuildings
- Eco-Build Classroom Suite (to eventually replace the old pre-fab building at the front)

Here we answer questions that have arisen since the project idea was first proposed back in 2011.

Question	Answer
<p>Progress of works and the outcome</p>	<p>Despite Covid-19 practical completion was achieved in September 2021 and we are delighted to say that after many delays we now have the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certificate of approval for the works issued by the local authority building control department at London Borough of Sutton • new homes structural insurance warranty in place • practical completion of the works signed off in September 2021 by Robinson Kenning & Gallagher Architects and Surveyors. Kevin Stocker, Partner at Robinson Kenning & Gallagher has recently commented “I truly believe that once the purchasers are in they will be delighted with their new flats” • Sales in progress - the apartments are now for sale (some sold or under offer already since remarketing recently started) - see our website for details • HM Government backed Help to Buy scheme available to buyers <p>We would love to hear from community organisations, charities, artists, social enterprises and anyone with an interest in using the facilities at The Lodge. We are happy to arrange visits by appointment.</p>
<p>Why has the building work take so long?</p>	<p>Works started in early 2018. However, the building contractor did not complete works on time. The contractor repeatedly gave us new estimated completion dates, but these were repeatedly not met. This has been very frustrating for all involved, including for our professional project managers Robinson Kenning & Gallagher (RKG) who have been overseeing and inspecting works, as well as for ourselves and others affected.</p> <p>RKG’s work on our project has included the conducting and arranging of numerous surveys, detailed design and build drawings for the specification of works, managing contract tendering and ongoing site inspections throughout the extended conversion process and contractor management.</p> <p>We had to terminate contracts with the builder in Spring 2021. RKG then oversaw completion of the specification of works. RKG signed off practical completion of works in September 2021.</p>

What is EcoLocal?	EcoLocal is the 'working name' of the Centre for Environmental Initiatives (CEI). Originally established in 1987, it is a Registered 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 300 organisations locally, run events and activities which reach 20,000 individuals, supporting over 1000 people with disabilities or other problems such as mental health issues. We enable over 200 people to volunteer 14,000 hours of time towards a variety of local projects in our community.
Is it a campaign group?	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 (in Grove Park).
Where is it?	It is in the middle of the Ecology Centre nature reserve – a site of interest for nature conservation.
Is The Lodge listed?	No, The Lodge is not a listed building. 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 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 had 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 on what to do with heritage buildings that they could no longer afford to keep
Local support?	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 residents present.
Was the process of selling a lease to EcoLocal publicly transparent?	Yes. In Sept 2013 Sutton Council's Strategy and Resources Committee resolved (publicly) that "Ecolocal is notified of the Council's intention to transfer the Lodge for their use, 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 further 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. Sutton Council retains the freehold of The Lodge.

<p>How did residents get to have their say on the future of The Lodge?</p>	<p>EcoLocal initially publicly consulted residents and local groups in 2011, as above.</p> <p>EcoLocal again 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, so that the building could be used for community use and benefit <p>The survey provided <u>the opportunity to register a negative response both quantitatively and qualitatively to both the above points.</u></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 a detailed community benefits analysis and business plan produced for London Borough of Sutton 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 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>Was the local MP a Trustee?</p>	<p>One of EcoLocal’s Trustees used to be the local MP. However, 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. He 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, who are also Directors of the charity, can benefit financially from the activities of the charity.</p>
<p>Other Trustees</p>	<p>EcoLocal’s Trustees have all been involved in various community organisations / volunteering activities and have a variety of political views spanning the spectrum of political debate. 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>
<p>Is EcoLocal a limited Company?</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. So EcoLocal is a company limited by guarantee (with no share capital) but is also a registered charity.</p>
<p>Is a Director the same thing as a Trustee?</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>‘Social Benefits Analysis’</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</p>

<p>Why have EcoLocal been offered a leasehold on The Lodge at less than full market value?</p> <p>Who benefits?</p>	<p>of the social benefit to be generated by the Lodge project.</p> <p>At a time when Council budgets shrank 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 was also a need to take into account the fact there would be significant costs incurred by the charity in converting the site to a mixed use facility. Furthermore, the building and the use of grounds would be protected for at least 125 years from 2018 – 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.</p> <p>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 created are being sold to pay for the purchase from LBS and to cover development costs.</p>
<p>Why are EcoLocal going to convert part of the building into flats?</p>	<p>The charity needed to raise funds to buy the leasehold from the Council and to pay for the refurbishment works to community areas and convert parts of the building into flats. 9 flats have been developed and 7 long leases are being sold on the open market. 2 flats have been retained by the charity to rent in order to generate revenue to cover ongoing 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 sales are complete, the charity is required to put these back into further improvements to the community areas of the building and toward the charitable purposes proposed on site for the benefit of local people. No individual is making a profit for themselves.</p>
<p>Heritage</p>	<p>Works have been carried out sensitively to enhance and preserve the key characteristics of The Lodge and its outbuildings. We 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 have raised heritage problems or archaeological issues.</p>
<p>Does EcoLocal have the expertise to carry out a development like this?</p>	<p>EcoLocal put together a project team whose experience includes:</p> <p>Robinson Kenning & Gallagher (RKG) Architects & Surveyors. RKG were chosen as they have over 40 years experience in both large and small scale developments and refurbishments many of which involve buildings originally constructed during the Victorian era. Their Heritage expertise stretches back decades working on historic buildings, often within conservation areas and they have significant experience in Grade 1, 2, 2* & Heritage at Risk buildings. Formed in 1971 and with a portfolio of projects of all sizes and complexity, RKG have extensive new build and refurbishment experience. Every project is monitored by a Partner from conception to completion working with a skilled multi-national team of Architectural, Technical and Building Surveying staff.</p> <p>Other members of the team have significant previous experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 more recent renovation of Honeywood Museum.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 and professional knowledge <p>We have used lawyers from different disciplines at Russell-Cooke Solicitors to advise on detailed legal aspects of the project and continue to do so. 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. We have taken detailed legal advice in order to ensure that the legal set-up complies with charity and corporate law, is in line with the terms agreed with LBS and so that safeguards are in place to ensure community benefits for the long term.</p>
<p>Who will benefit from EcoLocal using The Lodge</p>	<p>EcoLocal will make facilities available to many local groups and hundreds of individuals. We will support the activities of existing groups on site. We will also open up the space for more activities, training and events, appropriate to the location. The project will provide facilities for a wide range of people of all ages, including those with disabilities and other needs in a variety of ways. Volunteering valued (using the London Living Wage) at over £1.4m per year has been offered by local residents.</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 and in particular since the event of Covid-19. 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 has EcoLocal raised the funds?</p>	<p>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. There was no problem with obtaining a loan and the Charity Bank have been very supportive.</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 in the business plan.</p>
<p>Wouldn't it make more sense for Sutton Council to do the housing development?</p>	<p>EcoLocal prefers to carry out the development and operate the site itself. By doing so, EcoLocal is seeking to 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 are being entrepreneurial in a socially constructive way.</p> <p>Because the lease is for 125 years (from Jan 2018), the site will be protected from unwanted development and interference for the long term. 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.</p>
<p>Why has the building work take so long?</p>	<p>Works started in early 2018. However, the building contractor did not complete works on time. The contractor repeatedly gave us new estimated completion dates, but these were repeatedly not met. This has been very frustrating for all involved, including for our professional project managers Robinson Kenning & Gallagher (RKG) who have been overseeing and inspecting works, as well as for ourselves and others affected.</p> <p>RKG's work on our project has included the conducting and arranging of numerous surveys,</p>

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