

Converting the Old Rectory to an arts centre

Revised 11 July 2015

1. The Old Rectory and its context

The Old Rectory was most probably built for William Hollier who was rector of Carshalton from 1703 until his death in 1739.

The original house had two main floors with four rooms on each plus cellars and an attic.

It is grade II listed and is one of the finest historic buildings in the Borough. The outside is attractive and has long been a local landmark and the interior is fundamentally well preserved with much of the original panelling.

The Old Rectory also has significant group value with the numerous other listed buildings in and around the ponds. The area is one of the most distinctive parts of the landscape of suburban London. The special character of the area has been recognized for well over a century and was the reason why the Carshalton Council acquired most of the land and buildings around the ponds in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

Carshalton was one of the first conservation areas in the borough designated in the 1960s.

For the future, the development of the Wandle Valley Country Park will increase Carshalton's importance within the region.

The Wandle Valley Country Park is likely to be the most significant leisure development in the Borough in the next decade or so. The park is a large area and will be of regional rather than merely local significance comparable to the Lee Valley Park in size and importance. The park should bring significant economic benefits to the borough. Some of these will be fairly intangible: people like to live and work in attractive areas and they have a well-known tendency to do better economically. There should also be benefits in terms of direct visitor spend and Carshalton is central to the realisation of these. The Borough will have four village centres around the edge of the park – Beddington, Wallington, Carshalton and Hackbridge. Of these, it is Carshalton that stands out from the crowd with ponds, historic buildings and parks: the others do not have much to set them apart from other suburban centres. There is a very significant group of historic buildings around Carew Manor but they do not currently provide the services visitors will want.

Scale is critical. The more an area has to draw visitors, the more will come and the more they will spend.

2. The current situation

The local Heritage groups accept that the Council is in a very difficult financial position due to massive government imposed cuts. They understand that the Council needs to reduce the number of buildings it is responsible for and that it no longer has a need for the Old Rectory.

The local Heritage groups believe that, despite the difficult financial position, the Council wants to continue to preserve the character and amenities of the area around the ponds as their predecessors have done for almost a century.

3. The vision

- To establish an Arts Engagement Centre and Gallery in the Old Rectory at Carshalton Ponds.
- To be welcoming and available for the whole community to experience and engage in activities across the whole spectrum of the arts.
- Using the museum art collection, the historic building and beautiful location as inspiration to create a community resource.
- To establish a fun and creative arts hub for the Borough in conjunction with Honeywood museum and working with the wealth of local community artists and craftsmen.
- To engage with those who would not normally participate in arts activities, including looked after children, and emphasising the role of arts as therapy across age ranges and different needs.

The project is being developed by the local Friends groups, the Friends of Honeywood Museum, the Friends of the Ecology Centre, the Friends of the Water Tower, the Carshalton Society and the Carshalton and District History and Archaeology Society.

4. How the Old Rectory would be used

We are planning to use part of the building as a holiday let and part as an arts and exhibition venue. The holiday lets will provide the money to pay for the repair and running of the building and the costs of opening it to the public. Staffing will depend on volunteers.

5. The benefits of the project

The project will preserve the building including its original 18th century interior, and make it accessible to the public. It has the potential to become an inspirational and much loved home for the wider arts community, working with them delivering activities for all. It can become part of the “cultural hub” in Carshalton allied to Honeywood Museum and be of real benefit to residents in engendering well-being and a sense of place which is so important to retain. It would also increase the scale of tourism offer available. We are in a period when community partnerships and collaborations are crucially important in retaining our identity for future generations. This project could make a real difference.

6. Work so far

We have taken advice from the Sutton Council for Voluntary Services, the Ethical Property Foundation (a charity that advises other charities on property issues) and the Architectural Heritage Fund. We have also had a number of conversations with several types of potential user and have involved the Carshalton Traders in our discussions.

We have also contacted the Georgian Group, Save Britain’s Heritage, the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust and the National Trust to raise interest in the building and its protection.

We held a public meeting in March to explain the current situation in relation to the Old Rectory and to discuss possible initiatives and we have set up an Old Rectory website.

The Ethical Property Foundation and Architectural Heritage Fund have both strongly advised us that the uncertainties about the state of the building make the project very risky.

We are pleased that the Council has decided to repair the defects to the south wall and the flooring connected to it. There are still considerable uncertainties about the extent of repairs

to the fabric, especially the state of the panelling and the extent of fungal infestation. Our advisers say that any survey needs to be carried out by qualified conservation professionals.

These uncertainties make it very difficult to address the capital issues in our proposal. A number of potential grants are partly dependant on the condition and value of the building.

We want to apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Start-up grant which will cover part of the cost of a survey, the detailed development of a business plan etc. We would need to raise some additional money from other sources. We cannot apply for this grant without written permission from the Council.

Some possible funders have indicated that they would want to see a commitment from the Council to put the building to some public use before they provide grants for project development.

7. The Business Plan

The Friends groups have been continuing to develop their business plan, mindful of the Council's requirement that the Old Rectory has to have a viable and sustainable future without any recourse to Council revenue funds.

We have explored various ways of raising income including residential flats, office spaces, artists' studios, tea rooms, various types of selling spaces, educational courses, and a wedding venue. We have concluded that using part of the building for a holiday let is the most promising approach as it will not involve significant damage to the historic fabric, is consistent with the limitations of the site, such as the small amount of parking, and is likely to bring in a viable income.

We need more time to develop our business plans in detail and both the Ethical Property Foundation and the Architectural Heritage Fund have offered to help us in the very detailed and time-consuming work needed in this respect.

We have made arrangements to carry out a detailed historic survey of the building to provide a clearer and more detailed picture of the historically significant features.

8. Charitable Incorporated Organisation

We are setting up a Charitable Incorporated Organisation to provide an organisational framework for the development and ongoing running of the project. This will be called the Carshalton Old Rectory Association (CORA). A constitution has been drawn up and the application to the Charity Commission is in progress.

9. Process for Consideration of our Plans

We need to apply for grants to investigate the building and develop our business plan. We cannot apply for a Heritage Lottery Fund Start-up Grant without Council permission. The work in relation to both the Grove and the Lodge did not have to go through the process we are going through, as they started, over 4 years ago, before the process was devised. We believe that the Old Rectory is far too important and is so much a part of the entire historical ponds conservation area that it has to be given separate and special consideration. We therefore ask the Council to:

1. Give us permission to apply for a Heritage Lottery Fund start up grant.
2. Make a commitment to give the building over to community use.
3. Accept the need identified by separate advisory bodies for more thorough and

intrusive surveys to facilitate further planning;

The Old Rectory is one of the most important historic buildings in the Borough and has the potential to be a major community asset if time is given to allow the project to be fully developed.

All of this work shows our total commitment to this project and our aim of preserving the Old Rectory and securing its future as a resource for the local community.