

Long Ashton Library Consultation Report

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Background

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2018/19 contained agreed proposals to make savings of up to £260,000 from Library services between 2018 and 2020. The lease on Long Ashton Library expired in 2017, and the existing premises are proposed for closure at the end of 2018 with replacement via a twice weekly visit from a Mobile Library supported by a range of Outreach service provision.

The authority undertook a seven-week consultation between the 4th. September 2018 and 24th. October 2018 to gather the views of Library users and non-users to help shape the future provision of Library services to the area. The questions asked what parts of the library service have been, or are, used at present and sought views on the potential impact of the changed nature of the service and future provision to the locality.

The consultation survey was available online via the websites of North Somerset Council and Long Ashton Parish Council and in hard copy at the library and a range of other community venues within the locality. 92 completed questionnaires were received, one from a small business and the remainder from individuals.

2017 Population Estimate for Long Ashton	6383		
Long Ashton Active Library Users September 2018	1027	Active library users as a percentage of Long Ashton population	16%
Consultation responses received	92	Consultation responses received as a percentage of Long Ashton population	1.4%
		Consultation responses received as a percentage of Long Ashton Library Active Users	9%

Summary of responses

Question 1 outlined the draft proposals for continuation of library services within the village following closure of the current library premises in the light of the funding gap outlined in the supporting documentation.

91 responses were made, 71% indicating that they did understand why the authority has to make changes to the library service provision.

Question 2 listed the services that the mobile library would be able to provide (including books for all ages; information about Council services, health and business; a reservation and collection service; free Wi-Fi and support for the Summer Reading Challenge). Respondents were asked to identify other services that they wished to see provided by the vehicle.

68 free text responses were made, the majority of which were on the following topics:

- The need to ensure adequate provision of children's stock and activities, including Story and Rhymetimes.
- Concerns about lack of space on board the vehicle and the timing of visits – in particular the need for visits timed to take place after school preferably at school sites and for a Saturday morning stop.
- ICT – provision of public computing facilities on board the vehicle and staff support for use of mobile devices plus printing, scanning and photocopying.
- Provision of DVD's.
- Access for older service users, including a step lift, a chair to use whilst browsing and space for walking aids
- Regular monthly attendance by officers from NSC representing Streets and Open Spaces and community policing etc.

Many respondents wanted opening hours the same as, or greater than those of the existing premises and a full range of services and facilities identical to those currently on offer – in essence, "Everything that the current library provides".

Question 3 asked respondents to identify whether they were replying on behalf of an organisation or themselves. Only one person responded on behalf of their organisation and expressed their disappointment that, as a regular booker of the library meeting room, this facility would no longer be available to the community. 91 people responded on behalf of themselves or their families / friends and **Question 4** asked for their home postcode information.

Question 5 asked the individual respondents to provide some additional information, as to whether they were library customers, users of the home library service, library volunteers or library staff. Of those who responded, 75% were library customers, 8% users of the home library service and 2% each volunteers and staff. 7% did not identify as users or having a voluntary or working relationship with the library service.

Question 6 prompted the individual respondents to identify the extent to which the proposed closure of the library would affect them. Of the 89 responses to this, 73% indicated that it would affect them a lot, 20% a little, and 6% not at all, whilst 1% were unsure how it would affect them. The respondents were then asked to provide free text comments about the impact of the proposed closure, to which 80 free text comments were received. These comments broadly cover the following concerns:

- The closure of the library represents a loss to the village of an important community venue, with a disproportionate impact upon parents, children and older people.
- The loss of easy access to a cultural venue, for displays and exhibitions, the use of the library as a meeting place and concerns about the reduction in the choice of library materials to choose from alongside the cramped nature of the Mobile library when busy.
- Limited hours of the mobile library resulting in possible overcrowding on the vehicle.
- Concerns for working people (9-5 Mon to Fri) not being able to access the service, and in particular the loss of library facilities on Saturday morning, which is regarded as an important time for families to visit.
- Environmental concerns about the need to make longer journeys to use libraries in Nailsea and Bristol.

Question 7 concerned protected characteristics as defined within the Equality Act 2010, and asked respondents to let us know of anything that should be taken account of within our proposals to ensure that they were not disadvantaged due to any aspect of their identity. This question resulted in 23 free text responses covering the following areas:

- Parental concerns – children disadvantaged by lack of service after school or at weekends, the cost of travel to another library, working parents unable to take children at times when mobile might call and concerns for children with disabilities.
- Older people – concerns about access to the vehicle, vehicle steps and space inside preventing use of walking aids.
- Lack of toilet facilities for service users.

Question 8 asked how often users visited the library. Of the 87 responses, 33% visited once a week or more often, 43% a few times a month and 24% less than that.

90 responses were received to **Question 9** in which 64% of users indicated that they had used another library in the previous 12 months. In **Question 10** respondents were asked to identify the other libraries that they had used and provided the following locations:

- Nailsea Library 37%
- Bristol Central Library 32%
- Portishead Library 9%
- Bedminster Library 7%
- Clifton Library 4%
- UWE (Art & Design) 3%
- Pill Library 2%
- Redland Library 2%
- Weston s Mare Library 2%
- Other libraries 2%

Question 11 required respondents to identify the day and time that they usually visited Long Ashton Library. Saturday morning was the most popular time amongst respondents (64%), with all other times and days (Tuesday and Thursday mornings and afternoons) equally busy with between 30% and 36% visiting.

Walking to the library was overwhelmingly identified as the main means of travel to the Library in **Question 12** by 79% of 67 respondents, with travel by car at 15%, cycling and bus at 3% each. **Question 13** revealed that 77% of respondents had travelled for 15 minutes or less to reach the library, with 21% between 15 and 30 minutes, and only 2% for more than 30minutes.

Question 14 invited respondents to identify the things that they used the library for: Unsurprisingly, Books topped the list of the top 6 reasons for using the service:

- Books 96%
- Community Information 72%
- DVD's 37%
- Children's events / activities 36%
- Socialising 31%
- Health Information 22%

Only 13% of respondents used the library computers and 7% the free Wi-Fi service.

Question 15 asked respondents to identify any local venues that might be considered for 'pop up' library activities, including story and rhyme times for pre-school children. 40 responses were received with the majority referring to the Long Ashton Community Centre (including the Community Café), various church halls and the guide and brownie premises as possible locations.

Finally, in **Question 16** on behalf of Long Ashton Parish Council we asked whether respondents supported the establishment of a Community led library at a new location within the village, operated by Volunteers, with a level of assistance from the local authority. 86 responses were received:

Strongly Agree	57%
Agree	24%
Neither agree nor disagree	12%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	2%

Next Steps

The majority of respondents recognised the need for the authority to make changes to the library service in the light of the funding gap facing the local authority, but were clearly concerned that the closure of a premises based service and replacement with a Mobile Library would see a reduction in library provision which impacted particularly on older people, working parents and parents with pre-school and school age children.

In response to the points raised during the consultation:

The Mobile Library is the size of a small single deck bus. Access to the vehicle is via steps which convert into a lift for users with mobility difficulties, or are using a wheelchair. The vehicle can accommodate up to 8 customers at a time and has a folding seat available for use.

Stock on the vehicle will be reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of the community, and a free reservation service will still be available. We will provide a small DVD loan service. Free wi-fi for users with their own devices is available on board and adjacent to the library but it is not currently possible to provide a public laptop, printing, copying or scanning services on board.

Officers from community organisations and other council teams, such as streets and open spaces will be able to regularly visit and meet local residents.

We will continue to provide access to a range of community and health information.

Alongside the mobile library service we will also seek to establish a series of 'pop up' library events in the village, which will feature storytimes / rhymetimes and other library and book related activities and events in various community locations.

Subject to necessary consents, we hope to provide a mobile library service in a central location, not too distant from the existing library every Tuesday afternoon from 2.30 to 4.30, and every Friday morning from 9.30 to 11.30. These are provisional days and times and will be reviewed once operational. We have considered the provision of a Saturday morning stop, but regret this is not currently possible to achieve within the resources available. A number of requests were also made for a stop outside of both the local primary schools at the end of the school day. We regret that this is not possible due to the size of the vehicle and the conflicting demands for parking space at this time of day with parents collecting children in the narrow roads leading to the schools.

We noted that 64% of those who responded to the consultation indicated that they had also used other local libraries over the last 12 months, with Nailsea, Bristol Central, Portishead and Bedminster the most popular. North Somerset is a member of the LibrariesWest consortium and library membership cards are valid in every library in the Consortium, including those across Bristol. Items may be borrowed from and returned to any library across the region.

We will continue to support the Parish Council in their aspirations to seek to provide a Community led library within the village.