

Redditch Library Consultation – Public Meeting

Date, Time and Location of Meeting

Tuesday 24th January 2023 at 5pm

Redditch Library Meeting Room 2

Attendees

Public Attendees approx.. 40 (4 children)

Worcestershire County Council Attendees:

- Cllr Marcus Hart – Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities
- Hannah Perrott – Assistant Director for Communities
- Plus additional officers

Redditch Borough Council Attendees:

- Cllr Matt Dormer – Leader
- Plus additional officers

North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) Representative

A little over half of attendees are library members by show of hands.

Public Comments made and responses given during the session

Comment: We heard at the last meeting that knocking down the library will increase footfall to the town centre – why do you think that when there are 6 other entrances into the centre? Why do you think a purpose-built, well-kept building should be knocked down?

Response: NWEDR Rep – Active nodes draw people to various points; We have looked at how we can increase the connectivity and this proposal increases connectivity in the town centre.

Comment: Concern over disruption to library service, risk of reduction in library service because moving to a non-purpose built building, and at a high cost. Is there any benefit to the library from this move? Any improvement to service?

Response: Experience tells us that the risk around reduction in footfall and reduction in usage hasn't happened with other library moves, e.g. Bromsgrove and Wythall.

Co-locating with other partners is a key benefit, e.g. health, to bring in additional people who would benefit from library service. We have seen this already with our colocation with DWP.

Supplementary Comment: Do you have hard evidence?

Response: Yes we do. Bromsgrove Library example resulted in a 37% increase in footfall.

Comment: Challenge re. the statement that it will be same library provision – “it isn’t”. The table in the published Cabinet report has nothing in for business, doesn’t mention the computers and study places.

Response: The table previously published shows purely the proposed space allocation within the Town Hall, to demonstrate that the overall square footage is similar, it doesn’t mention the specific items or services which will be available on those floors. It is potentially misleading, but it is clear from the more detailed plans, which are available, exactly how the number of desks and various zones will fit in, including study desks.

Comment: We are losing half the archive.

Response: We are not looking at reducing or removing archive base, the storage space allocated is less, but the storage is made up of many things, not just archives. Local information would be prioritised for the available storage space if appropriate. This links to ongoing work with the Archives Team to determine the most suitable location for items.

Comment: Why is there no feasibility study for keeping the library where it is?

Response: This is a matter for Redditch Borough Council. The consultation is purely focused on whether or not the service can move to a new location, and what the possible barriers would be.

Comment: Challenge that the Bromsgrove Library move is not a good example to represent footfall – this isn’t a good example of a relocation, not a good comparison as the old site was out of town and is now closer to bus station, the footfall is more in that area anyway. This move in Redditch will prevent a lot of people accessing the space, there is a slope, anyone with small kids, elderly, will struggle to come up this slope. Only 1 parking space for library users?

Comment: How much money will we have to pay Redditch Borough Council because Worcestershire County Council don’t own the town hall. DWP noted they are only in the Kingfisher Centre while the building might be knocked down. Scaffolding outside the library to make it look like the building is falling down.

Comment: Labour Cllr – Labour may take the council in 2023 and I have pledged “no” to the library in the town hall if they get in. What will happen to the library plan if Labour get in?

Response: It will stay in current location.

Comment: On social media, members of the Redditch Conservative Council Group have shown contempt for the people who want to keep this building.

Comment: How will the decision be made on moving archive material?

Response: We will make decisions based on recommendations from County Archivist and volunteers working in the basement. Some material will move to temperature-controlled rooms in the Hive. The rest is likely to remain in Redditch.

Comment: Concern over available space within Town Hall.

Comment: What is wrong with the library, we have been lied to about leaking roofs. Redditch is the second top library in Worcestershire in terms of usage. To move it down the road will lose footfall.

Comment: Clarification requested. We are being told on one hand that this location is high footfall and prime location, and on the other being told that the new location will increase footfall. Which is it?

Response: Clarity provided – Redditch Borough Council are talking about footfall for cafes / entertainment. We are talking about library footfall.

Supplementary comment: It is confusing to talk about the 2 things. This consultation is about the library.

Comment: If there is extra space in town hall, why not move JCP and other third sector services in?

Response: Redditch Borough Council Representative - we want to occupy all of the space in the town hall to accommodate 3rd sector organisations and other services for the people of Redditch. There is lots of space available, and we have a duty to use the building in the best way for the people of Redditch. We want to enable residents to access more services, and for services to access more of the people they are trying to serve.

Comment: What is the Worcestershire County Council driver on this, you seem to be driving it and Redditch Borough Council come in late and come in the back of the room? Looks like a vanity project. If it's not broken why fix it?

Response: Cllr Marcus Hart – My chief motivation is the statutory duty to provide the library service. We are here as Worcestershire County Council because Redditch Borough Council have been successful in their towns fund bid and we have been asked if we can support it. Our goal is to ensure that whether the library stays here or moves down the road, there is continuation in the provision for Redditch Residents.

Supplementary Comment: Looks like WCC are driving it to save money. If it isn't broken, why try to fix it?

Supplementary Response: Redditch would like us to relocate because they want the land for Town Centre redevelopment.

Comment: Process of consultation – traced it back to Towns Fund, levelling up. Feels like this has already been decided. The money has already started to come over. How can we trust that this has not already been decided? Feels like there is more to it, money has already exchanged hands.

Response: Money has been granted for 3 projects. This part of it is not a done deal at all. There are outcomes that must be achieved by the government in line with Towns Fund, and that is what this project does, you will not get the same outcomes by doing it any other way than what we are doing here. If we don't do it, the money goes back.

Comment: If the money went back to the government, then we would save money?

Response: Town hall and the operation of town hall has a cost, lighting, heating etc. revenue costs. This reduces the money available to deliver services. By building a community hub and bringing services together, we share the cost of building operation, and ultimately have more money to deliver services to the people.

Comment: I feel like the library is being used as a pawn to fill up town hall. Matt (Dormer) doesn't use the library. 30% of library users are incidental from the Kingfisher, it is handy at the current location.

Comment: What exactly do you mean by relocate? Library consultation page talks about the relocation of library. Doesn't mention about the demolition. Wording of the consultation is not clear that the building will be knocked down afterwards.

Comment: What is your real motive for moving the library? Is it the money? Outcomes. Most people are on other side of the car park.

Response: The need to improve flow. All the consultants say the same thing, this building is in the way and preventing increased footfall to the town centre outside of the Kingfisher Centre.

Comment: Conservative Cllr - I have never seen this survey which says 2000 people say no to the library move. I have attended roadshows and asked 2 questions of about 40 people. Do we need a library? Does it matter where it is? Handful say no we don't need a library. About 6 or so say it must stay in the current building, most say doesn't matter where it is.

Comment: Could we better spend the money by bringing back the market, lots of empty shops, couldn't the money be better spent?

Comment: Multiple entrances to Kingfisher, this one is the quietest.

Response: Cllr Matt Dormer – Economic experts we have worked with say we have to demolish the building to increase flow out of the Kingfisher Centre. 2 specialist companies consulted, and both came back with the same answer, this will encourage flow out of the shopping centre.

Comment: Bromsgrove increased footfall by moving into town, why would footfall increase by moving our library out of town?

Comment: Bus and railway are other side of town, other than that, people use the car parks.

Response: Cllr Marcus Hart – Relocation to town hall would provide a one stop shop for a range of services.

Supplementary Comment: Services might require segregation. We wouldn't want to access all these services in the same location. Plus, it is further from the bus station which is a potential issue for those with mobility issues.

Comment: If money is not spent by 2026 it has to go back to central government, can this be delivered in time?

Response: Even with 3 years left post consultation, to get this across the line is tight, if we went back to the drawing board it would take even longer.

Comment: Would it be more sensible to consider destinations before foot fall?

Response: Chicken and egg – better companies won't come without the footfall evidence.

Comment: I own a retail business on Church Green East. I attracted shoppers into town from out of town. RBC have powers of leverage for those holding empty business properties.

Comment: Everyone knows the library is not the problem it is Church Green.