

Redditch Library Consultation – Public Meeting

Date, Time, and Location of meeting

Thursday 9th February 2023 at 10am

Redditch Library Meeting Room 2

Attendees

Public Attendees approx. 60 – 65. Almost all attendees were library members by show of hands

Worcestershire County Council attendees:

- Cllr Marcus Hart - Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities
- Plus additional officers

Redditch Borough Council attendees:

- Cllr Matt Dormer - Leader
- Plus additional officers

Cllr Emma Marshall was also in attendance

North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration representative

Public Comments made and responses given during the session

Comment:

For clarification – you say you want no diminution of the library service. It looks like the square footage of the new space is more than the current, but no space has been given for computers, business space, study space. Looks to me like we are moving to a smaller space and losing out because of it – the paper shows zeros for things when they are not zeros!

Comment: Can you explain what the advantages are to the library service if the service is moved. At the moment it looks as though you are complicit with RBC desire to develop the town, that doesn't give us advantages (applauded)

Response: WCC Officer - Replicate what we have in new building, we have relocated many libraries, in each instance we take the opportunity to find out what the services are that residents would like to see, meeting the needs of local community, we really need your input, where would you like to see changes

Comment: The benefit of doing this needs to add value to what there is because it is going to cost a lot of money. What value will this money spent be adding to the services?

Response: Conservative Cllr - creation of a community hub will bring the library together with other services that people need to access. (Public comment: these could take place in the Town Hall anyway if library wasn't there). I have worked with people myself and helped people to move back and forth between the Town Hall and the library to access services, I have helped those very vulnerable people to walk between.

Comment: At the end of consultation period, will all the feedback responses be published or will a summary from WCC just be available?

Response: Cllr Hart- subject to GDPR and data protection, there will be a comprehensive document that will go to WCC O&S, and then to WCC Cabinet. This will be fully in the public domain as a part of the Cabinet documents. The consultation document that I receive as a Cabinet Member will be thorough. As much information as possible will be put in the public domain because it is a statutory consultation. Subject to anything that has to be redacted legally, all information will be in the public domain.

Comment: When you have consulted on other libraries that will be moved, how many of those have not moved because the people have not wanted them to move? You must know?

Comment: The current library building belongs to WCC (and to the public). Why have we got scaffolding up from last June and not a thing has happened? Is this just to make the building look bad?

Response: Cllr Hart - There are problems with the concrete and this has needed to be fixed. It has not been erected to make this building look bad. That is not true. Unequivocally, not true. There have been delays and the work has taken much longer than expected, have asked for this work to be completed asap.

Comment: If the services move and it was an inconvenience to move to and from (to access the services in the new location), could other services move to the current library building? Could we use space in this building for other services?

Supplementary Comment: There would not be enough room here even just for NHS, there isn't enough available space.

Comment: What is happening to this building if the Library service moves? What will happen to this space?

Response: Cllr Dormer - It will be demolished. An open plaza will be created, somewhere we can have events, invite people outside, improving flow of people around the town

Supplementary Comment: Why not a botanical garden, a beautiful space where people can go? I am not happy about the library (moving), but if it does, why not create a more useable space? Where are the youth centre services? Can you focus on how we can incorporate more for local people?

Response: Cllr Dormer - This project is to help the people of Redditch to stay in Redditch and spend their money in Redditch rather than going to Birmingham

Comment: We have just been told the library service will be replicated at the Town Hall. RBC has told us the new library will be bigger, better, more sustainable and fit for the future. This is not true. Do you think this will have a detrimental impact on the consultation process? Someone might fill in the consultation thinking they will get a better library when they won't. A mixed message from RBC and WCC. Haven't been demarcated enough in the consultation.

Comment: In the published plans, it shows there will be a bigger children's area, bigger meeting rooms. But these meeting rooms will be shared whereas they are exclusively for Library use now.

Response: WCC Officer - The Library Service have stipulated that they must have priority use of meeting rooms in the Town Hall. We do not have 100% occupancy of meeting rooms now, the new meeting rooms will enable space capacity available (when not booked out for library use) to partners and other organisations.

Comment: The plans show square footage for the furniture, the data provided shows an overall slightly larger space but they have not allocated space for well used areas in the current building, you have allocated no space for the study desks.

Response: WCC Officer - The work that has been done so far is a high level exercise to show if there is sufficient space in the Town Hall to accommodate the furniture. We have conducted a full furniture audit and found that all the furniture can fit into the new space. There are no detailed plans at this point in terms of what goes where.

Comment: An awful lot of people in this town don't want the library to be knocked down. The money would be better spent on getting shops done, bringing in more shops of a variety that people want to visit. There are enough cafés in Redditch and people won't come in the winter to sit outside

Comment: If you want the town to be more acceptable to people make it so they can see different shops, even the charity shop could be made into a nice little supermarket. Knocking the library down is a waste of money!

Comment: Concerned that the move from point A to point B. RBC have said that services are going to be bigger and better, but I am worried that the process of the move will allow the opportunity to remove those services

Response: Cllr Hart - which services are you concerned that will be removed? It would be helpful to hear those now

Supplementary Comment: Anything and everything. The more things that move, the more chances there are to cut a corner here. Look what happened in COVID, corners were cut and we lost out on a lot of things

Response: WCC Officer - I can reassure you from a library perspective that this won't happen and I am committed to making it not happen.

Comment: To improve the services in the town centre, would it not be better to improve this building rather than knocking it down? 20 years ago we had a brilliant market place that people would come to from miles around. Now it is a disgrace. I wouldn't spend an hour in the town centre, you can keep this area as it is and repair it, not have people who are disabled walking down to the town hall to access the library.

Response: Cllr Dormer - 20 years ago the market was sold. The money has to be spent on the outcomes specified in the Towns Fund bid. Need the open space to repair the building.

Supplementary Comment: The market are not happy to be inside

Comment: If you move the service down to the Town Hall, there are a lot people with kids, older people with mobility issues – when it is pouring with rain. Are you going to build a covered walkway for people? Can you change the access from the front to the side, make sure you can access from a flat surface with no steps?

Comment: I am concerned about the money it will cost to demolish the current building plus the money to improve the Town Hall. Why can't that money be saved by improving the existing building, create a plaza either side of the library. I don't understand the money that is being wasted to demolish this and improve that

Comment: (To Cllr Dormer) You are on both the town Board and the Council

Comment: Can you clarify what you mean by library services? Do you mean all the events?

Response: WCC Officer - Absolutely

Comment: There are a lot of events on at the same time, is there enough space in the new library for that to happen so they are not interfering with each other?

Response: WCC Officer - We believe that there is. Redditch is a flagship library in terms of community. There are a lot of services a lot of provision and we are extremely proud of the work we have done. We want to continue to offer a rich offer and have capacity over time to grow

Comment: Is the proposed space over more than one floor?

Response: WCC Officer - Yes, first ground and second with storage in the basement

Comment: We have 4.2 million for this but we have to sell green belt land, community centre, Hughes has closed – we have no market and traders want to come back. All I see is a town going backwards. Where is this magic new train station going to be as most of the land is going to apartments. Our local MP has signed us up to be a smart town, 5G hub, no one is telling us about the 5G hub and our town being split up into quadrants.

Comment: This is a done deal

Comment: My concern isn't so much about losing services, it is about combining services. What I would say is that a couple of months ago I had to complain to Bromsgrove Library as there was a lady talking to an advisor in the middle of the library about her poor mental health and struggles to find a job. Are we going to have more situations like this with more combined services?

Response: WCC Officer - Libraries are welcoming spaces, we don't want to put any barriers to people coming in. Our role is to sign post people to specialist advice.

Comment: This library building measures 2225 sqm plus stairs. The new building comes to 1700 sqm. You can't fit the library into that space. Before the DWP was in here, that space was used for books. We need a bigger space to move our library into. DWP can go to Town Hall, the library has got nothing to do with other WCC services. You need a hub in the Town Hall for WCC services but not the library, it is not part of the hub. I have been and measured the spaces. Including the corridor space.

Response: WCC Officer - I have worked for WCC library services for 16/17 years. Worked through the shift towards Libraries being not just books.

Comment: I have some grave concerns about this consultation. This is supposed to be an independent panel but Cllr Dormer is shaking his head at comments made, which is biased. This project will go ahead and there is no time to change it.

Comment: I am a little annoyed that we have been discussing the plaza when I was told not to at the last meeting. The plans are a worry as I don't want to bring my children shopping and take them home wet. We need to see the feasibility study for keeping the library where it is. When we have that, can we have another consultation to see if you can find people who want to stay and those who want to move it. It is purpose built, you are trying to move it into an adapted space.

Comment: I think everyone in this room would agree, we don't believe what comes out of Town Hall. What is WCC going to get out of this money? (demolishing). It's your building. What is your cut?

Response: Cllr Hart - There is no cut in it for me personally or for WCC. We are here on behalf of the residents of Worcestershire. We own the building and the free hold. We want to ensure that what is here is replicated at the Town Hall, and ensure any transfer move costs are met by RBC and that the revenue costs to run the building / service are no more than they are now. DWP pay rent to us that allows this building, subsidises the cost of provision

Comment: We have heard today some really concerning issues raised about the process and the consultation. The strength of feeling is apparent to anybody. WCC need to take this on board and note there will be a legal challenge if any aspect of the service affects a disabled person, financial probity if it does not bring benefit to this town. Matt mentioned that the library will have 11 sqm of extra space in the Town Hall. Have you worked out how much that will cost per sqm?

Supplementary Comment: The money to demolish is from Central Government. It is not money that could otherwise be used on services

Comment: To a lot of us this sounds like it is the Dormer plan for Redditch. You are obviously going to go ahead with it, so is Cllr Hart.

Response: Cllr Hart - We can't predetermine this process

Response: Cllr Dormer - if the majority of the population of Redditch don't want this, I will back off

Comment: We already have a plaza and we have a coffee shop outside town hall which is never used

Comment: Can I ask how many floors are in the Town Hall?

Response: 5

Supplementary Comment: Emma (Marshall) said 2 of those floors will be taken over by NHS, 3 floors for library and more, where will they all go? Where exactly are they going to fit in?

Comment: Can I just ask how many complaints did you receive about knocking this building down?

Comment: I don't have computers, I use the Standard and Advertiser. I knew about this meeting through the Advertiser. It's a slope, so you walk down with your books, steps round the back and still a slope. I can't understand why this place is being knocked down.

Comment: In a streamed meeting from WCC last year about planning the consultation, someone said this will be a consultation which might not affect the outcome because this isn't a referendum and grinned. This concerned me. This is a done deal. It looks as though you feel you don't have to listen to the consultation. These meeting should be longer, 1 hour is not long enough.

Response: Cllr Hart - Can you tell me which meeting and I will have a look at it. I have made copious notes in what has been said. I am listening to you

Comment: Matt Dormers Facebook says these plans need to be delivered

Comment: It seems too obvious that this is all about money. This library could be a focus of the plaza, with café services on the ground floor, opening on to the square outside. We could open up the place more. With millions to spend on it, it could be made lovely. This shouldn't just be another commercial exercise

Comment: How do we go forward in addressing the concerns of the town?

Response: WCC Officer - Consultation is open until 24th February. Then the results will be analysed and we will write a Cabinet Report. WCC O&S will scrutinise the report before it goes to Cabinet.

Comment: Matt Dormer has previously said that everyone who doesn't actively oppose a proposal is in favour, and that is wrong

Comment: Ipsley Meadow – a lot of people were opposed to this and a small number were for it and it was demolished.

Comment: I think this consultation is at odds with the law on many counts. Consultation has to take place at a formative stage of the plan – this has been done at a point where plans can't be changed. There has been no option for us to say if we don't want it, this is against the law. I have a lot of queries about the quality of the information available. There is nothing in the library itself to tell you the consultation is going on, there is nothing about any alternatives to this move and you are obliged to provide those. You say options have been considered, we need to see the working on how this has been done.

Comment: If this consultation is as important to the library as we would like it to be, why is there no publicity in the library? I have had to search for information, ask staff for a copy of the survey and then someone gets the form out of the draw and hands it over. Why has it not been properly publicised?

Comment: There is less storage space for the archives in the new area plan and it is noted that Worcester would take some archive material. Has anyone from the Council been down to the archive area and looked at what would be moved? Did they give you the catalogue?

Response: WCC Officer - Yes. We held a consultation meeting with the Archives and Local History Society a few weeks ago

Comment: Why does the money have to be spent on knocking the library down?