

BLAG BIRKDALE LIBRARY ACTION GROUP

Dear Sefton Council,

11th January 2013.

Attached is a submission from Birkdale Library Action Group in response to the consultation regarding Sefton's Library Services of the Future.

Please consider this document when making your decision as to the future of Birkdale library.

Yours sincerely,



ON BEHALF OF BLAG.

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BLAG. Birkdale Library Action Group.

In response to consultation by Sefton Council regarding proposed closure of Birkdale Library.

INTRODUCTION

Following a proposal by Sefton Council to close down 7 Libraries in Sefton, BLAG set up an action group to investigate ways that a library service could continue to operate in Birkdale. Various BLAG sub groups have carried out research on library issues, which was co-ordinated into an overall plan by a central steering group. A petition was signed by just under 2,000 people demanding that Birkdale Library should be saved.

AIMS.

- To maintain a valuable Public Library/Reference/Information Service.
- To create a more cost effective & manageable service.
- To maintain an accessible library service for all.

BASIS OF BLAGS CASE.

It is essential that the library service in the Southport area should be accessible to all people and for this reason thought must be given to disabled and elderly people who can only access a library by car. Birkdale is the only library in Southport with a dedicated car park containing reserved spaces for the disabled. (The councils chosen library option for Southport – The Atkinson – will have the worst possible access for anybody arriving by car.)

It is felt that if Birkdale library were to close, that this user group could be victims of discrimination.

Another group that would be greatly affected by closure are pupils of the 8 local schools who would not be able use a library without travelling by public transport out of the area. By removing the “convenience factor” of not being able to use the library on the way home from school, it is thought that most of these children would be lost to the library system at the expense of their educational needs.

BLAG have investigated how Birkdale Library could remain open at a reduced cost to the council. This report contains details of how a saving of 48% can be made to the current revenue budget (see Appendix 2) reducing the net annual cost to £43,460.

This report also contains details of how Birkdale Library could provide an improved service in meeting local community needs whilst generating increased income which would contribute towards library running costs.

The report is broken down as follows:

- 1. AREAS OF PUBLIC CONCERN.**
- 2. PRESENT COSTINGS FOR BIRKDALE LIBRARY.
INCLUDING COST OF REMEDIAL WORK.**
- 3. HOW SERVICES CAN BE CHANGED/DIVERSIFIED TO REDUCE COSTS.**
- 4. SUPPORTING INFORMATION/EVIDENCE:
INCLUDING CAR PARKING. IMPACT ON SCHOOLS. MEANS OF ACCESS
PUBLIC OPINION. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES. LEGAL COMMITMENT.
ALTERNATIVE SERVICE. COUNCIL BUDGET ISSUES.**
- 5. PROPOSALS.**

1. AREAS OF PUBLIC CONCERN.

- Libraries are no longer just places from where books can be borrowed. Today's libraries are community centres for a whole range of local activities. This is a vital service for the promotion of community spirit and has the potential to be extended in order to further develop this social cohesion.
- Apart from schools, the Library is the only council run agency in Birkdale and as such could be used more by the council to bring council run services to the attention of the public.
- If the libraries were to close, this valuable link between the council and the community would be lost for ever.
- It meets the need of providing an equal opportunity to the young & senior citizens along with people with various types of disabilities or learning needs, by providing various formats of technology to access information e.g. Internet services, large print books, talking books
- The loss of an extremely valued Library service for the housebound. This service is carried out by volunteers who often need to carry large numbers of books to their cars. A car park is essential for volunteers engaged in this service.
- The council should be mindful of its responsibility to provide equal library access to all members of society - Reference: Equality Act 2010, Section 149.

2. PRESENT COSTINGS FOR BIRKDALE LIBRARY

Outgoing: Premises	£34,578.00	Income: Sales of Books/Publications	£ 3,101.00
Staffing	70,683.00	Fees	11,112.00
		Fines	4,845.00
		Lettings	2,060.00
Total Outgoing	£105,261.00	Total Income	£21,118.00

Total cost of running Library **£84,143.00**

For breakdown see Appendix 1

IN CONSIDERATION OF THE COSTS OF REMEDIAL WORK REQUIRED ON THE BUILDING.

The Condition Survey with Cost Summary states a cost of £174,399.

BLAG would claim that this is a distorted figure, particularly with regard to the cost of the electrical work..

In an attempt to put this into perspective BLAG requested Southport Architect Martin Perry MA,DipArch,RIBA (known by Sefton Council as an expert in his field) to inspect the building and give his opinion on the work required.

His report, a summary of which is attached, (Appendix 3) concluded that the work proposed in the councils survey is "substantially overstated".

Mr Perry also makes the observation that the council report "does not show any of the proposed work as being of an urgent nature". He states – "There may be a number of desirable work projects, but in the real world, building owners have to cut their cloth to suit their coat". Regarding the estimated cost of repairs, he says – "If I had a budget of a total of £60,000 over 3 years to carry out the (listed) improvements to the library building, I could do all the desirable things necessary".

This figure is only 35% of the council's own estimate.

3. HOW SERVICES CAN BE CHANGED/DIVERSIFIED TO REDUCE COSTS.

- The numbers of professional staff can be reduced (**Appendix 2**) whilst maintaining a satisfactory level of expertise, supplemented by volunteers. A professional member of staff should always be available during library opening hours. This would reduce staffing costs to **£30,000** giving a saving of **£40,683.00**.
- Consideration could also be given regarding other council business to be handled over the library counter (e.g Giving advice on council matters, signposting community services, receiving council payments).
- Citizens Advice Bureau could provide weekly surgeries. Age Concern, Social Services and Disability Awareness Groups could provide regular advice sessions. Councillors surgeries.
- Childrens groups could be extended and senior citizens activity sessions would improve social relationships for this age group. Greater use should be made of hiring out rooms for meetings by businesses, individuals and other organisations. Special rates could be offered for not-for-profit community organisations. Film nights could be held on a regular basis.
- Organisations such as Birkdale Civic Society could be invited to play a part in organising these events.

4. SUPPORTING INFORMATION/EVIDENCE.

CAR PARKING

Birkdale Library is the only library in the Southport area with a dedicated car park, including reserved disabled bays. This makes it user friendly to elderly and disabled and, as a result of this, is used by people from right across Southport who find the easy access a major reason to use this library. In this respect, the new Atkinson Library in Southport Town Centre will be extremely difficult for this client group to use because of the great difficulty of parking in that vicinity.

IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

Birkdale Library is also used by a large number of school children on their way home from school. There are 8 schools in the vicinity of this library with over 4700 pupils between them.. They are: Farnborough Road Infants (NOR: 343), Farnborough Road Juniors (479), Our Lady of Lourdes (528), Birkdale Primary (323), St Theresa's (89), Birkdale high (892), Greenbank High (873), and Christ the King High (1194). These children use the library because of its convenience and would be denied using the service if Birkdale were to close down. There is no way that the majority of them would switch to using another library as it would mean a bus journey and would take them out of their way. Convenience is a major factor in encouraging library use and taking this service away from the area could seriously damage the education process for these children.

MEANS OF ACCESS

Council statistics show that the most popular means of accessing libraries is by foot. Being situated in the middle of a residential area, Birkdale has a huge advantage in attracting foot customers. The second most popular means of travel is by car. Again Birkdale has the biggest advantage. Public transport – Three regular bus services stop outside the door.

PUBLIC OPINION

Completed petition forms containing around 2,000 signatures are available for council scrutiny. Public services are an important part of our lives. Birkdale Library is vital to the community spirit in the Birkdale Area. It is the only community hub in the area and is essential in promoting the feeling of social cohesion.

A letter from a G.P. stating her opinion that the closure of Birkdale Library will have a far reaching detrimental impact on the most vulnerable members of our community, which include the elderly and those with disabilities. (See **Appendix 4**)

IMPLICATIONS ON PUBLIC/EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

If Birkdale Library were to close the impact would be felt by people of all ages in the Birkdale area. However, the elderly and the disabled would be particularly hard hit as there is no alternative library with car park access other than to drive to Formby.

Mobility problems might well deny this group library usage.

Also, school children would be denied a library service as they cannot be expected to use public transport to travel out of their area whilst on their journey home from school.

LEGAL COMMITMENT

The above mentioned difficulty whereby the elderly and disabled are denied library access could well be considered discrimination against a vulnerable group within society and could contravene the Equality Act 2010, section 149.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE SERVICE

We have researched alternative schemes throughout the country of libraries that have been taken over and run as community projects. In some instances the council has handed over the building to a charitable trust who, in some cases, have run the library very successfully. A major advantage of this scheme is that the business rates are cut by 80% which greatly reduces the operating costs. **However, we have decided, at this point, not to make application to the council to proceed down this route.**

COUNCIL BUDGET ISSUES

BLAG are mindful of the need to reduce the costs of all council services in order to meet cuts of £50.7million to the council budget, brought about, mainly, by a reduction in Central Government funding. However, the savings to be made by implementing Option B as a way of reducing library costs, will only bring about a saving of around £400,000. Considering the upheaval that will be caused to local communities by this proposed loss of, what is for many, the only community hub in their neighbourhood, it has to be considered a devastating sacrifice, for an extremely small financial saving. This has to be balanced against a picture of **under spend** in the council's 2010/11 Budget (£3million) and 2011/12 Budget (£6million).

PROPOSALS:

- That Birkdale Library service remains, with a reduction in professional staffing levels supplemented by the utilisation of volunteers. Volunteers have been a feature of some libraries for many years. However, it is important that their talents and enthusiasm are not misused. Librarianship is a profession and professional staff would be central to the future running of the library.
- Implement changes to Staffing levels & personnel giving a saving of £40,000 +
- Implement alternative costing to repairs required allowing a significant saving.
- Increase community usage by encouraging additional children's "after school" and holiday time groups and activities. Also set up Senior Citizens activity, discussion and advisory sessions. These could be volunteer led.
- Consideration be given to increase income opportunities through positively encouraging outside Lettings.

Appendix 1 **EXISTING COSTINGS – BIRKDALE LIBRARY**

The cost of running Birkdale Library (2011/12) was £84,143. This was made up of premises costs £34,578 and staffing costs £70,683, weighed against an income of £21,118.

These costs break down as follows:

Premises.

Water and Sewerage Charges	£2,826 . 00
Electricity	2,563 . 00
Gas/ Oil	522 . 00
Internal & External Repair Costs	8,466 . 00
Refuse Collection	734 . 00
Telephone	291 . 00
Business Rates	12,557 . 00
Building Cleaning	6,619 . 00

TOTAL PREMISES COSTS £34,578 . 00

Staff

£14,349 . 00
10,684 . 00
17,712 . 00
4,386 . 00
7,998 . 00
11,544 . 00
4,011 . 00

TOTAL SALARY COSTS £70,683 . 00

Income

Sales of Books/Publications	£ 3,101 . 00
Fees	11,112 . 00
Fines	4,845 . 00
Lettings	2,060 . 00

TOTAL INCOME £21,118 . 00

TOTAL COST OF RUNNING LIBRARY £84,143 . 00

There is also a cost attached to alleged repairs required to the building.

The council place this cost at £174,399

Appendix 2

A PROPOSAL TO REDUCE OPERATING COSTS

	<u>Current Opening Times</u>	<u>Reduced Opening Times</u>	<u>(Reduction)</u>
<u>Monday</u>	10am – 5pm	10.30am – 5pm	(0.5 hrs)
<u>Tuesday</u>	Closed	Closed	
<u>Wednesday</u>	10am - 7.30pm	10.30am - 7.30pm	(0.5 hrs)
<u>Thursday</u>	10am - 5pm	10.30am - 1pm	(3.5 hrs)
<u>Friday</u>	10am - 5pm	10.30am - 5pm	(0.5 hrs)
<u>Saturday</u>	9.30am - 1pm	10.30am - 1pm	(1.0 hrs)
(all closed for lunch 1pm – 2pm)			
TOTAL	30 hrs	24 hrs	(6.0 hrs)

Current staffing at Birkdale Library (as per Appendix 1) amounts to 116.22 “gross” hours per week at a cost of £70,683. Within the 116.22 hours is allowance for absence due to staff holidays, sickness and training which we estimate at 16% (on the basis of 6 weeks holidays, 2 weeks sickness and 0.2 weeks training). Accordingly the normal weekly staff availability is $116.22 \times 84\% = 97.5$ hours per week.

For preparation time one member of staff is present half an hour before opening = 2.5 hours per week, meaning that 95 staff hours are available to cover 30 hours of opening. This equates to average staff cover of around 3.15 staff across the hours of opening (note that this includes the Library Manager).

Reducing opening hours by 6 hours per week will require $6 \times 3.15 = 19$ hours per week LESS of available staff time, or 23 hours per week of “gross” staff time (allowing for the 16% holiday leave etc factor)

This means that “gross” staffing could be reduced from 116.22 hours per week to 93 hours per week because of the cut in opening hours. We estimate this alone would save approx. £14,000 pa on staffing costs.

However our main proposal to reduce costs is to use volunteers to cover 48 of the “gross” hours per week. 45 “gross” hours per week would still be paid library staff. At the 84% factor, 45 “gross” hours equates to 38 staff hours per week of available staff time. Allowing for 2.5 hours per week of preparation time, this would mean an average of 35.5 hours per week of paid library staff time covering the (proposed) 24 hours of opening. This equates to average paid library staff cover of around 1.5 staff across the hours of opening (note that this includes the Library Manager).

The allocation of 45 “gross” hours of the retained paid library staff would be a matter for library management, but to illustrate the financial saving from **BOTH** reducing opening hours from 30 to 24 per week and the use of volunteers, we put forward the following potential staffing structure (using the hourly costs implicit in Appendix 1):

Appendix 2 - continued

Potential revised staffing

Library Manager (18 hours)	£14,349. 00
Senior Library Assistant (14 hours)	£8,550. 00
Library Assistant (13 hours)	£7,101. 00
TOTAL APPROX. SALARY COSTS	£30,000.00

This represents a saving of over £40,000 against the present staffing cost of £70,683.

As a consequence, the current net annual cost to the Council of Birkdale Library of £84,143 (as per Appendix 1) would reduce by over £40,000 to £43,460.

This represents a saving of 48% on the current revenue budget.

We recognise that the significant use of volunteers is not an “easy option”, but we believe there is the necessary public support to make it succeed. To illustrate the number of volunteers needed we have identified 9 sessions each of 2.5 or 3 hours.

These are: 5 mornings of 2.5 hours
 3 afternoons of 3 hours
 1 evening of 2.5 hours

As stated above, the retained paid library staff hours are sufficient to provide average coverage of 1.5 (paid) staff across the hours of opening (this includes the Library Manager). In order to revert to the current average (total) staff cover rate of 3.15 it would be necessary to have an average of 1.65 volunteers present across the hours of opening. Based on 24 hours of opening per week this equates to a requirement for 40 available hours of volunteer time per week (or 48 “gross” hours, allowing for 16% holidays/sickness etc. - as identified above).

This requirement for 40 available hours of volunteer time per week equates to 15 volunteer sessions of 2.5 or 3 hours.

Although it is possible that some volunteers would be willing to undertake more than one session per week, it is safer to assume that one would be the norm. Allowing for holidays, sickness etc it seems clear that a minimum of around 20 volunteer personnel are needed to provide the proposed level of volunteer cover.

We believe the necessary level of commitment exists in the Birkdale area to enable the volunteer option to work, but we do not wish to understate the amount of organisation required.

2 Cost Summary

Condition Survey of Birstdale Library done by/for
Sutton MBC 25. June 2012.
Pages 1-5 (p. 5 is blank).

Library inspected December 2012 by independent Architect to conduct
an Condition Survey

1. Repair work broken down by ^{building} elements & by priority categories 1-5. No Category 1 - i.e. urgent work.
Most in Category 2 - £74414
Substantial Electrical in Cat. 3 - £99,836 -
No Category 4 - i.e. work not essential.

2. ^{& locked} Private areas & roofs not inspected.

3. Generally poor maintenance with upward ivy growing up the building, & with gutters ~~and~~ blocked in car parks for instance.

- A. Flooring. Substantial replacements proposed but Rubber flooring in Entrance to lobby does not need replacing but minor repair at threshold. Hard to identify where the other areas are, but the surveyor proposes to replace the whole entrance hall floor. ~~which is based on this~~

5. Windows are proposed to be replaced but inspection shows that most windows are sound and need minor repairs.

- B. Lighting. proposed to service & renew fittings for a very substantial sum of over £100,000. The wiring has not been condemned otherwise the report would say so, & a general upgrade of light fittings,

where required, would cost ^{very} considerably less than stated.

T. Car park ^{is} proposed to be resurfaced on left hand side at a cost of £189,75. Actually general minor repairs of tarmac to all car park areas is required, after general maintenance of clearing gutters & silt, & all at a significantly lesser sum than charged.

○ Summary. General housekeeping is required by maintenance staff, which has been neglected in recent years.

Work proposed in survey is substantially overstated; ~~it would appear to have been~~
~~overstated~~

(W) W. M. A. Dip Arch. RIBA,

Appendix 4

9th January 2013

Dear Sefton Council,

Re: Detrimental impact of the closure of Birkdale library on the elderly and disabled

It is my professional opinion as a General Practitioner, that the closure of Birkdale library will have a far reaching detrimental impact on the most vulnerable members of our community- which include the elderly and those with disabilities.

Many elderly and disabled people come to Birkdale library specifically because of its accessibility and parking facilities. If the library is closed, these people will find it difficult if not impossible, to access a facility on Lord Street, which does not provide parking in the immediate vicinity and thus requires either public transport to be negotiated, or parking at some distance away from the building and then a walk (which in a lot of circumstances will also incur a cost). Then there is the issue of physically getting the books home. My fear is that many elderly and disabled people will be unable to access a central library if Birkdale were to close. **This poses a significant and real knock-on effect in terms of health and well-being.**

The likely outcome is one of social isolation. Libraries are a community space- one of the few places left in our society where people can meet without obligation to buy anything, where social interaction takes place, where relationships are made, conversations are held and people from all walks of life are together under one roof. They are places where our most vulnerable people can feel safe, warm and comfortable and at the same time have access to intellectual material. Many vulnerable people use the library as there is simply no-where else for them to go to interact with others. **Take this accessible resource away and the result is isolation, loneliness and loss of well-being.**

Loneliness and social isolation are risk factors in a number of diseases. Not only is there a strong link with mental health problems (stress, depression, anxiety) but also with poorer physical health, including falls, decreased physical activity, obesity, poor nutrition, higher intake of alcohol and also with cognitive decline. It is anticipated that the likely costs of treating these problems would far outweigh any savings the Council makes by closing Birkdale library down.

As a doctor, I must voice my concerns to you about the likely health implications of library closures and raise your awareness of the significant threat to the quality (and potentially, quantity) of life of our most vulnerable in society.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Maria Markides

MBChB, DRCOG, DFFP, MRCPG(distinction), PGCEHigherEd(distinction)

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