

## **Caversham and District Residents Association Response to Reading Borough Council Library Consultation**

**November 2015**

This is CADRA's response to the first phase of consultation on the future of Reading libraries in the face of budget cuts of £39 million over the next three years. CADRA acknowledges that some of these savings will have to come from the library budget. The aim of the consultation is stated to be 'to create a modern and fit-for-purpose library service, well-used by local residents because it provides the services they want.' CADRA supports this aim, and will do everything it can to support the continuation of the vital role which the library plays in the life of Caversham.

Caversham is a distinct community north of the River Thames, which attracts people from the villages round about, including those in South Oxfordshire. The Library is for many the heart of Caversham. It is Caversham's most distinguished public building, and is Grade II listed. It is a vital and vibrant source of information about what is going on in Caversham and in Reading as a whole.

People come to Caversham regularly to do their shopping and banking, visit the doctors, the post office **and the Library.** Bus routes from within Caversham and from South Oxfordshire pass through the middle of the village on their way in and out of Reading, and many stop just outside the library. The closeness of the bus stops and the car parks in central Caversham make it easy for people to get their books, which can be heavy, home from the library. In contrast, books borrowed from the Central Library have to be carried much further to bus stops serving Caversham or to car parks.

### **The importance of Caversham Library to the local community**

- The Library is at the centre of the community of Caversham and District which it serves.
- It is an accessible, neutral, safe place which is trusted and open to all. It provides a non-stigmatising environment.
- The Library is used by all ages of the community from pre-schoolers to pensioners.
- It is manned by well trained, friendly staff who can help users find what they want either independently or with support.
- Books can be ordered if they are not immediately available

*"At the moment I'm using the library ordering service for my son's reading list from school. I know that eventually I will be emailed when those books become available. It helps not having to buy them."*

- The Library is an information hub, providing information on all kinds of topics including council services, careers, job searches, local events and appeals.
- The Library provides other services such as word processing, printing, and photocopying.
- The Library provides access to the internet. In a world increasingly dependent on electronic communication, people without access are significantly excluded. For those who do not have it at home, it opens the doorway to the connected world.
- The community aspect of the Library, including story times/rhyme times and free picture books is especially important for new Mums and their children.

*"The toy library and rhyme time and other toddler craft sessions provide a great way of socialising with parents with children of a similar age. The toy library has given my kids great opportunities to*

*play with toys which I wouldn't have been able to buy. Both types of libraries provide a friendly place to hang out on dark winter afternoons when it's not easy to go outside with young kids. This use is only needed for a few years until the children go to school, but in my view was a vital part of that period in my life. I would say it can be very helpful coping with being a new parent mentally."*

- The National Literacy Trust says that children who go to a Library are twice as likely as those who don't to read well. It's not just the picking up a book. It's the social experience of reading, talking about books, browsing, comparing what you have read with family and friends.

*"I know some parents that have used the library's 'summer holiday time reading challenge' and found it very useful."*

- The Library helps to build a healthy democracy by providing free access to reliable information through which we form opinions.

### **Caversham Library in comparison with other branch libraries in Reading**

The table in the accompanying spreadsheet:

Comparative Statistics for Reading Libraries from RBC Library Consultation Oct 15  
Based on 14/15 data

has been compiled using the comparative information in the Borough Council's consultation documents.

When considered alongside the other five branch libraries, the figures for Caversham show it has most staff; longest opening hours; most registered members; most active borrowers; most visits and most issues.

Whilst staffing and total costs are relatively high, Caversham library is shown to provide a very efficient library, with the lowest cost per visit.

We note that whilst premises costs are the second lowest, the building does require significant investment in maintenance. We wonder whether funding could be attracted to preserve and enhance the fabric of this important building.

These figures show that we are fortunate in Caversham to have such a successful and well used library. They succinctly illustrate the high level of use of the facilities and the vital role played by the library in the life of Caversham.

The profiles of the catchment areas of each of the branch libraries show that Caversham has a relatively prosperous catchment area and a relatively healthy population, with significant levels of owner-occupation. However alongside this relative prosperity there are also pockets of significant deprivation. We wish to argue strongly that the relative prosperity of Caversham when compared with the catchment of the other branch libraries should not be a reason to reduce the relative level of library provision.

## **Recommendations**

CADRA recognises that following cuts in funding from Central Government, RBC has a huge task to save over £39m in the next 3 years and we accept that Caversham and the other Libraries in Reading will have to accept a reduction in funding.

1. We would regret a reduction in the opening hours at Caversham Library.
2. We would urge RBC to look at finding other sources of funding for Caversham Library to supplement council funding, as recommended by the Arts Council in their work on The Library of the Future 2013.
3. We would recommend that RBC considers allowing Caversham Library to share aspects of their services with others.
4. We would recommend that RBC considers equipping Caversham Library to be commissioned to deliver other public services.
5. We would oppose reductions in staffing levels, but recognise that volunteers could have a role to play in the future of library provision.
6. Availability as a meeting space outside normal opening hours could be of considerable benefit to Caversham, and provide a source of revenue.

20 November 2015

Caversham and District Residents Association

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