

## Reading's Library Services

Library services, including Caversham Library, form part of the Budget Consultation. Reading Borough Council estimates it needs to save a further £39million over the next 3 years to 2019. Reading's grant funding has reduced by 40% at a time when demand for local Council services in Reading is increasing. Over the next three years the Council will be making a series of budget proposals to make the savings needed.

The latest package of savings, efficiencies and income proposals, were agreed for consultation at a meeting of the Council's Policy Committee on 20 July 2015. [www.reading.gov.uk/budget](http://www.reading.gov.uk/budget) gives links to more information and how you can comment up to **5pm on Friday 16 October 2015**. Hard copies of the full proposals are also available to view at libraries, leisure centres and the Civic Offices. You can respond on line, email [budget@reading.gov.uk](mailto:budget@reading.gov.uk) or write to: Budget Consultation, Reading Borough Council, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU. Please ensure the budget proposals you are referring to is clearly identified. Feedback will be considered in advance of final decisions through the autumn and winter.

It is hard to do justice here to a long list of proposals. These affect almost all services and the Council makes clear that it will mean delivering some services differently and from different places, reducing some services and, in some cases, stopping them altogether.

One of the services listed is Libraries. It is proposed that the whole library service be *reviewed and transformed on the basis of objective criteria with the aim of saving in the region of £600,000 by 2017/18*. There is reference to a "Neighbourhood Library Offer" where the location, nature and opening hours of the service points will be informed by a full analysis of needs, performance and costs. Where appropriate libraries would be co-located with other services in community hubs.

The report explains that changes could include:

- *Providing services digitally*
- *Delivering back-office efficiencies*
- *Co-locating library services with other local services*
- *Using library services to deliver other service outcomes and priorities*
- *Volunteer-run libraries, co-delivering services with community groups, and increasing the use of volunteers*
- *Making better use of self-service technologies*
- *Sharing services*
- *Reducing opening hours*
- *Closing branch libraries.*

If you value your local service, you should express your views through the consultation.

Caversham Library provides a range of highly valued inclusive services and is a hub at the heart of the local community -exceptionally well used by all ages. In addition to the usual library services, it is a central point for all sorts of information and runs popular sessions for adults, school children and pre-school children. It is a hive of activity over the school holidays and after school and a vital resource for those not able to access a computer or the internet at home.

### **What happens next?**

Writing this at the beginning of August, there are still more questions than answers but a timetable has been set out:

*July to September 2015*

*Desk-based needs analysis*

*September 2015*

*Policy Committee approval for Phase One consultation programme and documentation.*

*October to November 2015*

*6 week initial public consultation.*

*November to December 2015*

*Analysis of consultation responses and development of strategic vision and options.*

*January to March 2016*

*12 week programme of consultation on vision and options with staff, service users and partner organisations to inform final proposals.*

## **What can we do?**

1. Respond to each stage of the consultations
2. Encourage others to do so
3. Support and use the library
4. Consider how you could support the library as a volunteer

These proposals are by no means unique to Reading and libraries are under threat all over the UK. Several groups have set up websites with more information.

<http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/>

<http://speakupforlibraries.org/>

<http://www.voicesforthelibrary.org.uk/>

## **The History of Caversham Library**

Our response should focus on current and future needs but it may also be interesting to share some history on the library building. The land, where the library now stands, had been the playground of Caversham House Academy, a school for boys. Church Street separated the playground from the main school buildings in Caversham House and a tunnel was constructed for the boys to cross safely. After the school closed, the large Georgian house gradually decayed and was demolished in the 1960s to make way for the precinct. You can see the house and the playground in this painting. Further right are the Working Men's club and Caversham Baptist Church. The church was built in 1877 which gives us a clue to the date of the painting.

The land for the library was donated by Mr Bullivant Williams and most of the construction costs were funded by the Carnegie Trust. The Scottish-American businessman and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, supported the building of public and university libraries across the world. His motto, 'Let there be light' was sometimes shown above the door. The award-winning design in 1906 was by the architect William George Hooper Lewton (1856-1914). A student at the Reading School of Art and local to Caversham, Lewton worked and trained with the well-known local architect William Ravenscroft. The style has been referred to as 'Free Renaissance' and has a very quirky mix of different elements. The tower is topped by the swan weather vane. As you will see from this picture shortly after the library opened, the present clock with the figure of Old Father Time did not feature in the original design. These were added at the request of the Caversham Urban District Council which disbanded in 1911 as part of the boundary change.

It is a fine building which has stood the test of time. It deserves a fine future.