

Meeting	Nottingham City Council Libraries Transformation Proposals Public Consultation Event
Date & time	Tuesday 29 April 2022, 6:30pm – 8pm
Venue	The Council House, The Old Market Square NG1 2DT
Attendance	34
Speakers	Cllr David Mellen, Leader of the Council, NCC (DM) Nigel Hawkins, Head of Culture and Libraries, NCC (NH) Terranum Abbas, Library Services Manager, NCC (TA)
Host	Jon Rea, Consultation and Engagement Manager, NCC (JR)

This was the second public consultation session on the transformation proposals for Nottingham City Library services and first in person consultation session. This was an in-person event, open to the public.

The event was advertised via Nottingham City Council website Engage Hub, The Next Chapter pages on the Libraries website and via social media channels. Pre-event registration was required. Information about the event has been shared across local networks and organisations.

There was a peaceful protest outside the Council House before the start of the meeting by the Save Nottingham Libraries campaign group.

Purpose of the meeting

To gather the public's views on the transformation proposals for the future of library services in Nottingham City.

No decisions have been made for the future of the library service. All the questions raised at the meeting will form part of the consultation report.

Agenda

1. Welcome and housekeeping (JR)
2. Presentation (DM, NH, TA)
A presentation was delivered by the panel on the transformation proposals
3. Q&A (All)
Participants were invited to ask questions and share comments and ideas on the proposals
4. Participants were encouraged to submit their views via the online survey <https://www.nottinghamcitylibraries.co.uk/the-next-chapter/> or complete a paper copy available in the library.
Participants can submit any questions outside of the session via: engage@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

Presentation

A presentation was given to the audience and covered the following areas:

- Introduction and background to the proposals (DM)

- New library developments underway (DM)
- Drivers for change (NH)
- Library Needs Assessment - Phase 1 review and recap (NH)
- Changes being proposed (TA)

Question and Answer

- The panel responded to the questions posed by the audience
- Questions summarise the key points raised by audience members and are not verbatim, additional comments outside of the main question were noted and are recorded at the end of this Q&A section
- Comments were noted but not always responded to where a direct question was not asked
- Alternative suggestions were noted
- A record of all questions, comments and suggestions is set out below and will be added to the consultation responses

Questions

Q1. I am worried where will people go and if there will be capacity at other libraries if Radford Lenton Library closes. Do these other libraries have meeting room capacity? The resident was worried that other libraries won't be quiet enough. Libraries are a warm, quiet and safe place to go. It is important to have quiet libraries with a silent area and Basford Library really helps his mental health because it is quiet.

Answer: Yes we do have capacity to support additional usage in the event of any library closure. You are right that libraries will get busier and are libraries are all very different.

Q2. Save Our Libraries are concerned about any library closure. It was questioned about the library being 'built using minor's welfare money', this should be a reason for keeping these libraries open to the public. They are a gift left to us from the past. We will not get the same atmosphere from the new library buildings, these old buildings are a part of our history.

Answer: Point noted and we will look further into historic finances and agreements, including surrounding land.

Q3. I am concerned about the deprivation in these areas [where libraries were at risk of closure], and with low online usage. People can't always afford to go online. The libraries need to be in walking distance for those who cannot afford to travel or who are old or disabled, those who may struggle to be mobile.

If these libraries close there will be no access to reference books to find out information, it will be closed away in a warehouse out of reach.

We have no Central Library. Now they propose to close three libraries.

The Council should be seeking the funding to make the libraries accessible and beautiful again. It is disingenuous to say the Council has run out of money. It is not progress.

We see the mistakes from getting rid of the buildings from the Broad Marsh area and now we see this in not progress.

Libraries are not open enough; they should be open longer so more people can visit.

Answer: We are having to make savings across the Council and have a legal duty to set a balanced budget. The council had received less funding from central Government and so unfortunately has financial cuts to make. It is hard but we do have to make choices.

We are opening a new Central Library; this is still happening.

Q4. The Council spent £60,000 for flood and floor damage repair at Radford Lenton Library, having repaired it, it is now going forward to closure; why?

The Radford Lenton area will have no library. It has no youth service left and it has no leisure centre left. It will have nothing left.

How do you know that people want these multi-use spaces, how do you know if these are wanted? Not everyone does.

I suffer from mental health issues; I don't want to go to a library in police station or doctor's surgery. People are frightened of these.

Libraries keep me safe, libraries are important. What evidence do you have of for demand for libraries in big shared centres?

Answer: I will need to confirm the exact figure of the repair however the repair for insurance purposes and to enable the library building to be safely accessible again after flood damage.

Multi-use spaces are used by many people who can access many services. We have won a prize for our joint service centre library design and there is a lot of value [partnership links] in these multi-use spaces. It helps keep our libraries. Footfall is increased and partnership opportunities are also increased. We do appreciate that not all may like these but they do serve a purpose.

Q5. Libraries hours have been shortened, and are not open when schools close. They have been part-time for many years. This affects how many visitors can go to the

library. People struggle to pay for travel. To say that people can travel to go to libraries isn't accurate. People can't afford broadband or computer equipment to go online at home. They need the library for this.

How safe will it be to access a library out of hours, is this safe for women to go to if there are no staff at libraries?

Why can't you ask for funding to keep these libraries open.

Answer: I agree libraries haven't been opened full time for a long time. I agree with you about the struggle for people to travel. When we do need to make these proposals I do understand not everyone can afford to do this.

We do apply for funding from the government. You need to apply for funding for specific schemes, not just to keep libraries open, that is funded by the Council. We have financial restrictions and need to make savings.

Q6. Aspley Library is my local library and I have been going since I was a child. Where Hyson Green library is now, it is not fit to be a library. The way you have conducted this whole scenario, you have a very poor method of communicating. The questions asked on the survey requires you to have a degree level to respond.

Short survey is simpler but it doesn't tell you if you need put a tick or cross. Very pictorial. Face for saying no, is a sad face. The poor communication is now offensive. You don't have to feel sad or bad to say 'no'. I am happy to disagree, don't make this feel bad.

Phase 1 a lot responded online. Knit and Natter (Aspley) don't go online. They can't go online. You need to communicate in other ways.

Answer: In terms of communication we have 3 more in-person public consultation meetings coming up. We have been open to suggestions and criticism and are taking note of these.

We have been displaying posters in libraries and staff and partners are signposting. This has been promoted both online and through other ways within our communities.

Q7. We have held three read-ins [at Basford, Radford Lenton and Aspley Libraries] and East Midlands turned up. Also there was a knit and Natter representative who has used the library since 1978, that's 50 years of library service that could be taken away. Looked at the foundation stones outside each of the libraries: Radford Lenton was built in 1926, Aspley Library in 1937 and Basford (unsure), but they were all built in similar times. They are beautiful buildings.

Funded by Andrew Carnegie, who funded libraries in Nottingham and across the world.

Similar to the John Carrol leisure Centre, these are community hubs for people to learn and socialise. You are taking these away from us.

One of the signatories [against library closure] was a local lady aged 85, she used to go to the library as much as she could, and now attends other social groups at her local library.

Closing libraries will damage people in these hard pressed communities, experiencing a cost of living crisis and closure of these libraries will compound to these social isolation and issues.

There are lot of misnomers in the Council such as the 'Improvement Board' and other is the 'Library Transformation' programme; in what George Orwell world does this show progress? It is not progress!

Answer: This has been noted.

Q8. The Next Chapter is too weighty. It is not like Harry Potter.

NHS England looked closely at the areas where they and libraries can work closely together.

All the sort of things got decommissioned by Nottingham City years ago. Libraries were already providing health information in the past but are not being identified as needed again.

Answer: Libraries are valuable services; we are trying to keep as many public services open as we can. These libraries have been chosen to be put forward for closure for a number of reasons due to difficulty and on-going cost to maintain and other factors. It is not an easy decision to make to put forward any library for closure.

Q9. The consultation isn't a shame. We haven't made any answers, who are you talking to? Are you listening to us?

Answer: we have engaged with public health and other local (and wider) partners and organisations looking to build a collaboration, looking for other ways to operate. These public consultations are listening to the public.

Q10. We do appreciate the Council has been in a horrible position over the last 12 years. It is difficult to get funding because we aren't a Conservative authority. I joined Radford Lenton Library in 1978.

I started using the new Hyson Green Library; it is useful and gets people in. But when I read about Basford Library closing I went down and realised how wonderful the building was.

Basford has been put forward for closure before. Once a library goes it doesn't come back. If people can't get into libraries in these areas, where will they go?

It is not a nice prospect, and not for those who live in those areas who will be left with no local library.

Nottingham is a UNESCO City of Literature; don't we get money to help support literacy? Where is the role in libraries in this?

If these libraries close, people won't go to other libraries. They can't afford to travel. People who are poor are bound to their closest libraries.

Please can we try and find a way to compromise to keep these libraries open.

A city of Literacy isn't about heritage, it is about people now and supporting literacy in our people and communities in current times. I hope you try and find a way around it.

Answer: We have one of the worst child literacy rates in the world. We shouldn't be looking at who doesn't go to the libraries but who should be going to libraries, and how to get people in. Improving literacy is important to us.

Q11. Sherwood Library has been paid for but the Council will need to lease it back. Sherwood Library wasn't a maintained building before but now you will need to pay.

I don't feel that Radford Library is hard or costly to maintain. Thieves jumped onto the roof and stole the leading from the roof and the Council didn't notice because there are no Community Protection Officers in Radford. This is how there is theft in the area.

Answer: We will not pay rent for the Sherwood Library space. The theft wasn't seen because it was in a hidden area on the roof not easily seen from the street level.

Q12. I don't understand why these libraries are closing, are you trying to drive kids to stay at home and watch TV? This is not health or good. I am out raged by the closures. It is not fair and it will damage our communities.

The Council is just trying to save money that it has mis-spent. The Council has been investigated for fraud. How can you say you are trying to make savings by closing libraries?

Nottingham doesn't have a new Central Library. The library was full and always used. PCs were busy.

How can you say the number of users has dropped? Of course Covid has meant it has dropped.

You need to increase opening hours and promote libraries more to the public, that way they will be used more.

Old buildings are being demolished and wasted. I don't think you understand that people can't afford heating, books or technology. Libraries provide this and a safe space to go.

Answer: The new Central Library will be opening, not in the timescale as initially planned as it has been subject to delay. We do appreciate and understand the value of our libraries and the value to our communities.

Q13. I cannot believe what you are proposing to do when you look at the areas where you are proposing to close the libraries. Aspley is one of the most deprived areas of the city. All of these areas [of libraries with proposed closure] are deprived.

It seems like there is no joined up thinking by the Council to understand the impact of these closures [on our communities]. Other local services have been closed in these communities, and now libraries.

The other point is about the whole strategy of the Council, all elected Cllrs should be defending these cuts not campaigning about Tory cuts.

It need a proper campaign to keep services open. Cllrs who will not fight to defend our services should step aside.

Answer: This has been noted.

Q14. Bulwell Library is my closest library, and I have used libraries at many points throughout my life. The Council has underestimated how crucial libraries are for mental health, cohesive communities, literacy and social interaction.

A drop in usage is about the drop in community engagement. If you want to transform services, some of the £15million should have been used to fund library services.

Also children centre services are closing. I urge the council to reinvest in libraries to support communities which need them and will struggle without library support.

Answer: We have a lot of engagement with our customers and can see customer needs. We have a lot of development colleagues who engage with partners and other local groups and make contact with community groups to understand community need.

We campaign in different ways and we have opportunity to change our Councillors every 4 years through election. We do extensively engage with those in our communities but we also have to balance the books financially. We are having to put past issues right and we understand that there have been big consequences about these. We recognise the value libraries give to our communities.

Q15. As a mother of young children closing one of these libraries is a big concern. It is a place of support and a place to go to read with your children.

Radford Lenton Library opening hours reduced and it is harder to go.

It doesn't seem right to be closing these community libraries without opening the Central Library first.

Answer: This has been noted.

Q16. I am British working class. I am a parent who encouraged my children to read and write. If libraries close how will this be possible for future generations?

The feeling, energy, emotion from going into the library, don't take that away from our children. Children will end up on the street.

People use the Central Library to do their homework at night. I had it in my generation, but the children of this generation will miss this. It helps parents. It helps inspire children. Libraries are a part of our communities.

Answer: This has been noted.

Q17. I don't think that it is was right to close the old Central Library before opening the new Central library. Taking books out of the old Central Library just to put into storage, this is going to cost money.

Answer: We have been open about needing to close the old Central Library before getting the new library because [the project for the new Central Library] relied on the sale of the building. We had to do that in a phased way.

Q18. Other councils aren't making cuts. Inspire aren't. Nottingham County Council isn't running the library direct.

Answer: Sherwood Library is a good example of good investment and use of money. Other authorities are closing libraries across the country.

Q19. Sherwood Library is my closest library and I am pleased it is being rebuilt. My concern is for the average person not being able to access services online. You still need a physical library in our communities and other physical services, not everyone is online.

Answer: We will continue to keep access to public PCs free for library members and will be opening a new Sherwood Library when it reopens.

Q20. Why did you close the Central Library? It was in a good condition. Why don't you hold onto the Angel Row library?

Answer: We needed the sale of the old Central Library to ensure we got a new Central Library; it relied on this sale. Holding onto the old Central Library site was not an option for us.

Q21. You didn't inform communities about the Library closures. This isn't clear enough and needs be to clearer.

It is on your website but how are these coming in from other sources? How are people who are not online finding out about this?

Answer: We have promoted the Libraries Transformation proposals both online and physically at sites. There are posters across all libraries, staff are signposting members of public and supporting awareness, and we are promoting this through our extensive partnership [internal and external] channels.

Q22. Why don't you promote your library facilities more and make an income from our services? Why do you charge so little and not use your facilities as an income generation scheme? Get money from the local students to use your facilities. Get money for room hire.

Why don't you ask for sponsorship for running our libraries? If you are concerned about community cohesion, why are you closing libraries.

Answer: This has been noted.

Q23. I am concerned that the Labour party is hiding the library closures. This is not clear.

How much money does it cost to print the Arrow? Can this be used to pay back? Tax payers pay for this. The Arrow is propaganda. It has multiple prints per year; how can you justify this spend on propaganda?

Answer: The Arrow is now only printed once in hard copy per year, the rest online. We have made cut backs. We are consulting on closing three libraries and information about the proposal detail has been clear. These public consultation sessions are a part of this.

END.

Thank you for your time and we were pleased to hear your thoughts, comments and feedback on our library transformation proposals.