

## **Church Stretton Library Support Group**

**Response to the Shropshire Council consultation on the proposed relocation of the Church Stretton library to the Academy on Shrewsbury Road.**

**14<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

## Executive Summary

This consultation response has been produced by the Church Stretton Library Support Group (CSLSG). The CSLG was formed in November 2014 to campaign for the retention of the library in its current premises. The CSLSG has spent approximately four months researching the case for closing the library in the centre of Church Stretton and relocating it to the school on Shrewsbury Rd. Its findings are described in this submission and point overwhelmingly to the flaws in the proposal and the strength of the case for “keeping it where it is”.

At an early stage in the life of the group it decided that it was not appropriate to focus solely on a campaign against the relocation proposal. We accept that we should explore the potential for delivering budget cuts on the current site and exploit the potential for setting up new funding and governance arrangements to secure the long term future of a valuable public service in the heart of the community it serves.

This consultation submission focusses on 7 areas of weakness and poorly specified plans associated with a relocated library. These are:

- Demography and Accessibility
- The Council’s ESIIA document
- Safeguarding and staffing
- Public transport, the minibus, disabled issues and parking at the academy
- The impact on Church Stretton, retail viability, unplugging valuable activities
- The lack of answers to questions, misleading information, defective consultation
- Public opinion (report on our market stall activities, the petition, the public meeting and the drop-in)

The submission then explores options for the future based on the principle that the library stays where it is. We note in passing our disappointment that the Council has not identified options that retain the library “where it is” and this task has had to be taken up by a community group. Our options fall into short term options and options that will take longer to put in place. In the short term we are confident that a combination of reduced hours, reduced space, the letting of released space at commercial rates and income generation can make a substantial contribution to achieving budget cuts and retain the library at the heart of our community. In the medium term we suggest that new governance and funding arrangement is put in place to secure the long term future of the library and protect it from Council cuts. This medium term strategy is discussed in this submission as either a charitable trust or a Community Interest Company.

In our view it would be a serious error for Shropshire Council to pursue its single option of relocation given the overwhelming public rejection of this proposal summarised in the body of this submission in the public opinion section, the seriousness of the many defects in the relocation plan and the willingness of an energetic support group to continue to work co-operatively with the Council to deliver the Council's own objectives at the same time as respecting the democratic wishes of residents and users.

In our conclusion we say:

“We want to work with the Council to achieve an outcome that assists it with its budget cuts and to make sure that we maintain and develop community facilities in this town. That work continues. All that remains to make sure the democratic process works to a high standard, people are listened to and robust options are developed, is for the Council to abandon the relocation plan and give us 12 months to demonstrate that the library can stay where it is, develop new models of service delivery and deliver proportionate budget cuts”

## **Introduction**

The Church Stretton Library Support Group was formed on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2014 when it became clear that Shropshire Council was promoting the closure of the library in its current building and its' relocation to the Academy on Shrewsbury Road. During that time we have devoted hundreds of hours to our attempts to clarify the detail of what would be on offer at the academy and we have had meetings with senior Council staff and councillors at Shirehall (15.12.14) and with Cathy Thomas at the school. We have organised a petition that attracted over 1100 signatures, organised a public meeting attended by 203 residents and organised a drop-in session at the Silvester Horne Institute that attracted over 130 participants. We have handed out leaflets to hundreds of people outside the Co-op and the Spar shops and at our two market day stalls and we organised a walk to the school from Market Sq so that all those interested could experience the difficulties of walking to the Academy with books.

Our activities have been widely reported in the "Shropshire Star" and the "South Shropshire Journal" and on BBC Television "Midlands Today" after filming over 50 local residents outside the library voicing their concerns and their strong support for keeping the library where it is.

The level of public support for our campaign is overwhelming and is associated with a positive appetite for change to assist the Council in dealing with budget pressures. In our view and described in detail in this consultation response, there is an overwhelming case for retaining the library in its current premises and for making a contribution to budget savings with the library on its current site and in a way that meets with public support.

This consultation response is divided into 8 sections:

Demography and Accessibility

The Council's ESIIA document

Safeguarding and staffing

Public transport, the minibus, disabled issues and parking at the academy

The impact on Church Stretton, retail viability, unplugging valuable activities

Lack of answers to questions, misleading information, defective consultation

Public opinion (report on our market stall activities, the petition, the public meeting and the drop-in)

Options that will deliver budget savings whilst retaining the library in its current premises

The consultation response is a collaborative effort written by the following people:

Lesley Dench

Bernard Ford

Madeline Haigh

Sue Hird

Felicity Thomas

Hazel Whitehouse

Chris Whitehouse

John Whitelegg

## Demography and Accessibility

To quote Shropshire Council's own ESIIA document, the Council must pay "due regard" to the "protected characteristics" of communities in Shropshire. In terms of our response, we must look to the same census statistics as the council, to show that our demography in this area is special and evolving differently from populations in other areas. 41.7% of the population are 65 and over, this percentage is in the ascendancy and is likely to be for the foreseeable future.

School age children account for 12%, so even in crude numerical terms this relocation can be seen as disadvantageous to a majority of the population in the parish of Stretton.

Shropshire Council, whilst protesting that they cannot possibly afford to disadvantage either the young or the elderly, seem to be concentrating their efforts on providing for the minority, and on not placing "due regard" on the requirements and wishes of the majority. It is therefore proportionally unrepresentative to move the library service away from where it is best for the elderly. What rationale does Shropshire Council have for disadvantaging this "protected characteristic" group?

Anecdotally, elderly and disabled residents have told the Library Support Group that they are finding it hard to envision and support a SERVICE that expects them to:

Travel out of town, away from the other services and retail outlets that currently they can access all together in one trip.

Wait for buses - often in inclement weather, or depend on a minibus service that STILL may or may not be available, and may not suit their needs.

Fit in with an increased level of timing issues, so as to ensure proper safeguarding.

To accept a 'service' that is diminished because of the lack of a correct level and appropriateness of staffing, and set in an area that is diminished too, in its size and in the services it can provide.

To make decisions based on such little consistent information, knowing that the results of

Shropshire Council's second consultation will probably form part of an agreement that is so ill-defined, yet could affect them so deeply.

Many of these more elderly residents have told us that if the library moves to the school they will be unable and/or unwilling to go there. Their perception is that the library would then fail and be subsumed into the school.

Church Street Library is a respected site in the community, in the same way as the Council Offices and Mayfair are described as the 'familiar and respected sites' that have been chosen to deliver public service points. To insist on a move to the school pushes these residents into an unfamiliar environment that does not take account of their 'protected characteristic' status. The conditions pertaining to this proposed new and unfamiliar situation are still not detailed nor presented in any consistent form by Shropshire council nor its key partner, Church Stretton School. Providing the detail AFTER the consultation is not logical.

A decision to move the library to the school without proper consultation and consideration of other options and without giving the level of detail and time required, pushes elderly residents to the margins of the decision-making process and makes them feel completely unrepresented by the people who are supposed to do so.

It is difficult too, to align the Council's requirement of itself in the ESIA document to deal with the problems that disabled residents have identified, with their inaction so far. Is there, or is there not, a suitable minibus available for transport? When a member of the Library Support Group asked Councillor Chapman this very simple question, he replied that there was a service bus that stopped outside the school. When then asked if this was his answer to such a fundamental question for some residents - he shrugged!

Propelling a mobility scooter, walking frame or buggy so much further than the town centre, along pavements that are narrow and uneven, is an issue of great impact. There is no consideration of parking or storage facility for these transports and aids - nothing detailed either for the baby/infant buggies that are regularly seen at Church Street library. The real needs of the disabled in our community are not clearly recognised in the Council documents.

Again these library users are being taken away from the town centre, and away from the other places that are usually factored in and amalgamated into one trip to the centre of Stretton. Unless things have changed considerably, the school does not offer a GP surgery, a dentist, supermarket, chemist, baker, newsagent or coffee shop. People - especially those potentially disadvantaged groups of elderly and/or disabled - need their services together and within easy and logical access.

## **The Council's ESIIA document: an evaluation**

### **1. First Impressions**

- Not a lengthy document, on considering decisions are to be made which will affect many peoples' lives, not least some of the most vulnerable in our society.
- Not a lengthy document to alter the face of Church Stretton, as there are no guarantees from the council how this lovely building will be used, if not housing the Library and Information Services.
- Not a lengthy document in which to describe what factors, advantages and risks have played a part in the decision-making process.
- An even shorter document when you take into account that almost the all the first page is taken up with the description of the tool which the Council are using to determine need. However, the concept that this assessment tool should be expanded to include social inclusion is a good one; except that not all the groups are mentioned. Perhaps they were of lesser importance or not applicable to Church Stretton. *It is essential that everyone is considered in a democratic process i.e. single parent families, those living alone, those registered disabled but also those with significant health needs that might be affected by these proposals. Not to mention people on low incomes, etc.*
- Considerably more detail is required from this document if the Council is not to lay itself open to severe criticism and even possible action over infringement of human rights legislation. It is obvious that there is a considerable amount of data/information/detail missing or undeveloped.
- Because of the lack of information and poor engagement with the Church Stretton Community there is a real sense of discrimination and lack of advancement of equal opportunities.

### **2. The How**

- If the necessary information had been collected prior to the November meeting it would have been obvious that the requirement for this project required a full ESIIA Report early on in the process. This document is insufficient to allow for the needs/wants/expectations of the Church Stretton Community.



### **3. Name and change of Service**

- This project as it stands is not for a relocation of Church Stretton Library - it is a proposal for the expansion of Stretton School library. For all that it be called the Community Library, it will be housed and managed within the school. As an interested party, the school should be named in the beginning. It raises the question as to whether there any more interested parties that we know nothing about .i.e. what decisions have been made about the existing, attractive, Victorian library building?

### **4. Aims of the service**

- As part of the background information Council expressed its need to reduce expenditure of library services to between £1.3m - £1.5m, a difference of £200,000. This would appear to be an extraordinary differential. £200,000 would go a long way to keeping Church Stretton Library the way it is.
- The overall aim is to support the vulnerable elderly and the young in Shropshire but there seems to be no regard for them at all in re-siting a service away from the centre of town making extra difficulty for both young mothers with pushchairs and the elderly with mobility problems.
- In assessing numbers of the vulnerable whether young or old, nationally statistics show that there is an increasing number of the vulnerable elderly, whereas it would seem the reverse is true for the young. The elderly would be the most disadvantaged by this proposal. Surely it is the Council's aim to promote independence in the elderly, not restrict it.
- Shropshire Council might aim to deliver services in partnership but there has been little partnership working within this community. No consideration was given to enhancing activities within the current library, although I am aware that this work is being undertaken now. The risks of not being able to afford to keep the library open have been considered but not the risks of keeping an 'out of town community library' when its potential is not met.
- The library network is listed as 6 major towns and 10 local hubs, nowhere is there listed in this document a breakdown of use in these localities; the use of the library might be far more consistent in Church Stretton than in another location, it might not; but it needs to be demonstrated.
- The Council should be able to satisfy its population that it is working in a democratic manner and that by changing a venue it will not run the risk of perhaps 1/3 of the current service users not being able or wanting to access different premises

## **5. Data and Information**

- The lack of sufficient data has already been identified. However, as some of the data has been collected without consultation with the staff involved, there are inaccuracies and misconceptions; for example, there may be only 21% of active users recorded but of those 21% some of them may be taking out books on behalf of someone else, a child, grandchild, spouse, partner, friend or neighbour. Without ascertaining this information, the 21% is not an accurate answer.

## **6. Key Facts**

- These are interesting but to comply with human rights legislation, we need to know a good deal more. How many live alone, how many have cars, how many need significant help using transport. The cost and maintenance of a specialist disability friendly vehicle is prohibitive. The school will have a 'duty of care' to ensure that the operatives are suitably trained and insured to support the kind of person using this transport. The data on potential use and costs is missing and is an essential component of this project.

## **7. Population Structure**

- It would appear that the numbers of school children compared to the overall population is very low compared with the adult population and particularly with the over 65 years. It seems very unbalanced to move large to small rather than the other way round, particularly as the large is getting bigger and the small, smaller.

## **8. Church Stretton Library User to location data**

- This was an interesting bar chart and one would have expected the reds and blues to add up to 100% but in both cases it is 99% - some consistency! Of the 65% of active users living within 2kms of the proposed location nearly half of those living furthest away will have twice as far to travel, if the proposal goes ahead.

## **9. Stretton School Proposal**

- The School library proposal outlines very clearly all the advantages to the pupils and staff of the school and some of the benefits to the general public but few of the difficulties. Information from the Community Library proposal should have been available in this document as a comparison.
- Accessibility is a key component of this and although consideration has been given to use of school transport and pick-up points, there is no mention of the logistics of maintaining a service for the public and a service for the school. It needs to be established who the transport is designed for and this detail has not been considered, but this is imperative in a project appraisal document.
- The proposed layout of the new project has also given cause for concern and there is no evidence of these concerns in this document.
- The other key issues are around revenue. There seems to be a sense that there will be revenue savings in this venture but there is no evidence. The aim is to staff and run a building during hours not currently part of the normal school working hours and this will have enormous cost implications. Nowhere is there any sense that the extended working days, additional weekend and holiday openings have been costed out.
- How can an approval in principal be considered without all the financial details - not just capital but revenue and on-costs?

#### **10. Intended audiences and target groups for service change**

- Church Stretton is a venue for thousands of tourists, many of whom visit the library. They ask questions of the very knowledgeable staff and take advantage of the information, books, and histories etc. that are available. They are not registered. Where is their input into this process?
- People who are not necessarily registered with a disability would find the half mile trek to the school unacceptable.

- The volunteers currently do not claim expenses. They might feel differently if they have a further mile to travel with each visit.
- It may be more difficult to accommodate the different groups that currently meet in the library particularly as there would be further constraints of school breaks and lunch-times.

### **11. Evidence**

- This item demonstrates how much necessary information has not been provided in order to proceed with this project and yet it would appear that already this is the Council's preferred option. This has not been a democratic process; the whole action from start to finish is flawed. No Public Service Body should be making financial decisions without the backing of sound data – this has not been available. There is a lack of transparency and openness in this supposed democratic process.

### **12. Specific Consultation**

- All these specific groups have been formed since the November meeting, but this is work that should have been done before. There needs to be good clear evidence of the benefits, advantages and risks of all options before a preferred option is agreed. This has not happened.

### **13. Potential Impact**

- If the necessary work had been undertaken by the officers of the Council, it would have been evident months ago that there would be a high negative result to this proposal, and the full report determined before the November meeting. The loss of time, energy and money involved in this is totally unacceptable in an environment where every penny counts and we are being told to give up our wonderful library because there are insufficient funds.

### **14. Initial Assessment**

- The layout of this is appalling, the English language is designed to be read from left to right but this table is so designed that not only does the title grid not appear at the top of the page, but words are written underneath one another.
- There is no evidence of the threat that boisterous teenagers might unintentionally present to older people, which is very much about safeguarding both the young and the elderly.

- Concern has to be raised about the general public trying to negotiate playgrounds, car parks, entrances and exits at the beginning and end of the school day, not to mention break times.

#### **15. Actions to Mitigate Negative Impact**

- Positive impact solutions need to show exactly how families with children and adults will use the library and what is the likely change to their use of the library if it moves. Mothers with small children might feel less intimidated using a public library in town than a community library in the senior school. Will there be more children using the library after school than currently use the public library? This is debateable.
- Access remains an important issue, disabled people have the right to be treated equally and a proposed back entrance which is kept locked does not facilitate this.
- Perhaps the “Intergeneration activities” could be described in more detail, as these could be misinterpreted.

#### **16. Review of actions before decision –making**

- In order to review any actions, a full detailed financial report needs to be made available of the real costs of running the current service in its’ present location.
- At the moment there seem to be blanket figures being produced.
- What is the current library worth in terms of resale or rental potential? This information is necessary in order to look at other options.
- Staffing is another major issue; two experienced Public Library staff are at risk of losing their jobs to a service which will be undermanned in general, let alone covering late hours opening, weekends and school holidays. Where is the justice/democracy in this? The staffing figures that have been produced do not add up. There is no differentiation between senior staff and assistants. Are domestic staff e.g. cleaners included or does this come under maintenance?
- What are the maintenance costs? Has major work been undertaken, or is part of the consideration potential work that needs to be done? This is not just about an extension to a school building, it is the support and maintenance when the school is closed.

- With regard to the proposed new community library, transport has been highlighted, but much more detail is required, e.g. running costs. Car parking is always a nightmare. What steps will be taken to ensure that the general public have access where and when appropriate?
- Safeguarding is not just about children.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There is an overriding sense that the Council expected to make a major change as to how the Church Stretton Community go about their ordinary lives without any fuss or bother. There was insufficient contact and exchange between the Community and the Council Officers in order for latter to assess what was wanted/needed/expected by the former from their library service. The major complaint about the whole process is the access to reliable, trustworthy data and evidence of detailed finance planning. There was also a requirement for some worked up alternatives to the only two options on the table; the “do nothing” option does not count and one remaining option is unacceptable as it does not demonstrate democratic process. The whole reason for having open transparent discussion and alternatives to the Council process is to ensure that all legal issues are covered.

## **Safeguarding and Staffing**

The Head of the school has publicly stated that ‘safeguarding’ in the proposed library will be a priority of the school and that he would allow nothing to threaten the safety and well-being of the pupils. We accept that this is a very sincere stance. However, the plans submitted by the school do not fully explore the staffing implications of ‘safeguarding’.

The plans for the new library at the school show a reverse L-shaped building, with an adult entrance at the front and near the road, and the pupil entrance at the rear. There is to be a partition separating the pupil from the adult section, though at this stage it is not clear where the partition will be. The connecting door will be locked at break and lunch time, though the Wi-Fi access will be in the pupil area. Two manned desks will be needed, one to serve the public and one to serve the pupils.

With the issue of ‘safeguarding’ we maintain that two members of staff will be needed at the pupil end in order that they may carry out their normal duties and supervise the activities of pupils and adults using the Wi-Fi facility.

At the adult end two librarians will be needed, the minimum number accepted by the Library Service for the present Church Stretton library.

At present the school employs in its library one librarian (not qualified) on four days a week, and two Resources staff, one full time and one part time. The duties of the Resources staff are mainly connected with other school matters.

This is clearly insufficient to make-up the number of staff we feel are necessary for the proposed library. It is significant that at the Phoenix school (referred to by the school) the Dawley public library is indeed on the same site but there is no integration during the school day and the connecting door is kept locked because of the issue of ‘safeguarding’. At the Bishop Heber school in Cheshire (again referred to by the school), they do have integration. However, the librarian can see the whole room from her desk and the adult library is open only two days a week, between 1.30 and 7.30pm.

We are told that the school governors have indicated that they are not willing to incur extra staffing costs so how will they address the issue of staffing and ‘safeguarding’? It is not good enough for the school to say that staffing will be worked out when and if the decision is made to re-locate the library to the school.

## **Public transport, the minibus, disabled issues and parking at the academy**

For car users, dedicated library-user parking adjacent to the library area is essential. More people will have to use their cars to go to the library than at present because of the out of town location. The restriction imposed by the school proposal's lunchtime closure will concentrate library use and therefore parking into a much smaller time span during the day.

Any car park access will be very difficult at school finishing time between 3.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m.

Access to the building for the disabled demands the shortest possible distance from the car to the library. The disabled access library entrance requires going through the school library. For safeguarding purposes, this access point will be locked to public library users when the school is using their library. Thus users who need mobility aids such as wheelchairs, mobility scooters, walkers or sticks might find their specific entrance, and the disabled access toilet, not simply closed to them, but locked.

For many elderly people without a car, the half-mile walk from town to Academy, carrying their books, is not an option, especially in bad weather and during the winter months. The Ring-and-Ride service has already told us that they would not be able to take this on as a new route.

For those using mobility scooters to get to the library, there is the prospect of a half-a-mile journey out of town, along the busy Shrewsbury Road and on narrow pavements, with the same bad weather problems-- the rain, the fog, the snow- and the early darkness of the winter months.

Transport to the proposed location is a major issue. The 'Community Library Proposal' brochure stated: "*The school minibus could also be used to provide a shuttle service from the town centre for a small fee*"

The school minibus would be a single destination service --it runs only to the library and back. If a fee is charged it would be, in effect, a charge to use the library and moreover one levied on the most vulnerable in our society. It would arguably be in breach of the spirit of the 1964 Public Libraries and Museum Act which provides for free access to the library for the user.

The Library Support Group has repeatedly asked: "Please confirm that the minibus will be free of charge to users" but received evasive replies such as;

*"Yes we would endeavour to do this, although we may consider a small fee."*

This ambiguity is repeated in the Council's own second consultation documents, where a free service is quoted in 'Item 4 Transport Options', but the accompanying FAQs 2/2/15 refers yet again to a small fee.



The Library Support Group also asked for confirmation that the minibus would run every weekday and on Saturdays, and for an indication of a possible schedule. The school's reply: "*Will run on weekdays only. Schedule to be arranged.*" means there is NO Saturday service on offer even though the Library will be open all day.

The school minibus does not have wheelchair access. There is no space for baby buggies. There is no space for the shopping trolleys used by the elderly who cannot carry their books, or who may continue to try to fit a library visit in with shopping in the town. There is no indication that groups such as the Book Clubs, and audiences for talks/events/pre-school and other specifically timed activities can all be accommodated on the minibus.

There is no indication that any thought has been given to alternative arrangements and public notification when the vehicle is off the road for any reason, such as repairs or servicing, or even through non-availability of a driver. Furthermore, the school minibus does not have a dedicated driver but is driven by school staff as required. It is a reasonable expectation that Shropshire Council should have provided information on the legal and regulatory regime within which the minibus will operate, when carrying the general public rather than the school's own students. The use of the vehicle may mean it should be formally registered as a Community Transport operation, and the drivers required to undergo training and/or PSV licence requirements.

The public bus service, the 435, is seen as one of the main methods of getting out to the school, and there is a bus stop, without a shelter of any kind, outside the school. However, 'Minsterley Motors Company' controls the 435 bus timetable, not Shropshire Council, or Church Stretton School. The Weekday service is one bus every hour; on Saturdays, one bus every 2 hours.

On Monday –Friday there are 2 buses in the morning which would enable library users to catch the bus back before the new library shuts for lunch. In the afternoon, the outgoing bus and the return buses arrive at the school during the school's own finishing time between 3.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. respectively. This is a tremendously busy time of day, with 600 pupils leaving by school coaches, or being collected on the school run and is therefore a period which most people would prefer to avoid.

On Saturdays, there is only a 2-hour service and to miss the return bus at 4.06 p.m., means waiting until the last bus back which is after 6.00 p.m. The library, of course, closes at 5.00 p.m. The weekday Evening opening hours until 7.00 p.m. will be almost inaccessible for the 435 bus service users as the last bus to pass the School returning to the town is around 6.16 p.m.

The problems and restrictions of the bus service timetable and the school/library schedule make an unsatisfactory combination for library users.

## **The impact on Church Stretton, retail viability, unplugging valuable activities**

*“The Rural Services Network believes that local services – such as village shops, pubs and post offices – are at the heart of functioning communities, as well as offering a lifeline to many vulnerable residents. Their steady erosion needs to be addressed and reversed.”*

Source: Rural Services Network (2015)

<http://www.rsonline.org.uk/images/files/rsn-manifesto2015.pdf>

We would argue that libraries have a role and status at least as important as shops, pubs and post offices and in terms of cultural and educational provision and the support of older age groups, even more so.

The Rural Services Network tracks the decline of services in rural areas and links this to the damage it does to the interests of older residents and to the local economy:

*“When the last outlet closes, it is often no exaggeration to say that a tipping point has been reached. A focal point in the community has gone and a place where residents would meet has disappeared. There is now little option but to climb in the car and go elsewhere. Those who find it hard to travel may become isolated. Job opportunities in those local outlets no longer exist and the money that was spent in them flows out of the community.”*

Source: Rural Services Network (2015)

<http://www.rsonline.org.uk/images/files/rsn-manifesto2015.pdf>

Libraries are part of the solution to the problem of decline:

*“• Encourage the public sector to look to local rural retailers and outlets to improve access to their services. Examples include library drop-off points and prescription pick-up points within village shops.”*

Libraries bring people into a local community especially an attractive town like Church Stretton and they add to the footfall (the number of people visiting the town, using cafes and businesses, spending money and supporting jobs). Cutting off this source of revenue and community gain at a time of austerity and budget cuts is counter intuitive and must be resisted.

It is government policy to “rural proof” its policies and this public policy commitment applies equally to local government:

*“• Recommit to the principle of rural proofing by Whitehall and its delivery agencies, to ensure a fair outcome for rural communities. Make clear that that commitment comes from the top and has the backing of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. • Apply rural proofing rigorously to its post-2015 programme for Government. In particular, to think carefully about the targeting of needs-based policies to ensure they reach rural communities.”*

*“The Rural Services Network wants to see all Government policy making being subject to rural proofing, so sufficient early thought is given to how those policies will benefit rural communities and so any unintended rural consequences can be identified.”*

Source:

<http://www.rsonline.org.uk/images/files/rsn-manifesto2015.pdf>

Removing a library from the heart of a community is a contribution to diminishing the economic viability of small towns when we should be doing the opposite. This has been recognised by local businesses in Church Stretton and was referred to in one of our press releases (Appendix 1 to this section of our report)

Shropshire Council is a member of the Rural Services Network (RSN) and is committed to protecting rural services.

Pursuing the closure of the library at the heart of the community is a clear example of a local authority saying one thing and doing the opposite. It is time for Shropshire Council to protect and enhance local services, footfall and rural economic viability and not pursue policies that damage these outcomes.

## **Appendix**

### **Press Release**

#### **Immediate**

**17<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

### **Church Stretton businesses back the campaign to keep the library where it is**

The campaign to keep the library where it is has received a boost from the backing of local businesses. The library support group has argued strongly for the library to remain where it is for a variety of reasons including keeping as many Church Stretton facilities and destinations in the town as possible. The many hundreds of people we have spoken to, the 1100 people who signed the petition and the 203 people who turned up at the public meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February have all expressed support for keeping the library where it is because it is more convenient and links in with their use of shops, cafes, GP surgery and a large variety of destinations.

The overwhelming support for retention by residents of Church Stretton has now been strengthened by the views of our business community who also support retention of the library on the current site.

John Gott (Berry's café) said:

*"A market town centre stands like a house of cards: the whole much greater than its individual parts. If one of the more significant parts - in this case the library - is taken away then the whole becomes less attractive."*

Ros Ephraim of Burway books said:

*"The Church Stretton Community needs its Library Hub in the centre of the town"*

John Vine of Newsworld on Sandford Avenue said:

*"The library should stay where it is. This is important for users of all ages and for businesses in the town centre and is good for the community as a whole"*

Jane van Doesburg of the High St delicatessen said:

*"The proposed relocation of our town library would compromise its value within the community"*

Commenting on the support of the business community, Felicity Thomas, a spokesperson for the support group said:

*"One of the many delights of living in Church Stretton is the wide range of independent, high quality, retail outlets and cafes in the centre. These businesses add a great deal to our quality of life and to the tourist economy of this town and we want to see them thrive. Once we start "unplugging" important facilities from our town we damage the mutual benefits that all our facilities and businesses gain from the presence of each other. If the library leaves the town this will damage our economy and its small businesses and that is not acceptable. We are delighted that businesses support our campaign and we will support them in any way we can."*

## **Lack of answers to questions, misleading information, defective consultation**

### **The material provided to the public for the Library Consultation is seriously flawed and does not provide a secure basis for decision making.**

First, the documents concerning the Council's preferred option of relocating the public library service at the school.

- 1. The school's brochure, which forms the basis of the Council's proposal to move the public library to the school cannot be used as a reference point in this phase of consultation, and thus invalidates the entire exercise.**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2015, in an email to Bernard Ford, Cathy Thomas made this statement on behalf of the school:

*"Our document was an outline proposal. It is a working document that is evolving as we become fully appraised of the emerging issues and options. Therefore to base your response on it as it stands at the moment would not be appropriate.*

*Our document may also include answers to questions we are asking - some of which may be related to statements made by the Library Support group.*

*We will be clarifying - as far as we can - the specific points you raise on space; staffing; and use of the mini-bus. I say as far as we can because as I am sure you will appreciate the issue of staffing in particular has sensitive and confidential considerations attached to it. Staffing will be confirmed on any adoption of the project.*

*We intend to submit our document -in any revised form - as part of our response to the consultation. I repeat therefore that to base some of your arguments on the document as it stands at the moment may not be appropriate."*

**We find it quite astonishing that the prime source of information on the Council's preferred option is making this retraction of its own document as a source of information for response just 13 days before the end of this second consultation phase. This situation has not been made known to the general public, many of whom have completed their response forms on the basis of material now judged by its own creator as not an appropriate basis for comment.**

**We contend that this is unacceptable, unless another phase of the consultation is held, based on whatever information the school may be planning to release, and refer you to Woolf's guidance as follows: "Changes mid process/new options: If the public body fundamentally changes its proposal mid-process or is minded to proceed in a way which was not part of the proposal consulted upon, then basic fairness may require it to re-consult or consult afresh on the changed proposal."**

**2. Correspondence between leading school governor Alan Fox and ex-governor Roger Wilson, CBE concerning misleading assertions by Mr Fox in support of the school's proposal in Church Stretton community magazine "Focus" February edition (readership 60% of Church Stretton households).**

Roger Wilson 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015 to Alan Fox.

*"Dear Alan,  
.....I read your letter about the Library development with interest, and then with some dismay when I reached the sentence "There are three dedicated library staff already employed by the school including one qualified school librarian."*

*I know for a fact this is not the case. I know I have not been a governor for the last 12 years but I am in touch with the school and the library in particular because of Sheelagh's past involvement.*

*The truth is that the school librarian is not qualified as a librarian. She is paid on a clerical grade - a fact we agreed as governors in the 1990s when Jean Brayford ceased to be the teacher in charge of the library. She also works 0.8FTE. Cover is provided by Resources staff as and when required, not on a scheduled basis.*

*Your statement is deceptive, although I accept there is no deliberate attempt at deception. The trouble with statements like this is that they rebound. There will be those in the community who see the statement as a clear promise. It suggests that the school library currently carries a staffing budget of about £50,000 per annum (maybe more - I am out of touch with rates) and will carry that forward into the new structure if the proposed idea is implemented. The reality is more like one quarter of that sum implying that to meet the new staffing commitment the school will have to find a substantial sum of new money to meet it.*

*The staffing case is however complicated because the school's responsibility for safeguarding children in an area shared with the public in an unregulated way implies that more staff are needed at any rate. As it would be irrational to re-site Resources from the main building there will no longer be readily available on-site cover. ....  
Because of your remark this issue now needs clear statements of policy from the school. My understanding is that school collaboration over the library is conditional on no additional unfounded budgetary demands for the school. If that position has changed we need to know and a statement from the Chair would be appropriate.*

*If it has not changed you should publicly withdraw the statement made in the letter to Focus."*

Following this Alan Fox has submitted a correction for publication in the April edition of Focus which will be distributed some two weeks after the end of the consultation period.

**Misleading statements on behalf of the school will therefore have been in the public domain for the entire period of the consultation, again undermining the credibility of the process.**

On 02/03/2015 Roger Wilson provided the follow-up information below:

*“I am very happy for my email to be quoted or used in full. However, anything more than a summary of Alan's response should have his explicit agreement. I think a fair summary would be something along the lines of:*

*In reply to Mr Wilson's email Mr Fox accepted that he had made a mistake by not double-checking facts which his own observations had led him to. He confirmed that the situation is as described in Mr Wilson's email. He is planning a further letter to Focus to set matters straight.*

*As a result of the exchange of emails it is fair to conclude, until the school says otherwise, that:*

*The school is able to relocate one member of staff who currently acts as school librarian.*

*She is on a clerical grade, employed 0.8FTE during term time alone.*

*She has no library qualifications.*

*No other school employees will be assigned under current plans although governors have the power to redistribute budgets.*

*Without budget being made available to permit new employment:*

*The library would have to be closed to the public when pupils are in the building.*

*The library would have to be closed to the public when the school librarian takes a break.*

*The library would have to be closed one day a week to non-school users.*

*There is no staff cover in the event of illness.*

*The library would be closed during school holidays.*

*The school governors would have to make specific decisions to change this situation. It is not within the power of the head, local councillors or local authority officers to do so, even if they can provide the necessary funding. “*

*Roger Wilson CBE*



**3. Further misleading information published in the Shropshire Star on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> February concerning Church Stretton Library Staff.**

As the Support Group entered into extensive correspondence with Council staff and elected members on this matter we will not go into detail here. We would point out, however, that because of Council recalcitrance in this matter, the misleading statements were not corrected in the newspaper until the publication of Cllr. Charmley's letter on 27<sup>th</sup> February, following a complaint to the Chief Executive. **Again, we take an extremely serious view of the delay involved in providing accurate information to the public.**

**Now we move on to the proposal contained in the February 2<sup>nd</sup> document as "A reduced service in the current building". It is our contention that this is presented in such an unsubstantiated and biased way as to make any intelligent assessment of its viability impossible without further information and independent research.**

On issuing questions about the figures and statements in this option, the following became clear:

- a) no costings had been obtained by the Council to provide likely income from rental of any part of the current library building. At a Support Group meeting with Kate Garner and Lee Chapman, (Shire Hall 25.2.15) when we queried the failure to obtain accurate rental costings, we were invited to go and find this information for ourselves. We contend that in a proper consultation the onus is on the Council to provide such information to the public in the documents circulated for comment.
- b) no rationale exists for the Council's proposal to rent out the main library area as opposed to the two existing office spaces: "*there are no definite thoughts on this at the moment.*" (Council response to question posed on 25.2.15)

- c) no information has been provided by the Council to explain substantial variations in staff costs between current hours and suggested hours of 18.5 per week. The council's response that "*We're not going to answer this question as we have agreed that going into the details of staffing/salary costs to this level is not appropriate*" **fails to address the substance of this enquiry, and hampers public attempts to build on this option.**
- d) Our enquiry about the disproportionate distribution of service costs in this option is explained by the Council as "*worst case scenario*" and again this response has no discernible basis.
- e) The exclusion of storage space in the current library compared with its inclusion in the school option again is indicative of the bias visible throughout this "option". The Council response that "*Existing library storage space considered as an operational detail not relevant to the public consultation*" gives no justification for this withholding of information.

**Again turning to Woolf, he states "The obligation is to let those who have a potential interest in the subject matter know in clear terms what the proposal is and exactly why it is under positive consideration, telling them enough (which may be a good deal) to enable them to make an intelligent response."**

**We contend that the presentation of this option fails this test. No attempt has been made by the Council to enable constructive consideration of the "Keep it where it is" option as a basis for the development of alternative proposals by a member of the public working on the February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015 consultation documents.**

**In conclusion, with only a few days remaining to the end of the current consultation period, we consider that the inadequate and constantly changing material put forward by the supporters of the school option, much of it not available to the public supposedly being consulted, is not a safe or satisfactory basis on which to make a decision.**

## **Public opinion (report on our market stall activities, the petition, the public meeting and the drop-in)**

In December 2014, more than 40 people gathered at the Silvester Horne Institute to present their questions and concerns about the proposal to the Town Council Meeting. Since then, opposition to the School library site has grown considerably, involving town residents with a wide range of ages and background, and those in outlying areas who rely on the town's facilities.

The Petition to retain the Service in its current building was launched at CSLSG's Market Stall in the Market Square in December, with a second Market stall in January, and on both Market Days, people queued to add their signatures. Members of the Chamber of Trade joined the Support Group campaign, with the petition placed in local shops and cafes. Over a thousand people responded to the straightforward premise of the Petition – to retain the library on its present site and to abandon plans to move it to the School on Shrewsbury Road. The Petition, containing 1,102 signatures, was presented to Full Council at Shirehall on 26<sup>th</sup> February. Twenty Supporters were able to travel to Shrewsbury for the morning meeting, many saying they were also representing friends, family and neighbours unable to get there.

In January, a Walk to the School from Church Stretton town centre took place, when people tried out the journey carrying their library books, which were weighed before setting off. Eight hardback books weigh 14 lbs. (6.3kg.), six paperbacks weigh 4lbs. (1.8kg.). The book-weight and distance involved, a return journey of a mile from the Market Square, will impact not least on the Home Delivery volunteers.

On 4<sup>th</sup> February the Support Group organised a Public Meeting in the Silvester Horne Institute, attended by over 200 people. The Group presented detailed analysis of documents from the first "Consultation", gave councillors, council officers and the School Head the opportunity to respond, and then opened the debate for more questions and comments from the audience. The audience rejection of the School scheme was overwhelming, and the Council much criticised for the poor quality information offered in the proposal documents.

On 5<sup>th</sup> March, the Support Group held a 'Drop-In' at the Silvester Horne Institute from 2.00-6.00 p.m., with displays showing suggestions for viable alternative options. Several residents, as well as members of the Support Group, had offered ideas, and there was an interesting uniformity of solutions from the contributors. The Support Group Committee answered questions and listened to concerns. A special display board was available for people to add comments and further suggestions. A Straw Poll was conducted to indicate which of the suggestions was most favoured to be taken forward.

The display also featured the work of the Support Group in exposing the astonishing and disgraceful incompetence in the compilation of Shropshire Council's second Consultation's published statistics which provoked both anger and disgust

The Drop-In attracted 124 people. As an example, at 3.30pm there were 49 people in the display area, reading the information and writing their comments.

## **A summary of the contributions made by local residents at the drop-in session held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

Setting up a Charitable Trust received the most votes in the Straw Poll (55), with many commenting that a charitable trust could receive gift-aided donations. A Community Interest Company received the next highest vote (44), and there were suggestions that a combination of Trust and CIC would achieve most for the Library, getting the benefits of both. These two options were seen as providing a firm financial footing on which to develop and grow the library service. It is recognised that these are complicated issues which need careful consideration but these are viable options which received strong public support.

Moving the Visitor Information Service out of its present space, releasing the room for either rental to a tenant or for the library to use for income-generation, by holding events/ regular group letting/evening classes, was also popular. A volunteer-run Town Museum (charging an entrance fee), in the VIC room was suggested as a tourist attraction, as was a cafe. Some if not all of the income-generating activities could be run on days when the library itself is closed, providing income throughout the week.

During discussions, there was strong support for: *'Keep the building. Strip the service down to minimum and build up after a period of revenue seeking and income generation.'*

Raising the Council Tax below the referendum limit received many favourable comments, and was seen as a way of distributing the load more fairly across the county, while some wanted the County's reserves to be called upon, especially given the poor rates of interest on the county's investments of £126m.

A retired professionally qualified librarian, new to the debate, asked about the qualifications of the school library staff, and what would be transferred to the school location e.g. the issue system, the inter-library lending facilities, professional supervision. She commented that Church Stretton Library is receiving a financial cutback which is out of proportion to other branch libraries. She stressed *'It is important that the public library remains a public library and not a school library that the public are allowed into. Will the school 'librarian' report to the school head as the line manager or to a chartered librarian at a main library/county HQ? If it is the former rather than the latter then the ethos and ideals of a public library rather than a school library may be lost. Is the school librarian professionally qualified i.e. a library school graduate who also has public library service experience?'*

She commented *'There does not seem to be provision for quiet study space, hard copy materials e.g. newspapers. This is an important function of public libraries to provide a space for quite often less affluent members of the community who do not have space at home.'* She expressed concerns about Governance. *'At the moment the library is under local authority control. The local authority is democratically elected. The proposal takes the library into the control of the school which is outside LEA control and is run like a business with 'income generation' becoming increasingly important. The people of Church Stretton surely have a right to veto this proposal'*. Like many others she was prepared to see some reduction in hours and some staffing to keep the service in the present building so that it would be there when funding is increased, looking ahead even if only as far as May 2015 and possibly a new political regime.

## **Options that will deliver budget savings whilst retaining the library in its current premises**

Church Stretton Library Support Group have considered the responses to the previous 'community conversation ' and the second consultation, via a hugely well-attended public meeting that they organised on 4th February and a more recent information-giving and gathering event. In many cases residents of Church Stretton have sought out members of the support group, to offer their thoughts and opinions. On 5th March, an exhibition was held, explaining other options and showing revised and **ACCURATE** statistics. Many respondents were able to identify viable options, to discuss and add detail to these, and offer their thoughts and ideas to people who actually listened.

Clearly, the majority of the community in Church Stretton wish to keep the library in its current building. We are all very aware of the parlous state of public spending, and whilst we do not agree with reducing space and hours at the Church Street library, if this must happen at the beginning of the next phase, then a fair and proportional budget cut should be clearly indicated across all 22 libraries in the county.

These are some of the options that should have been democratically considered at the beginning of the process that Shropshire Council embarked upon eighteen months ago. The options fall into two stages:

### **STAGE ONE.**

- Initially, consideration could be given to some possible reduction in staff hours. This should be done collaboratively, and only after detailed planning with staff and CSLSG. We would then envisage staff hours recovering and extending as the service grew. Staff have also identified improvements in library processes that could lead to efficiencies.

- The Public Library remains in the largest part of the building and VTIC stock and literature is moved into the main body of the library. The library is then awarded whatever fee would have been available to other agencies, and tourist information would stay where people expect to find it.

- The area that VTIC was based in would then be made available for tenancy or as a multi-purpose area, used by many agencies, becoming an income-generating base for the library.

With staff collaboration, some internal reorganisation could allow a freeing up of the area that is currently the computer suite.

We have taken local advice on commercial tenancy of these areas and the estimates are as follows:

VTIC area rental: £3000 pa

Computer Suite: £2500 pa

We recognise that commercial tenancy may be a “safe” route to a small income, but there will be many other income-generating ideas that we feel would offer more. These would include collaborative work with other statutory agencies and more community groups: U3A group hire, creative writing groups, and Arts Festival events. Many more suggestions and comments on library usage and income generation are included later in the full document.

- Another income generation possibility is currently under discussion, this being the installation of a train-ticket machine. This could give a substantial income - between £5000 and £10,000 p.a.. and we envisage could be staffed by volunteers from a specialist Rail Users group.

As Shropshire Council offered only one option when the community was eventually presented with plans for the library service, CSLSG has had to do this preliminary option analysis - and in a very short time period.

**We now wish the Council to agree to a plan to keep the Library where it is during a period of time while we develop and implement the plans outlined in Stage One of our Options document. At the same time, Church Stretton Library Support Group and other supporters will work to offer our Stage Two plan to put the Library on a long-term financially sustainable basis, with a new structure forming and signing an S.L.A. with the Council.**

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## STAGE TWO.

Preliminary Option Analysis suggests that for the library service to be delivered in a Locally Commissioned format via the School is not seen as workable or representative. Following various meetings and exhibitions, Stage Two options are:

- For CSLSG to work collaboratively with Shropshire Council on plans to develop making the library a Charitable Trust or a Community Investment Company - or a combination of these two.

It needs to be acknowledged that these proposals would take time, but also that work has already begun, and further, experienced personnel have been identified to help with these proposals. Given that the council have had eighteen months 'head start' to develop and offer their options, CSLSG, supported by the community, would hope for and expect sufficient time to clarify and detail these proposals, after the second consultation period ends and BEFORE the portfolio holder makes any decision. We would hope then to be in a position to sign a Service Level Agreement with Shropshire Council.

## **OPTION FOR A REDUCED SERVICE AND INCOME GENERATION**

We do not agree with the detail in the “Consultation document” and have queried the Controllable Budget staffing figures which do not compare with the figures given for the current service.

Current service staffing costs shown equate to £20.95 per hour over 32.5 hours per week for 52 weeks. Using the same calculation, the document’s figures given for a service reduced to 18.5 hour per week equates to £28.78 per hour. There has been no explanation for this.

### **PREFERRED OPTION**

Our **Preferred Option** would be for the library to be kept in its current building. We do not agree with the reduced space option given but would acknowledge that if cuts have to be made a fair and proportionate budget cut would be to reduce by 1/3 including all 22 libraries.

**Our Option** would be for a **22hour a week** service in the **127 sq.m. space** which, using the figures given for a 32.5 hour per week service, would cost:

Staffing costs: £23,967

Building and Services: £8,725

Total: £32,692

The lettings income for 2013/14 is given as £4,142.

This figure would reduce the costs to a **TOTAL £28,550 (only £865 more than the Council’s reduced option which drastically reduces the floor space and hours!)**

However, lettings income is increasing and library staff are working unpaid to make this happen.

**A reduction of space by 56sq m. (i.e. the VIC and Computer room only)** would provide an opportunity for letting and income generation to reduce the £28,550 still further and also make use of the library space over 7 days each week.

We would expect the lettings to be for complementary services e.g. arts events, youth cafe, railway ticket sales and perhaps work with the Academy to assist student in library use and research.

Staff and Volunteers are prepared to work collaboratively with the Council to do this.

## Church Stretton Library Statistics

The figures given on p.3 for **VISITS, i.e. footfall** are **INCORRECT for the years**

**2009 – 2012 (the first 3 columns)**

**This should have been realised when the document was compiled.**

There is a “clicker” at the door which is activated when anyone walks in – and out. Therefore, the daily visit figure is, in fact, half the number of clicks – because people who walk in usually also walk out!

**VISITS** should read:

| 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | Difference    |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------------|
| 32819   | 44318   | 38933   | 38663   | 36588   | <b>+11.5%</b> |

**This is very different from the -44% shown in the ESIIA** upon which respondents are expected to form their opinions.

Also the **REQUEST** figure for 2010/11 is **wrong**. It should be 2332, not 153.

The % change is correct.

## CURRENT USE

Having obtained the more recent figures to enable us to compare Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec) in 2013/14 with Quarter 3 in 2014/15 this clearly shows a picture of **INCREASED USE**:

Library use is changing. Overall book borrowing is decreasing, as it is nationally, but Church Stretton library is following the trends and Computer Time and Event Attendance is **INCREASING** dramatically:

|                            | Q3 2013/14 | Q3 2014/15 | Difference |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| VISITS                     | 8,928      | 9,926      | +15%       |
| COMPUTER TIME<br>(minutes) | 48,764     | 52,941     | +7.9%      |
| EVENT ATTENDANCE           | 124        | 267        | +53%       |



In the same period Total Loans were down 12.5%, Items Requested were down 1.9%, again reflecting the national trend to greater computer and ebook use. The Active Borrowers recorded were down 1.9% but it has been observed that families often only use one ticket and do not take items out on tickets for each member of the household.

These figures show a greater **INCREASE** in overall use rather than a downward trend which the ESIIA mistakenly shows. The staff are encouraging individual family members to take out items on their own tickets which will give a clearer picture of Active Users.

Borrowing does not complete the picture. Computer Use and Event Attendance are well up which indicates how Church Stretton is responding to national changes.

Visitors often come in to use the Local History resources and use reference material or read newspapers and do not borrow any books. Last year about 80 Thursday-afternoon Family/Local History users requested help with research – most did not borrow “books” but used the resources available and computer time together with assistance from volunteers. This would most certainly not happen if the stock were to be re-located to the Academy.

## **A suggested revenue generation idea**

It is the view of the Library Support Group that the library in its current location is a very valuable community hub and asset and has a great deal of potential to increase its already large contribution to our community and to the economic viability and vitality of the town. We have reviewed a number of revenue generation ideas all of which depend absolutely on keeping the library where it is and all of which have the objective of contributing revenue to the library and assisting the Council in achieving its budget cuts. One of these ideas is discussed below.

### **Selling train tickets**

Church Stretton does not have a place where we can talk to a real person, buy rail tickets and get really good advice. Our station has approx 110,000 “entries and exits” p.a. and for a small town is very well used. The ticket machine on Platform 1 is frequently out of order and does not sell the best value tickets or give advice on how to plan the journey at a lower cost. It cannot even be used to pick up tickets ordered and paid for on the internet because it is out of order so often.

The legislation covering the privatised rail system allows anyone to set up a ticket selling operation. We also have a very enthusiastic group of rail users and rail activists in Church Stretton who would be able to volunteer as very knowledgeable ticket sales representatives. The ticket sales desk would be based in the library, staffed by volunteers, incur no running costs and generate several thousand pounds of revenue p.a. depending on the volume of ticket sales and the commission on those sales. We are in contact with the main organisations that regulate this business (ATOC and ORR) and a meeting has been arranged in London to discuss this proposal on 20<sup>th</sup> March.

The retail commission on ticket sales is listed in the table below.

## Retail Commission rates for selling rail tickets

ATOC's intended future commission rates 2015-2019

| Market  | Channel /Threshold                                   | Third Party Sales                                     | Inter-TOC Sales |
|---|--|---|-----------------|
| Public internet                                   | Non-Season Ticket sales                              | 5.0%  | 5.0%            |
|   | Season Ticket sales                                  | 2.0%  | 2.0%            |
| Public telesales                                  | All sales  | 9.0%  | 9.0%            |
| TMC/TA and TOC BTS sales                          | All sales  | 3.0%  | 3.0%            |
| Business Account Facility (Public internet sites) | Sales up to £50k                                     | 5.0%  | N/A             |
|   | Sales over £50k                                      | 3.0%  |                 |
| Station and On-train sales                        | Ticket Offices, Ticket Vending Machines and On-Train | Non-Season Tickets                                    | 9.0%            |
|   |  | Season Tickets  | 2.0%            |
| International sales (from 1 Oct 2014)             | BritRail Passes                                      | 9.0% until 31 March 2017, then 8% until 31 March 2019 | N/A             |
|   | Domestic point to point fares                        | 8.0%  |                 |

## Overall Conclusions

We do not approve of the massive cuts in Council budgets that are undermining community life in Shropshire but we will play a full and proportionate role in assisting the Council to make those cuts. We do this because we take the view that we must limit the damage that is being done nationally and locally so that we retain the capacity to restore public services and community life to the levels we can expect in one of the richest countries in the world. The current period of decline in public services and progressive reduction of Council spending on public services will come to an end and we are determined that we will still have the basics in place and can ensure that Church Stretton thrives economically, socially and as an outstanding community of national significance in its many examples of community activities, facilities and citizen involvement in delivering a high quality of life.

To achieve all this we need the Council's help. We need the Council to withdraw its proposal to move the library and give us 12 months to develop all our ideas, set up new structures and demonstrate that we can match the budget savings that are associated with closing the library in its current premises. The Library Support Group has the critical mass to do this but we do not have time if the Council chooses to ignore the overwhelming support we have been given by the residents of Church Stretton.

We have shown that the plan to relocate our library is fundamentally flawed. The Council has failed to give consultees clear, unambiguous evidence on which to base decisions. The Council has conducted one consultation that was subsequently redesignated as a "community conversation" and failed to report the most important result it should have reported which was the number of respondents who wanted the library to stay where it is and the number who did not or did not know. The Council then, at our request, initiated a second consultation but failed to link it with clear information and repeatedly told us that the information we wanted would only become available after the decision was made. The Council has failed to work up options that could deliver budget savings at the same time as keeping the library where it is. The Council has failed to demonstrate that its' plans for Church Stretton meet basic standards of evidence-based decision taking and has failed to demonstrate that the Church Stretton plan is a fair and proportionate element in a Shropshire wide plan to achieve £1.3 million budget savings in a way that is moderated by the need to rural proof the County and protect older age groups. The Council has failed to show that its' decision making is fair and proportionate across the county. We still do not know how the £1.3 million budget cut will be allocated across 22 libraries and 4 mobiles and it is not acceptable that the Council presses on with its plan for Church Stretton without demonstrating its county wide strategy for dealing with library cuts.

The Council has failed to follow the good examples of more community-minded local authorities investigating new models of providing library services in an age of budget cuts and austerity. Both Suffolk and Kent Councils have engaged with new models of providing library services including the same ideas we have arrived at in our own discussions e.g. the charitable trust idea. We very much regret the lack of initiative within our Council and the lack of engagement with citizens in the joint production of new models of service delivery.

In spite of all this we want to work with the Council to achieve an outcome that assists it with its budget cuts and to make sure that we maintain and develop community facilities in this town. That work continues. All that remains to make sure the democratic process works to a high standard, people are listened to and robust options are developed, is for the Council to abandon the relocation plan and give us 12 months to demonstrate that the library can stay where it is, develop new models of service delivery and deliver proportionate budget cuts.