

## STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF SHROPSHIRE LIBRARIES YES CAMPAIGN

Public lending libraries are a hallmark of a self-confident, civilised and caring society. In an age dominated by money, competition and the market, libraries represent another principle, one based not on financial transaction but on community, sharing, equality and openness. Their vital role in education, literacy and leisure, and their often unacknowledged social role, cannot be over-emphasised. To visit a library is always a pleasure.

It is therefore a matter for dismay and anger that Shropshire Council is attempting to rid itself of its libraries. Put crudely, it wants shut of them. As quickly as possible. In this Age of the Market, what place is there for a human activity which does not produce a profit? Especially one, like a library, which requires public money even to exist. Cultural facilities like the arts, museums and libraries always need money and, as soft targets, their budgets are usually the first to be plundered.

Despite the hand-wringing and the crocodile tears, this is an exercise in cost-cutting wedded to the ideological aim of "shrinking the state". One direct consequence of bailing out the reckless and criminal banks with billions of pounds of public money is that Shropshire's libraries will be debased, closed down even, for savings over three years of £1.3 million, less than half a percent of the council's net annual income. The savings are so small yet the damage, particularly to our children, will be so great.

Under Shropshire Council's preferred option, accountability disappears, skilled staff and experience are lost, volunteer book-stampers take over and libraries are moved to unsuitable premises, or even closed.

We of the Shropshire Libraries Yes Campaign are not prepared to stand by while our library service is disassembled. We have taken legal advice from a leading public administration lawyer. Initial indications are that in its procedure for library changes, the council has acted *ultra vires* in several ways and that there is a high likelihood of our being granted a judicial review under legal aid. We continue to investigate this option. In the meantime, we are calling on the council to put a moratorium on all changes to the library system for the rest of this financial year and to enter into discussions with the Campaign about a better way forward.

and other  
interested organisations

Michael Green, 14 October 2015