



LIBRARY WORKING GROUP
part of the “Civic Centre Site Working Group” and
“Town Centre Area Action Plan Working Group 2010”

Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association)
Jenina Bas Pendry (Residents First)
David Wakefield (Friends of the TW Museum, Library, Art Gallery)
Heather Featherstone (. / .)
John De Lucy (British Library)

Thinking differently about libraries

Some thoughts for Town Forum members from the Library Working Group

Library services across the country are undergoing change from being the ‘Google’ of the past to become more than lenders of books and CDs, and a public internet resource. Pressure for change is both national and local, cultural and financial.

The Library Working Group has looked at the libraries in the Tunbridge Wells area and we have asked you all to look at libraries elsewhere. We found that e-books, the internet, multi-media and cultural change are already influencing the role of libraries. More recently, cuts in public spending may have put some services in danger.

At this stage there are more questions than answers. We hope that the presentation to the Town Forum tonight (Thursday 25th November) by KCC will inform us on some of the key trends. We have identified some of these here:

Borrowing:

Tunbridge Wells had 354,547 visitors, that's 24% up on last year; 266,230 items were issued and 13,038 people borrowed books/music/films. (*Most recent statistics from the librarian)

New: In 2011 main libraries in Kent will have automated checking in and out systems.

New 2010: downloading of e-books from home introduced.

The Head of the British Library said recently that by 2020 only 25% of titles worldwide will be published in print only. Some 75% will only be published digitally, or in both digital and print form.

One of the ‘must have’ gifts for this Christmas being advertised on TV now is the digital bookreader, ‘Kindle’.

What does all this mean for reading, book lending and libraries in the future?

Internet access:

This is a popular service that is available in all the libraries in the Tunbridge Wells area in both adult and children's sections, and IT support is available from librarians.

According to the Office for National Statistics, there were 19.2 million households with an Internet connection in 2010, representing 73 per cent of households. In 2010, 30.1 million adults in the UK (60 per cent) accessed the Internet every day or almost every day. This is nearly double the estimate in 2006 of 16.5 million.

How can libraries help the unconnected and IT illiterate?

How can libraries be relevant in an increasingly digital community?

Could wi-fi zones for laptop users be used for people to study, research and work in the library?

Sharing premises:

Other KCC or TWBC services could be co-located in the library to provide efficiencies and improve access to services for the community?

New: Some KCC libraries are piloting the registration of births and deaths in the library. In other libraries we have seen tourist Information services, payment of parking fines, and other public service information and assistance.

What other services could share the library premises in Tunbridge Wells?

Librarians

The role of the librarian is changing? Traditional librarian skills are still important but so are IT, marketing, management, teaching and research skills, and the capacity to inspire.

Who will work in the library of the future?

Local history and culture:

Local libraries have traditionally embodied local history and culture. Now that we can access library and museum collections around the world from our home PCs, will 'local' library collections become more or less important?

New: In 2012 the new Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone will open.

New: Management changes at KCC have seen the Tunbridge Wells and Ashford library areas combined.

How will services continue to be responsive to the needs of the Tunbridge Wells community, its history and culture?

How can the library service be better connected to the TW museum services?

Libraries as meeting places:

We found Book clubs, homework clubs, lectures, literacy classes, IT advice, work, business meetings, and more in the libraries we have visited.

Is there a new community role for the library as a meeting place for mum's and babies and the elderly through to local businesses and public services?

Are library facilities appropriate for this role? What about opening hours, and the availability of toilets and refreshment?

How can libraries generate income from these and other services to supplement its free lending services?

