Getting Building Fund – Harlow Library Refurbishment

**Questions and Answers**

## Library Stock

**Q: Will the public have first call on book stock and computer use?**

A: The public will continue to have access to a comprehensive library service. The computers are solely for public use. We will also always provide space and capacity for customers to sit and use their own devices

**Q: How will the volume of books stocked in the Central Library compare with other libraries in Essex eg. Basildon, Chelmsford or Colchester?**

A: There are around 37,000 books in Harlow library. Chelmsford has around 83,000 books, and Basildon around 33,500 books. During lockdown we have completed a comprehensive stock audit. We will also shortly be implementing the new library management system to keep track of, and increase availability of, our existing stock within the Essex libraries network. We will continue to provide an adequate level of stock related to the current users of Harlow Library, which we will continue to improve and monitor. We recognise that good quality stock is really important to our library users. We will use our stock to encourage new members or existing members to try something new! As our active users grow we will adjust our stock levels accordingly.

**Q: If book stock is driven by historic trends how will you ensure that an increasingly socially representative publishing world is reflected in this stock over time. Diverse representation is a pressing issue in children's publishing, publishers are finally responding, but it might not be reflected in the data/trends you intend to use over time unless there is proactive investment.**

A: We want to ensure the books we put into our libraries are books people want to read, you can go online and order any book from Harlow library, if we haven’t got a book then we will get it, it will be up to date and our systems will help us drive that. Stock will be wide and diverse, and customers can also suggest new stock

**Q: How many books will be there in the new library?**

A: We intend to have the same number of books there is now.

**Q: Will you ensure that professional librarians will be looking at wider ideas on inspired book stock titles?**

A: Yes, we will.

**Q: Why did Essex CC reduce the book stock of Harlow Library by 53% between 2009/10 and 2019/20?**

A: There has been no reduction in the last few years.

**Q: Harlow's population is predicted to rise by 14,000 in the near future. Will you commit to fairly raising the number of books at Harlow library to bring the number comparable to the number at Chelmsford library?**

A: Harlow has five libraries, Chelmsford has some small satellite libraries with a small amount of stock. As the Harlow population grows, we will have to look at the book stock however, in ten years’ time we may look at an additional large library in Harlow.

**Q: Why does Harlow Library sell off books that are less than two years old?**

A: Stock may be removed if it hasn’t taken out in the last two years, the new library management system will tell us where those books are and will tell us which books are wanted and not and so we will not be buying books that don’t go out.

**Q: Will you consider increasing the number of computers as there will be a growing need?**

A: If there is a growing need then we will increase the number, there is also the alternative of giving people a set number of hours they can use a computer.

**Q: Susan Barker talked about e-books early on in the consultation process. Research suggests that most people want real books so why this emphasis on e-books?**

A: The use of e-books increased during lockdown, it may stay that way or revert back. We would like people in the library borrowing books.

**Q: Given the ACL presence should you widen the non-fiction book stock?**

A: Yes, we will have appropriate stock.

## Libraries Consortium

We are joining the consortium; we will have access to better titles and better systems to understand the titles people want to borrow. We will have access to over 6 million additional items.

**Q: Will book reservations from other authorities within the consortium still be free?**

A: Yes, reservations are free however it may be a slightly longer process.

**Q: Would it possible for the Essex libraries to follow Hertfordshire, in regards to having new books, they put these out as ‘hot picks’, you can only take out for 1 week. Also, they have the latest magazines again for one week, examples being photography, country file, travel, health and wellbeing. Our library in Harlow is so old and tired, Hertfordshire seem to do this well, and keep a larger selection of all books.**

A:By joining the ‘library consortium’ we will have access to a lot more books especially e-titles, the use of these have gone up by around 237% in the last year and so these will be made available. We can also look into the ‘hot picks’.

**Q: Is book stock going to be enhanced? It had become very run down and impacted on people not coming into the library because they couldn't get the books they wanted.**

A: It is important that by joining the ‘library consortium’ and getting a new library management system it will help us enhance books as we will be getting the books that people want.

## Coffee Shop

**Q: Who will run the cafe going forward? It didn't work with volunteers before. Understandably volunteers weren't reliable and no one knew when the cafe would or wouldn't be open.**

A: ACL will be running the coffee shop as a business but hopefully there will be work opportunities available for people in the area as well

**Q: There are many existing coffee shops very close to the library, why is another coffee shop seen as being a good use of space?**

A: We think it will enable students and other people who study in or use the library for a long time to not have to pack up and go away to have a coffee and then come back, we will trial it and see how it goes.

## Library General

**Q: Susan Barker says that the library is 'tired and past its best', why has ECC allowed it to become so run down and depleted of books?**

A: Essex County Council is a large organisation and has a budget that it spends on maintenance. This is not an enormous budget and ECC has to decide where the money is allocated. We are delighted that we were successful in bidding for this extra funding of almost £1 million from central government to enable us to improve Harlow library.

**Q: Will people have access to the library after working hours?**

A: There are no current plans to change opening hours, but ECC is open to reviewing hours in future, in consultation with local staff and partners. With regards to ACL (Adult Community Learning), staff on site will know who is accessing the library outside of normal library/ACL use.

**Q: Do you have any plans to promote and entice people to attend the library?**

A: We will have a major launch to promote the newly refurbished library, with communications and public events, and hopefully the redevelopment will increase footfall to the library. The inclusion of ACL in the same premises will also hopefully drive people who use the service to utilise the library as well. We also rely on members of the public, such as yourselves, to encourage library usage through word of mouth.

**Q: Since Essex needs to upskill its residents would it be worth working with a selection of local employers so they can publicise what they do and the type of roles they have available? Not to turn it into a job centre, but it might help motivate people to develop new skills if they can see local employers.**

A: We will of course be in close contact with local businesses and employers. ACL has a strong apprenticeship offer and this development will hopefully help to cultivate links with local enterprises. Meeting the needs of the local economy is one our key priorities.

**Q: What security measures are in place to protect the equipment?**

A: We don’t specifically have security measures in place apart from the expectation that people will respect shared community property. I’m sure that we can provide further information around out of hours security if the questioner wants to get in touch directly.

**Q: Will eating food be allowed in the library?**

A: There will be a coffee shop on site, but this will have suitable flooring to ensure that it is not damaged by food debris, staff will also manage this within the library space.

## Library Staff

**Q: Are you maintaining the same skilled staff, is there any change of employment contracts or regulations?**

A: Our staff will be deployed to other libraries in Harlow while the refurbishment is taking place and they will then come back to the new library, if that is what they want to do. We can confirm it will be the same level of staff.

## Current and temporary services

**Q: What will happen to ‘book talk’ group when Harlow Library is closed? Where will be facilitated? Will there be a section of the new library that can be used for the book group once a month?**

A: In the interim, the group can meet in one of the other libraries in the area until the Harlow library reopens. We would be delighted for the group to continue to use the new space once it is completed and encourage new groups. Additionally, everything in the plan except the computers is moveable so a bigger open space can be created.

**Q: Will volunteer centre still be at the library?**

A: We are in discussion with them but haven’t reached a resolution yet.

**Q: Would you consider changing the Epping/Northweald temporary provision offer – owing to poor public transport connections?**

A: That provision is just for the registration service, not for ordinary library usage. We wouldn’t be looking to change the library offer there.

**Q: Could Mark Hall Library/Old Harlow library (alongside Tye Green) be favoured instead for temporary provision?**

A: They are all going to have enhanced provision. We are looking at all three sites in the scheme closely. The registration service itself will be relocated back to Tye Green as it has been seen to be the most suitable location. We will do the best that we can, and the library will hopefully be shut for the shortest amount of time possible while the redevelopment work takes place.

**Q: Will current services using the first floor be rehoused?**

A: The Law Centre is now the only service on the first floor, we are working with them to find a temporary solution, but they will return when the works are completed.

**Q: Has space been allocated to The Law Centre in the refurbished Harlow library?**

A: There is a space for The Law Centre upstairs in the library.

## Local Libraries

**Q: Can you offer reassurance that all the local Harlow libraries will not be closed once new redevelopment completed?**

We can provide absolute assurances that no other libraries will be closed, as set out in the current libraries strategy which runs until 2024.

**Q: Does this affect more local libraries (i.e. Tye Green)? Will they still be open?**

A: During redevelopment we will look to increase the opening hours and staff at some of our Harlow branch libraries for the duration of the build. As the current Essex Libraries Strategy states, there will be no closures of any Essex Libraries for the duration of the strategy period.

**Q: We hope that our local libraries will receive an upgrade and investment soon.**

A: The other Harlow libraries are not due for an upgrade soon but please get in contact if you want to discuss. We are taking every library on its own individual circumstances. Where we feel there is a need for further investment and renovation work, then we will endeavour to do so.

## Design

**Q: Will there be space between shelves to accommodate wheelchair users?**

A: Essex County Council will of course ensure our plans are compliant with the Equalities Act 2010. We can assure that there will be space for wheelchair users, and this has been considered in the plans.

**Q: Assuming you won’t want to wheel away bookshelves while people are browsing, how much sqm space have you got in the library area for rhyme time, for other library events.**

A: The exact layout has not been agreed as of yet, the purpose of the public events was to provide you with an indicative layout so we can take your views into account as we finalise the plans – including space for events such as rhyme time.

**Q: Will there be a quiet area in the library for those that are studying? You have mentioned about the library being a great place for families, but this can be noisy and make it difficult for those studying.**

A: The computer area is a quiet area; members of the public could also bring their own devices to plug in and work in that area quietly. There will be tables and chairs for people to study and we are happy to take that away and make it clearer on the plans for when they go online

**Q: Can you be clearer about disabled access to the first floor? The existing lift is only for one wheelchair? Will there be additional lifts with so many students and members of the public needing to access the first floor.**

A: We had only planned for one lift due to space in the library, but of course there are stairs for those able to use them. We will keep an eye on the proportion using each but the intention is that one lift will be enough for people with mobility issues.

In other ACL centres if we have large numbers of people with mobility issues we can move things around such as moving classes to the ground floor and so we can accommodate that if required.

**Q: How many entrances and exit points are around the library space, including the staircase? Do you think they will impact on people’s ability to concentrate and feel safe while browsing?**

A: These will stay the same, the current exit at the back of the library will now be an emergency exit.

**Q: Disabled toilet?**

A: Yes, there will be.

**Q: FYI the new area for the computers (where registrars currently are) is a well-known suntrap, please don't over-look this.**

A: We can now confirm the new windows to this area will include an internal film for privacy and to alleviate solar heat and glare

**Q: Harlow has many retired and elderly people, will you provide suitable seating for them?**

A: Yes, there will be suitable seating.

**Q: With regard to furnishings will there be chairs with backs (stools do not encourage people to stay) and round tables too please... facilitates group activity?**

A: Yes, there will be chairs with backs and a round table.

**Q: How will the floor space for ‘library’ users compare before and after the scheme is completed?**

A: In the existing library layout, there is lots of unused space, and making better use of the space in the building is a core part of the refurbishment scheme. It is likely that under current plans, the physical floor space of the library will be reduced but we want to get the best and right level of stock so members of the public borrow more books.

However, we will be using the space more effectively and flexibly using modern designs and furniture. We also plan to use the first floor as an events and exhibition space. The children’s library will be a prominent space at the front of the building to encourage children and their families to enjoy books. Lots of comfortable seating space and an area for events and activities. We will also provide sensory equipment which has proved very popular in other libraries.

The new look library will encourage customers to sit, work, study and enjoy the space. We will create comfortable seated areas to customers to enjoy the surroundings. A café will be provided for all customers to enjoy. We hope that customers will stay longer in our space

**Q: Cycle racks – currently there is space on the north entrance – however it isn’t the most secure. Are there any plans to upgrade bike storage facilities?**

A: There no current plans but ECC will take this point away and look at it

**Q: What is the intended heating system and aircon?**

A: We do not yet have this level of detail in current plans. The project is currently in the design stage and this information will be made public as we progress further with the design and planning process.

**Q: What will the external building look like and how green will it be?**

A: The building will have new windows with good energy efficiency and these are currently under design.

**Q: The drawings shown make it look very cramped for the public. How many peoples can be accommodated for a) using the tables for study (students) b) people coming in to sit and read. If a school wants to bring a class of pupils to the library, will there be enough space?**

A: The full design has not been completed, but we will ensure that the library is a comfortable environment for all those who choose to study here. When plans are finalised ECC will make these available.

## Art Work

**Q: There has been a fair bit of chat about sculpture but in the past Harlow art Society has been able to display work in the library and the photographic society. Will there still be exhibition space?**

A: Yes, this is what the exhibition space will be used for. Additionally, ACL will be offering art and creative courses and agree that it would be great for Harlow to have a creative offer.

**Q: Art work is crucial, especially our sculpture and we would appreciate a proper exhibition space.**

A: We can reassure that the sculpture will be kept safe and will be re-installed in the library and there will be an exhibition space.

## Investment

**Q: This seems like a huge level of investment into a building which is largely not owned by Essex County Council. How long is the lease with Riley’s snooker club and will this lease money come out of the funds?**

A: Part of the building is on a long lease and the lease money will not come out of the project funds.

**Q: What safeguards will be put into place to ensure that the private owners of the present Harlow library building reimburse the taxpayer for money spent on refurbishment if they decide to use the building for other purposes in the future?**

A: Harlow library is part-owned and part-leased. We can confirm that work has all gone through the legal requirements and with the part-owner, we can reassure that we have gone through the process and have been working with the owner throughout the project.

## ACL

**Q: Is the long term plan for ACL to take over the running of the library? Will staffing levels and functions change? Will ECC still be running the library long term?**

A: No, they are complementary but different functions. There is always the possibility that staff levels will change but only because, as mentioned earlier, hours could be subject to a review and increased if local residents and staff request it.

**Q: Is ACL an Essex Council service or is it run by a private provider?**

A: It is an Essex County Council service.

**Q: Will ACL be encouraging public library membership amongst their clients as part of the deal?**

A: Yes, we see this as a collaborative opportunity so we hope that the ACL learners will enrol at the library as they will be walking through that space to come through to classes.

**Q: As I understand it Essex Teacher Training is also based at ACL. There is no mention of this in the new plan?**

A: The Essex Teacher Training services are currently based at the Abbotsweld site and we will be in discussion with the ACL Teacher Training team about the options for relocation.

**Q: Are we offering the same number of ACL classes at present?**

A: Absolutely yes, there may even be an enhanced service due to the new location and additional facilities. We are hopeful that we could potentially expand the offer quite significantly.

**Q:** **ACL is an education provider; will they have dedicated computers for their students?**

A: Within the plan there is a computer suite specifically for ACL, the other computers there are for members of the public.

**Q: What are the plans for the existing ACL site?**

A: This has not been decided yet, ECC is exploring the options and discussing these with partners such as Harlow District Council.

## Consultation

**Q: We need to bear in mind those who are not digitally connected. Can we find a way to include them in the discussion?**

A: Due to the current National Lockdown circumstances we can only use this digital format.  When restrictions have eased we plan to display the plans in the library, as well as publishing the details in the library newsletter. There has also been consultation with some residents who visit the library and we will continue to do that. Staff will be asked to put up posters about what is taking place in all five Harlow libraries.

It is important to note that this is not the way that ECC prefer to hold consultations. Due to lockdown restrictions and short timescales for the project it was felt that an online consultation was the best option to allow residents to see plans and share their thoughts.

**Q: Who was consulted in the planning of this proposal?**

A: Engagement with the public is currently taking place including these public events, and we want this to go further into the public domain. The opportunity to bid for this money from the Government happened very quickly so we needed to get that done. We now need to complete the project in just over a year in order to comply with the Government rules. Officers have also taken on board all comments that have been submitted, please send us any further comments you may have. We are continuing to engage with local residents and will take on board all comments made across a range of consultation methods. We do feel that the current space is poorly utilised and hope that the proposed floor plans address some of these issues and make a more useable space for members of the public. We have also taken information from the library consultation which took place two years ago. All new comments are welcome.

**Q: Why was there no public discussion prior to the bid being submitted to Government? Why are these proposals only being discussed now?**

A: Unfortunately, there wasn’t time, the timescales announced by the Government were very tight – a matter of days to put projects together and submit an initial list – which reflected the hope at that point in time that the country might be emerging from the pandemic restrictions.

**Q: How much money did Essex County Council spend on developing plans to close several of our towns libraries before changing its mind?**

A: The consultation was around £77,000.

**Other Comments**

* I love the new children’s area.
* Many young people use the library for games. It is crucial that they have space. We need to encourage them to come in to the library.
* I do object to the coffee shop mainly because Esquire Coffee (a semi-independent business) is nearby in the Water Gardens. Perhaps a gallery space or exhibition area instead?
* A library should be a place to discover new genres, not everyone knows their tastes. It takes time to find this out, also our tastes change with age and life experiences etc.
* Harlow is a dedicated Sculpture Town. Harlow Art Trust I am sure would be happy to talk to you about presenting and promoting sculpture at the library.
* E-titles are good but no replacement for books as your consultation evidenced.
* The book stock has certainly been reduced by around 50% in the last 10 years.