

# WANDSWORTH BACK TO THE FUTURE

Compiled by Sean Creighton

<http://historyandsocialaction.blogspot.com>

[sean.creighton@btinternet.com](mailto:sean.creighton@btinternet.com)

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## YORK RD LIBRARY CLOSURE NOT BASED ON PROPER NEEDS ASSESSMENT

'There are no operational reasons to close any library ....' states the Director of Finance in the Council's review of the Library Service (para. 44). Its only justification is to meet the cuts required by the ConDem Government. Despite the ConDem claim that everyone is meant to take an equal proportionate share of the cuts, the possible closure of York Gdns Library is a targeted and disproportionate assault on an area of high social deprivation, particularly on those from ethnic groups, especially Black residents, and those with learning difficulties and mental health problems. The total potential saving is a mere £219,000, and if Council Officers' recommendations for measures to soften the impact are accepted, the saving will only be £127,000.

Whether the assessment of needs is adequate will need to be tested. On the surface the rationale for the closure is low useage and the usefulness of the building for other Council services, not on needs to fulfil the Council's statutory obligations to provide Library services.

### The Flawed Consultation Process

Wandsworth Council has begun to consult on its proposals to close the Library along with a package of reduced opening times for all libraries. People can get involved by reading/downloading the documents on the Council's website [www.wandsworth.gov.uk/info/200062/libraries/1060/library\\_review\\_consultation](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/info/200062/libraries/1060/library_review_consultation). The timetable for consultation meetings to be held in every Library is set out in the box below.

The consultation will however be flawed because key information is not available:

- what other cuts will have to be to the Library service if the saving on the closure of York Gdns is only £127,000?
- what are the costs involved in moving the Learning Resource Centre into the building?
- what are the alternatives to moving the Learning Resource Centre into the building?

- What are the costs of the suggested strengthening of children's services?
- Why cannot the proposed strengthening of the children's services be achieved with the retention of the Library as a central part of creating an integrated multi-disciplinary Community, Children's and Library project?

### Assessment of Review Paper

- The paper that went to Committees and full Council in November and December are cleverly written by the Officers. They regret that savings have to be made as part of the cuts required by the Government.

### The Value of Wandsworth's Libraries

It presents a glowing picture of the health of the Library Service.

- 'The library service is universal and is the most-used Council service on a voluntary basis. Any service reductions will impact on this access, but the option recommended would, subject to public consultation, minimise the impact while delivering a

Library	Location	Date	Time(s)
Balham	Hall	14 January	6.30pm - 8.30pm
Battersea	ACCL	12 January	10am - 12noon
Earlsfield	Hall	13 January	2pm - 4pm
Northcote	Children's Library	21 January	10am - 12noon
Putney	Meeting Room	19 January	6.30pm - 8.30pm
Roehampton	Children's Library	18 January	2.30pm - 4.30pm
Tooting	Children's Library	20 January	2pm - 4pm
York Gardens	Main Hall	10 January	6.30pm - 8.30pm

contribution to the Council's revenue savings.' (Box. Page 2)

- 'Wandsworth, .... , has undertaken a significant amount of capital investment in its library infrastructure over the past 20 years to create modern interiors in keeping with changes in society.' (Para. 8)
- The report highlights the importance of early book learning for the under-5s as giving them a head start when they go to school. (Para. 19)
- 'Despite media interest in IT developments, there is no evidence yet that online access is having any substantial impact on leisure reading habits.' (Para. 21)
- 'The benefit of a library over a bookshop, for instance, is that it is the only publicly available place that holds a back catalogue of stock, including out of print material. The print run for most books is quite small and the library service can provide a much wider choice than the bookshop.' (para 16)
- 'The printed book still remains the most

efficient and popular technology for leisure reading, particularly by older people and for children learning to read. However, online information resources are increasingly much more effective than books for information purposes.' (para 22)

- Libraries 'will remain important places for IT access and learning - especially for the more deprived elements of society who do not buy their books, or have IT access at home.' (Director of Finance. Para. 44)
- 'Libraries will also continue to offer a positive and high-profile face to the Council as safe and welcoming community spaces....' (ditto).
- 'The Borough's libraries are highly appreciated by the public and any reductions in service or closures will, it is acknowledged, be unwelcome.' (ditto)

#### Statutory Duty

The Council has a statutory duty to provide a

'comprehensive and efficient public library service for all persons to make use thereof' (Section 7, Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.) The report points out that the Secretary

of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Jeremy Hunt, and the Chancellor want arts, museums and libraries to be protected.

### Residents Use of Libraries

Wandsworth has a population of 297,500 and 11 libraries. The population served by each Library is different:

Library	Population Covered
York Gardens	81,466
Northcote	78,351
Balham	75,659
Tooting	75,015
Battersea	72,849
Battersea Park	69,600
Wandsworth Town	62,986
Earlsfield	61,620
Putney	58,283
Southfields	55,602
Roehampton	26,383
(Mid- 2008; Table. Para. 11)	

The 'least well-used libraries ... (in terms of borrowing) are Battersea Park, Roehampton and York Gardens. Roehampton, in particular, serves an isolated area of the Borough. Battersea Park is the only Wandsworth library reasonably close to the Nine Elms redevelopment area.' (Para. 9)

As a result of low useage the 'most expensive in terms of net cost per visit' in 2009/10 were York Gardens (£4.09), Roehampton (£2.41) and Battersea Park (£2.34). In 'terms of net cost per issue' it was Battersea Library (£4.89) York Gardens (£4.42), Roehampton (£3.53) and Battersea Park (£3.49).' The report does acknowledge, however, that 'It is difficult to make completely accurate comparisons as, for example; the three neighbourhood libraries each have some form of additional facility such as a hall or IT Centre, and Battersea Library houses the Reference and Heritage sections.' (Para 9)

### Useage Issues

Low useage, however, raises a number of fundamental issues, which are not adequately addressed in the Review or the accompanying Equality Impact Assessments & Surveys, including:

- the degree to which there is consistent promotional outreach
- the engagement of local schools
- the extent of population turnover
- the degree to which libraries cater for the increasingly complex ethnic/language mix in their catchment areas
- the extent to which the above issues are more complex on the Council estates in the catchment areas of these three libraries

### Assessment of Needs

The report concentrates its assessment of need mainly on population groups useage of the Libraries.

**25 - 44 Age Group.** This group totals 135,700 and is projected to rise to 135,900 by 2014. 57% are registered as library members (45% of total). 'This group also contains the parents of the vast majority of children in the Borough.'

(Para. 15) Many of this group 'will have good access to IT at home. The library service is, therefore, complementary to their own information resources and the larger percentage of them will be using the library service to borrow books, as well as accessing a free community space where they can be alone or participate in family activities.' (Para. 16)

**Children.** 'During 2008/09, Wandsworth children's book borrowing was the highest in London, with 711,719 issues.' Children's book loans per library range from 25% - 62% of total loans with York being 4th as children's loans are 50% but 9th in terms of total loans. (Table. Para. 17)

**60+ Group.** ' This group makes up 7.6% of library member. Compared with under 12% of the Borough population at 33,500, which is projected to fall to 32,900 by 2014. (Para. 20)

There is no assessment of the use made of the Libraries of their computer access provision.

### Library Closures

The Review report discusses the basis on which a neighbourhood library could be closed. York Gardens is marginally the most expensive at £219,000. (Table. Para 26). The main alternative for closure is Northcote Library.

Northcote 'has the highest percentage of loans to children (62%) of all Wandsworth's libraries. 60,018 children's books were borrowed in 2009-10, compared to 37,192 adult books. It has 7,670 registered borrowers, 53% of whom never use any other library. Visitors have increased by 15% with overall issues rising by 1% in 2009/10.' (Para. 29)

'Northcote is an area of the Borough with a high percentage of young families and good local schools, while access to alternative libraries at Balham and Battersea is not easy for families with young children, or for school classes, given parking and main road constraints, or for older people for whom mobility is an issue.' (Para 30)

Of course what the Officers cannot say is that Northcote's catchment area is largely middle-class held by Conservative Councillors whereas Latchmere is working class and Labour.

The report does recognise that 'Latchmere Ward is ranked as the most deprived ward in the Borough, using health, economic, crime and education measures. Nevertheless, there remains an argument for closure of this library in particular due to the useage and cost considerations .... and the fact that its one-mile catchment area is completely covered by a combination of the one-mile radius cover provided by other libraries..... York Gardens library presently has the lowest number of adult active borrowers (1,793) of any Wandsworth library and the lowest number of visits (70,567) and issues (65,323) per annum.' (Para. 31)

However, there is no assessment of what travelling longer distances by people from 'socially deprived' areas is on the use of services, due to e.g. increased travel costs and increased timed involved particularly for those on low incomes with complex issues relation to family needs and work patterns. (e.g. shift and night work). The Officers, however, do hint at such issues in their assessment of Northcote Library above, and in relation to the potential loss of the children's library at York Gdns.

### **Alternative Uses for York Gdns Library Building**

It is clear that the main reason for the suggested closure of York Gdns Library is not the low useage or the cost, but the fact that the building can help the Council resolve other service issues. The report states that 'there would also be potential for the Council to relocate' the Children's Services Department Professional Centre Learning Resource Centre there. (Para. 32)

The Officers hold out the prospect of an improved set of children's services in the building:

- 'The current provision at York Gardens One O'clock and Children's Centre already offers a full Children's Centre programme (apart from on-site day care) because it serves areas with higher levels of disadvantage.'
- 'There is potential to enhance the capacity and range of services at the Centre by extending the provision into the York

Gardens library building, by collocating some Sure Start services which are currently spread in other venues in the area.'

The Officers do acknowledge that 'This element will need further detailed consideration, including the capital and revenue implications, but opens up the option, though only a possibility at this stage, of an extended Children's Centre alongside the relocated Learning Resource Centre, adjacent to York Gardens Adventure Playground and near to the linked day-care provision at St Peter's Nursery. The details of such an approach would need further joint development to ensure full benefits are achieved from this integrated approach.' (Para. 33)

They also suggest that 'some form of children's library provision' could be retained there' with 'a children's librarian .... on an outreach basis from Battersea Library, thereby mitigating any closure of the adult service.' (Para. 34)

In order to soften any arguments about the closure damaging the needs of adults in Latchmere as a socially deprived area the Officers recommend that 'the I.T. training centre facilities presently at York Gardens, together with the staffing establishment of one I.T. Tutor, be transferred to Battersea Library (where space exists) should York Gardens Library be considered for closure.' (Para. 35) They recognise that 'using the national average for the percentage of households owning a PC (70%), it is likely (given its overall deprivation ranking) that Latchmere ward is well below this average (as low as 52%). Local people would consequently be harder hit by any reduction in access to IT facilities, as currently offered by the library, for education and job seeking.'

If the retention of the children's librarian and the transfer of the IT centre were agreed the saving on York Gdns Library closure would be reduced from £219,000 to £127,000.' (Para. 37)

### **Equalities Assessments**

The inadequacy of the discussion in the main

Review is highlighted by the information contained in the accompanying Equality Impact Assessments & Surveys.

It is clear that non-white sections of the population use the libraries more than the white British, which will partly reflect the formers' recognition of the importance of learning and also their possible lower ownership of home computers.

### **Ethnic Use of All Libraries**

While making up 66% of the population only 55% of British whites use the libraries. The Assessment states:

- 'Residents from non white ethnic groups are more likely to use libraries than the White British population.'
- 'This group are relatively more deprived than the White British population and are therefore more dependent on public services.'
- 'They would therefore be affected by a reduction in opening hours to a relatively greater extent.'

### **Ethnic Use of York Gardens**

The ethnicity of Latchmere's residents and their use of the Library is very different from that of other parts of the Borough.

- As a % of users white British adults make up 36%, white other 12%, mixed 4%, Asian 8%, Black 34% and other 5%.
- In terms of children and young people, the figures are 25% white, 13% mixed, 7% Asian, 45% Black, and other 9%.

There is also a problem as to the size of the York Gardens Library's catchment population. The main report says n.82,000 while the Assessment says approx. 8,200. Is the latter a typing error? The Assessment tells us:

- that in 'the Library Users Survey 2009 83% of those using the library lived in SW11 supporting the view that York Gardens Library is used mainly by residents living in the immediate neighbourhood.'
- '59% of households in this area rent from either the Council or a Social Landlord. A further 16% rent from private landlords.'
- '6.4% of the population in this area receive

disability allowance.'

It also points out that since the 2001 Census 'there have been many large developments on the riverside within the library's catchment area and further developments are underway. York Gardens Library is therefore serving a growing population.' The main report, however, does not provide the figures for this growth in population.

Underpinning the social deprivation of the area the users of York Gdns Library include:

- 6% with mobility problems
- 4% with hearing problems
- 4% with eyesight problems
- 3% with problems using hands and fingers

While these %ages are at the higher end compared with other libraries, it is the following figures that make York Gdns catchment population stand out from the rest because it serves:

- 8% with learning disabilities
- 7% with mental health problems

### **Relationship with Child Poverty Strategy**

The social deprivation of Latchmere is a major issue in the Council's Child Poverty Action Strategy required under The Child Poverty Act 2010 adopted in January by the Children and Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny and Executive meetings on 14 and 18 January.

The draft states:

- 'Early social experiences are important determinants of later life chances and children in low-income families can face a 'double disadvantage'. National and local statistics indicate that children living in poverty achieve less well. For example, disadvantaged children tend to attend pre-school education for shorter periods of time than those from more advantaged groups.'
- 'In 2007, 25% of children were in families dependent on workless benefits. However this varied greatly by ward; three wards (Latchmere, Roehampton and Queenstown) had over 40% of children living in a family dependent on workless benefits. Over 30% of all children in Wandsworth in 2007 who

were in a family dependent on workless benefits lived in one of these three wards.'

- 'Supporting the development of good social and emotional skills.

**Key actions will include:**

- Focussing the '5 hour cultural offer' for children and young people growing up in poverty as an initial priority
- Promoting the 'Cultural Wealth Fund', Sports and Arts Grants and Youth Opportunity Fund in the priority wards of Latchmere, Queenstown and Roehampton
- Targeting summer fun and other holiday activity programmes to children from deprived backgrounds
- Building the capacity of local providers to deliver cultural activities to improve sustainability
- Exploring the opportunity to promote affordable urban food growing projects on Council Housing estates

### **Effect of Economic Downturn**

In reporting the agreement of the Strategy to the Council meeting on 3 February, the Executive stated: 'In approving the Strategy we noted that it will be delivered within a climate of economic downturn and this will impact on the speed and progress even though the ambition to reduce and eventually eradicate child poverty should remain steadfast. Child poverty is a key priority at a local and national level and the Strategy and action plan provides the basis on which a discrete set of activities will be implemented to address the main underlying causes of poverty in Wandsworth and ameliorate its negative effects.'

The Library Review does not assess the contribution of keeping the Library open could make to non-financial aspects of reducing child poverty in the area, nor of how the Library and nearby children's services could be developed to provide an integrated anti-child poverty service.

(Full details of the Act can be seen on: [www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snsp-05585.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snsp-05585.pdf). The Council report can be seen on [www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov/mgConve](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov/mgConve)

[rt2PDF.aspx?ID=9866](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov/mgConve), and the draft strategy on [www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov/mgConve](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov/mgConve) [rt2PDF.aspx?ID=9867](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov/mgConve).)

### **Battersea Park Library**

A major argument for keeping Battersea Park Library open is because of the new residential population expected to build up in the Nine Elms area. The lack of a Library serving the residents on the Thessaly, Patmore and other estates in that area, which are also 'socially deprived', is a sad indictment of the Council's lack of attention to need. It is likely that the new more affluent residents who will eventually move into the Nine Elms area will want to have a Library in the area, and not have to travel to Battersea Park Library. A new library there would be of benefit to the newer wealthier residents and the residents on the Council estates. Such a library could be financed out of the Community Infrastructure Levy (replacing Section 106 monies) on the Nine Elms developments. The provision of such a library is then likely to be used by a Council still committed to cuts to justify the closure of Battersea Park Library, at the expense particularly of the residents on the Doddington and Rollo Estates.

### **Long-Term Defence of Libraries**

Whatever the outcome of the current Library Review, this will be the first during the period of the ConDems Comprehensive Spending Review cuts. Each Library will need to be defended and will need to have active and vigilant Friends Group, promoting it, especially to new residents, helping it put on a wider range of activities at the Libraries, and co-ordinating with each other to jointly make representations to the Council.

If the Council responds positively to a rejection by residents of the current Library Review by going back to the drawing board, then it will need to consider the issues discussed above, and could also usefully consider how in the light of the possible decentralisation of services down to a more neighbourhood area, what increased role library buildings could play in accessing Council and other services, and being embedded into the heart of the evolving

cultural, heritage and learning, strategies.

## WHAT CAN BE LEARNT FROM THE WIRRAL LIBRARY INQUIRY?

In 2009 a Public Inquiry was held into whether Wirral Council had acted reasonably in meeting needs of its residents for its library services in the context of available resources and their statutory obligations. This was set up by the then Secretary of State. The Inspector found:

- that it had failed to make an assessment of local needs in respect of its Library Services
- In particular, some specific needs for adults had not been addressed, including the specific requirements for older people, disabled people, unemployed people, and those living in deprived areas.
- Although the Act does not specifically cover the role of schools in library provision, the Council had not demonstrated that it had had due regard to the general requirements of children, which meant it was in breach of its statutory duties.
- Its approach to re-visioning the service was fundamentally flawed, because it focused specifically on the issue of asset management and cost savings.
- The decision was made without a clear understanding of the extent and range of services currently being provided in the libraries, including those which are 'core' to the service and those which are ancillary.
- It was in breach in relation to the needs of deprived communities.
- There was an absence of an adequate plan for and commitment to a comprehensive outreach service.
- 'Without an assessment of needs and a strategic Library Service review, the Council has displayed a lack of logic around why some facilities were recommended for closure and not others.'

The Inspector was particularly concerned about the proposed closures:

- in areas of significant deprivation
- in terms of a reasonable distance to travel especially where there is a higher concentration of older people and disabled people in an area
- where libraries had inter-dependent links with schools and/or children's centres - which would require specific consultation with governing bodies

### Specific Needs

The Inspector considered that it was reasonable to seek to ascertain how the specific needs of different people within communities - such as older and younger people; men and women; unemployed people; BME groups; and disabled people - were established. The Council did not undertake a separate or specific review of the Library Service and the needs of their communities in relation to it. It appeared to have a general view of the local communities, rather than considering the different needs that might exist among different people and groups.

'The Council assumed it knew what people wanted . . . . , but did not base this on any evidence of what local people who live, work and study in the area want and need; i.e. "the general....and...special requirements of adults and children".'

The 'particular circumstances of specific residential communities and their need for library facilities were not considered.' Nor did it present its evidence on a library by library basis. It was unable to convince the Inspector that that it had made an assessment of needs in the following circumstances:

- where libraries are located in an area of significant deprivation
- where there is a strong case that a physical presence is needed to meet local needs.
- where libraries have particular characteristics within the local population and/or geography of the local area that make access more difficult, where the distance from the nearest library is contested;
- where libraries have strong links with schools and/or children's centres,

seemingly meeting the needs of both children and adults.

### **Unreasonable Action**

Because it could not demonstrate that it had made an assessment of local needs, the Inspector 'concluded that the Council cannot have acted reasonably in meeting such needs through their proposals, either in meeting their statutory obligations, or in the context of available resources, as, in the absence of such assessment or demonstrable knowledge of local needs, it was incapable of rationally identifying a reasonable option for meeting such needs both comprehensively and efficiently.'

The Inspector set out what she regarded as what could be 'reasonably expected in the way of an analysis of needs:

- consideration of the wide range of those needs caught by the definition of all those who live, work and study in the area, and the specific needs of adults and children and young people of all ages;
- an assessment of accessibility - drawing on travel data including car usage data, public transport routes and the cost of services;
- consideration of the views of existing users, and an attempt to analyse the reasons and motivations of non users and how their use could be encouraged;
- an assessment as to whether there is any differential impact (via an equalities impact assessment) on whether any specific communities or groups would suffer any adverse impacts as a result of the changes to the service; and
- consideration of information from partner organisations and other departments, including reference to learning strategies for children and adults, links with social and adult care, and employment initiatives.

### **Different Ways of Working**

In terms of any consideration of new and or amended ways of operating the service that might be more efficient, she suggested that it is reasonable to expect an assessment of:

- whether the library buildings are fit for purpose, and or in the right place to serve

the needs of the community;

- whether there is scope for more effective use of resources, through for example flexible staffing arrangements, self-issuing, or the Community Asset Transfer model or partial model;
- whether there is scope to provide the service more efficiently via delivery partnerships within and outside of the authority, for example through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with other council functions;
- whether there is demand for the services in the way that they are currently offered;
- whether the buildings are beyond their useful life and what the scope of shared facilities might be;
- whether a physical presence is necessary, taking into account the particular needs of that community, and if it could be replaced by other means such as a mobile service; and
- whether steps are needed to encourage use of library provision.

'While this is not an exhaustive or definitive set of criteria', the Inspector 'would expect a 'reasonable' authority to use such evidence, together with an assessment of resources available, to devise a comprehensive vision and development plan for the service, which addresses these considerations within the development plan. It may, having done this, still draw different conclusions than those others might draw, and it might make decisions that are unpopular, but importantly, these decisions would be based on evidence which could be used to demonstrate the comprehensiveness and efficiency of the service provided by reference to demonstrable need and resources.

### **Plan**

The plan should include:

- a statement of what the service is trying to achieve;
- a description of local needs, including the general and specific needs of adults and children who live, work and study in the area;
- a detailed description of how the service will be delivered;
- how the plans will fully take into account the demography of the Wirral and the

different needs of adults and children in different areas (both in general and specific terms);

- the resources available for the service, including an annual budget; and
- how the specific breaches identified in this report have been addressed.

The full report can be seen on:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/>  
[http://www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/libraries/6119.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/libraries/6119.aspx)

**In early 2010 the Wirral Inquiry Inspector Sue Charteris was appointed to lead an Inquiry into Northumberland's plans to close 6 Libraries. Her report is awaited.**

**For a positive trade union view on libraries see the report commissioned by Unison *The People's Inquiry into the library service*: [www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/19151.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/19151.pdf).**

## LAMBETH COUNCIL AND WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL 2012

Lambeth Council is considering ways in which to increase the income it makes from events in its Parks and Open Spaces. It is considering holding a three day World Music Festival in 2012/13 celebrating diversity through music to be held on Clapham Common. It will require the construction of an events arena accommodating 15,000 spectators. Two days will consist of a commercial programme ticketed at around £40 per person. However, for the third day access will be free to Lambeth residents. The first event would take place in 2012/13 with investment required from 2011/12. Two questions arise:

- Will any part of the events area be on the part of the Common which is within the boundary of Wandsworth?
- If it is will Wandsworth Council negotiate third day access to residents of Wandsworth?
- If not will Wandsworth Council negotiate third day access to residents of Wandsworth living around and in the streets off the Common as compensation for the noise and disruption caused by the Festival?