

Library Local Vision

1. Introduction

The ambition for the Library Local programme is that it will significantly transform the physical look and feel of Waltham Forest's four Library Local branches and compliment the Library Plus Improvement Programme. It will also facilitate the transformation of the way front line services are delivered across the Council.

2. Context

The Council's Library and Information Service review in 2011 defined a two-tier library service, with four Library Pluses in the Town Centres (Walthamstow, Chingford, Leyton and Leytonstone), open 7 days, and four smaller Library Locals, (Hale End, Higham Hill, Lea Bridge and Wood Street libraries), open for 30 hours over 4 days. There is an on-going capital programme to improve the Library Plus libraries.

There is now an opportunity to transform the Library Locals, taking advantage of some of the regeneration schemes across the borough, to deliver a more efficient library service by moving the library locals out of standalone buildings (where appropriate), into new buildings alongside other services and to work with community and partner organisations.

The Library Locals currently occupy valuable sites and capital receipts from these will fund the relocation/remodelling/refurbishment of the Library Locals. The aspiration of the library service for Library Locals is to maximize the scope for the self-service library at the heart of the community.

A feasibility study has been carried out:

- To test out the initial assumptions made for the proposed future locations for the four Library Locals
- To review options for alternative accommodation in the immediate surrounding area(s)
- To review options for the future use of the existing Library Local sites

This has confirmed the initial proposals and where alternative options exist.

3. Vision

The Council's vision is that Library Locals:

- Be modern and attractive spaces which match up to the best public library buildings in London and have the built-in flexibility to adapt to future service needs
- Offer a 21st century library service supporting literacy and numeracy, reading and information needs and access to digital services. Be public spaces which are welcoming and support community cohesion
- Be located in accessible places alongside other community facilities

- Recognise the varying needs of different age groups and supports younger people to get the most from the library experience especially in the area of ICT software and hardware
- Enable and empower members of the community supported by library staff to shape the local service to offer the best customer experience, now and in the future

The proposed changes sustain and enhance the current services; do not lead to any reduction in the number of libraries (8) that the Council operates as part of its statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 and; safeguards the Council's service standard that no member of the public lives further away from a Library Local than 1.5 miles and 2 miles from a Library Plus. At a time when neighbouring authorities are reducing or closing libraries, Waltham Forest is investing in its libraries and enhancing them.

The improvement to the Council's Library buildings and the services they provide are planned to contribute in a meaningful way to regeneration, for the benefit of the local community by bringing residents better shopping, streets and leisure and to create and retain more wealth and opportunities in the borough.

4. Opportunities

Local regeneration offers some exciting opportunities to relocate into new premises, where appropriate, to provide a more cost-effective service, provide more accessibility and enable reinvestment in the service. Key issues are:

- ✓ While libraries are popular with some sections of the community, performance is declining overall and the buildings feel 'dated' and/or are in need of repair and in three of the four locations are in the wrong place i.e. away from the retail centres in their localities
- ✓ Alongside the Council's focus and investment in the Library Plus Improvement Programme, Library Locals must complement these in community localities as part of the overall library and information service provision
- ✓ There is currently little flexibility in the use of space, while the size of some of the buildings means space is over-generous but hard to utilize for the levels of usage
- ✓ Sale of three of the existing sites would enable the money raised to fund the relocation/remodelling/refurbishments

The project plans to relocate and remodel the Library Locals at Hale End, Higham Hill and Wood Street and remodel and refurbish Lea Bridge.

Current Library Local spaces range from 740m² at Wood Street to 310m² at Higham Hill and it is planned to relocate libraries into spaces more appropriate for a 21st century library service which has greater emphasis on e services, whether e books or access to computer databases and public and staff ICT while still providing print sources, information and guidance.

Each location will provide space for books and other reading matter, ICT, flexible space for library/partner use for activities, meetings etc. and potentially space for a community partner.

The Library Local Improvement Programme will be phased to take account of the regeneration opportunities with Hale End being developed and relocated first and the others to follow by 2018/19.

Hale End

Options in Hale End have centred on using the “Town Square” development as the driver for relocation and remodelling of the service delivery. A number of sites were assessed both within the Tesco development and in the surrounding area e.g. the former Budgens supermarket on Larkshill Road and the old cinema on Hale End Road.

The favoured site is one of the units within the footprint of the “Town Square” site, across the square from its extensive car parking and adjacent to a children’s play area and a nursery.

The proposed library site covers two floors and would enable the mix of books, ICT, study/browsing space, flexible meeting space and potential partner space to be provided. Provision of an additional unit as a community space will also be investigated.

The current site would be sold and appropriate residential accommodation put in its place.

The timescale for completion and relocation/sale is 12 months maximum.

Higham Hill

Options to replace Higham Hill are focused on the Priory Court redevelopment as this location is very close to the centre of the community and less than ½ km from the existing library. The Priory Court development will:

- ✓ Deliver high quality, sustainable development in the Priory Court area
- ✓ Set the standard for future development
- ✓ Increase the number of residential units on the estate
- ✓ Provide an opportunity to improve the public realm and recreational environment
- ✓ Contribution to the supply of affordable housing
- ✓ Support the renaissance of neighbourhoods through place shaping
- ✓ Use corporate assets to meet the Council’s aspiration for growth
- ✓ Enable the Council to achieve best use and value from its assets

Alternative sites at Billet Road and Banbury Park have been considered but offer insufficient accessibility and space, are not located in the centre of Higham Hill and are situated close to the North Circular Road which creates access problems.

The timescale for this relocation is 2018-19 as the sale of the current Higham Hill Library site is central to the redevelopment project progressing. The existing library site will be used to provide additional housing.

Lea Bridge

The present library is well-located on Lea Bridge Road near the junction with Markhouse Road/Church Road in an area of retail activity, is only 1km from the Lea

Bridge Overground station which opened in May 2016, is Grade II Listed and has a Covenant on it which only allows the building to be used as a public library. For all these reasons it is intended to continue to use the current building as a Library Local. It will be appropriately remodelled and refurbished and accommodate a partner organization in the area which is surplus to the needs of the library service.

The timescale for this remodelling/refurbishment is a maximum of 3 - 5 months, when it is scheduled.

Wood Street

The future location for a new Wood Street Library has been identified as being at the first of the Borough's major housing regeneration projects, Marlowe Road. This is closer to the existing community focus further up Wood Street from the existing site on the junction with Forest Road.

There are commercial retail units in the design for the new development at Marlowe Road. The Council has the option to use these for community use, i.e. for a new relocated Library Local. The structure of the building will be delivered as phase 1 of the development.

The layout of the units has already been defined by the developers and discussions are underway to confirm the availability of adequate space for the library service.

The timescale for the Marlowe Road development started in spring 2016 and is timetabled to take 2 years until completion. There will then be a period required for fit out as this is not included in the agreement with the developer.