

# SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL



## LIBRARIES SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

October 2018

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction	Page 3
<b>PART A: A framework for statutory library services</b>	
2. Purpose and objectives of the libraries service	Page 5
3. Resource constraints	Page 5
4. Types of library service delivery	Page 8
5. Providing reasonable access	Page 22
6. Meeting local needs	Page 30
7. Best value considerations	Page 31
<b>PART B: Detailed area proposals and rationales</b>	
8. Area 1: Western Somerset	Page 37
9. Area 2: Taunton, Wellington and Surrounding Area	Page 46
10. Area 3: Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea and Surrounding Area	Page 58
11. Area 4: Central Somerset	Page 71
12. Area 5: Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster and Surrounding Area	Page 85
13. Area 6: Yeovil and Surrounding Area	Page 90
14. Area 7: South East Somerset	Page 100
15. Area 8: Frome and Surrounding Area	Page 107
16. Area 9: Wells, Shepton and Mendip Hills	Page 111
17. Background papers, useful links and links to supporting evidence	Page 117

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This service delivery plan sets out how Somerset County Council proposes to deliver its statutory duty to deliver a comprehensive and efficient libraries service in the future. Following an extensive service review, consultation and re-design process, the proposals mark a significant change to the way that library services are currently delivered. The plan describes and explains a set of principles which will guide library service delivery across the county. It also sets out how different types of library services will be provided in different communities and areas around Somerset, and the basis on which recommendations are being made.
- 1.2. The plan has been developed following a detailed consideration of feedback gathered through consultation and community engagement, an assessment of local needs and access considerations, and an assessment of the impact of proposals on different groups. Proposals have been designed to achieve an appropriate balance between the availability of resources to fund the service on the one hand, and the needs and requirements of residents and library service users on the other. The plan seeks to achieve the County Council's ambition and objectives for its libraries service, set out in detail in the *Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework* document (see section 17 below for further details), whilst also putting the service on a sustainable financial footing and fulfilling our basic legal duty as a library authority. The rationale behind specific proposals is explained throughout the document, with supporting evidence where appropriate.
- 1.3. The need for library services is changing and will continue to evolve into the future. Library services in Somerset will need to continue to adapt and evolve to meet changing requirements, respond to changes in the external environment (including potential changes to resource levels), address changing national and local government priorities and take advantage of developments in the public library sector. This service delivery plan provides a foundation for the Libraries Service in Somerset, specifically by setting out a rationale and basis for a fundamental change to the delivery of library services, following the re-design programme and an extensive public consultation exercise. It does not seek to impose any constraints on the future development of the service. Future changes to library services will be guided by resource considerations, legal requirements and due process (including, where appropriate, further public consultation).
- 1.4. The service delivery plan is organised into two parts:
- Part A describes and explains a set of principles which have been developed, following consultation, to guide the design and delivery of sustainable library services that also deliver Somerset's statutory duty. The different models we plan to use to deliver the Libraries Service are set out, alongside a proposed framework (shaped by feedback from the consultation exercise) which explains how legal requirements will be met within the current constraints on council resources. The most significant and relevant themes emerging from the public consultation exercise are explicitly explored, and the council's response is explained.
  - Part B describes how these design principles have been applied in different areas of Somerset to re-design the service. The way in which library services

are proposed to be delivered to different areas and communities in the future is described, and the rationale behind proposed changes is explained.

- 1.5. As well as drawing upon evidence gathered through public consultation and stakeholder and community engagement, the development of the delivery plan has been underpinned by a range of technical assessments. Assessments of need and equalities impacts are set out in detail in separate documents; assessments of access and value for money are summarised within Part B of this document. All of these assessments make use of technical approaches, methodologies and datasets which are explained fully in the background paper *Data Analysis – Methodology and Data Sources* (see section 17 below for further details). Driving times and walking / cycling distances are an important consideration, and it is important to note that these have been estimated using geographical mapping techniques. They are not absolute measures and all references to driving times and distances should be taken as estimations and interpreted accordingly.
- 1.6. Somerset County Council's statutory duties in respect of Public Library Services are set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964; most significantly in Section 7 of that Act. It is important to note that the proposals and principles set out below mainly describe how the first part of the 'section 7' duty is delivered; specifically, the requirement under section 7(1) to deliver a 'comprehensive and efficient' public libraries service. Section 7(2) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act confers further obligations on authorities to maintain a sufficient and adequate range of borrowing and reference stock, to promote services, and to co-operate with other authorities. The changes being proposed to the libraries service will affect the quantity of stock we hold, but we will use a well-established data-led approach to ensure we maintain the adequacy and sufficiency of the stock we have. The proposed changes will not affect other aspects of Section 7(2) duties. Therefore, the way Somerset County Council discharges its duties under Section 7(2) of the Act is not directly considered in this document.
- 1.7. The Delivery Plan is grounded in the *Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework* set for the Libraries Service in November 2017 through a formal County Council decision. It builds on (and does not duplicate) the strategic judgments made through that decision, by providing a framework and rationale for specific proposals for change. Decision makers and stakeholders reading this service delivery plan may wish to refer to the earlier strategic document. For further details, see section 17 below.

## PART A: A framework for statutory library services

### 2. Purpose and objectives of the Libraries Service

2.1. A *Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework* for the Somerset Libraries Service was set in November 2017 (see section 17 below for further details). Many respondents in the consultation exercise expressed support for the vision statement:

*“Somerset Libraries are a dynamic, evolving and integral part of the community that open up a world of opportunities for reading, understanding and discovery”*

2.2. There was widespread support for a wider purpose for library services beyond the traditional focus on lending books. Feedback from the consultation shows that the value of library services for children and young people, health and wellbeing, digital inclusion and the role of libraries as community hubs is well understood and appreciated. We did not specifically consult on our outcomes framework, but this feedback gives us confidence in continuing to use it to guide service delivery. The Somerset outcomes support the delivery of England-wide library offers but have been adapted and developed to meet local priorities and needs.

2.3. We propose to continue to deliver library services in line with a broad set of commissioned outcomes, which will be reviewed and updated from time to time to reflect changing local needs and priorities. The framework set in November 2017 will continue to apply for the foreseeable future, setting a purpose for the Libraries Service to achieve the following outcomes:

- More people enjoy a vibrant and dynamic reading experience
- More people are enabled and inspired to make the most of the digital world
- Library services strengthen and enable communities
- People, in particular the most vulnerable, are enabled to make informed choices for their health and wellbeing
- Libraries contribute to economic growth
- Libraries support Children and Young People to be safe, healthy & happy; and inspire them to develop skills and be ambitious for their future.

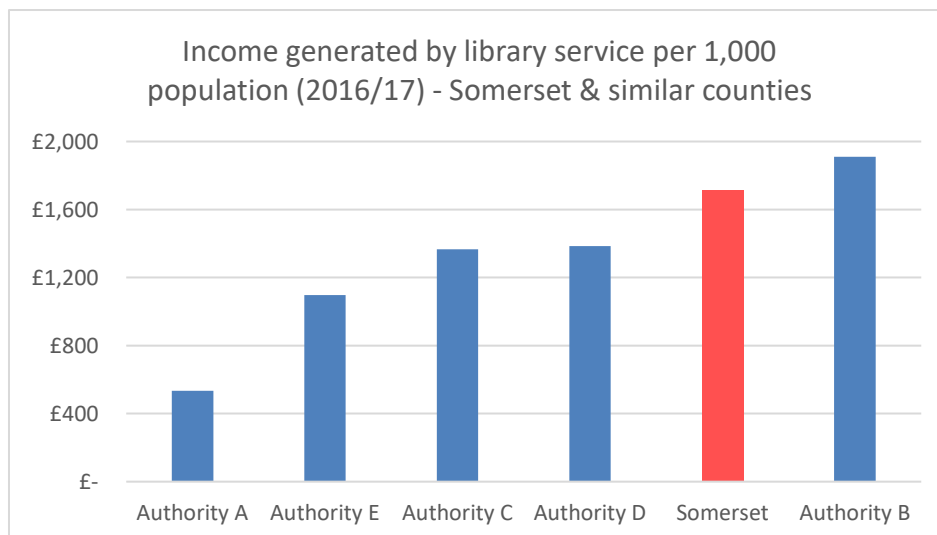
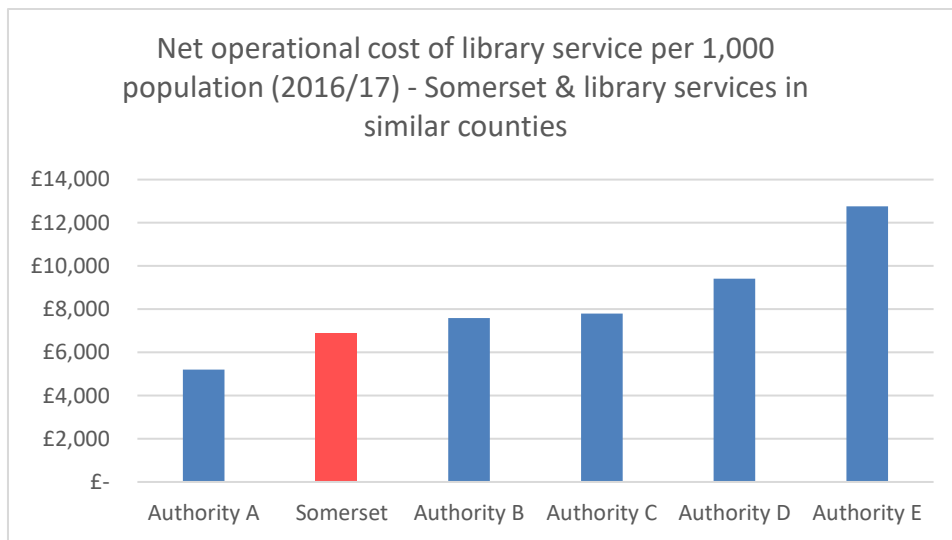
### 3. Resource constraints

3.1. The way we provide library services cannot be divorced from the availability of funding and the financial challenges faced by the local government sector, including Somerset County Council. In 2018/19, the budget available for library service delivery in Somerset was £4.02m (this excludes support service overheads, depreciation and capital expenditure). As noted in the most recent budget monitoring report for the county council, in Somerset the Revenue Support Grant has fallen from around £90m per year to less than £9m per year in five years. The council's external auditors issued an “adverse” value for money opinion, discussed at the Audit Committee in July 2018. During 2018, there has been considerable focus by the Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team on addressing the financial pressures, with an initial focus on bringing the 2018/19 budget into balance. Some one-off savings have been made from the Libraries Service's budget as part of this process but to date, the base budget position has not been changed.

## APPENDIX 1: LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

However, it is clear that, from 2019/20, the available budget for library services will need to reduce from its current level on an ongoing basis in order to support the County Council's overall financial position.

3.2. Somerset Libraries already provide good value for money, compared to other library services in similar, rural county authorities. Like other services in the County Council, the Libraries Service has delivered significant savings in recent years - in real terms, the budget has reduced by around 30% since 2011<sup>1</sup>. The graphs below<sup>2</sup> show how Somerset compares to other, similar library services on a unit cost basis, for net operational cost and income generation (using the latest available cost benchmarking data). Staff costs are low on a per capita basis compared to other authorities; the LibrariesWest shared service reduces costs significantly; and a lot of income is generated by providing services on behalf of other public bodies, sharing our buildings, and fees and charges for the services we can charge for. Delivering further cost reductions from this position will not be possible without significant changes to the way services are delivered.



<sup>1</sup> Based on the 'CPI All items' index of inflation.

<sup>2</sup> These graphs are based on data from the CIPFA libraries benchmarking dataset.

- 3.3. In the light of this financial position, the proposals developed for public consultation were designed to achieve a further saving of between £300,000 and £520,000, depending on differing options for different areas. Following public consultation and a detailed analysis of needs, access and impact, it is clear that many Somerset residents value library services, that there are high levels of need in many communities, and that reductions at the upper end of this range would have a very significant impact on the ability of the service to deliver commissioned outcomes. The overall county council revenue budget position has deteriorated since consultation proposals were developed but there has not been a corresponding change in the proposals.
- 3.4. The Service Delivery plan seeks to strike a balance between resource constraints and the need and usage of the service. The proposals for network re-design set out here would enable the Libraries Service to reduce costs by approximately £270,000 per year<sup>3</sup>. A further £75,000 of cost reductions are proposed to be achieved through a combination of means - following up on some of the alternative suggestions made during the consultation period to enable costs to be reduced in a small group of libraries, and by undertaking a restructure of the libraries senior management team.
- 3.5. The total reduction in cost of £345,000 is lower than the level of reduction anticipated at the outset of the Libraries Service Redesign programme but will still make an essential and valuable contribution to supporting the County Council's overall

**Key points - sections 2 and 3:**

- The public have expressed support for a wider purpose for Somerset's Libraries Service and we will continue to support a range of outcomes.
- Somerset's Libraries Service provides good value - unit costs are low, and income generated is high, compared to similar counties.
- How we design a 'comprehensive and efficient' Libraries Service must take account not only of need, but also of the availability of financial resources and how we can best use them. We no longer have the funding to provide the services that we used to, and the Council is having to change what it can and can't do in all areas.
- A proposed cost reduction totalling £345,000 will put the Libraries Service on a more sustainable financial footing and provide essential support to the Council's overall revenue budget position.
- We feel that a cost reduction at this level strikes the right balance between the need for library services, including levels of usage, that reflect local community needs, legal requirements, and the amount the County Council can afford to spend.

<sup>3</sup> The actual level of saving will depend on the number of Community Library Partnerships agreed, but in all scenarios is likely to be close to this figure.

revenue budget position from 2019/20 onwards. In doing so, we hope it will achieve the objective of putting the Libraries Service onto a sustainable financial footing for the future.

#### 4. Models for delivering the library service

4.1. We propose to deliver statutory library services<sup>4</sup> in a number of different ways which, taken together, will deliver a comprehensive and efficient service for Somerset. We anticipate that many users will use more than one model of service delivery, particularly where access to library buildings is less convenient. Some potential scenarios could include:

- Customers living in towns or large villages that do not have a library building may use our online digital services to reserve a book which they then pick up at a mobile library stop, or any library building within the LibrariesWest consortium area.
- Customers living in deeper rural areas may use digital services to download an e-book, and to look up events and activities taking place in a library building on a day they are planning a trip into town.
- Customers living in sub-urban communities that do not have a local sub-urban library building may use nearby public computer access provided as an outreach service to claim universal credit and apply for jobs. They may also travel to a nearby library building occasionally to attend a business start-up advice event.

##### *i) Library buildings – operated by the County Council.*

4.2. Library buildings operated by the council will deliver:

- a range of borrowing and reference stock (in all formats).
- a range of activities and events, designed to achieve commissioned outcomes and meet local needs, including specific support for children through the Summer Reading Challenge and the Bookstart programme.
- public computer access and associated printing and scanning.
- public wi-fi access.

4.3. Evidence from the public consultation shows that service users and communities value library buildings. There was a strong view that library buildings bring people together and provide a focus for communities. Libraries Service staff were valued very highly by respondents to the consultation, many of whom were concerned that a community library model would mean that staff would be replaced by volunteers. Many of our library buildings are effective at delivering on a wide range of commissioned outcomes, and one of the learning points from the consultation exercise is that library buildings provide public benefit (by, for example, reducing social isolation) even where structured events and activities do not take place. Customer feedback from a recent customer survey shows that library buildings deliver a high-quality user experience.

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<sup>4</sup> This section sets out the elements of service delivery that we consider fall within our statutory service. Somerset Libraries also includes the Performing Arts Library service; this is not detailed here because we do not consider the Performing Arts Library service to form part of the statutory service.



*"We need the professional expertise of library staff. They all do an excellent job."*

*"It is a much-loved focal point where all people can meet and feel safe. It provides a space for a diverse mixture of services and gives great pleasure to its visitors. The library is great value for the small amount it costs to run"*

4.4. However, library buildings can be a relatively expensive form of libraries service provision, particularly where usage is low. Some of our buildings have associated long term maintenance liabilities and costs over and above day to day running costs, and these are becoming less affordable within current resource constraints. At a time when the County Council is having to look at reducing services to a 'core' statutory minimum, to deliver essential services within current resource constraints, we are proposing to reduce the number of library buildings that are funded and operated by the council from 33 to 19.

4.5. Many of our libraries already receive support from communities - many Library Friends groups play an invaluable role in improving the effectiveness of libraries, and our library buildings benefit from income generated through community contributions and shared services such as local information centres. A number of stakeholder groups stated, as part of consultation feedback, that they would prefer to make a contribution towards the operating costs of our library buildings than see them close but were less comfortable with taking on the responsibilities required for a Community Library Partnership model. Our principle stakeholder group, Friends of Somerset Libraries, felt that these 'community supported' models of service delivery were a more equitable and fair model than the Community Library Partnership model proposed in the consultation.

*"Do not close Street library - it would be a travesty ... in return we as the Parish Council will ensure that the newly formed library goes from strength to strength"*

4.6. We have considered the 'Community Support' model carefully and considered a number of specific community support proposals put forward during the consultation period for specific libraries. We will be taking forward proposals for community support for several of the 19 library buildings. We have a reasonable level of confidence that these will enable us to reduce operating costs in a sustainable way. The expected reduction in costs has been factored into the savings set out in paragraph 3.4.

4.7. However, we have a legal duty to plan Libraries Service provision around meeting local needs, providing reasonable access and delivering value for money, having considered the impact of changes on specific groups. This legal duty to develop a plan based on evidence and need overrides local community support factors which are not within the council's control and may be transitory - the decision on whether we retain a library building as part of the council-operated service has been based on analysis of these overriding factors, and not whether community support has been offered during the consultation period.

- 4.8. Where we retain library buildings, the mix of services provided (particularly activities, events and stock) will vary, and will be adjusted and developed in response to local needs and value for money considerations. In the remaining library buildings, a modern, high-quality customer experience will continue to be delivered, providing public benefits across a range of outcomes, tailored to local needs.
- 4.9. We recognise, following feedback from the consultation exercise, that limited opening hours for library buildings constrain our ability to deliver a modern, high-quality customer experience and impact on value for money. For most of the library buildings that will be retained by the council we do not propose to reduce opening hours (and we will seek to increase opening hours where it is affordable to do so). However, having considered local needs, resource constraints and feedback from the consultation exercise, we will consider reducing opening hours for 3 library buildings (Cheddar, Ilminster and Martock). This would only be done as a last resort to achieve cost reduction targets for these 3 libraries, which we hope can be achieved in alternative ways that have emerged through the consultation exercise. Any reduction in opening hours at these sites would be subject to a further local consultation and a fresh equalities impact assessment.
- 4.10. The Service Delivery plan sets out the localities in which we will provide library buildings. Within localities, library buildings may be relocated, or may be adapted to accommodate a wider range of services (library or community 'hub' models). 9 of the 19 library buildings being retained are already shared with other services and partners. We are actively pursuing opportunities for sharing buildings in a further 5 localities. The relocation or re-modelling of library buildings within a locality is a way of improving value for money and / or reducing costs. Feedback from the consultation indicates that customers support this approach as an alternative way of saving money.

***ii) Community Library Partnerships: library buildings delivered in partnership with communities***

- 4.11. Through an extensive dialogue with a wide range of community partners, we have developed a partnership approach which we are confident has the potential to maintain building-based library service delivery through community support. If the proposals in this report are accepted, we will be seeking a number of 'Community Library Partnerships' in 15 locations across Somerset. The partnership approach developed builds on the current, successful pilot Community Library Partnership in Porlock, as well as government guidance and national good practice. Whilst we are encouraged by discussions to date with a number of communities, at this point it is uncertain whether these discussions will develop into Community Library Partnership agreements. It is unlikely that this will happen in every one of the 15 locations.
- 4.12. Library buildings delivered through Community Library Partnerships will only be possible where community partners choose to provide financial support and / or take on significant responsibility. Feedback from extensive community engagement and consultation has highlighted that this is a significant challenge for community partners. Whilst we are encouraged by the serious consideration many communities have given to this model, we recognise that some communities – for whatever reason

- will choose not to provide the necessary support, and (as we have stressed during the consultation) there is no expectation that they should do so.

4.13. The County Council has a responsibility to deliver public library services and accordingly, we believe that the council must not depend on community support (which may or may not be forthcoming) to deliver its statutory service. This applies mainly to Community Library Partnerships, but also to the 'community supported' model explained in paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 above. For this reason, Part B below sets out an alternative form of service delivery. The alternatives include:

- a combination of mobile library service and / or outreach delivery, as an alternative to Community Library Partnerships; or
- an option to reduce opening hours if 'community supported' models do not materialise as anticipated in certain communities.

4.14. However, where Community Library Partnerships are established in a locality, we would deliver our statutory duty, and meet the local needs of that community through the Community Library Partnership. We would not provide unnecessary and duplicate mobile library or outreach services. We therefore consider that where Community Library Partnerships are established, they would form part of the County Council's statutory Libraries Service. If such Community Library Partnerships subsequently ceased to operate, then we would deliver the statutory Libraries Service through the alternative means set out in Part B below, ensuring that we are not dependent on community support. Because the proposals set out in Part B have been developed following a comprehensive needs assessment, equalities impact assessment and public consultation, we would generally not carry out a further public consultation or service review exercise if we had to switch between a Community Library Partnership and the alternative set out in Part B below. We are of the view that the alternative means described in Part B would meet the County Council's duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service under section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act.

4.15. If Community Library Partnerships can be established, the County Council would retain an element of control, influence and supervision through the support we would provide, and through a legal contract between the parties involved in delivering the partnership. Minimum standards would be prescribed, and the quality of service delivery would be monitored, including the reliability of opening hours, the equalities and diversity issues identified through our equalities impact assessment, and adherence to data protection rules. The County Council would retain responsibility and control over the range and type of stock provided, and the provision of public computer access and associated services. Community Library Partnerships would remain within the LibrariesWest network and would be able to access these services. Further details of the proposed arrangements are set out in the relevant background papers, referenced in section 17 below.

4.16. Community Library Partnerships would deliver:

- a range of lending stock, i.e. books and audio books.
- Public computer access and associated printing and scanning.
- Public wi-fi access.
- Specific support for children through the Summer Reading Challenge and support to the Bookstart programme.

4.17. Evidence from the public consultation shows that many people have concerns about Community Library Partnerships. Many respondents did not believe Community Library Partnerships would be viable or sustainable, and concerns were expressed about the use of volunteers and a potential reduction in service delivery standards or quality. We will try to address concerns about sustainability and viability through a robust process of assessing the robustness of Community Library Partnership proposals, prior to entering into any agreements. We will also support Community Library Partnerships, both during a transition phase, and on an ongoing basis. However, as noted above, we are not relying on Community Library Partnerships to fulfil our statutory duties, because we have identified alternative appropriate ways of doing this, as set out in Part B below.

*“Recruiting volunteers is especially difficult these days ... Volunteers are not likely equipped to handle high-needs customers, either, and ... will not likely return if they’ve been shouted at by members of the public. There should always be one paid member of staff on site to support the volunteers”*

Staff consultation response

4.18. Nonetheless, in the public consultation respondents overwhelmingly preferred this form of service delivery to the alternatives set out in Part B - Community Library Partnerships were significantly preferred over a Mobile Library alternative.

4.19. Feedback from respondents who use Porlock Community Library indicates that they value the service provided by this pilot model and, on the whole, believe it works well. Throughout the Libraries Service Redesign process, the County Council has set a clear objective to maintain library buildings wherever possible. We believe that Community Library Partnerships have the potential to deliver a quality service and provide public benefits across a wide range of outcomes. If the proposals set out here are implemented by decision makers, we will put funding and resources into the implementation and ongoing delivery of Community Library Partnerships <sup>5</sup>.

4.20. Finally, our needs and access assessment has identified locations which do not currently have library buildings and are served by the mobile library service, but where community library partnerships could be a suitable form of service delivery. Resource constraints mean that it is not affordable for the council to provide new library buildings in these locations (and we consider that local needs are being met sufficiently through a combination of mobile library delivery, digital access and access to library buildings elsewhere). However, we have an aspiration to explore the potential for Community Library Partnerships in these localities in the future when capacity and resources allow. We will retain surplus library book stock for a period of time whilst we explore these options.

### **iii) Library Outreach Services**

4.21. We believe that Library Outreach Services have the potential to meet local needs and deliver public benefit in a cost-effective, affordable way. Outreach services would also provide a more consistent level of service to communities with high levels

<sup>5</sup> For further details, see the relevant background papers referenced in section 17 below.

of need across Somerset. Our initial needs assessment work, carried out at the start of the review process, identified some areas of high need where very few people were using the Libraries Service. These were sometimes located very near to library buildings. We therefore believe that Library Outreach Services also have a role to play in engaging residents who may benefit from library services, but who do not currently engage with them. A key part of our strategy to modernise the Libraries Service and maximise the delivery of outcomes is to deliver targeted activities and events outside of library buildings.

*"I am regularly involved with BabyBoogie, storytime and IT sessions here at Frome Library. With regard to the children's activities, I know every attendee finds the activities enjoyable and valuable, but it has concerned me that there is little attendance from the populations identified as most needy in Frome"*

Staff consultation response

4.22. Feedback on Library Outreach Services received through the public consultation exercise was notably different depending on whether outreach services were proposed as a new service in an area which currently did not have a library building, or as a replacement for a library building currently operated by the council.

- Some respondents in Bridgwater and Frome felt that outreach services would provide a valuable complementary service in areas of high need. Some community stakeholders in Yeovil were also supportive of the proposals for outreach services.
- Generally, respondents using libraries where Library Outreach Services were proposed as an alternative to the current library building were not supportive of proposals for outreach services. With some exceptions, respondents in these communities did not feel that outreach services would be sufficient.

4.23. Having considered this feedback, alongside the evidence and analysis carried out in the needs, access and equalities impact assessments, we propose to maintain council-operated library buildings rather than deliver our statutory duty through Library Outreach Services in several locations. We consider that Library Outreach Services would provide an effective means of statutory service delivery in high needs areas where access to complementary library buildings is affordable, sustainable and relatively convenient. They are also an effective way of mitigating the impact of potential library closures for certain groups with specific needs. This principle is reflected in the detailed proposals set out in part B.

*"Outreach services may be a useful adjunct to libraries but ... they are in no sense a replacement or substitute. ... it is one thing to encourage people in a deprived area to use a library which is down the road. It is futile if getting to the library involves travel costs that they can ill-afford"*

4.24. Library Outreach Services will deliver:

- a range of activities and events, designed to achieve commissioned outcomes and address local needs, whilst also improving people's awareness of the benefits of library membership.
- Public computer access in two localities where this has been identified as a key mitigation (if no Community Library Partnership can be established).
- The Bookstart service for children.

The range of Library Outreach Services provided would be tailored to meet local needs - further detail is set out in part B below and in the background paper *Library Outreach Services* (see section 17 below).

4.25. As with all services, the value for money and effectiveness of Library Outreach Services would be monitored, and the mix of events and activities would be regularly reviewed, considering local demand and need. If services or events were not being used, we would reduce them; if services were over-subscribed, we would look to increase them. We would also review services if the underlying need changed (for example, if digital inclusion training was no longer required). Further details on how this process is anticipated to work are set out in the background paper *Library Outreach Services*.

4.26. We have an aspiration to extend the provision of Library Outreach Services beyond those localities specified, and we will endeavour to provide a much wider range of Library Outreach Services outside of library buildings, where resources allow. However, these aspirational additional services would not form part of the statutory service. We would endeavour to maintain small book collections as an outreach service in areas where library buildings have closed, and where access to alternative venues is more difficult. This could, however, only be provided where suitable community space could be found and again, would not form part of the statutory service. We do not currently have any firm proposals of where small book collections might be situated, but we will retain surplus book stock for a period of time whilst we explore options.

**iv) Mobile library service**

4.27. We currently deliver mobile library services at 149 mobile library stops around the county, in line with a policy developed and agreed (following public consultation) in March 2015. The service is used by around 1,800 people in Somerset. The full details of the policy are available on the County Council's website (see section 17 below for details), and we do not propose to change the underlying policy, which broadly sets out the principles that:

- The council engages with local stakeholders before making any changes to mobile library stops.
- Mobile library stops are generally not provided within 3 miles of a library building.
- Mobile library stops are not provided within ½ mile of another mobile library stop.
- Mobile library stops are placed at risk if usage is very low (local community representatives are informed where this happens). If there is no increase in usage over a 6-month monitoring period, the service is withdrawn.

4.28. Feedback from the consultation on mobile library provision was very negative where mobile provision was proposed as an alternative to a library building. Many respondents felt that mobile library stops would not provide a suitable alternative form of Libraries Service delivery. In addition to a general, widely-held view that mobile provision would not serve the needs of larger communities, several specific criticisms came out of the consultation:

- Respondents highlighted that a mobile solution would not provide community space, and would not, therefore, provide the social value that library buildings offer - particularly in combating loneliness.
- Many respondents expressed concerns that the mobile library would not provide public internet access.

*“alternative coverage through mobile libraries is a mirage, all they can partially replicate is limited book lending which reflects what libraries used to be and not what they need to become”*

- Concerns were expressed by some respondents about the accessibility of the mobile service for older or disabled people.
- Many responses expressed concern about the timing and / or frequency of mobile options proposed in the consultation period - many respondents felt that one visit per month was not frequent enough, some respondents highlighted the difficulty of accessing a mobile service for those who worked during the week.
- A number of responses highlighted the use of library buildings by local primary schools and were concerned that a switch to mobile library provision would deny access to library services for primary school children.

4.29. Having considered this feedback, we feel that some of these concerns are, to an extent, misplaced. The mobile library is fully accessible and should not present any access issues for customers who have mobility difficulties. Also, the mobile library service regularly visits primary schools and nurseries in areas of the county which do not have library buildings (currently, 22 schools and 14 pre-school settings are regularly visited, and many school children in rural areas use the mobile library service). For the purposes of borrowing stock, mobile service delivery does not present any particular disadvantages for children or people with mobility problems, compared to library buildings (over and above the general weaknesses in mobile library service delivery of inconvenience, and a more limited range of stock and services available, which apply to all users).

4.30. We agree, though, that mobile library provision offers a much more limited service, providing less social value than a library building - largely limited to book lending, with a much more limited impact on commissioned outcomes. We also share the concerns of many respondents that the mobile service would not (currently) be able to provide public computer access<sup>6</sup>. We believe that mobile library provision can only ever be part of the provision of modern library services to communities, but that it does have a valuable role to play alongside library buildings, digital and outreach

<sup>6</sup> Some public library services do offer public internet access through their mobile library network, and this is something we would like to explore in Somerset. However, for the time being this is our aspiration and not a development we will rely on when considering how to provide our statutory duty.

services. As noted in paragraph 3.1 above, we anticipate that many service users will use more than one type of service delivery, and users within communities will use a different mix of library services depending on their particular needs and circumstances.

4.31. Because of the strong and widely-held views on the adequacy of mobile access, we have taken some time to review the evidence available and consider the issue.

4.32. Firstly, we have considered the issue of the sufficiency of mobile library provision for smaller communities (larger villages and smaller towns with a population of less than 4,000) in rural areas that are relatively distant from current, or alternative library buildings. The table below sets out an analysis of estimated library usage, comparing a selection of smaller communities that currently have only mobile library provision, with two smaller communities that currently have a library building.

Table 4.32: Comparative mobile and static library usage<sup>7</sup> in selected smaller communities:

Community	PopIn. (2011)	Usage of library in locality		Usage of alternative libraries <sup>8</sup>		Usage of mobile	Travel to nearest alternative library	
		Active B'wers	Public. Comp. Users	Active B'wers	Public. Comp. Users	Active B'wers	Dist. (miles)	Drive time (mins)
Wiveliscombe	2,178	335	45	145	60	n/a	7	17
Puriton	1,968	n/a	n/a	105	15	10	4	9
Coleford	2,151	n/a	n/a	100	20	50 <sup>9</sup>	6	17
Ilchester	2,153	n/a	n/a	135	15	10	5	10
Milborne Port	2,802	205	30	35	15	n/a	8	18

Note:

- 'Active B'wers' - (active borrowers) - people who have borrowed at least one item within the year 2017/18.
- 'Public Comp. Users' - (public computer users) - people who have used the 'People's Network' public computer access within the year 2017/18.

4.33. This analysis has limitations, not least the difficulty in drawing robust comparisons between communities that each have different characteristics, and the number of communities we have been able to sample. However, considering this data and feedback from the consultation, we believe that some conclusions can be drawn:

- A significant number of service users living in smaller towns / larger villages already use alternative libraries - usually when they are travelling to larger towns.

<sup>7</sup> All usage figure have been rounded to the nearest 5 for data protection reasons.

<sup>8</sup> Estimates of the number of active borrowers using alternative libraries in Wiveliscombe, Ilchester and Milborne Port have been calculated by adding together the total number of active borrowers using each individual alternative library and reducing this total number by 10% to account for estimated duplicate usage (i.e. active borrowers who use more than one alternative library)

<sup>9</sup> A large number of the mobile library users in Coleford are primary school children.



*“... it seems inevitable that some local library branches may close ... people who live in small communities take their shopping requirements to large towns and supermarkets ... it should be possible to combine shopping and library visits”*

- Smaller towns / larger villages that have library buildings seem to have a higher proportion of residents using the Libraries Service, compared to communities of a similar size<sup>10</sup>. This evidence supports feedback from staff and respondents, who have expressed views that replacing a library building with a mobile library will cause the Libraries Service to lose significant numbers of customers. However, we do not have data on the use of digital library services at this level. Some users in the communities sampled may use these services as an alternative to mobile library services and / or travel to a library building.
- There is some evidence that users of our public computer access services are more likely to travel to alternative libraries. In Wiveliscombe, our data indicates that there are more people using the public computer access in Wellington and Taunton than in Wiveliscombe. In other communities sampled usage of public computer access does not seem to drop as significantly (when compared to borrowing) when there is no library building in the community.
- In smaller towns / larger villages served by a mobile stop, the mobile library service is used by a relatively small proportion of borrowers - most seem to find it more convenient to use a library building in a nearby community. But the mobile library service is used by some residents - those who find it more difficult to travel to alternative library buildings, as well as many children. This represents, across the three localities sampled, just 1.1% of the built-up area population.

4.34. Secondly, we have considered the issue of the sufficiency of mobile library provision for larger communities.

4.35. We do not hold data on comparable larger communities that do not have library buildings, but we have assumed that similar conditions apply, and in particular that:

- Without the convenience of a local library building, a number of borrowers would either switch to using digital library services, or cease using the service, rather than use the mobile library service or travel to a nearby library building. If customers stopped using the service, it would impact on the delivery of service outcomes.
- As with smaller communities served by a mobile library stop, we assume that in larger communities the majority of Libraries Service customers would travel to a library building in a nearby town if they were able to, rather than use the mobile library service.

4.36. Having considered feedback, alongside the evidence and analysis carried out in the needs, access and equalities impact assessments, we propose to maintain council-operated library buildings rather than deliver our statutory duty in other ways in several locations that were considered for potential change prior to the consultation

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted, however, that we do not have data on the use of digital forms of library services at this level; and some of the 'lost' custom may in fact be transferring to our digital service. One of the communities sampled (Coleford) is relatively close to an alternative library building outside Somerset, and other borrowers may be using this facility.

period. We do not believe that a mobile library service can provide an adequate service in larger communities that do not have good access to alternative libraries. We have concluded that the likely impact on overall usage of the Libraries Service would be too great if libraries were replaced with mobile or outreach services in these communities, and this in turn would limit our ability to deliver commissioned outcomes. The evidence we have reviewed suggests that many borrowers prefer to travel to alternative library buildings rather than use the mobile service in their own community. We do not, therefore, feel that moving from a 'static' to a mobile library service is a reasonable approach for larger populations with costly or difficult access to alternative library buildings. Where access to alternative library buildings is more affordable and reliable, or where communities are smaller in size and have lower levels of need, we feel a combination of mobile services and access to alternative libraries is a more reasonable approach, given the financial constraints we are operating within.

- 4.37. We consider that the mobile library service does have an important role to play in mitigating the impact of potential library closures for many customers, particularly in areas where access to alternative libraries is more difficult. Specific scenarios include
- smaller communities (with populations of less than 4,000) that are more distant from alternative libraries, and in some nearby rural communities within the catchments of these larger villages / small towns.
  - Larger communities or urban areas with higher needs that are not within walking distance of alternative libraries, and where walking distances to public transport routes are more difficult for people with restricted mobility (but which, overall, do have reasonable access to alternative library buildings).  
Primary schools that currently use library buildings regularly and would not be able to if the library building closed.
  - Using a mobile library as an alternative means of providing access to book-lending services in larger towns with relatively low levels of need, where access to alternative libraries is good, but may be inconvenient or more difficult for a minority of users.
- 4.38. Where mobile library provision is introduced as a result of the implementation of the delivery plan, the mobile service will be designed through local engagement and with local needs in mind. We have developed an indicative plan for potential mobile library provision, based on an analysis of need and likely demand (for further details, see the background paper *Mobile Library Services - possible frequencies and stop locations*, referenced in section 17 below). However, this represents our initial thinking and will be developed through local engagement in areas where library buildings cannot be maintained. Once mobile library stops are established, they would be monitored and reviewed in line with the current policy.
- 4.39. In all these locations we feel that a Community Library Partnership model is likely to be more effective at meeting needs than mobile library provision. This is one of the key reasons why we will support Community Library Partnerships.
- 4.40. Where Community Library Partnerships are agreed, we will deliver our statutory duty to communities through support to these library buildings, and we will not provide a mobile library stop within 3 miles of the library building (in line with the current policy).

4.41. Mobile Library Services will deliver:

- a range of lending stock i.e. books, audio books and DVDs.

**v) Home Library Service**

4.42. The Home Library Service is a relatively small part of the current statutory service which fulfils an important role in providing access to customers who cannot travel to library buildings or the mobile library. The service is available to anyone who is unable to visit a library for themselves - perhaps because they are housebound, living in long term care, carers, or people who are vulnerable due to long term health conditions or disabilities. The service is open to people of all ages and is offered in conjunction with information about our digital services and a 'good neighbour' scheme. Around 650 customers receive regular visits at home from volunteers, who bring books or other lending stock from local libraries. The service also plays an important role in reducing social isolation, supporting other health and wellbeing outcomes, as well as fulfilling part of our statutory duties to provide a service for all persons.

4.43. The Home Library Service was reviewed in 2014/15, and we are not proposing to change any aspect of the Home Library Service as part of this programme. We will work closely with our current partner, the Royal Voluntary Service, to ensure all those who could benefit from using the Home Library Service are able to do so.

4.44. The Home Library Service will deliver:

- a range of lending stock (in all formats) and support customers to use our range of e-lending resources, including e-audio, ebooks and e-magazines.

**vi) Digital Library Services**

4.45. The LibrariesWest website and app provide a limited service compared to library buildings and outreach services, but it is highly effective for many customers, and usage of the service is increasing. The ability to reserve and renew lending stock means that customers do not need to visit libraries to carry out these transactions. We maintain an events calendar and customers can look up events and activities to plan the use of these aspects of the service in advance. In this way, our digital offer supports many customers who access library buildings less frequently, whether because of travel distance or personal circumstances. We estimate that Somerset Libraries Service users visited the LibrariesWest website or the LibrariesWest app over 380,000 times during 2017/18 - as in the retail sector, this is a significant and growing proportion of 'footfall' for the service as a whole.

4.46. As well as improving customer convenience and enabling library visits to be more effectively planned around trips into town, we now offer a range of borrowing stock through digital channels. Customers are able to download e-books, e-audio and e-magazines and access a range of reference resources online. We have over 18,000 titles available across a digital platform that is shared with LibrariesWest partners. During the last financial year, over 50,000 items were issued / borrowed through this digital platform by Somerset Libraries Service customers. The service makes a significant contribution to our core outcome of supporting reading, but the reference

resources also support learners and groups by enabling access to research material. Online access to resources such as the COBRA and MINT UK databases supports businesses and entrepreneurs, and in turn supports our economic development outcomes.

4.47. We did not ask any specific questions about online services and did not propose any changes to our digital 'offer' during the consultation period. Feedback received on our digital offer through the consultation was therefore limited. However, we know that the service has limitations - as with mobile and outreach services, it complements rather than replaces access to library buildings. The digital service does not, in itself, reduce social isolation and improve health and well-being or community resilience. It cannot be accessed by people who are digitally excluded and does not, therefore, meet the needs of some of our more vulnerable customers.

4.48. However, our digital service plays a key role in enabling convenient access to some aspects of library service delivery for a large and growing number of people. By enabling many people to undertake borrowing transactions online, and to plan their visits into town around activities and events offered by the Libraries Service, it plays a key role in making our modern library service far more comprehensive, efficient and convenient than it would otherwise be. For this reason, we consider the digital offer to be part of our statutory service.

"I love the library and always have 20 books out as well as e-books and magazines. I live 20 mins drive from Frome and come in every few weeks and use the online renewal service in between. The library is near the shops and I use them as well."

4.49. The digital library service will deliver:

- a range of e-books, e-audio books, e-magazines and reference stock available as websites and an app, accessed by using a Somerset Libraries membership card.
- An online renewals and reservations service, reducing the need for customers to travel to library buildings.
- Access to information on events, activities and other services available at library buildings (including Community Library Partnerships), to support customers who access these services when travelling into town.

**Key points - section 4:**

- Library buildings are highly valued by Somerset residents, and provide the most effective form of library services. However, we cannot afford to continue to fund all of our current library buildings.
- We will maintain 19 library buildings around the County as part of our statutory service. We will at least maintain (and aspire to increase) opening hours at most of these buildings; we feel this is key to achieving our vision of a thriving and dynamic Libraries Service. However, for 3 libraries we will consider reducing opening hours (subject to further consultation) if we cannot deliver cost reductions in other ways.
- For 15 of our current library buildings, we will work with communities to try to keep libraries open through Community Library Partnerships (this includes Porlock Library, already operated in partnership with the community).
- The County Council has a responsibility to provide library services, and there is no expectation that communities will step in. The proposals ensure that, where library buildings cannot be maintained, all residents will be able to access some form of library services.
- We do not regard our mobile library service or the Home Library Service as a replacement for library buildings. However, they provide a means of accessing library services which delivers our statutory duty to customers who find it more difficult to travel to library buildings. The evidence shows that many borrowers in communities that are served by a mobile library travel to alternative libraries rather than using the mobile service, and we will design service provision on this basis.
- Because mobile library services are not valued as highly by Somerset residents, and cannot replace all of the benefits of a modern library building, we will support Community Library Partnerships wherever possible, and ensure that our network of funded library buildings is designed to maximise access and the delivery of outcomes, within current resource constraints.
- Library Outreach Services will be delivered where need is highest, and where access to library buildings is more affordable and convenient. Library Outreach Services provide a cost-effective and more consistent level of service to communities with high levels of need across Somerset.
- Our digital offer has limitations, but it plays a key role in enabling convenient access to some aspects of library service delivery for a large and growing number of people. Digital library services make our modern Libraries Service more comprehensive, efficient and convenient for those with the means to go online.

## 5. Providing reasonable access

*"I feel that the blanket statement of "maintain reasonable access to library services for a reasonable majority of the population" ... is rather a stock phrase and appears meaningless."*

Staff consultation response

5.1. Case law<sup>11</sup> is clear that the duty to provide a comprehensive library service does not mean that everyone should live close to a library, and that decisions about how to provide library services must recognise the constraints on council resources.

*"The key is reasonable ability to access the service by all residents of the County. This means that distances and time taken to reach a library must be reasonable and any particular problems, whether physical disabilities, or created by age or family considerations, must be capable of being met."*<sup>12</sup>

5.2. This section considers the key question of what is 'reasonable' access in the context of the feedback we have received in the consultation period, Somerset's geography, the needs of customers (including specific groups), and the constraints on resources. We hope to keep as many library buildings open as possible through Community Library Partnerships, and we will support these partnerships wherever possible. However, as the authority responsible for statutory library services, we cannot rely on other parties to provide a statutory level of service. We need to consider 'reasonable access' in terms of access to library buildings, mobile library, outreach and digital services that are fully funded by the county council.

5.3. There is no standard definition of 'reasonable access' applying to public library services in England. The department for transport uses threshold definitions of between 15 and 30 minutes travel time to measure 'reasonable' access to a range of services<sup>13</sup>, and these give some guidance to what proportion of people are able to travel (by different modes of transport) to access different types of services within certain 'threshold' timescales. The Welsh Assembly Government maintains a range of public library standards for Wales<sup>14</sup>, one of which sets expected standards for access for urban and rural areas. A similar standard existed for England but was discontinued. Both of these approaches recognise that only a certain percentage of people within a rural area will be able to access services within certain timescales. Having reviewed these approaches, we do not feel that they can be applied to Somerset's geography given the current financial constraints.

5.4. As explained in section 4 above, based on the evidence available and feedback from the consultation, we feel it is likely that if library buildings close:

- some users of these libraries will transfer to the mobile, outreach or digital services being delivered in their localities; however

<sup>11</sup> In particular, see Justice Ousley in *Bailey v London Borough of Brent* [2011].

<sup>12</sup> Quote taken from Justice Collins judgment in *Simon Draper v. Lincolnshire County Council* [2014].

<sup>13</sup> Taken from Somerset Intelligence website ([www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/accessibility](http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/accessibility)).

<sup>14</sup> See <https://gov.wales/topics/culture-tourism-sport/museums-archives-libraries/libraries/public-library-standards/?lang=en>

- the majority of users are likely to either travel to use alternative libraries, or cease using library services altogether.

*“the [bus timetable] means staying ... for at least an hour and a half ... the total time is over two and a half hours. Be honest, unless they had another reason to go to Wincanton, no-one is going to do this, even though in principle possible”*

5.5. Some people may stop using library services because it becomes less convenient for them to do so. The proposals we have developed aim as far as possible to maintain convenient access to library buildings for as much of the population as possible (including through our support to Community Library Partnerships). However, ‘reasonable access’ will be determined by the feasibility, rather than the convenience, of access. We also have a duty to meet, as far as possible, the particular requirements of vulnerable groups - children and families, older people and disabled people in particular. Many respondents to the consultation highlighted the length and inconvenience of public transport routes as a concern. For some people, if Community Library Partnerships cannot be established, it will become more difficult to access library buildings. Whilst this is very regrettable, in the current financial situation our principle focus will be to ensure that people are able to access library services in an affordable way (which may still be more difficult and inconvenient than is currently the case).

5.6. Our statutory duty applies to people residing in Somerset, and to people who work or study in Somerset (but who may reside in other local authority areas). It follows that our consideration of ‘reasonable access’ should also take account of this group of customers, and the analysis below takes account of centres of major employment and further education colleges. Our digital offer, in conjunction with the Home Library Service and the good neighbour scheme, enables us to offer access to people who cannot leave their own home. Data from a recent customer survey indicates that the majority of customers access the library service by walking, or by using their own transport (car or bicycle):

Table 5.6: How people access library services<sup>15</sup>:

Mode of transport	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Own transport	517	42%
Public Transport	50	4%
Walk	656	54%

5.7. Feedback from the consultation period shows that being able to walk to a library building is important to many people.

*“my wife’s greatest pleasure is, when she is well enough, being taken down to the library in her wheelchair”*

*“Having the library on my doorstep enables me to borrow books without having to trek into Taunton town centre”*

<sup>15</sup> Data is from our most recent customer satisfaction survey (June/July 2017), specifically answers to the question “How to you get to the library?”

5.8. Public consultation and our equalities impact assessment has identified significant impacts that would arise for some groups if they could no longer walk to the library:

- families with young children living in single car households, where the sole car is used for commuting and children are reliant on being able to walk or travel in a pushchair to the library.
- People on lower incomes, who cannot afford the costs of car transport or public transport, and who may need regular public internet access.
- Older children who may no longer be able to walk independently to the library.
- People who find it difficult to combine shopping and library trips because they cannot carry both shopping and books back on public transport, or to where a car is parked, because of limited physical strength.

5.9. We consider the first two of these impacts to be especially significant, and likely to affect many people. Good, sustainable and affordable access by either public transport or cycling can go some way to mitigating impacts for people on lower incomes, and to a lesser extent, families with younger children who want to access library buildings. However, we feel it is important to maintain access to library buildings in communities where there are significant numbers of people who are able to walk to the library, and where alternative library buildings are not within cycling distance and / or cannot be accessed by affordable, sustainable public transport.

5.10. Different people will consider different distances to be convenient 'walking distances'; we have used a standard definition of 2 miles<sup>16</sup>. Currently, we estimate that 69% of Somerset's population lives within a 2-mile walking distance of their nearest library building. Many people in the built-up areas of Yeovil, Taunton and Burnham and Highbridge, and to a lesser extent in the Watchet / Williton area, are currently able to walk to two library buildings. With the more limited resources we have available, we believe that providing library outreach services in sub-urban areas will be a more effective and consistent form of provision than maintaining additional library buildings.

5.11. Maintaining the 19 library buildings set out in Part B below could reduce this proportion to an estimated 58%. By retaining 6 of the libraries originally proposed for potential change, we estimate that over 10% of Somerset's population will maintain the ability to walk to the library<sup>17</sup>. These 6 communities all have significant populations (each over 6,000 people) living within walking distance of the current library, but do not have cycling access to alternative libraries, and public transport links are more expensive.

5.12. Considering the resources we have available and the feedback from the consultation, we do consider access to be 'reasonable' for larger populations where library buildings are not within walking distance, but where driving distances are short, and there are good and affordable public transport links to other libraries. Cycling distances have also been considered to analyse the impact of changes proposed on users with lower incomes. This means that, to reduce costs, we have

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<sup>16</sup> For an explanation of this definition of 'walking distance', see the background paper *Data analysis - methodology and data sources*.

<sup>17</sup> If Wellington Library, Cheddar Library, Ilminster Library, Martock Library, Crewkerne Library and Shepton Mallet Library were closed in addition to the changes proposed in this delivery plan for 15 library buildings, we estimate that only 48% of Somerset's population would be able to walk to a library building.



had to review areas of the county where we currently provide two library buildings serving communities that can access both libraries by affordable public transport. These 'paired' communities include Street and Glastonbury, Watchet and Williton, North Petherton and Bridgwater, and Somerton and Langport. The specific issues and conclusions are set out in Part B below.

5.13. We understand that this approach will have an adverse impact on many people who can currently walk to a library building. This impact has been analysed in the Equalities Impact Assessment and will be mitigated as far as possible, either through Community Library Partnerships, where these can be established, or through the provision of mobile library services, outreach services and our digital offer.

5.14. Nonetheless, decision makers must have regard to the fact that this approach could have an adverse impact on some users if we are unable to establish Community Library Partnerships.

*"[it is] awkward to catch a bus with a baby buggy and/or several children in tow"*

*"It is clear that no one proposing the closure of [my local] library ever travels by bus, foot or by bicycle. I invite you to make the trip and then judge for yourself how easy cheap and safe it is."*

*I am 70, have used a library since I learnt to read at 3 and a half ... Can't use the bus due to mobility and strength issues. Can walk to [my local] Library with a stick or shopping trolley... Need more coverage of mobile library if [my local library] closes."*

5.15. In smaller towns, villages and rural areas many more users currently drive to library buildings, and so fewer people would be affected by no longer being able to walk to the library. Car ownership is high in rural Somerset, with around half of households having at least two vehicles. However, distances between library buildings are often longer - normally too far for cycling - and public transport links are often less convenient and / or more expensive. These factors have a significant impact for households in rural Somerset who have access to one car/van or no vehicles at all. Table 5.15 shows that, amongst older people, women are most likely to be affected by a lack of car ownership and shows how car ownership amongst older people differs between rural and urban areas.

Table 5.15: Older people in Somerset with no car, by Rural-Urban classification<sup>18</sup>

	Female 65+ No car	Male 65+ No car	% Female 65+ No car	% Male 65+ No car
Rural village and dispersed	2,679	903	15.2%	5.6%
Rural town and fringe	3,547	1,070	28.0%	10.4%
Urban city and town	9,886	3,389	35.0%	15.3%

<sup>18</sup> Source: Census 2011, see <http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/rural-transport/>

- 5.16. Many people in Somerset currently use their own vehicle to access the library, often as part of a trip into town with a wider purpose. Driving times into town centres are extremely variable and depend on traffic conditions which can vary significantly. The time taken for parking and walking within town centres is also variable and has not been included within our calculations. We have revised our estimates on driving times because of feedback from the consultation (for further details, see the background paper *Data analysis - methodology and data sources*), but any estimation technique on driving times carries a degree of inaccuracy. Nonetheless, driving remains a very important means of access in Somerset, and accordingly we have considered what driving times should be judged as 'reasonable'.
- 5.17. Having considered feedback from the consultation exercise and the resources available, we have sought to design a library network which we estimate will enable access to a library building by car (in normal traffic conditions) in around 20 minutes or less for the vast majority of Somerset users. In parts of Exmoor and some of the deeper rural areas driving times to the nearest library building may be higher, but we have sought to achieve a maximum drive time of 30 minutes for even the most remote communities. This principle has had an important impact on the design of our proposed library network in Western Somerset and is one of the key factors why we believe maintaining a library building in Dulverton is necessary to deliver our statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive service. It is also an important factor in the decision to retain library buildings in rural 'hub' communities such as Wincanton, Crewkerne and Cheddar.
- 5.18. We received a very significant amount of negative feedback about public transport during the consultation - particularly considering the relatively small proportion of users who currently use public transport to get to the library. Many respondents were concerned that travel by bus to alternative library buildings was inconvenient, unreliable and involved lengthy journeys. Many also highlighted concerns about the sustainability of public transport networks. The cost of public transport was also raised as a concern by many and has been identified as a significant issue affecting people on low incomes, children and young people, and parents of young children.

*"Not everyone has a car to get to Sherborne/Yeovil libraries. Buses have/are being cut and the fares are expensive plus time-consuming for a round trip."*

*"Yeovil library is over 8 miles away and for those without a car it entails a bus journey of over 30 minutes and a significant walk from the bus depot to the library meaning it would take all morning or afternoon to change books!"*

*"It's all very well saying there's a bus service ... but, have you looked at the connections from villages ...? It's up to a 2 hour wait. Also, I cycle from my village, I couldn't cycle to Yeovil."*

*"What seemed very clear to me, as someone who is dependent on buses for transport, was the lack of understanding of the effects of recent cuts on the feasibility of using the service .... A standard round trip to Taunton now takes 4 hours rather than the previous 3. There is no chance of any schoolchild being able to use the library after school"*

5.19. Travel times by public transport are often long in Somerset; sometimes far longer than the 20 or 30 minutes noted for driving times in paragraph 5.17. Timetables are often infrequent, and fares are usually over £5 for inter-urban transport for people who do not hold a concessionary travel pass. For these reasons, many respondents felt it was unreasonable to expect anyone to travel by public transport to access alternative library buildings.

5.20. Whilst we share these concerns, taking into account the analysis from our equalities impact assessment and the significant financial challenges we face, we believe that public transport does offer a reasonable form of access in some circumstances. In particular, where fewer people are impacted by change, alternative forms of library provision such as digital, mobile and outreach services are likely to be more effective in providing a comprehensive service and meeting local needs. This will depend on specific local circumstances, but as a guiding principle we consider that public transport offers a reasonable form of access to library buildings (alongside complementary alternative forms of library service delivery) in the following circumstances:

- for smaller communities (normally less than 3000 people), where fewer people rely on public transport because populations are smaller.
- For mid-sized communities (ranging between 3000 and 6000 people), but only where levels of need are lower, and the majority of households have access to a car or van, and where public transport links are likely to be sustainable.
- As noted in paragraph 5.12 above, for larger populations where there are good, more affordable and sustainable public transport links to other libraries, and where distances to alternative libraries are relatively short.

5.21. The proposals set out in Part B below are consistent with these principles, and have been developed to try to ensure, as far as possible, that library buildings are accessible from surrounding areas by public transport networks.

5.22. We acknowledge, and decision makers must have regard to, the practical difficulties of using public transport in Somerset and the impact that this position has on certain groups - particularly those who are not eligible for a concessionary pass, for whom the cost of public transport is significant. We will try to ensure that people are able to walk to their local library building wherever possible, by supporting Community Library Partnerships. For communities where public transport access is less likely to be sustainable, or where public transport journeys are especially lengthy, support will include financial contributions.

5.23. Community Transport and demand-responsive transport networks are used by far fewer people in Somerset but provide much needed access for some people without cars, particularly those with reduced mobility and those in rural areas not served by scheduled public transport. Community and demand-responsive transport tends to provide access to one or two larger communities from a wide range of surrounding villages. Planning library provision around these community transport hubs is an important way in which we can meet the needs of elderly and disabled people and mitigate the impact of changes to library provision for those living in rural areas.

5.24. Finally, evidence from our catchment mapping exercise, and feedback obtained during the consultation highlighted some local patterns of travel behaviour which

have been considered in the development of proposals. Usage analysis within catchments indicates that in some communities, many library service users use libraries in nearby larger settlements. For example, within the catchment of Bishop's Lydeard library, the majority of borrowers use the library in Taunton town centre. Feedback from the consultation highlighted how some communities were more self-contained and tended to access services locally; whereas in other communities people tended to travel to other towns to access services. Sometimes these travel patterns are counter-intuitive. For example, we received some feedback during the community engagement exercise that people living in South Petherton were more likely to travel to Crewkerne to access services than to nearby Martock. Information from retail catchment studies has provided some useful insights into travel behaviour in different parts of Somerset and has been used alongside feedback from the consultation in developing proposals. These local factors are more subjective but are important in maximising the effectiveness of the statutory network.

*"Technically I fall in the Frome catchment area, Bruton is my nearest library but Wells is the one I pop into from time to time simply because Wells is where I now have to go to the bank (all closer branches having been closed). Your concept of catchment areas doesn't work in the context of small villages with limited transport. Our issues are where can I park, at what cost and what else is there"*

**Key points - section 5:**

- There is no standard definition of ‘reasonable access’ to library buildings, and we have to consider what is affordable given current resource constraints. We have given a lot of consideration to how we can maximise access to a comprehensive service, whilst meeting the needs of particular groups and delivering the cost reduction required.
- We acknowledge that access to library buildings will be more difficult for many people if we are unable to establish Community Library Partnerships in the areas where we are proposing changes. However, our focus has been to ensure that it is possible for people to access a library building, even if this may involve longer, less convenient journeys for some people.
- Feedback from the consultation and our analysis of equalities impacts shows that being able to walk to the library is very important. We have sought to design a network that maximises the number of people who can walk to the library, whilst delivering the level of cost reduction required and meeting local needs effectively. This principle has been an important factor in the decision to retain 6 libraries in some of our larger communities, where access to alternative libraries by public transport is more expensive.
- We believe that providing Library Outreach Services, rather than library buildings, is a more cost-effective way of delivering library services in sub-urban areas, where in some parts of the county people are currently able to walk to two library buildings.
- There are also areas of the county where two larger communities are within relatively easy and affordable reach of one another, and we consider that in these areas reasonable access can be provided to both communities through one library building.
- We consider that the following ‘design principles’ will maintain reasonable access for smaller communities and rural areas:
  - Driving distances to communities with library buildings should generally be no more than 20 minutes (up to 30 in deeper rural areas). This is a significant factor in ensuring the service is ‘comprehensive’ in the context of Somerset’s geography.
  - Library buildings should be located in communities which are at the centre of public and community transport networks, in order to maximise access for people who are unable to use a car.
  - We have taken local feedback about travel patterns into account.
- The changes proposed will have an adverse impact for many people who can currently walk to a library building if we are unable to establish Community Library Partnerships, however we believe they are sufficient to meet the council’s legal duties in either scenario.

## 6. Meeting local needs

- 6.1. Appendix 2 to the covering report sets out a comprehensive assessment of needs, for the county as a whole and for each area. We have a statutory duty to consider how library service provision meets the needs of Somerset's population, and the County Council's strategy for the Libraries Service also sets an objective for the service to be targeted towards meeting needs and improving outcomes. The proposals set out in this delivery plan have been developed on the basis of these needs. The approach we have taken to assessing need (including consideration of feedback from the consultation exercise) is well documented in Appendix 2 and is not repeated here.
- 6.2. We have also carried out regular assessments of the impact of proposals on specific groups, prior to the proposals. Appendix 4 to the covering report sets out a full impact assessment of the proposals set out in this delivery plan. The assessments build on earlier impact assessments which have analysed the potential impact of a wider range of proposals, both prior to the consultation exercise and afterwards, having incorporated learning from the consultation. These impact assessments have been used to shape our judgments on how service provision should be designed to best meet the needs of specific groups.
- 6.3. Part B of the plan gives details of how the needs assessment and equalities impact assessments have been factored into the design of library services at a local level.
- 6.4. As well as considering local needs at community and area level, we have also considered how the service should be positioned to meet the needs of Somerset's population as a whole. The proposal to retain 7 of the 22 library buildings we consulted on (at an estimated ongoing cost to the council of £185,000 per year) has been shaped, in part, by the overall consideration of needs. As with the needs assessment, our consideration of equalities issues has also been a factor in judgments about how resources are allocated.

*"although the data acquisition and methodology for needs analysis has much improved ... it is still unclear exactly how those libraries scheduled for closure have been selected. In particular, the weighting given to each of the ... factors and how an overall ranking has been decided is not clear"*

Friends of Somerset Libraries

- 6.5. In developing proposals, we have had to balance different considerations - cost and affordability, need, impact and access. Service provision has been designed by weighing up these different factors and coming to the best judgment in the local circumstances. We do not consider one of these factors to have overriding importance. We therefore have not attempted to apply weighting to different factors. Where we feel it is most appropriate, access considerations have been put ahead of local deprivation factors. In other locations we have focussed on designing service provision around need, with a consequential negative impact on access for other, less deprived communities. We have tried to set out the rationale and logic for these relative judgements in Part B below.

## 7. Best value considerations

7.1. Some of our smaller libraries, though much-loved, are little used. Other libraries are very well-used by their communities and provide excellent value for money. As a best value authority, we must consider overall value, including economic, environmental and social value when reviewing service provision. This section explains how we have addressed this requirement in the development of proposals.

7.2. Many excellent points were raised about economic, social and (to a lesser extent) environmental value during the consultation exercise, including:

- Libraries have a social value which goes well beyond the traditional lending of book stock. Many respondents highlighted the cultural value of library buildings, the value they brought to communities, and the value libraries provided to individuals. This was a very significant theme running through consultation feedback, highlighted by a large number of respondents.

*“A library is a source of lifelong learning. The earlier in life children are introduced to books and the more they read, the better their life chances.”*

*“my message to the County Council is this: close this library and you shut down what - for many - is a lifeline providing vital human contact. Close this library and you will directly and negatively impact upon the mental health and physical wellbeing of hundreds of local elderly people”*

*“the Library is an important part of the social fabric ... it not only fulfils its role as a Library, but is central to local events such as Somerset Day ... footfall that morning was 515. The library garden was alive with dance displays by local school children, music... with an enthusiastic audience of families and visitors”*

*“Lots of people love the library because all the books take them to other worlds. It feels really magical.”*

[Child at primary school focus group]

- The economic value that library buildings can bring through their contribution to the sustainability of town centre economies came through very strongly in consultation feedback.

*“The consultation seems to view libraries in isolation from the rest of the built environment ... The Mary Portas Report into sustainable High Streets is quite clear about the role libraries and other services have in helping town centres flourish ... losing the library from the Town Centre will be another nail in the Town Street/Market place area. ... the positioning of services that [the council] manage is one of the few areas where they can clearly make a difference.”*

- That any local library closures could have an environmental impact, by increasing travel, congestion and pollution, both directly through the displacement of library customers, and indirectly through the effect of library closures on the sustainability of smaller, rural town centres.

*“The loss of Wiveliscombe library could ... lead to a decline in the town’s role as a rural centre ... this will undermine attempts to promote sustainable growth in rural communities and require more travel to reach services in Taunton or Wellington ... with increases in road usage, CO2 emissions, congestion and pollution”*

- That the council should consider the impact of ‘displacement’ costs in overall value judgments about the service - within the Libraries Service, the council and the wider economy.
  - Some respondents highlighted that the closure of one library would simply transfer costs to another library, which would become busier and need more staff. Therefore, savings would be lower than assumed.
  - A small number of respondents highlighted a potential link between library closures and increased concessionary fare re-imburement costs for the council, because concessionary pass holders would make more frequent journeys to access alternative libraries.
  - Other respondents felt that the saving made by the council in closing a library would lead to a higher level of cost to people in communities, who would have to spend more on travel to access library services.
- That by preventing loneliness, enabling digital inclusion, supporting job seekers and business start-ups, improving health and well-being and supporting community cohesion, library services make a valuable economic contribution to the wider public sector.

*“The saving achieved by the reduction or closure may be more than offset by the new cost to SCC, TDBC, the healthcare system and Avon and Somerset Police of compensating for the damage caused”*

7.3. We have considered all of these points carefully; given the strength and depth of consultation feedback on these issues, our conclusions are set out in detail here.

#### ***i. Economic value***

7.4. Economic value has been considered in four different ways.

##### *Value for Money and unit costs*

7.5. Firstly, we have considered the relative economic value of different library buildings to the County Council and the Libraries Service, through the use of unit cost comparisons to establish the relative value for money of different library buildings.



The methodology employed is set out in the background paper *Data Analysis – Methodology and Data Sources* (see section 17 below for further details).

7.6. There are limitations.

- Some library buildings may appear to be more expensive or offer poorer value because of specific local circumstances - high rents or business rates bills, or a challenging location which suffers from lower footfall.
- Reduced opening hours generally cause a reduction in usage, which in turn impacts on value for money.

7.7. Notwithstanding these limitations, we have a statutory duty and a financial imperative to maximise the efficiency and productivity of the Libraries Service, and consideration of value for money (in unit cost terms) has formed part of the judgements made to develop the proposals. We do not consider though, that unit cost comparisons are as important as the consideration of access and relative need for different libraries, and we acknowledge the limitations of the unit cost approach. This being the case, judgments on unit costs have only been used as a secondary factor in the development of proposals, and local circumstances have been taken into account as well as calculated cost figures.

*'Displacement' costs*

7.8. Secondly, as part of the consideration of overall value and cost, we have considered the cost of 'displacing' customers using the Libraries Service and we agree with the view of some consultation respondents who felt that we had underestimated these potential costs in some locations. The savings figures presented to decision makers (see the covering report for further details) have been revised to account for an increase in the cost of providing library services in other ways (whether through alternative library buildings, mobile or outreach services).

7.9. We have not included an analysis of other potential internal displacement costs. We do not agree with the view of some respondents that potential increases to concessionary bus travel cost should be taken into account. We have considered this point and feel that, in general, concessionary travel journeys to visit libraries will be incorporated into trips into town that are already being undertaken for other reasons. There may be some exceptions, but these are unlikely to have a significant impact.

*Wider impact on other public sector costs*

7.10. Thirdly, we have considered the economic value of library services for the wider public sector. Some compelling and well-argued points have been made by a number of respondents to the consultation, highlighting the value of library services as a 'preventative' service which can reduce higher cost interventions by preventing ill-health, crime or unemployment. These points echo those made in various academic

and research papers on this topic<sup>19</sup>, as well as the council's own thinking about the value of its library service<sup>20</sup>.

7.11. On an overarching level, many respondents to the consultation have argued that we should not reduce library services at all, because it will, in the end, cost us more to do so. We have considered this point, and we do not agree for two principle reasons:

- The county council is in a very difficult financial situation which must be addressed in the short and medium term. We have a statutory duty to set a balanced budget each year, and all services will need to play a part in doing this.
- Many of our libraries deliver a great deal of 'preventative' value. But some deliver significantly less than others because our library building network is not as well-aligned to need and demand as it could be. We believe that we will deliver more value by modernising and re-aligning library services.

7.12. At individual library / community level, considerations of wider value are highly relevant. We have not attempted to incorporate financial measurements of loneliness, digital exclusion, school readiness or social cohesion into our analysis because we do not consider these to be sufficiently robust. We have, however, put considerations of need, usage and access at the heart of the development of proposals for change. By designing service provision to effectively meet local needs and ensuring that the majority of people who are likely to benefit most from library services have good access to these services, we hope to maximise the economic value of Somerset Libraries Service to the wider public sector.

*Economic benefit of libraries in town centres*

7.13. Finally, we have considered the role of library buildings in supporting the sustainability of town centres.

7.14. This service delivery plan is concerned with the location of libraries and other library services in different communities, rather than the precise location of a library within a community. Nonetheless, the project team has considered, in the light of concerns raised during the consultation, how far vibrant town centre economies should be considered to be an objective of the Libraries Service, and what account should therefore be taken of town centre economies in the design of the service.

7.15. We have concluded that town centre sustainability should not, in itself, be a direct objective for the Somerset Libraries Service. The economic development outcome that the libraries service is commissioned to deliver centres on the role of the service in providing information, technology and support in the pre-start up and start-up phase of business development, rather than the more incidental economic impacts of library footfall. We believe that, in order to design an efficient libraries service, library buildings should be positioned primarily on the basis of how they best provide support

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, a June 2015 paper by the not-for-profit Social Finance organisation "*Investing to Tackle Loneliness*" which develops a cost-benefit analysis for the value of preventing chronic loneliness. ([https://www.socialfinance.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/investing\\_to\\_tackle\\_loneliness.pdf](https://www.socialfinance.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/investing_to_tackle_loneliness.pdf)).

<sup>20</sup> See the *Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework* background paper, referenced in Section 17 below.

to nascent businesses and budding entrepreneurs, rather than established retail businesses.

7.16. However, where local needs, access and affordability considerations justify the case for maintaining a library building, the library service would work with local economic development partners (principally district and town/parish councils) to support local regeneration and economic development objectives. The location of library buildings within a community will always be dependent on affordability and value for money considerations.

### **ii. Social value**

7.17. We consider that the social value of Somerset Libraries Service is encapsulated by our outcomes framework (see the background paper *Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework*, referenced in section 17 below), which has been at the heart of the re-design process. As noted in section 2 above, feedback from the consultation shows that the value of library services for children and young people, health and wellbeing, digital inclusion and the role of libraries as community hubs is well understood and appreciated. We did not specifically consult on our outcomes framework, but this feedback gives us confidence in continuing to use it to guide service delivery.

7.18. The outcomes framework was used to develop the methodology and approach for the needs assessment<sup>21</sup>, which in turn has been used to develop the proposals set out in Part B of this plan. The further considerations of accessibility and value for money discussed elsewhere in the delivery plan have also embedded regard for social value into the development of proposals.

### **iii. Environmental value**

7.19. Having considered the points raised in the consultation exercise about potential increases in congestion and pollution arising from possible library closures, we do not consider environmental value to be a significant factor in our design thinking, relative to other factors. We feel that library buildings do not, in themselves, deliver a material and intrinsic environmental value. However, we do agree that library closures could have an effect on travel behaviour that, in turn, could have an environmental impact. These considerations have been considered as part of the analysis of wider impacts of the proposals, set out in the 'other implications' section of the covering report.

7.20. Best value legislation also requires the council to carry out a consultation exercise, and to have regard to the views expressed. The consultation exercise has played a very significant role in shaping proposals:

- views gathered through the consultation exercise have shaped our approach to assessing need, access, and value.
- We have drawn heavily on evidence from the consultation throughout the assessments of need, access and equalities impact set out in Appendix 2, this document and Appendix 4 respectively.

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<sup>21</sup> See the background paper *Data Analysis – Methodology and Data Sources* referenced in section 13 of the Needs Assessment (which forms Appendix 2 to the covering report).

- The overall response has been a key factor in the council's judgment about the allocation of resources to its Libraries Service. The level of response and the overriding messages about the value of library buildings have influenced the decision to reduce costs by an amount that is lower than the total savings established prior to the consultation.
- Many alternative suggestions on how savings could be achieved were made through the consultation exercise; some of these will be taken forward for individual libraries.
- The project team, and the cabinet lead, have considered the feedback from the consultation, and reflected on a wide range of messages (at overall service level, and for individual communities/libraries).

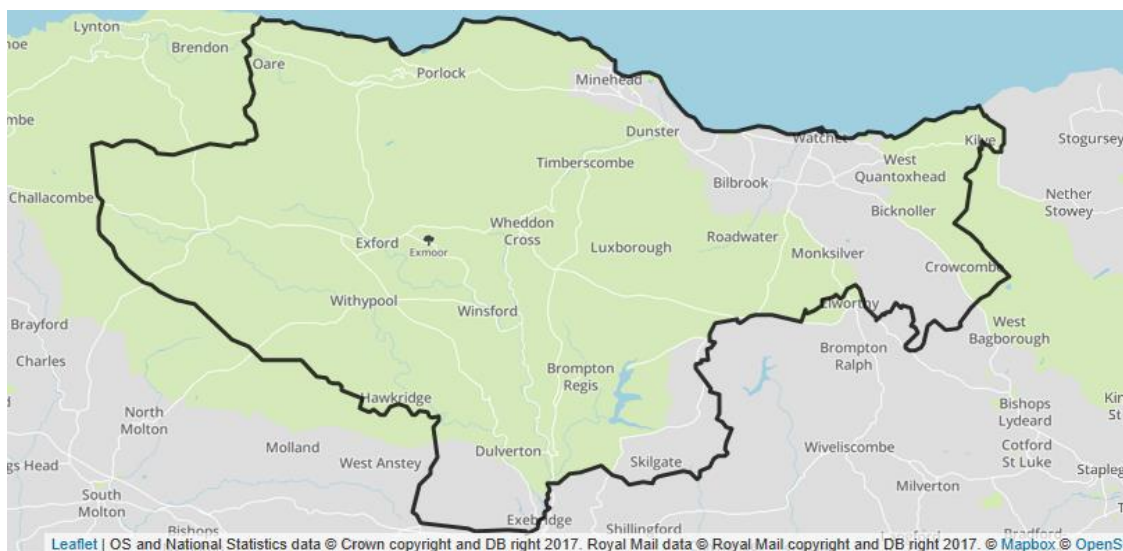
**Key points - sections 6 and 7:**

- Many respondents to the public consultation highlighted the wider social and economic value of libraries. We have considered this wider value through our assessments of need, value for money and access.
- Comprehensive needs and impact assessments have been undertaken, and proposals have been developed to address needs and minimise impact as far as possible within resource constraints.
- Our needs assessment and consideration of social & economic value has been a significant factor in the decision to retain a number of library buildings around the county. But continuing to fund all of our library buildings is not an affordable, sustainable option.
- In areas where we can no longer afford to maintain two or more libraries, and where reasonable access can be provided by a single library, we have used judgments on relative need and relative value to design the most cost-effective way of providing library services.
- Following feedback from the consultation, we have done further work to ensure that we have sufficient resources to manage the impact of potential library closures on other nearby libraries.
- We have considered feedback on the role of library buildings in supporting town centre economies. We have concluded that, given current financial constraints, this should not be a significant factor in planning library service provision. However (subject to affordability and value for money considerations) we will work with local economic development partners to try to situate library buildings in locations which support local economic regeneration objectives.
- We have considered the potential environmental impact of library closures and our view is that this is limited.
- The consultation exercise has played a very significant role in shaping proposals.

## PART B: Detailed area proposals and rationales

### 8. Area 1: Western Somerset

8.1. The map below shows the Western Somerset area boundary. The area includes most of West Somerset District, including Exmoor, the coast and hinterland from Porlock to Kilve, and the rural areas to the north of the Brendon Hills and north-west of the Quantock Hills.



8.2. There is very little evidence that people travel in to the area for work or study from other local authority areas. Other than a relatively small amount of 6<sup>th</sup> form provision near Minehead there are no major centres of full-time further education. There could be some travel to work from the Bampton area of Devon into Dulverton, but we have been unable to obtain any firm evidence of this and so it is considered to be negligible. We do not consider the provision of access for people whose place of work or who are undergoing full-time education within area 1 to be a material issue.

8.3. Minehead is the dominant convenience goods shopping destination in Western Somerset (including Exmoor), attracting shoppers from the whole area<sup>22</sup>. Minehead library catchment covers the majority of the area but does not extend to the southern and western parts of Exmoor around Dulverton, Simonsbath, Withypool and Brompton Regis (where Dulverton Library has the dominant catchment). Usage of Minehead library is low in the eastern part of the area around Watchet and Williton, where Williton Library has the dominant catchment. The far west of Exmoor around Simonsbath has a very small number of library users who use the mobile library only; this part of Somerset is closer to South Molton and Lynton/Lynmouth in Devon and many residents will look to these towns for local services.

8.4. Minehead also has high levels of need; it is the second most deprived community in the area on most measures and has the highest levels of adult social care intervention. Minehead library has the highest usage by some margin, and Minehead

<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk/Planning---Building/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base-Information/Economic-Evidence/Town-and-Village-Centres-Report>.

town has the largest population of all urban areas, with significant growth predicted. Public and Community Transport networks serve Minehead well; most community transport routes are orientated towards Minehead, and three public transport services currently provide access to the town from Dulverton, Porlock and communities to the east along the A39 / A358 corridor to Taunton. Table 8.3 below shows that Minehead provides walking access to more people in the area than all other libraries combined.

Table 8.3: Estimated number of people within walking distance of libraries:

Library	Estimated number of people within walking distance (2 miles)	% of Area 1 population
Minehead Library	11,812	36.9%
Porlock Library	1,408	4.4%
Watchet Library	5,938	18.5%
Williton Library	7,105	22.2%
Watchet Library or Williton Library	7,379	23.0%
Dulverton Library	1,281	4.0%

8.5. It follows that maintaining a principal library in Minehead will be effective in meeting local needs and providing reasonable access for a large proportion of the area.

8.6. However, we believe that to meet local needs and provide reasonable access across the whole of area 1 it will be necessary to maintain more than one library building in Area 1. Our needs assessment has identified that the area as a whole has some of the most significant deprivation in Somerset across a range of measures, and access to alternative library buildings within and outside the area is relatively poor. To design a Libraries Service that is consistent with our strategy and delivers effectively against our outcomes framework we need to focus resources in this area, to the extent that this is affordable.

8.7. We believe it is necessary to maintain a library building in the Watchet / Williton area because:

- There are significant levels of need in this area. The combined population of these two communities is large, and significant growth is forecast. There are high levels of income and employment deprivation. The level of unemployment and other needs came across strongly in the consultation response from users of Watchet library in particular. Social isolation and digital exclusion risks are high. Usage of Williton library is relatively significant.
- Many people in this area currently live within walking distance of a library building.
- Driving times from Watchet, Williton and some of the surrounding rural communities are between 20 - 30 minutes to alternative library buildings in Minehead, Taunton and Bridgwater.
- Although there is a good sustainable bus service providing links to Minehead and Taunton, the cost of travelling to either of these communities is significant.
- Car ownership levels are relatively low, especially in the urban areas (44% of households in parts of Williton have no vehicle).

8.8. Although the catchment population of Dulverton library is very low compared to most other libraries, we believe it is necessary to maintain a library building in the Dulverton area because:

- Access to alternative library buildings is poor. Driving times from Dulverton, Brushford and Withypool to Minehead are around 40 minutes or more; driving times to Wellington and Taunton are longer. Whilst public transport routes to Taunton and Minehead exist, these are long (around 90 minutes to Taunton), and fares are expensive. There is some concern about the sustainability of these transport connections, given the pressures on local authority budgets (both routes are subsidised and not considered commercially sustainable).
- Feedback from the consultation highlighted the isolation of Dulverton and the surrounding area, and the poor transport links. Dulverton retains a large proportion of retail spend locally for a community of its size, and (as illustrated in table 8.7 below), Dulverton library retains a very high proportion of library use within its catchment, compared to other predominantly rural library catchments, where usage of alternative libraries is higher. There are limitations to this analysis, but it suggests that library users in Dulverton library catchment rely more heavily on Dulverton library.

Table 8.7: usage of Dulverton library within Dulverton catchment, compared to other smaller rural library catchment usage<sup>23</sup>

Library catchment	Use of catchment library		Use of libraries outside catchment <sup>24</sup>		Ratio - catchment library: non-catchment library use	
	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users
<b>Dulverton</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>70:10</b>	<b>90:10</b>
Milborne Port	250	40	50	30	50:10	13:10
Porlock	210	40	130	20	16:10	20:10
Nether Stowey	340	50	240	50	14:10	10:10
Castle Cary	480	50	370	70	13:10	7:10
Wiveliscombe	540	70	460	110	12:10	6:10
Bruton	230	20	210	30	11:10	7:10
South Petherton	360	60	410	60	9:10	10:10
Bishops Lydeard	220	30	310	80	7:10	4:10

<sup>23</sup> User figures are for the library catchment, not for the community. There are limitations to this methodology - library catchments all have different characteristics and usage of alternative libraries can be influenced by the 'reach' of a library as well as by access / isolation issues. For further information, contact the report author or see the background paper *Data Analysis – Methodology and Data Sources*, referenced in section 17. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 for data protection reasons.

<sup>24</sup> Excludes use of mobile library. Figures for aggregate usage of alternative libraries have been reduced by 10% where more than one alternative library is used, to account for estimated duplicate usage (i.e. active borrowers who use more than one alternative library).

*“The town of Dulverton has an importance far greater than its size by being the only centre for services of any kind for southern Exmoor, and is itself very isolated by distance from services elsewhere”*

- Community transport and car scheme services provides access to Dulverton from parts of Exmoor and Brushford, but there is no access by community transport from the Dulverton / Brushford area to other parts of Somerset. Car ownership in some parts of Dulverton town, and in nearby Brushford, is relatively low (according to 2011 census returns, 38% of households in one part of Dulverton do not have a vehicle).
- Dulverton library is relatively inexpensive to run and provides very good value for money. Given the isolation of the community, providing a sufficient level of mobile library service would be relatively expensive. In pure financial terms, the business case for reducing funding is marginal.
- Although the population of Dulverton and the surrounding area is low, there is good evidence from the public consultation that there is a reasonable level of need in Dulverton library catchment. A notably large proportion of users of Dulverton Library took part in the consultation exercise, and overwhelmingly these respondents felt the library should be maintained.
- There is likely to be a significant impact on groups with protected characteristics if Dulverton library were to close. The access issues noted above make it difficult to mitigate these impacts effectively.

8.9. We will seek to maintain the existing Community Library Partnership at Porlock, by ending the current pilot arrangement and developing an agreement for the longer term. However, if this is not possible to achieve, we will provide reasonable access to library services for people living in Porlock and the surrounding rural catchment through a combination of access to the library building at Minehead, a mobile library service and the digital library service. This is because:

- The population of Porlock and the surrounding catchment is low. The library is well used by a core group of library members and provides good value for money, but overall usage levels are low. Evidence from the community engagement exercise and retail studies suggests that the majority of people living in Porlock are likely to make regular trips to Minehead to access other services.
- Driving times between Porlock and Minehead are relatively short (around 15 minutes); driving times from the rural districts to the west and south of Porlock are longer (around 25 minutes), but these districts are very sparsely populated. It should be noted, though, that levels of car ownership in Porlock are relatively low (in one part of Porlock village, 30% of households had no car or van at the time of the 2011 census).
- There is currently a bus service linking Porlock to Minehead with a relatively short (20 minute) journey time, and community transport is available for people who find it more difficult to access this bus service. However, the bus service is subsidised by a group of local parish councils, and is not considered to be commercially sustainable.
- There is some evidence of need in Porlock and the surrounding area, especially evidence of health deprivation and self-identified disability. The population has a



high proportion of older people. However, overall needs are lower in Porlock than in many other communities in Western Somerset.

- 8.10. Feedback from the consultation exercise from users of Porlock library was limited - the lowest level of responses received by 'main library used'. We feel that this reflects the fact that the current Community Library Partnership model is working reasonably well and, generally, meets the needs of residents. There is some evidence from the consultation that users think the current arrangement works well.

*“Porlock library seems to very successfully fulfil a role as a hub for the village rather than simply being a book-lending facility. I am fairly new to the area, and I have been impressed with the extent to which the library building is used for the benefit of both local residents and visitors to Porlock. The volunteers who run the library give the impression of being welcoming and knowledgeable.”*

- 8.11. We are confident that the current arrangement can be maintained, and put onto a longer term, more sustainable footing. In recognition of the value for money provided through the current arrangement, and the potential difficulty of accessing alternative libraries (in particular, if the current bus service ceased to operate), we will provide ongoing financial support to the Community Library Partnership if it can be maintained.

- 8.12. However, if this is not possible, we believe that in the context of the resources available to the council, mobile library and digital provision will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for the relatively small number of people in Porlock who are likely to find it difficult to travel to the library in Minehead. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people - in particular, children, disabled people, older people, parents with babies, people in rural areas and those on lower incomes. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Porlock, and believe that one stop, once per month, would be sufficient. However, we would engage with community representatives to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

- 8.13. Although driving times from parts of Exmoor to Dulverton or Minehead are long, and public transport access is limited, we believe that needs of rural parts of Area 1 can be served effectively by a combination of:

- Access by car, community transport or (for communities along the A39 / A358 corridor) public transport to library buildings in Minehead, Dulverton and the Watchet / Williton area. Community transport networks are centred on Minehead and Dulverton and provide some means of accessing these libraries for those in surrounding areas who cannot use alternative forms of transport. Public bus number 28 runs from Minehead to Watchet and Williton, and on towards Taunton, and is a relatively frequent and sustainable commercial bus route. It provides access for communities along the A39, and to a lesser extent, some communities to the south east of Williton. Car ownership rates in most of the rural districts are high.
- Digital library services, for those who have internet access.

- The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy, with an additional stop in Porlock if required.

**Library service provision in the Watchet / Williton area:**

8.14. As noted in paragraph 8.7, we believe it is important to maintain a library building in the Watchet / Williton area. However, with the level of resources available, we do not believe it is affordable or cost-effective to maintain two library buildings in the Watchet / Williton area. The two buildings are just over 2 miles apart, and are linked by a reasonable bus service, which is relatively inexpensive. Some people living in the urban areas of Watchet and Williton live within walking distance of both library buildings, and the majority of people in these settlements live within cycling distance of both libraries. Access by car between the two communities is convenient, with parking available a very short distance from both libraries.

8.15. We believe that the needs of these communities, and the surrounding rural areas, will be best served by maintaining a library building in Williton, rather than Watchet. This is because:

- Williton library is positioned better to serve a wider catchment than Watchet library. Evidence from retail studies and our catchment analysis indicates that more people look to Williton than Watchet to access convenience and food shopping, as well as library services. Fig. 8.15 and Table 8.15 below set out the evidence from our catchment mapping exercise.

Fig. 8.15a: Borrowing usage - Williton

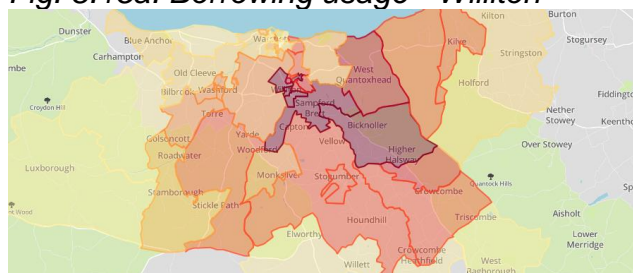


Fig. 8.15b: Borrowing usage - Watchet



Key to map shading (note that green shading represents Exmoor National Park and Quantock AONB):

Low Medium High

Table 8.15 - usage counts in the Watchet and Williton area<sup>25</sup>

Library	Watchet library catchment		Watchet urban area		Williton library catchment	
	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users
Williton	450	100	170	40	1030	210
Watchet	380	90	320	70	360	90
Minehead	140	50	Not measured		310	90
Taunton	80	50			210	70
Mobile Library	20	0			60	0
Other libraries	0	0			80	10

<sup>25</sup> Catchment user counts are rounded to the nearest 10 for data protection reasons.

- Usage of Watchet library is concentrated in the urban area of Watchet, whereas usage of Williton library extends across a wide catchment. There is a considerable overlap between the two library catchments, even in the urban area of Watchet, where a significant number of users make use of Williton library.
- Usage of Watchet library is much lower than usage of Williton library, across all measures of usage. For further details, see Table 4.10 in Appendix 2 to the covering report.
- Although needs are undoubtedly very high in Watchet (higher, in general, than Williton), we believe that these needs can be met effectively through a combination of mobile library and library outreach service provision, coupled with good access to Williton library for people living in Watchet, should this be necessary. Paragraphs 8.17 - 8.19 below set out further detail on this point.

8.16. Feedback in the consultation and community engagement exercises from users of Watchet library and community and stakeholder groups indicated that users of Watchet library, and local stakeholder groups, felt that the current library should be retained and that a mobile and outreach model would be insufficient. The high level of need in Watchet was highlighted as a reason to maintain a library building, and there is strong evidence - both from the consultation and statistical analysis - that a number of elderly and disabled people are likely to find it more difficult to access an alternative library in Williton.

*“Watchet has a considerable number of elderly people many of whom may no longer be able to drive ... we provide a vital service in a deprived area”*

*Staff consultation response*

8.17. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library building in Watchet and, in recognition of the high level of need in this community, we will provide ongoing financial support to a Community Library Partnership if it can be established. However, if this is not possible, we believe that in the context of the resources available to the council, a combination of mobile library provision, digital library services and library outreach services would be a reasonable solution. The combination of services would provide access and meet local needs for people in Watchet who are likely to find it more difficult to travel to the library in Williton. In forming this judgment, we have considered the high needs of the community, feedback from the consultation exercise, an assessment of the potential impact of closure and the resources available to the council.

8.18. As noted in table 8.15, a significant proportion of users living in the Watchet urban area already make use of Williton Library. Access between Watchet and Williton is relatively convenient:

- Some parts of Watchet are within walking distance of Williton library. Walking routes exist between the southern part of Watchet and Williton.
- Most of Watchet urban area is within cycling distance of Williton library.
- A frequent bus service connects Watchet and Williton - journey times are around 6 minutes and the service currently runs with a 30 minute frequency. Bus fares are generally inexpensive, and free travel on this route is available for older

people and other people who are entitled to a concessionary pass because of a disability.

- Driving times are very short from all parts of Watchet urban area to Williton, and many residents of Watchet community will drive close by to the library at Williton relatively frequently. There is convenient parking adjacent to the library at Williton.

8.19. However, there are likely users who are less able to use Williton Library, in particular, the relatively high number of people who do not have access to a car, and / or who are unable to walk or cycle because of mobility difficulties. Families with young children and those on lower incomes may find it too expensive to use public transport. If necessary, library services would be provided to these groups through a combination of mobile and outreach service delivery.

- We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Watchet, and believe that a number of stops, with a frequency of around 3 times per month, would be sufficient. However, we would engage with community representatives to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.
- Targeted library outreach services will support the delivery of commissioned outcomes and go some way to meeting the high levels of need in Watchet urban area. In particular, outreach services provided locally for under 5s would help to mitigate the access difficulties faced by young children and new parents and go some way to meeting the need to support school readiness identified through the consultation and needs assessment. Outreach services supporting health and wellbeing for older adults would help to mitigate any access difficulties faced by this group and go some way to meeting the need to address social isolation risks and health deprivation identified through the consultation and needs assessment. Further details on these services are set out in the background paper *Library Outreach Services*, referenced in section 17 below.
- Digital library services would be available to users with internet access.

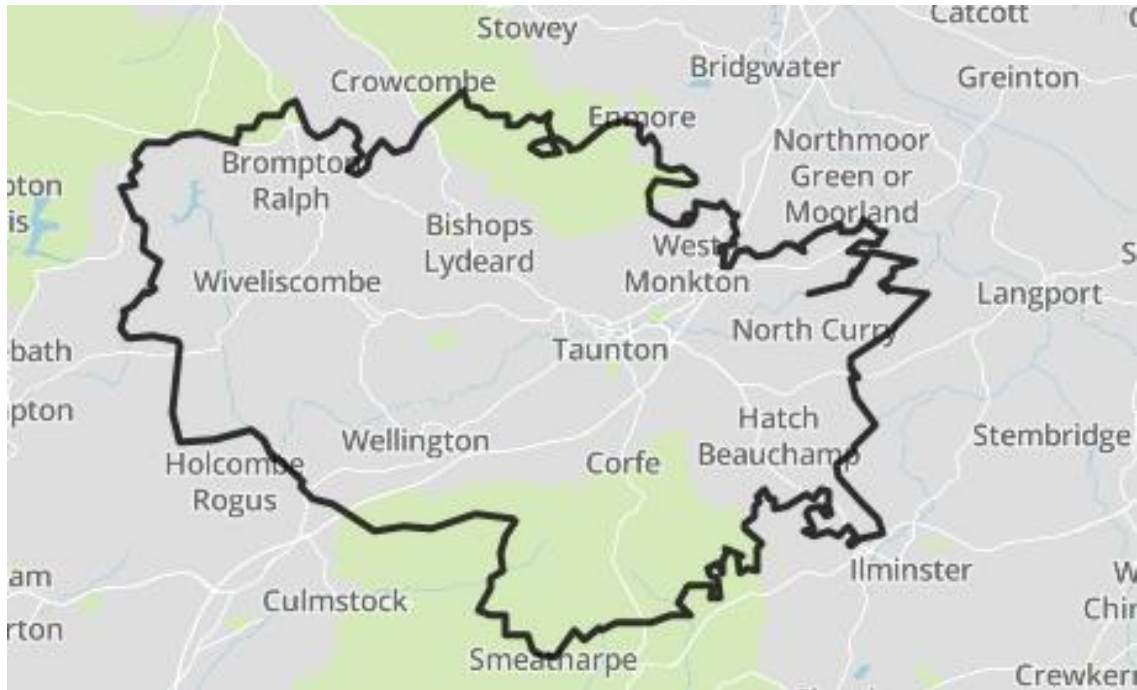
8.20. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, children and new parents, older people, disabled people, and those on lower incomes.

**Proposals - Area 1:**

- The council's libraries will be retained in Minehead, Dulverton and Williton.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Watchet. If we are unable to do this, we would provide Library Outreach Services and a Mobile Library Service to this community, to complement access to Williton Library.
- We will seek to maintain the existing Community Library Partnership at Porlock, by ending the current pilot arrangement and developing an agreement for the longer term. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community, to complement access to Minehead Library.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

## 9. Area 2: Taunton, Wellington and Surrounding Area

9.1. The map below shows the boundary of this area. Area 2 includes much of the Taunton Deane District Council area, from the Devon border across to the Quantock Hills to the north-west of Taunton (including the Somerset portion of the Blackdown Hills area), and the western part of the Somerset Levels extending to Stoke St Gregory in the east and towards Ilminster in the south-east.



9.2. A number of people are likely to travel in to the area for work or study from other local authority areas, particularly Devon. Taunton has a number of further education establishments (including a sixth form college and the University Centre Somerset / Bridgwater and Taunton college campus). Both Wellington and Taunton are employment centres with good access to the M5; many people travel to work in these centres from Devon and from North Somerset. The provision of access for people whose place of work is within Somerset, or who are undergoing full-time education in Somerset, has been considered below in respect of these two communities.

9.3. Taunton is the dominant shopping destination in the area, attracting shoppers from the whole area and well beyond<sup>26</sup>. Wellington retains a proportion of shoppers within its town centre and food store, but at the time of the most recent survey, 39% of food shopping within the Wellington retail catchment took place at Taunton based stores.

9.4. Taunton Town Centre library catchment covers the whole area with the exception of a small rural area around Brompton Ralph in the Brendon Hills (within the catchment of Wiveliscombe Library). Usage of Taunton town centre library is lower in the western part of the area around Wellington and Wiveliscombe, where Wellington Library has the dominant catchment. Wiveliscombe library is the dominant catchment in Wiveliscombe and rural areas to the north and west.

<sup>26</sup> Please see the background paper *Summary of recent retail studies*, referenced in section 17 below.

9.5. Taunton has the highest levels of need in Area 2. It has by far the biggest population and is surrounded by a densely populated urban fringe which contains a further significant population in Creech St Michael, Cotford St. Luke, Ruishton and a number of other populous villages. Taunton is likely to see significant housing and population growth, has a large population of workers (including some commuting from outside Somerset), and students at two further education centres. The town has high levels of deprivation, particularly in Priorswood to the north and Halcon to the north-east of the town centre, but also (to a lesser extent) elsewhere in the town and urban fringe areas. Taunton town centre library has the highest usage by some margin of all libraries in Somerset (the latest available benchmarking data shows that it is the second highest used library for borrowing in the South West). As the county town of Somerset, public and community transport networks serve Taunton well. Community transport routes are orientated towards Taunton town centre and the hospital at Musgrove Park, from all rural parts of the area, Wellington, Wiveliscombe and Bishops Lydeard.

9.6. Public transport routes radiate out from Taunton town centre to:

- Wellington, including Rockwell Green and Tonedale, to the south west, and less sustainable public transport routes serving communities in the Blackdown Hills and the Upper Culm valley in Devon to the south;
- Wiveliscombe and Dulverton (via Norton Fitzwarren, Cotford St. Luke and Milverton) to the west;
- Williton and Bishops Lydeard to the north west, as well as less sustainable public transport routes serving communities in the Quantock Hills to the north;
- North Petherton and Bridgwater to the north (via the large urban fringe area of Monkton Heathfield);
- Street, Othery, Burrowbridge and Creech St. Michael to the north east, as well as less sustainable public transport routes serving the larger villages of North Curry and Stoke St. Gregory
- Somerton, Langport and Thornfalcon / Ruishton to the east;
- Ilminster and Chard to the south-east.

All of the main communities in Area 2 are linked to Taunton Town Centre by public transport.

9.7. Within Taunton, a town bus network complements the inter-urban public bus network by linking Priorswood and Lyngford in the north of Taunton, Bishops Hull and Comeytrowe in the west, and Holway in the south-east to the town centre. The majority of the built-up area of Taunton lies within walking distance (2 miles) of the town centre, and a number of cycling routes extend to the communities on the urban fringe. As can be seen from Table 9.7 overleaf, Taunton Town Centre library serves the largest population within walking distance in Area 2; over 50% of the population of the area live within walking distance of Taunton town centre.

9.8. It follows that maintaining a principal library in Taunton town centre will be effective in meeting local needs and providing reasonable access for a large proportion of the area, particularly because of the relatively good public transport links.

Table 9.7: Estimated number of people within walking distance of libraries:

Library	Estimated number of people within walking distance (2 miles)	% of Area 2 population
Bishops Lydeard Library	3,589	3.1%
Priorswood Library	38,827	33.6%
Taunton Town Centre Library	58,619	50.7%
Priorswood Library or Taunton Town Centre Library	64,249	55.6%
Wellington Library	15,511	13.4%
Wiveliscombe Library	2,901	2.5%

9.9. We believe that to meet local needs and provide reasonable access it will also be necessary to maintain a library building in Wellington, because:

- Although access to Taunton town centre is reasonable, in particular with good and frequent public transport links, Taunton is not within reasonable cycling distance, and the cost of public transport is high (£6.60 for an adult return).
- A significant number of people in Wellington currently live within walking distance of a library building, and the cost of public transport to Taunton would have an impact on a relatively large number of people. Public computer access is well used, and there are a number of events, including events for parents and young children who may not be able to travel to Taunton. Having considered consultation feedback, we do not feel that a combination of access to Taunton library, Library Outreach Services, Digital Library Services and Mobile Library Services would meet the needs of Wellington residents.
- The population of Wellington is relatively large, and significant housing growth is forecast. Wellington is a 'Tier 1' town, with a number of employment sites, close to a motorway junction. Although there is a strong draw to nearby Taunton, Wellington town centre provides a good range of services, with 2 supermarkets and other amenities drawing in shoppers from the surrounding rural areas. Usage of Wellington library is high.
- Although need is not as high as in parts of Taunton, there are significant levels of need in some neighbourhoods in Wellington. There are high levels of education deprivation and social isolation in some parts of the town, as well as some income and employment deprivation. Income deprivation and usage of the public computer access, and the cost of reaching Taunton by public transport, was highlighted in a number of consultation responses.
- Wellington is the closest alternative library to Wiveliscombe and provides reasonably convenient access for people with cars living in the rural areas between Wellington and Wiveliscombe, and along the Devon border, many of which would otherwise be over the target 20-minute driving time from Taunton library. There are some community transport services serving Wellington town centre from these villages.



*"Wellington is the only [library] I can realistically visit with my 2 year old."*

*"Public transport to Taunton is expensive, particularly for the many on low incomes who use the computers etc in their search for work. Parking costs are much higher than in Wellington and I am sure there are elderly clients who are happy to drive into Wellington but would not choose to drive into Taunton with congestion."*

9.10. We consider that the needs of Wellington can be met through a single library building, in a central location. We do not consider that additional outreach services are necessary to meet local needs - these may be provided but would not form part of the statutory service.

**Library service provision in the rural parts of Area 2:**

9.11. Many of the rural parts of Area 2 have good access to Taunton and Wellington town centres. Paragraph 9.6 above details the public transport routes into Taunton town centre and illustrates how the urban fringe communities around Taunton are well served by public transport into Taunton town centre.

9.12. The south eastern part of Area 2 (the Blackdown Hills, Staple Fitzpaine, Corfe, Hatch Beauchamp, North Curry, Stoke St. Gregory and areas in between) mainly lie within a relatively short drive of Taunton, although traffic congestion can considerably lengthen driving times at peak times. Some of the deeper rural areas in the Blackdown Hills have driving times into Taunton or Wellington of 20-25 minutes, but these districts are sparsely populated. The rural areas to the north of Taunton (in the Quantock Hills) also have reasonable access by car into Taunton town centre - some people in this area currently use Priorswood library but are able to access the town centre library with a small additional cost of parking and a slightly longer drive. Public transport is limited and may not be sustainable in all these areas. However, car ownership is high and demand responsive (Slinky) transport is available. All public and demand responsive routes lead to Taunton town centre.

9.13. The area around Bishops Lydeard (including Halse, Lydeard St. Lawrence and part of the Quantock Hills) generally looks to Taunton for services, although some small convenience shopping is available in Bishops Lydeard. The main settlements (Cotford St. Luke and Bishops Lydeard) are linked to Taunton town centre by public bus services and good road connections.

9.14. We will seek to maintain a library building in Bishops Lydeard through a Community Library Partnership. However, if this is not possible to achieve, we will provide reasonable access to library services for people living in Bishops Lydeard and the surrounding rural catchment through a combination of access to the library buildings at Taunton and Williton, a mobile library service, and digital library services. This is because:

## APPENDIX 1: LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

- Table 9.12 below shows how library service users in the catchment for Bishops Lydeard library are more likely to use Taunton library than Bishops Lydeard library. This is very unusual for a rural library catchment, and indicates that for many, access to Taunton town centre is relatively convenient.
- Usage levels for Bishops Lydeard library are very low, reflecting a relatively small population. Even though the library costs relatively little to operate, it does not provide good value for money - unit costs are high (the second highest cost per visit, the highest cost per hour of public computer network usage, and fourth highest cost per borrower in 2017/18).
- Evidence from the community engagement exercise and retail studies suggests that the majority of people living in Bishops Lydeard are likely to make regular trips to Taunton to access other services. Many people in Bishops Lydeard are also likely to work in Taunton.
- Driving times between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton are relatively short (around 15 minutes). Driving times from the rural districts to the north and west of Bishops Lydeard are longer (around 20-25 minutes to either Taunton or Williton), but these districts are quite sparsely populated, and the majority of users do not use Bishops Lydeard library. Levels of car ownership in Bishops Lydeard are relatively high (the percentage of households with no car or van at the time of the 2011 census ranges between 5% and 17% in different parts of the village).
- There is currently a bus service linking Bishops Lydeard to Taunton and Williton with a reasonably short (24 minute) journey time, and community transport is available for people who find it more difficult to access this bus service. The bus service is considered to be commercially sustainable.
- There is some evidence of need in Bishops Lydeard, and there are pockets of income and employment deprivation, as well as some evidence of digital exclusion risk in parts of the catchment. Analysis of usage data suggests that usage of the public computer access facility in Bishop's Lydeard library is very low, and the majority of users in the catchment use these facilities at Taunton library. Overall, local needs are lower in Bishops Lydeard than in many other communities in Area 2.

Table 9.14: usage of libraries within Bishops Lydeard catchment<sup>27</sup>

Library	Borrowers	PN Users	WiFi users
Taunton	320	80	20
Bishops Lydeard	220	30	10
Mobile library	10	0	0
Williton	10	0	0
Wiveliscombe	10	0	0
Wellington	0	0	0

9.15. Feedback from the consultation exercise from users of Bishops Lydeard library was limited, reflecting the low level of usage. Respondents did not support the mobile library proposal, but, having considered this feedback, we have concluded that mobile library provision, in combination with access to Taunton and Williton libraries and the digital library service, would be effective in meeting local needs. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have

<sup>27</sup> Catchment user counts are rounded to the nearest 10.

an adverse impact on some people; in particular, younger children, older people, disabled people, parents with babies, and those on lower incomes. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Bishops Lydeard, and believe that one stop, once per month, would be sufficient. Subject to discussions with Bishops Lydeard Primary School, mobile library provision could include a further stop outside the school to mitigate the impact of potential library closure on primary school children. We would engage with community representatives to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

9.16. The south-western part of Area 2, along the Devon border from the Blackdown Hills around to Ashbrittle, including the villages of Langford Budville, West Buckland, Milverton, Nynehead, Bathealton and Chelston, lies within the rural catchment of Wellington library. Customers in the north west of this part of Area 2 around Milverton use a mixture of Taunton, Wellington and Wiveliscombe libraries, whilst to the south usage is more concentrated on Wellington library. Although public transport in the area is limited, demand responsive and community transport provides access into Wellington and Taunton for the relatively low number of people who do not have access to vehicles. Driving times into Wellington are reasonable for most of this area, with the exception of the remote district to the west of Stawley and Ashbrittle, which is 25-30 minutes' drive from Wellington.

9.17. The north-western part of Area 2 (including the small town of Wiveliscombe, the villages of Fitzhead and Langley Marsh, and the sparsely populated rural area around Chipstable, Waterrow, Huish Champflower, Clatworthy and Brompton Ralph) is more distant from Taunton and Wellington. In some parts of this area (e.g. around Fitzhead) usage of Taunton and Wellington libraries is higher than usage of Wiveliscombe library, but in Wiveliscombe town and the districts to the west and north, Wiveliscombe library has the predominant catchment.

9.18. There was a significant response to the public consultation from users of Wiveliscombe library, and from stakeholder groups in Wiveliscombe and surrounding rural areas. Feedback in the consultation and community engagement exercises indicated that users of Wiveliscombe library, and local stakeholder groups, felt that the current library should be retained and that a mobile library would be insufficient. Access was cited as a significant issue for the town and the rural surroundings. There is a bus service between Wiveliscombe and Taunton, but journey times are lengthy, the timetable is inconvenient, and the cost of the bus fare for people without concessionary bus passes is significant (£6.60 return for adults, £4.40 return for children aged 5-15).

*“Wiveliscombe is a small but thriving town. The nearest towns are at least 20 minutes away, and so even for those people with their own transport our own services are much preferable, for those without their own transport essential, particularly with the new much reduced bus timetable.”*

*“please, decision makers, do not convince yourself that the 10% of households who do not have access to a car at all, and those who do not have access to a car because it is use by a partner, can hop on a bus to go to the library.”*

*“Wellington library is too far for us to go - (we live in Clatworthy) - so we would struggle to access the library service”*

9.19. Consultation responses also noted that Wiveliscombe library is well-used and provides good value for money, and that a mobile library service would not provide the range of events, activities and opportunities for social interaction that were available at the library. Our needs assessment has highlighted that there are small pockets of income and employment deprivation in Wiveliscombe town, although usage of the public computer access is low. Loneliness and social isolation are important needs being met by the library at present, and the rural areas to the north and west have a relatively high risk of digital exclusion. Notwithstanding these important considerations, needs in Wiveliscombe town and the surrounding area are in general lower than needs in the urban parts of Area 2.

9.20. We have carefully considered these views and have considered the number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in Wiveliscombe and how the needs of this population can be reasonably met. As part of this assessment we have reviewed usage in the urban and rural parts of Wiveliscombe library catchment, and levels of car ownership in Wiveliscombe town. Table 9.20 below shows that in the urban area of Wiveliscombe, people are more likely to use Wiveliscombe library than other libraries, but that there is still a reasonably high usage of alternative libraries (particularly for public computer access). Across the 7 statistical output areas which comprise the built-up area of Wiveliscombe, average household car ownership is 84% (however, only 36% of households have more than one car). The vast majority of people living in the rural districts are likely to access library buildings by car (although community and public transport does serve the area).

Table 9.20 - usage counts in Wiveliscombe catchment<sup>28</sup>

Library	Wiveliscombe library catchment		Wiveliscombe urban area	
	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users
Wiveliscombe	540	70	340	50
Taunton	310	90	110	50
Wellington	170	30	50	10
Bishops Lydeard	20	0	n/a	
Mobile Library	10	0		
Williton	10	0		

9.21. As noted in section 3 above, taking into account the analysis from our equalities impact assessment and the significant financial challenges we face, we believe that inter-urban public transport does offer a reasonable form of access where populations are smaller. It is acknowledged that journey times the bus timetable and fares make access more difficult, but our view is that the majority of people living in

<sup>28</sup> Catchment user counts are rounded to the nearest 10 for data protection reasons.

Wiveliscombe and the areas to the west and north would be able to access alternative library buildings in Taunton, Wellington, Williton or Dulverton. We have concluded that:

- many people in Wiveliscombe and the surrounding rural areas will regularly access Wellington or Taunton for other services, particularly for main food shopping.
- Although journey times are lengthy, for those who have concessionary passes, service 25 offers a free link from Wiveliscombe and some other communities in the area to Taunton town centre.
- Those living in deeper rural areas are likely to be dependent on household vehicles or community car schemes. Again, journey times are longer, but Wellington library (and in some areas, Williton and Dulverton libraries) would be accessible within a reasonable driving time, taking into account the sparsity of the population in the areas to the north and west of Wiveliscombe.
- Household car ownership is relatively high in Wiveliscombe, although there are a significant number of households that do not have access to more than one vehicle. In practice therefore, whilst some people will qualify for a concessionary bus pass, others (particularly those without access to a car during the working week) won't qualify and could be affected.

9.22. Our impact assessment process has highlighted, and decision makers must note, that there are people who may not have access to a vehicle, who would find it much more difficult to access alternative library buildings. These include children (particularly primary school children visiting after school), those on low incomes, and families / new parents with babies. Decision makers must carefully consider that some adverse impacts could be significant for some individuals. However, considering the overall level of resources available, our view is that the needs of this group could reasonably be met by a combination of mobile library services and digital library services.

9.23. In forming these judgements, we have considered the views of consultation respondents in the Wiveliscombe area. We have also considered the needs and access issues of other people living in larger villages / small towns in Somerset - for example, Coleford and Ilchester - that do not currently have library buildings. We have also taken into account the resources available to the council to deliver library services across the county.

9.24. Wiveliscombe library is well-used, particularly for borrowing. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Wiveliscombe. We believe that a frequency of around 3 times per month (with extended stop times), would be sufficient to meet the needs of those who cannot access alternative libraries. Subject to discussions with Wiveliscombe Primary School, mobile library provision could include a further stop outside the school to mitigate, to some extent, the impact of potential library closure on primary school children. Our initial assessment indicates that there could be a need for new (monthly) mobile library stops at Huish Champflower, Brompton Ralph, and Milverton. We would engage with community representatives in Wiveliscombe and these communities to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

9.25. Needs currently being met by the library - in particular, addressing social isolation risks, activities for children and (relatively small) usage of public internet access to address digital exclusion - would not be met locally by mobile library and digital library services. Our impact assessment process has identified some actions to mitigate these issues. However, decision makers must carefully consider the fact that some impacts are difficult to mitigate; in particular, the loss of public computer network access. We consider that, notwithstanding this important point, needs could be met reasonably, as there is low usage of the public computer access terminals in Wiveliscombe. Also, a significant number of public computer access users living in the Wiveliscombe catchment area currently use the service in Taunton or Wellington libraries.

9.26. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library building in Wiveliscombe and, in recognition of the difficulty of accessing alternative libraries for this community, we will provide ongoing financial support to a Community Library Partnership if it can be established. However, if this is not possible, our view is that a combination of mobile library provision and digital library services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs.

9.27. As noted above, we acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, children and parents of babies, older people, disabled people, older children, those living in rural areas, and those on lower incomes. The access difficulties (especially the high cost of transport) mean that those on lower incomes who do not have access to a car are particularly likely to be adversely impacted. This could include children and primary carers who do not have access to a car in the day. There could also be an impact on the sustainability of the town centre economy in Wiveliscombe, with potential knock-on environmental impacts.

9.28. To summarise, although driving times from some of the outlying parts of Area 2 are long, and public transport access is limited, we believe that the needs of rural parts of Area 2 can be served effectively by a combination of:

- access by car, community transport or public transport to library buildings in Taunton and Wellington. Car ownership rates in most of the rural districts are high.
- Digital library services, for those who have internet access.
- The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy, with additional stops if required in Wiveliscombe, Huish Champflower, Brompton Ralph, Milverton and Bishops Lydeard, including (subject to the agreement of the relevant schools) stops at the primary schools at Bishops Lydeard and Wiveliscombe.

**Library service provision in the urban area of Taunton:**

9.29. As noted in paragraph 9.8, we believe it is important to maintain a library building in Taunton town centre.

9.30. Taunton is a large town which is currently served by two library buildings in the town centre and in Priorswood, in the north of Taunton. There was a significant

response from users of Priorswood library in the consultation. The high needs of the area were highlighted by many respondents and these are documented in Appendix 2 to the covering report. Some respondents also highlighted access issues, particularly for vulnerable people, noting that there were a lot of disabled people in the area, and a high prevalence of people with mental health conditions.

*“Bus fares cost £3.60 for one adult return journey into town. This is a significant sum as a proportion of the disposable income of many working age residents.”*

*“I suffer mobility problems and I know that its not just myself that finds it difficult to get in to town to visit the main library.”*

*“It’s a really long walk into town and the bus is expensive.”*

*“There is of course the main library in town, but for many people, especially the elderly and those on a very low income, it’s not so easily accessible.”*

9.31 We have carefully considered these views and have also considered the number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in north Taunton and how the needs of this population can be reasonably met. Priorswood library primarily serves the urban area of north Taunton, but many users also travel by car from surrounding parts of Taunton and the rural fringe areas to the north and north-east, to take advantage of free parking and more convenient access. For some residents in the north of Taunton it is a long walk to the town centre (for the far northern outskirts the town centre is over 2 miles distant) and travelling into the town centre is more difficult for elderly and disabled people. However, having considered the feedback from the consultation exercise we believe that Taunton town centre library provides good access to people in the urban area of north Taunton, and other users of Priorswood library living in rural fringe areas. This is because:

- bus services serve the area well (and also serve the nearby communities of Monkton Heathfield, Henlade, Creech St. Michael, Staplegrove and Kingston St. Mary), and the majority of the urban area of north Taunton is within walking distance of the town centre.
- Cycling is relatively convenient for the whole of the urban area, for those who can cycle.
- For older people and people with disabilities, low-floor buses operate regularly into the town centre. Bus travel is free for people who are eligible for the concessionary travel scheme.

9.32. Priorswood is an area of high need, and the library is well-used (particularly for activities and public computer access). The high level of need in Priorswood was highlighted as a reason to maintain a library building by many consultation respondents, and there is strong evidence - both from the consultation and statistical analysis - that a number of disabled people are likely to find it more difficult to use the alternative library in Taunton town centre because they find it uncomfortable to do so, as a result of a mental health condition. The library is used by Selworthy

school, a large special school who have noted the importance of the facility in supporting their curriculum.

- 9.33. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a full library service from the current site in Priorswood. Having carefully considered evidence presented in consultation responses, and the high needs of this community, we will provide ongoing financial support to a Community Library Partnership if it can be established. However, if this is not possible, we believe that a combination of library outreach provision (from the current site) and digital library services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for people in north Taunton who are likely to find it more difficult to travel to the library in the town centre. In forming this judgment, we have considered the needs of the community, feedback from the consultation exercise, an assessment of the potential impact of closure and the resources available to the council.
- 9.34. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, children and parents of babies, older people, disabled people (especially those with mental health conditions or learning disabilities), and those on lower incomes.
- 9.35. To mitigate the impact on digitally excluded people, particularly those who find it difficult to use the town centre library, public computer access would form part of the library outreach provision delivered at the current site. However, this would be available on a more limited basis than at present.
- 9.36. The Halcon area of Taunton has similarly high needs to the Priorswood / Lyngford area around Priorswood library. As part of our strategy to re-focus library provision on high-needs areas, where we can make the most difference to outcomes, we will deliver Library Outreach Services in the Halcon area of Taunton, as well as from the current site of Priorswood Library (which is being retained by the council for use as a family support hub). In both locations, Library Outreach Services would be designed to meet local needs; in particular, the needs of pre-school children, new parents, older children and the digitally excluded.



**Summary proposals:**

- The Council's libraries will be retained in Taunton town centre and Wellington.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Priorswood (Taunton). If we are unable to do this, we would provide Library Outreach Services to this community at the current site, including some provision of public computer access.
- We will provide Library Outreach Services in the Halcon area of Taunton.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Bishops Lydeard. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Wiveliscombe. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community and explore the demand for Mobile Library Services in some of the surrounding villages.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

## 10. Area 3: Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea and Surrounding Area

10.1. The map below shows the boundary of this area. Area 3 includes much of the Sedgemoor District Council area, from the North Somerset border down the M5 corridor to the Quantock Hills and the boundary with Area 2. It also includes the eastern part of the West Somerset District Council area. The area is focused along the A38/M5 corridor but extends beyond to the west of the River Parrett, and eastwards covering the western part of the Polden Hills and parts of the Somerset levels.



10.2. A number of people are likely to travel in to the area for work or study from other local authority areas, particularly North Somerset. Bridgwater has a major further education establishment, with a further campus in Cannington. Bridgwater is also a significant employment centre with good access to the M5; many people travel to work in Bridgwater from outside Somerset. The Hinkley Point C construction project is likely to draw an increasing number of workers into the area over the medium term. The provision of access for people whose place of work is within Somerset, or who are undergoing full-time education in Somerset, has been considered below in respect of Bridgwater.

10.3. Bridgwater is the dominant shopping destination in the south of the area, attracting shoppers from Cannington, Nether Stowey and the rural areas around these communities, and the rural fringe of Bridgwater from North Petherton across to Westonzoyland and up to Puriton / Woolavington<sup>29</sup>. Burnham-on-Sea retains a proportion of shoppers within its town centre and food stores and attracts shoppers from across the Burnham-on-Sea / Highbridge / Berrow built-up-area and the rural surrounds. Many shoppers in this part of Somerset look to Weston Super Mare for services. Taunton draws some shoppers from the southern part of Area 3. Highbridge retains 55% of localised convenience shopping, largely through a local

<sup>29</sup> Please see the background paper *Summary of recent retail studies*, referenced in section 17 below.

food store. North Petherton, Nether Stowey, Westonzoyland and settlements in the rural/urban ‘fringe’ around Bridgwater retain less localised convenience shopping (these communities have no large food stores).

10.4. Bridgwater library catchment covers the southern part of the area - from Kilve in the west across to Middlezoy and overlaps Nether Stowey library’s catchment entirely. There is a further significant overlap with North Petherton library’s catchment area with the exception of a small rural area around Brompton Ralph in the Brendon Hills (within the catchment of Wiveliscombe Library). Usage of Bridgwater library is lower in the western part of the area around Nether Stowey, where Nether Stowey Library has the dominant catchment, and North Petherton catchment dominates this settlement and the area to the south. Burnham-on-Sea library catchment covers the northern part of the area and is the dominant catchment across this part of Area 3.

**Library service provision in Bridgwater**

10.5. Bridgwater has the highest levels of need in Area 3. The town has by far the biggest population and is surrounded by a densely populated urban fringe which contains a further significant population in Cannington, North Petherton, Woolavington, Puriton and Westonzoyland. Bridgwater is likely to see significant housing and population growth and has a large and growing population of workers (including some commuting from outside Somerset), notably those working on the Hinkley Point C development. The town has high levels of deprivation, particularly in Sydenham to the east, Westover ward to the south west of the town centre, and Hamp in the south of the town, but also elsewhere. The Bridgwater library catchment has the highest average levels of deprivation of the 4 biggest libraries in Somerset, below the Somerset average on most measures of deprivation. Table 10.5 shows that Bridgwater library has the highest population within walking distance and has the highest levels of usage across all measures.

*Table 10.5: Estimated number of people within walking distance of libraries:*

<b>Library</b>	<b>Estimated number of people within walking distance (2 miles)</b>	<b>% of Area 2 population</b>
Bridgwater Library	45,176	44%
North Petherton Library	7,065	7%
Bridgwater Library <i>or</i> North Petherton Library	50,441	49%
Burnham-on-Sea Library	20,378	20%
Highbridge Library	17,062	17%
Burnham-on-Sea Library <i>or</i> Highbridge Library	23,262	23%
Nether Stowey Library	1,789	2%

10.6. Community and demand-responsive transport routes are orientated towards Bridgwater town centre in the south of Area 3. Public transport routes run into Bridgwater from Cannington, North Petherton, Middlezoy and Westonzoyland, Woolavington, Puriton and villages in the Polden Hills, and communities along the

## APPENDIX 1: LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

A38 between Bridgwater and Highbridge. A less sustainable and infrequent daily service links Nether Stowey to Bridgwater town centre.

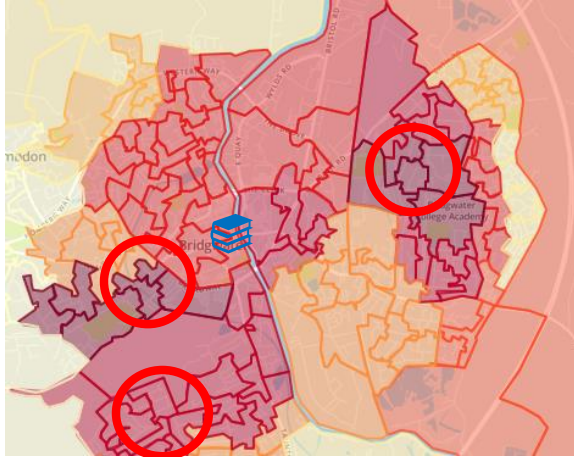
10.7. Within Bridgwater, a town bus network complements the inter-urban public bus network and most parts of Bridgwater town are linked to the town centre by public bus routes. All of the built-up area of Bridgwater lies within walking distance (2 miles) of the Town Centre, and a number of cycling routes extend to the communities on the urban fringe, including North Petherton.

10.8. Maintaining a principal library in Bridgwater town centre will be effective in meeting local needs and provide reasonable access for a large proportion of the southern part of the area, particularly because of the relatively good public transport links.

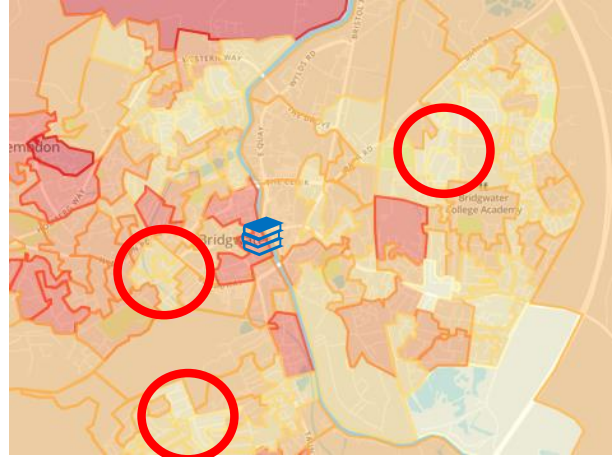
10.9. Figure 10.9 below shows that the Sydenham, Hamp and Westover areas of Bridgwater have a range of high needs and library usage is relatively low in these areas.

*Fig 10.9: Deprivation and library usage (borrowing) in Bridgwater:*

*Fig. 10.9a: Index of multiple deprivation*



*Fig. 10.9b: Borrowers as a % of popln.*



*Key to map shading:*

Low Medium High

 Library building

*(circled areas show areas of higher deprivation with low rates of library borrowing)*

As part of our strategy to re-focus library provision on high needs areas, where we can make the most difference to outcomes, we will deliver Library Outreach Services in the Sydenham/East Bower, Westover and Hamp areas of Bridgwater. In these locations, Library Outreach Services would be designed to meet local needs; in particular, the needs of pre-school children, new parents, older children and the digitally excluded. We will also endeavour to deliver outreach services in other parts of Bridgwater, but this will not form part of our statutory service.

### **Library service provision in the Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge area:**

10.10. We have concluded that to meet local needs and provide reasonable access across the whole of Area 3 it will be necessary to maintain more than one library

building in Area 3. We believe it is necessary to maintain a library building in the Burnham-on-Sea/Highbridge area because:

- There are significant levels of need in this part of Area 3. The combined population of these two communities is large, and significant growth is forecast. There are high levels of income and employment deprivation. The level of unemployment and other needs came across strongly in the consultation response from representatives of Highbridge library in particular, and Highbridge is one of the most deprived parts of Somerset. Social isolation and digital exclusion risks are high in the urban parts of the area, and health deprivation and disability rates are high in Burnham-on-Sea, which has a high proportion of older people. Usage of Burnham-on-Sea library is significant.
- A very significant number of people in this area currently live within walking distance of a library building.
- Driving times from the northern parts of Area 3 and the coastal settlements north of are around 30 minutes to Bridgwater - more in congested traffic conditions. Burnham-on-Sea is an important hub for local services for the coast to the north, and the rural hinterland between Mark
- Although there is a good sustainable bus service providing links to Bridgwater and Weston-Super-Mare, the cost of travelling to either of these communities is significant for those who do not have a concessionary pass.
- Car ownership levels are very low in Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge.
- As noted in paragraphs 10.3 and 10.4, the northern part of Area 3 has relatively self-contained library and retail catchments, centred on Burnham-on-Sea

10.11. However, with the level of resources available, we do not believe it is affordable or cost-effective to maintain two library buildings in the Burnham-on-Sea / Highbridge area. The two buildings are less than 2 miles apart, and are linked by a good bus service, which is relatively inexpensive. Many people living in the urban areas live within walking distance of both library buildings, and the majority of people in these settlements live within cycling distance of both libraries. Access by car between the two communities is convenient. Sedgemoor District Council's 'Role and Function of Settlements' analysis notes that "*[Highbridge] residents are more dependent on the facilities in neighbouring Burnham on Sea for their shopping. Due to the town's very close proximity to and shared facilities with Burnham-on-Sea, it is suggested that Highbridge and Burnham-on-Sea should be treated as a single urban area in terms of the settlement hierarchy.*"<sup>30</sup>

10.12. We believe that the needs of these communities, and the surrounding rural areas, will be best served by maintaining a library building in Burnham-on-Sea, rather than Highbridge. This is because:

- Usage of Highbridge library is very low and is much lower than usage of Burnham-on-Sea library, across all measures of usage. For further details, see Table 6.11 in Appendix 2 to the covering report.
- Burnham-on-Sea library is positioned better to serve a wider catchment than Highbridge library. Evidence from retail studies and our catchment analysis indicates that more people look to Burnham-on-Sea than Highbridge to access convenience and food shopping, as well as library services.

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<sup>30</sup> Role and Function of settlements - 2016 update available from <https://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/1269>

Fig. 10.13 and Table 10.13 below set out the evidence from our catchment mapping exercise.

Fig. 10.13: Borrowing usage - Burnham

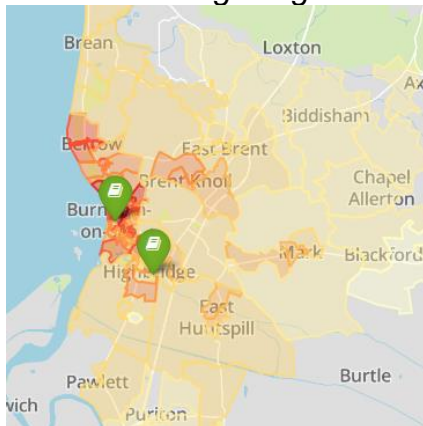
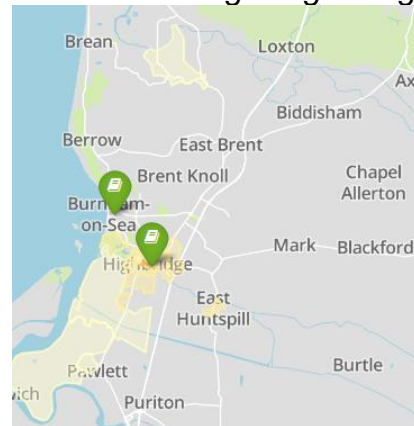


Fig. 10.13: Borrowing usage - Highbridge



Key to map shading:

Low Medium High

Table 10.13 - usage counts in the Burnham and Highbridge area<sup>31</sup>

Library	Burnham-on-Sea library catchment		Highbridge library catchment	
	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users
Burnham-on-Sea	2300	710	310	140
Highbridge	140	70	140	70
Bridgwater	240	80	20	20
Cheddar	60	10	0	0
Mobile Library	30	0	0	0
Other libraries	70	20	0	0

- Usage of Highbridge library is concentrated in the urban area of Highbridge (with slight usage in some rural districts to the south, and some usage in East Huntspill to the east), whereas usage of Burnham-on-Sea library extends across a wide catchment. Burnham library catchment almost wholly overlaps Highbridge library catchment.
- Although needs are undoubtedly very high in Highbridge (higher, in general, than in Burnham-on-Sea), we believe that these needs can be met effectively through Library Outreach Service provision, coupled with good access to Burnham library for people living in Highbridge, should this be necessary. Paragraphs 10.15 and 10.16 below set out further detail on this point.

10.13. Feedback in the consultation and community engagement exercises from users of Highbridge library and community and stakeholder groups indicated that users of Highbridge library, and local stakeholder groups, felt that the current library should be retained and that a Library Outreach delivery model would be insufficient. There were also concerns raised about the proposals for Highbridge library by users of

<sup>31</sup> Catchment user counts are rounded to the nearest 10 for data protection reasons.

Burnham-on-Sea library. The high level of need in Highbridge was highlighted by many as a reason to maintain a library building, but access concerns were raised by some (although only a few) respondents:

*“Up to two thirds of households may not have access to a vehicle during working hours and would have to rely on bus transport instead. The adult return fare from Highbridge to Burnham is £3.60 (more from the Huntspills or Pawlett) and for those on low income this is a major deterrent”*

*“Some of the long term unemployed will struggle particularly with Burnham being the nearest library. It's not a long way off, but during colder seasons it'll be demotivating for those who have to walk or catch a bus there”*

10.14. We have carefully considered these views and have also considered the number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in Highbridge and how the needs of this population can be reasonably met. For some residents in Highbridge it is a long walk to Burnham-on-Sea library (particularly for the new housing areas to the south of the river Brue, which are around 2 miles away). For elderly and disabled people travelling into the town centre is more difficult, and it is too far to walk for many young children. However, having considered the feedback from the consultation exercise, and particularly having considered the pattern of catchment usage, we believe that Burnham-on-Sea library provides good access to people in the urban area of Highbridge, and other users of Highbridge library living in rural fringe areas. This is because:

- Detailed analysis of library usage at statistical output area level indicates that usage of Burnham-on-Sea library is higher than usage of Highbridge library for almost every part of Highbridge<sup>32</sup>. Of the 7 output areas nearest to Highbridge Library, only one has a higher number of users using Highbridge Library over Burnham-on-Sea.
- Reasonably frequent bus services into Burnham-on-Sea serve Highbridge and the communities along the A38 to the south. A less sustainable and less frequent bus service also serves East Huntspill to the east. For older people and people with disabilities, these buses are accessible and are free for concessionary bus pass holders. Community and demand-responsive transport provides further access for those who find it difficult to walk to a bus route.
- Cycling is relatively convenient for the whole of the urban area, for those who are able to cycle. Walking is less convenient, but feasible for many people.

10.15. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library building in Highbridge. However, if this is not possible, we believe that in the context of the resources available to the council, a combination of digital library services and library outreach services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for people in Highbridge who may find it more difficult to travel to the library in

<sup>32</sup> See the catchment mapping tool, referenced in Section 17 below.

Burnham-on-Sea. In forming this judgment, we have considered the high needs of the community, feedback from the consultation exercise, an assessment of the potential impact of closure and the resources available to the council. Targeted Library Outreach Services will support the delivery of commissioned outcomes and go some way to meeting the high levels of need in Highbridge. In particular, outreach services provided locally for under 5s would help to mitigate the access difficulties faced by young children and new parents (who would otherwise face a long walk or the cost of bus travel) and go some way to meeting the need to support school readiness identified through the consultation and needs assessment. As with other areas with high needs, Library Outreach Services could be effective in attracting new audiences to library services in the Highbridge area. If it is not possible to establish a Community Library Partnership, Library Outreach Services would be designed to meet local needs; in particular, the needs of pre-school children, new parents, older children and the digitally excluded. Digital library services would be available to users with internet access. We have concluded that, because of the good access to Burnham-on-Sea library, Mobile Library Provision would not be provided in Highbridge.

- 10.16. We acknowledge, and decision makers must consider that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, children disabled people, and those on lower incomes.

**Library service provision in the urban fringe and rural parts of Area 3:**

- 10.17. Many of the rural parts of Area 3 have good access to Bridgwater and Burnham-on-Sea. Paragraph 10.6 above details the public transport routes into Bridgwater town centre and illustrates how the urban fringe communities around Bridgwater are well served by public transport into the town. The communities of Cannington, Westonzoyland, and the Puriton/Woolavington area have reasonable access to Bridgwater by car or public transport, and community / demand responsive transport is available in many areas. Driving times from the rural areas in the south-east part of Area 3 are generally well within the 20 minute target time. Some of the rural districts at the edge of Area 3 (in the Somerset levels and Polden Hills) are around 20 minutes' drive away and driving times into Bridgwater can be affected significantly by traffic congestion.

- 10.18. The area around North Petherton (including North Newton and parts of the Quantock Hills and Somerset levels) generally looks to Bridgwater for services, although North Petherton is also used for convenience shopping and many people will travel into Taunton regularly. North Petherton is linked to Bridgwater and Taunton town centres by public bus services and good road connections. A good cycle path links North Petherton and the estates of Stockland and Wilstock to Bridgwater.

- 10.19. We will seek to maintain a library building in North Petherton through a Community Library Partnership. However, if this is not possible to achieve, we will provide reasonable access to library services for people living in North Petherton and the surrounding rural catchment through a combination of access to the library buildings at Taunton and Bridgwater, a mobile library service, and digital library services. This is because:



## APPENDIX 1: LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

- Table 10.20 below shows how library usage in the catchment for North Petherton library is spread between North Petherton, Taunton and Bridgwater libraries, with significant usage of Taunton and Bridgwater libraries. This indicates that for many, access to alternative libraries is relatively convenient.
- Usage levels for North Petherton library are low, particularly for activities and events and public computer access. Even though the library costs relatively little to operate, value for money is worse than many other libraries because usage levels are so low.
- Evidence from the community engagement exercise and retail studies suggests that the majority of people living in North Petherton are likely to make regular trips to Bridgwater and Taunton to access other services. Many people in North Petherton are likely to work in one of these towns.
- As explained in paragraph 10.19 above, access to alternative library buildings is good. Levels of car ownership in North Petherton catchment are high (the percentage of households with no car or van at the time of the 2011 census is 11% for the catchment as a whole). Car ownership is lower within North Petherton itself (up to 30% of households in parts of North Petherton town have no access to a vehicle), but public transport links are very good here.
- There is some evidence of need in North Petherton, and there are pockets of income and employment deprivation, as well as some evidence of digital exclusion risk. Analysis of usage data suggests that usage of the public computer access facility in North Petherton library is low, and more users in the catchment use these facilities at Bridgwater library. Overall, local needs are lower in North Petherton than in many other communities in Area 3.

Table 9.14: usage of libraries within North Petherton catchment<sup>33</sup>

Library	Borrowers	PN Users	WiFi users
North Petherton	410	60	10
Bridgwater	300	80	10
Taunton	160	40	10

10.20. Feedback from the consultation exercise from users of North Petherton library and the wider community (including community stakeholders) was significant, reflecting positive engagement from community groups in the consultation and an effective campaign through the local primary school. Respondents strongly disagreed with proposals that could lead to the closure of the library building and did not support the proposed mobile library provision. There was more support for a Community Library Partnership option than in some other communities. Traffic congestion and journey times into Bridgwater were cited as a significant concern by many residents - noting that it can take up to 30 minutes to drive into Bridgwater Town Centre. The cost and inconvenience of public transport was also highlighted.

<sup>33</sup> Catchment user counts are rounded to the nearest 10.

*“Please keep the library open here. To get to a library in Taunton or Bridgwater is not easy I do not drive and to get a bus into either of these towns is not easy buses are not as regular as they used to be. The traffic into Bridgwater is so bad that it can take over 30 minutes sometimes an hour to get there.”*

“I am in my 87th year and use the library at least once a week. I certainly couldn't carry library books from Bridgwater on the bus now. I also enjoy friendly chats with the very helpful staff. PLEASE DON'T CLOSE THE LIBRARY!”

10.21. Having carefully considered this feedback, we have concluded that mobile library provision, in combination with access to Bridgwater and Taunton libraries and the digital library service, would be effective in meeting local needs. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, children, disabled people, those living in rural areas, and those on lower incomes. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for North Petherton, and believe that one stop, once per month, would be sufficient. Subject to discussions with North Petherton Primary School, mobile library provision could include a further stop outside the school to mitigate the impact of potential library closure on primary school children. Our analysis has also identified a potential need for a further mobile library stop in North Newton, where usage of North Petherton library is relatively high. We would engage with community representatives to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

10.22. The northern part of Area 3 (the coastal communities north of Burnham-on-Sea, Lympsham, East Brent, Rooksbridge, Brent Knoll, Mark, East and West Huntspill and Pawlett, and areas in between) mainly lie within a relatively short drive of Burnham-on-Sea. Driving times in normal traffic conditions are generally below 15 minutes. Other than along the main A38 corridor, which has good public transport links, public transport is limited and may not be sustainable. However, car ownership is high and demand responsive (Slinky) transport is available. All public and demand responsive routes lead to Burnham town centre.

10.23. The western part of Area 3 extending west along the coast from the Parrett estuary and south into the Quantock Hills (including the villages of Nether Stowey, Stogursey and Comwich, and the sparsely populated rural areas around and between these settlements) is more distant from Bridgwater. In the eastern part of this area around Cannington and Comwich usage of Bridgwater library is high and driving access into Bridgwater is generally good. However, Nether Stowey library has the predominant catchment in the western part of the area, and driving times to Williton, Taunton and Bridgwater are longer from this part of the county (up to 25-30 minutes). Although many people in this area are likely to travel to Bridgwater regularly for main food shopping, Nether Stowey provides a more local hub for convenience shopping and other services. A car scheme provides access to Nether Stowey from Stogursey and the surrounding area (we understand that this scheme also serves Bridgwater).

10.24. There was a significant response to the public consultation from users of Nether Stowey library, and from some stakeholder groups in Nether Stowey. Feedback in the consultation and community engagement exercises indicated that users of Nether

Stowey library, and local stakeholder groups, felt that the current library should be retained and that a mobile library would be insufficient: there was strong opposition to any proposal which risked the closure of the library building. Access was cited as a significant issue for the village and the rural surroundings. There is currently a bus service linking Nether Stowey to Bridgwater and Williton, but this is operated through EDF funding and is not considered to be sustainable.

*"I'm a single elderly reader living 5 miles from the library. It's the duty of the council to whom I pay my council tax to support my needs ... I visit Stowey several times a week and support local businesses - without the library however I would be less drawn. 13 miles to Bridgwater & parking problems would be far worse."*

*"We are isolated. I am 76 years old, no transport of our own. I am disabled. I use a mobility scooter. We have no transport, everything taken from us."*

*"We seldom go into Bridgwater. A regular visit to the library if Nether Stowey closed would involve a significant time and money cost"*

10.25. Consultation responses also noted that Nether Stowey library is well-used and provides good value for money, and that a mobile library service would not provide the range of events, activities and opportunities for social interaction that were available at the library. The library building has a significant heritage value to the village. Our needs assessment suggests that there is limited evidence of deprivation in Nether Stowey village, although there is evidence of more significant deprivation (especially education and employment deprivation) and digital exclusion in the rural areas to the north of Nether Stowey, around Stogursey. There are small pockets of income and employment deprivation within Nether Stowey, although usage of the public computer access is relatively low. Loneliness and social isolation are important needs being met by the library at present. Notwithstanding these important considerations, needs in Nether Stowey village town and the surrounding area are in general much lower than needs in the urban parts of Area 3.

10.26. We have carefully considered these views and have also considered the number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in Nether Stowey and how the needs of this population can be reasonably met. As part of this assessment we have reviewed levels of car ownership in Nether Stowey village and the surrounding rural areas. 2011 census data for the 9 statistical output areas where the predominant library usage is of Nether Stowey library shows that average household car ownership is 86% in output areas covering Nether Stowey village (with 45% of households having more than one car). In the rural areas car ownership is higher - taking an average of output area level statistics, around 7% of households have no car, with 54% having access to two or more cars. The vast majority of people living in the rural districts are likely to access library buildings by car (although community and public transport does serve the area).

10.27. There is no doubt that if the free bus service ceases (which we must assume is likely to happen within the lifespan of this service delivery plan), people with no access to cars would face difficult access to a library building. There is also no doubt that Nether Stowey library provides a good value, well-used facility which makes a significant difference to cultural life and well-being and educational outcomes for people in the village. In particular, for those at risk of social isolation, and for children (including children at the local primary school, and pre-school children) it provides a very valuable service. However, taking into account the analysis from our equalities impact assessment and needs assessment, the significant financial challenges we face, and feedback from the consultation, we have concluded that:

- The population in the area likely to be most affected (in particular, those living in Nether Stowey village) is small. We no longer have sufficient resources to provide all of our current services, and there are many communities the size of Nether Stowey elsewhere in Somerset that do not currently have access to library services.
- Many people in Nether Stowey and the surrounding rural areas will regularly access Wellington or Taunton for other services, particularly for main food shopping. Car ownership is relatively high, although journey times are lengthy from the sparsely populated districts to the north of Nether Stowey.
- The number of people who do not have access to a car (including the more significant population of people without access to a car during the working week) who currently have walking access to Nether Stowey library is relatively small, and we believe that the needs of this population can be met through a mobile library service.
- Nether Stowey is a relatively wealthy and resilient community, with other community assets that could provide space for the activities and events that currently take place at the library (many of these are already organised by community groups and take place out of hours).

10.28. Our impact assessment process has highlighted, and decision makers must note, that there are people who may not have access to a vehicle, who would find it much more difficult to access alternative library buildings. These include children of all ages, young people studying, older people, disabled people, families / new parents with babies and those on low incomes. People with access to cars living in rural areas around Nether Stowey would face longer driving times to alternative libraries in Bridgwater, Taunton and Williton. Decision makers must have regard to the fact that some adverse impacts could be significant at an individual level. However, considering the overall level of resources available, we are recommending that the needs of this group could reasonably be met by a combination of Mobile Library Services and Digital Library Services.

10.29. In forming these judgements, we have considered the views of consultation respondents in the Nether Stowey area, but also the needs and access issues of other people living in larger villages / small towns in Somerset that do not currently have library buildings. We have also considered the resources available to the council to deliver the library service across the county, and the needs and social capacity of the community of Nether Stowey.

10.30. Nether Stowey library is well-used, particularly for borrowing. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Nether Stowey and believe that

a frequency of 2 times per month (with extended stop times), would be sufficient to meet the needs of those who cannot access alternative libraries. Subject to discussions with Nether Stowey Primary School, mobile library provision could include a further stop outside the school to mitigate, to some extent, the impact of potential library closure on primary school children. There are already mobile library stops elsewhere in Nether Stowey catchment, and we have not identified any further locations where further stops are likely to be necessary. We would engage with community representatives in Nether Stowey to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

10.31. It is acknowledged that needs currently being met by the library - in particular, addressing social isolation risks, activities for children and (relatively small) usage of public internet access to address digital exclusion - would not be met locally by mobile library and digital library services. Our impact assessment process has identified some actions to mitigate the adverse impact this could have on those who find it more difficult to access alternative library buildings. However, decision makers must have regard to the fact that some impacts are difficult to mitigate; in particular, the loss of public computer network access. We consider that, notwithstanding this important point, needs are met reasonably, because there is relatively low usage of the public computer access terminals in Nether Stowey.

10.32. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library building in Nether Stowey and, in recognition of the relative difficulty of accessing alternative libraries for this community, we will provide ongoing financial support to a Community Library Partnership if it can be established. However, if this is not possible, we believe that in the context of the resources available to the council, a combination of mobile library provision and digital library services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for people in Nether Stowey and the surrounding area who are likely to find it more difficult to travel to the libraries in Bridgwater, Taunton or Williton.

10.33. To summarise, although driving times from some of the outlying areas in the western part of Area 3 are long, and public transport access is limited, we believe that needs of rural and urban fringe parts of Area 3 can be served effectively by a combination of:

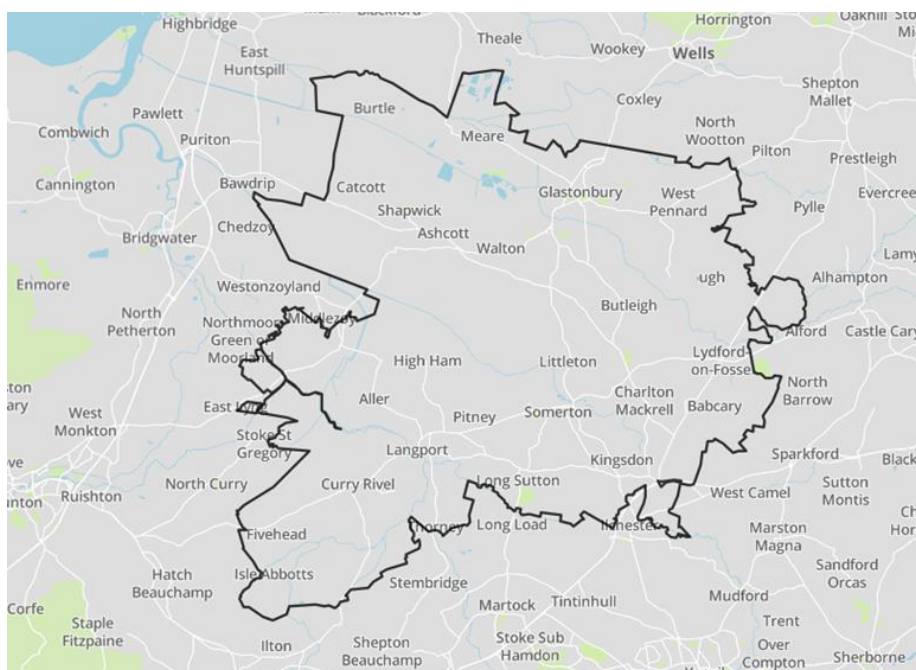
- access by car, community transport or public transport to library buildings in Bridgwater and Burnham-on-Sea, with Williton and Taunton libraries providing additional access in some areas.
- The digital library service, for those who have internet access.
- The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy, with additional stops if required in North Petherton, North Newton and Nether Stowey, including (subject to the agreement of the relevant schools) stops at the primary schools at Nether Stowey and North Petherton.

**Summary proposals:**

- The council's libraries will be retained in Bridgwater town centre and Burnham-on-Sea.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Highbridge. If we are unable to do this, we would provide Library Outreach Services to this community.
- We will provide Library Outreach Services in the Sydenham, Westover and Hamp areas of Bridgwater.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in North Petherton. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community and explore the demand for Mobile Library Services in the nearby village of North Newton.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Nether Stowey. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

## 11. Area 4: Central Somerset

11.1. The map below shows the boundary of this area. Area 4 includes parts of Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Mendip District Council areas and covers the majority of the Somerset levels.



11.2. Relatively few people are likely to travel in to the area for work or study from other local authority areas. Street has a further education establishment (Strode College), and there could be a small number of students accessing this college from outside of Somerset, but we consider that numbers are likely to be limited. There could be a small number of people travelling to Street, Glastonbury, Somerton or Langport (or other areas) for work, but again we consider that numbers are likely to be limited. We do not consider the provision of access for people whose place of work or who are undergoing full-time education within area 4 to be a material issue.

11.3. Town centre and retail studies published by South Somerset District Council and Mendip District Council both identify distinct retail catchment zones in the Street/Glastonbury area to the north, and differing catchment zones in the Somerton/Langport area to the south. The larger Street/Glastonbury zone is noted as drawing in shoppers from the southern part of Area 4 in both studies.

11.4. Street is the dominant shopping destination in the south of the area. Clarks' village attracts comparison goods shoppers from across the region, and there are large food stores in both Street and Glastonbury. Langport and Somerton retain less retail shopping than Street / Glastonbury, with many shoppers in this area looking south to Yeovil, north to Street/Glastonbury and (particularly from Langport and the south-west part of Area 4) towards Taunton<sup>34</sup>. Outside these 4 main settlements, there are no settlements in Area 4 with any notable retail catchment.

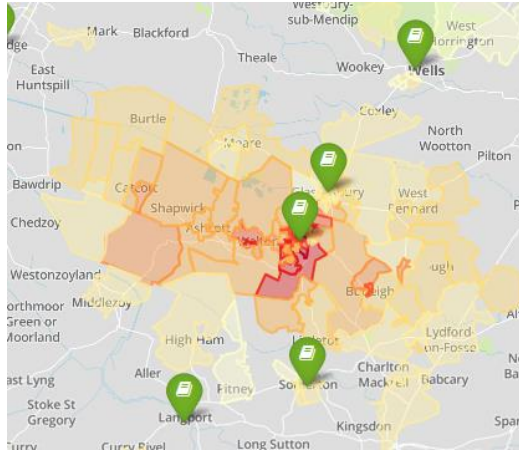
<sup>34</sup> Please see the background paper *Summary of recent retail studies*, referenced in section 17 below.

APPENDIX 1: LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

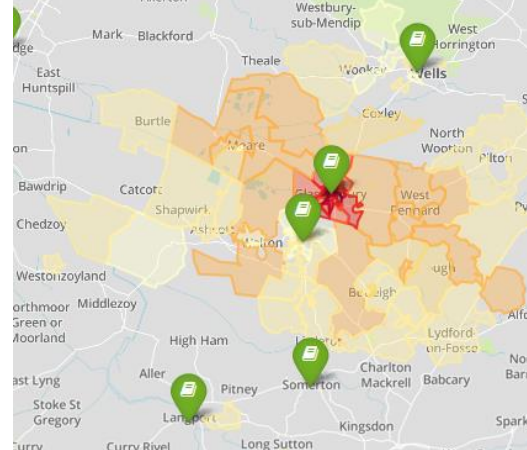
11.5. Figure 11.5 below shows how library catchments in Area 4 overlap significantly. Both Street and Glastonbury libraries have large catchments that overlap to a significant extent in the north of the area. To a lesser extent, Langport and Somerton catchments overlap in the southern part of the area.

**Fig. 11.5: Borrowing rates in library catchments in Area 4:**

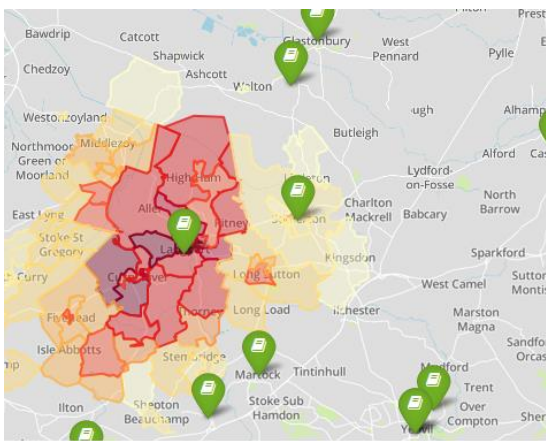
***Borrowing - Street library catchment***



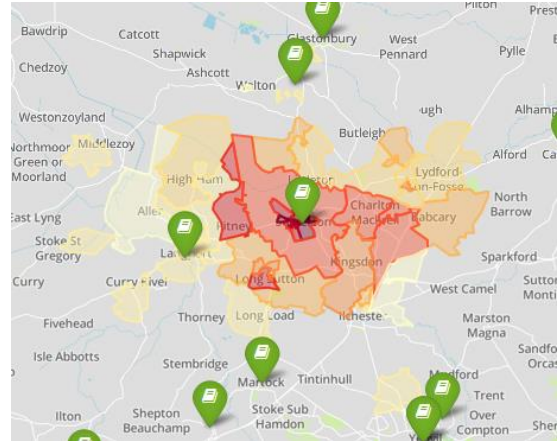
***Borrowing - Glastonbury library catchment***



***Borrowing - Langport library catchment***



***Borrowing - Somerton library catchment***



**Key to map shading:**

Low Medium High

11.6. Library provision is considered for the northern and southern parts of Area 4 separately.

**Library service provision in the Street/Glastonbury area:**

11.7. We believe it is necessary to maintain a library building in the Street / Glastonbury area because:

- Although access to Wells library is reasonably good, it would not provide walking or cycling access to the large communities of Street and Glastonbury.
- Public transport routes in the area serve both Street and Glastonbury well, providing access to library services from many of the surrounding rural



## APPENDIX 1: LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

communities. Driving times to Wells or Bridgwater are over the 20-minute target time for a significant proportion of the north-western part of Area 4.

- There are significant levels of need in this part of Area 4. The combined population of these two communities is large, and significant growth is forecast. There are high levels of income and employment deprivation in Glastonbury. Usage of both libraries is significant.
- As noted in paragraphs 11.3 - 11.4, the northern part of Area 4 has a relatively self-contained retail catchment centred on Street/Glastonbury.

11.8. However, with the level of resources available, we do not believe it is affordable to maintain two library buildings in the Street / Glastonbury area. The two buildings are 2.2 miles apart, and are linked by a good bus service, which is relatively inexpensive. Most people living in the urban areas live within cycling distance of both library buildings, and some people live within walking distance of both libraries. Access by car between the two communities is convenient. Community and demand responsive transport covers the urban area and the surrounding rural districts and is capable of providing access to both libraries. The cost of maintaining two libraries in a relatively small area is significant and cannot be sustained in the current financial climate. It is acknowledged that this approach is likely to have a significant adverse impact, as considered further in the paragraphs below.

11.9. Both Street and Glastonbury libraries are well-used and provide good value for money. Table 11.9 below compares usage across the two catchments, and Table 11.10 compares total usage (for residents of the catchment, and users residing outside of the catchments). Borrower usage is higher for Street library, but usage of the public computer network access and event participation is higher for Glastonbury.

*Table 11.9 - Usage counts in the Glastonbury/Street area and surrounding catchments<sup>35</sup>*

Library	Glastonbury library catchment		Street library catchment	
	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users	Active Borrowers	Public Computer users
Street	1460	540	2020	680
Glastonbury	1630	840	1570	810
Wells	810	310	750	290
Somerton	120	30	630	80
Langport	50	20	280	30
Bridgwater	50	10	120	20
Mobile	130	0	150	0
Other	130	30	200	30

*Table 11.10: Selected library usage measures (2017/18 financial year)*

Library	Active Borrowers in the year	People's Network User hours	Event participation in the year	Footfall in the year <sup>36</sup>	Current Opening hours per week	Footfall per hour of opening	Total library catchment population
Glastonbury	2,131	10,624	2,291	96,674	46	40	31,239
Street	2,495	6,013	1,639	58,804	34	33	41,614

<sup>35</sup> Catchment user counts are rounded to the nearest 10 for data protection reasons.

<sup>36</sup> Footfall for Glastonbury library includes footfall relating to other services in the Library hub.

11.10. Street library has a larger catchment population, reflecting a larger reach for the catchment which is likely to be attributable to the draw of Clark’s village. Both Street and Glastonbury have large food stores, although (unlike Clarks village) the Sainsbury’s in Street is distant from the library. There is evidence, from the consultation and community engagement exercises and from retail catchment analysis, that more local people travel from Glastonbury to Street to use the town centre rather than vice-versa - Glastonbury high street has a significant tourism footfall. However, the location of Morrisons and Tesco supermarket is more convenient for Glastonbury.

11.11. Access is good between the two communities. Nearly all the bus routes that serve either Street or Glastonbury serve both locations, although the bus stops are better situated for Street library (adjacent to the library rather than up or down the high street in Glastonbury). Access by public transport from rural areas is slightly better to Street, where users of the 667-bus service from Keinton Mandeville and villages to the south and east of Area 4 would have to change buses to reach Glastonbury. Access from urban parts of Street to Glastonbury library, and from urban parts of Glastonbury to Street library, is considered to be good in both directions, because of the extension of various through services into the suburbs of both communities. Table 11.11 below gives some evidence that car ownership is likely to be higher in Street. Car parking is available in both locations, with similar charges.

Table 11.11: Households with no car or van, Street / Glastonbury area, District Council Ward profiles (wards cover largely urban districts, but all have some rural parts)<sup>37</sup>

Street Ward profiles	% of households with no car or van	Glastonbury Ward profiles	% of households with no car or van
Street North	23%	Glastonbury St. Benedicts	32%
Street South	20%	Glastonbury St. Edmunds	20%
Street West	10%	Glastonbury St. Johns	17%
		Glastonbury St. Marys	14%
Ward level average	18%	Ward level average	21%

11.12. The level of deprivation is generally higher in Glastonbury. One neighbourhood in Glastonbury has significant deprivation over multiple indices and is within the 10% most deprived nationally. Street has some evidence of income and employment deprivation, and social isolation risks are high in the north of Street. On the standard index of multiple deprivation Street has one area within the bottom 30% nationally, and none within the bottom 20%. Paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of the needs assessment provide further detail.

11.13. Summarising the paragraphs above, we have concluded that:

- Usage is higher for borrowing in Street, but higher for public computer access and events and activities in Glastonbury. Borrowing services are easier to provide through Mobile Library / Outreach service delivery models, effective public

<sup>37</sup> Taken from the ward profiles dataset on the Somerset Intelligence website.

computer access provision is more difficult to provide for high level of usage. Value for money is good at both locations.

- Street town centre is likely to have a more significant footfall and catchment reach than Glastonbury town centre. However, the situation of Glastonbury library in a hub building provides a valuable footfall benefit for this library, which (as a building as a whole, but not necessarily a service) has significantly higher footfall.
- There is little difference between the two locations when considering access issues. Car ownership seems to be higher in Street, but the location of the bus stop in Glastonbury was highlighted as a concern by many respondents to the consultation.
- Need is higher in Glastonbury.

11.14. Taking all of the above evidence into account, we have concluded that providing a library building in Glastonbury would meet the needs of the population of this part of Area 4 most effectively. This approach has a better fit with the Libraries Service strategy to re-focus service provision on areas of highest need and fits with the council's wider strategy for sharing public sector assets.

11.15. Feedback to the consultation was very significant from users of Street library and from community representatives and stakeholder groups from Street (the highest response level by library used). Respondents overwhelmingly strongly disagreed with the proposals, particularly any proposal which involved the closure of Street library. There was also strong disagreement with proposals which risked the closure of Street library from respondents using Glastonbury Library. Many concerns were highlighted. The quotes below illustrate concerns about access issues, and the widespread view that mobile and outreach library provision was inadequate for a community the size of Street.

*"I know the idea may be to close Street Library and use the Glastonbury one instead but this wouldn't work. I can't see many Street people paying for fuel to drive to Glastonbury and then paying to park in order to borrow a book - not cost effective. With the High Street a mass of charity shops and with no supermarket in the High Street either, I think the closure of the library would be one loss too many"*

*"Although there is another in Glastonbury, this is too far for my children to cycle to and I worry that without it there reading and that of other children in the community will suffer."*

*"It is unlikely that bus services will run to accommodate after school visits to Glastonbury Library. The fare cost will also be a deterrent to hard working families. Walking to Glastonbury and back takes too long and the route is dangerous for both cyclists and pedestrians"*

*"It is clear that no one proposing the closure of Street library ever travels by bus foot or by bicycle. I invite you to make the trip and then judge for yourself how easy cheap and safe it is."*

*"In a community as large as Street [outreach and mobile services] could not be considered as an adequate alternative service"*

- 11.16. Consultation responses also noted that Street library is well-used and serves a big community. Respondents highlighted the social value of the library, and the contribution it makes to the civic fabric of Street and the high street economy. Many were concerned about the impact on the elderly, disabled and children. Our needs assessment has highlighted that there is some evidence of income and education deprivation in Street, as well as a high risk of social isolation. The role of the library in addressing these needs was noted by many respondents.
- 11.17. We have carefully considered these views. We have also considered the significant number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in Street and how the needs of this population (as assessed in Appendix 2) can be reasonably met. We have considered the impacts identified through our impact assessment process. As part of this process we have considered how different groups within the population in Street are able to access library facilities in Glastonbury, and we have also considered levels of car ownership in Street (see table 11.11 above).
- 11.18. As noted in paragraph 5.5 above, 'reasonable access' will be determined by the feasibility, rather than the convenience, of access. We also have a duty to meet, as far as possible, the requirements of vulnerable groups - children and families, older people and disabled people in particular. We consider it likely that - if we are unable to establish a Community Library Partnership in Street, some people in Street may stop using the libraries service because it becomes less convenient for them to do so. This point is highlighted here because in Street, which has a large population, convenience factors may have a very significant impact on library usage. Considering access to Glastonbury library first:
- The vast majority of people in the rural parts of Street catchment would be able to access Glastonbury library with slightly longer journey times by either public transport or car. Some users currently accessing Street library by public transport may face higher fare costs to get to Glastonbury, and some may have to change bus in Street.
  - Within Street, evidence suggests that over 80% of households have access to a car or vehicle. Data tells us that car ownership decreases with age, and many of the households without access to a car are likely to comprise of older people, who are eligible for free travel under the concessionary bus pass scheme. Although it is acknowledged that Glastonbury Library is further from the bus stop than Street library (and that this would have an adverse impact on those people using public transport who have mobility problems), we consider that concessionary pass holders with reasonable mobility are likely to have access from Street to Glastonbury library.
  - Some disabled users may not have access to a car, either because of their disability, or for other reasons. Where disabled users have mobility problems, they are likely to be eligible for the concessionary travel scheme. Where they are unable to use public bus services, community and demand responsive transport is available and could be used to transport users to Glastonbury library.
  - Access is likely to be more difficult for children, especially young children and babies in households without access to a car during the working week. Primary carers of children may also find access more difficult. For this group, walking or cycling may be possible, but is unlikely to be easy and is not

considered to be reasonable as a means of access for most parts of Street (with the exception of the northern and eastern part of the town, which is closer to Glastonbury library, and under a 2-mile walking distance). However, the cost of public transport from Street to Glastonbury is more affordable than in other parts of Somerset and we consider this provides a reasonable form of access. The frequency and journey times of public transport means that it is feasible to travel by public transport from primary schools in Street to Glastonbury library after school.

- For those on lower incomes who do not have access to a concessionary bus pass public transport may be less affordable, and this group are also less able to afford the costs of car ownership. For families and children this will have a more significant impact. We consider that cycling between Street and Glastonbury provides a reasonable option for those on low income who want to access a library building without accompanying children, where they have a reasonable level of fitness or mobility. It is acknowledged that this will only be a reasonable form of access for some people.

11.19. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library building in Street, and in recognition of the significant population in Street, and the high levels of library usage, we will provide a good level of ongoing financial support to a Community Library Partnership if it can be established. However, if this is not possible, we believe that a combination of library outreach provision, mobile library services and digital library services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for people in Street who are unable to travel to the library in Glastonbury. In forming this judgment, we have considered the needs of the community, feedback from the consultation exercise, an assessment of the potential impact of closure and the resources available to the council.

11.20. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on many people; in particular, children and parents of babies, older people, disabled people, people living in rural areas (who would face longer journey times) and those on lower incomes. Impacts are likely to be particularly significant in Street because of the large number of people affected, and decision makers should carefully consider these impacts.

11.21. If we are unable to establish a Community Library Partnership, Library Outreach Services would be designed to meet local needs for those who are unable to access Glastonbury library. To mitigate the impact on digitally excluded people, particularly those who find it difficult to access Glastonbury library, public computer access would form part of the library outreach provision. However, this would be available on a more limited basis than at present. Reading and activities for the under 5s would be provided to meet the needs of younger children and the identified educational deprivation needs, as well as supporting parents of babies and addressing social isolation risks for this group. Health and Wellbeing events and activities for adults would be provided to mitigate impacts on older people and disabled people, and to address identified social isolation risks. Locations for outreach services have not been determined, but we have carried out an initial review of potential locations and have identified a number of suitable facilities with suitable access for disabled people.

11.22. If we are unable to establish a Community Library Partnership, Mobile Library Services would be provided in different locations around Street, to provide a borrowing service for people who find it difficult to access Glastonbury library. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Street we believe that around 8 stops per month (with stop times of 30 minutes), would be sufficient to meet the likely level of need and demand. We would design a network of stops within Street urban area to maximise access. Subject to discussions with primary schools in Street, mobile library provision could include further stops outside up to 3 primary schools to mitigate, to some extent, the impact of potential library closure on primary school children. Our initial assessment also indicates that there could be a need for new (monthly) mobile library stops at Compton Dundon and Walton outside Street. We would engage with community representatives in Street and these communities to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary. Digital Library Services would provide a further means of access to borrowing for those who are able to access these services, but who would have more difficulty accessing Glastonbury library.

**Library service provision in the southern part of Area 4:**

11.23. We have concluded that it is necessary to maintain a library building in the southern part of Area 4 to meet local needs because:

- The area has a significant population, in the towns of Somerton and Langport as well as in the larger villages and rural areas to the west of Langport, and in the densely populated rural area to the east of Somerton.
- If the area was reliant on access to alternative libraries at Glastonbury, Ilminster, Yeovil and Taunton, significant populations in the south-western and eastern parts of Area 4 would be over the 20-minute drive time target established in section 5 above.
- Although sustainable public transport routes link Somerton and Langport to one another, and to Taunton, Yeovil and Glastonbury, bus fares from Somerton and Langport to other towns are high. Between Somerton and Langport, over 9000 people currently live within walking distance of a library building. We consider that a population of this size should have more affordable access to a library building for those who do not have access to a vehicle.
- Both Langport and Somerton are designated 'tier 1' settlements and are likely to experience significant housing growth in the coming years.

11.24. The southern part of Area 4, including the towns of Langport and Somerton, generally has a lower level of deprivation than many other parts of Somerset. As with Glastonbury and Street, with the level of resources available, we do not believe it is affordable to maintain two library buildings in this part of Area 4. The two buildings are less than 5 miles apart, and are linked by a reasonable, sustainable bus service, which is relatively affordable. Access by car between the two communities is convenient. Community transport is available in the area through a car scheme. Car ownership is generally high. The cost of maintaining two libraries in a relatively small area is significant and cannot be sustained in the current financial climate. It is acknowledged that this approach is likely to have a significant adverse impact, as considered further in the paragraphs below.

11.25. A number of consultation respondents representing Somerton library suggested an alternative option of reducing opening hours or staffing resources at both Somerton and Langport, whilst retaining both libraries (a variant of this option could include volunteers supplementing staff, with a lower reduction in opening hours). We have considered this suggestion carefully, but are not recommending it to decision makers because:

- The staffing hours reduction required would need to be significant at both libraries to meet the required level of cost reduction. Because premises costs are largely fixed, staffing costs need to be reduced significantly and disproportionately in order to achieve the equivalent cost saving across two library buildings.
- There is a risk that a reduction in staff hours to the required level could only be achieved with a very significant reduction in opening hours across both sites, which, from our experience of service delivery, is likely to create a confusing 'offer' for customers and have an adverse impact in terms of meeting needs. Whilst existing customers may be able to adapt to much more limited opening hours, building a sustainable library service depends on attracting new customers, who are very often put off by limited opening hours.
- The County Council would still retain property-related liabilities at two sites, which would not support the overall sustainability of the service.

11.26. Furthermore, given the level of resources available, we consider that there may be scope to reduce opening hours at a single library in this area, because:

- The area serves a relatively low population, compared to other library catchments in the proposed network. Although usage across Somerton and Langport libraries is not insignificant, footfall per hour of opening is low at both libraries.
- Evidence from retail catchment studies and community engagement suggests that many people in the area are likely to travel to other towns for shopping and to access other services.
- The area has relatively low needs.

There is no direct proposal in this delivery plan or the covering report to reduce opening hours, and we would only do this as a last resort. Any future proposal to reduce opening hours would be subject to a further period of public consultation. It is noted here as part of the service delivery plan because the plan is intended to have a long-term lifespan.

11.27. Both Langport and Somerton libraries are well-used for the size of the catchments and provide good value for money. Table 11.27 below compares total usage across a range of measures. Although footfall is higher in Somerton, usage on all other measures is higher in Langport.

Table 11.26: Selected library usage measures (2017/18 financial year)

Library	Active Borrowers in the year	People's Network User hours	Event participation in the year	Footfall in the year	Current Opening hours per week	Footfall per hour of opening	Total library catchment population
Langport	1,644	1,346	3,187	35,069	32	21	21,450
Somerton	1,245	1,044	2,639	38,203	29	26	19,012

11.28. Whilst the population of Somerton is slightly higher than that of Langport, when the relatively populous villages to the west of Langport are considered (with a combined population of nearly 3000 in the 2011 census), the balance of the population of the area is likely to be weighted towards Langport. Langport has a large food store, and a secondary school, although Somerton also draws shoppers and visitors as the rural hub town for a large area to the west. Needs are generally higher in the area around Langport, which has a modest degree of income and employment deprivation, although education deprivation is higher in Somerton, which also has a significant pocket of social isolation. The area to the west of Langport has significant digital exclusion risks, and (considering the higher level of income and employment deprivation evident in this area) users are likely to benefit from being able to access a library building using affordable public transport.

11.29. Taking the above evidence into account, we have concluded that providing a library building in Langport would meet the needs of the population of this part of Area 4 most effectively.

11.30. Feedback to the consultation was significant from users of Somerton library. Respondents overwhelmingly disagreed with the proposals, and in general strongly disagreed with options that did not retain a library building in Somerton. The importance of the library building in reducing social isolation was a theme in responses, alongside concerns about volunteer-run libraries, the inadequacy of a mobile library model for Somerton, the housing growth in the town, and concerns for older people, children and those on low incomes. The comments shown illustrate views about access:

"I have no car and love being able to just walk to the library and shop locally. I would not want to get on a bus to find another library."

"In the consultation document it refers to good transport links but I would not agree with this as the buses now run less frequent and Links no longer exists.."

"I've read the supporting information and to expect low income families/ OAPs with no transport to get to and from Langport is a ridiculous argument"



11.31. We have carefully considered the views of respondents to the consultation. We have also considered the relatively large number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in Somerton and how the needs of this population (as assessed in Appendix 2) can be reasonably met. We have also considered the impacts identified through our impact assessment process. As part of this consideration we have considered how different groups within the population in Somerton are able to access library facilities in Langport. We have also considered levels of car ownership in Somerton, which are around the average for the urban area of Somerton (ranging between 7% of households with no access to a car or van in some output areas, up to 27% of households with no access to a car or van in one output area close to the centre).

11.32. We have concluded that, although significantly less convenient than the current library provision, for most people in Somerton and the wider catchment, access to Langport library would be reasonable, in the context of the county council's financial challenges:

- The vast majority of people in the rural parts of Somerton catchment would be able to access Langport library (or, for those further afield, Shepton Mallet, Glastonbury, Martock or Yeovil libraries) with longer journey times by either public transport or car. All users currently accessing Somerton library by public transport may face higher fare costs to get to Langport or Yeovil, and it is acknowledged that the timetables may make library visits significantly less convenient. However, the same bus routes serving Somerton go on to serve either Langport, Glastonbury or Wells. Both Somerton and Langport have convenient free parking.
- Within Somerton, the evidence suggests that many households have access to a car or vehicle. However, there are a significant number of households without access to a vehicle. Data tells us that car ownership decreases with age, and many of the households without access to a car are likely to comprise of older people, who are eligible for free travel under the concessionary bus pass scheme. We consider that concessionary pass holders with reasonable mobility are likely to have reasonable access from Somerton to Langport library.
- Some disabled users may not have access to a car, either because of their disability, or for other reasons. Where disabled users have mobility problems, they are likely to be eligible for the concessionary travel scheme. Where they are unable to use public bus services, a car scheme is available and could be used to transport users to Langport library.
- Access is likely to be more difficult for children, especially young children and babies in households without access to a car during the working week. Primary carers of children may also find access more difficult. For this group, the cost of public transport from Somerton to Langport is more affordable than in other parts of Somerset and we consider that this provides a reasonable form of access.
- For those on lower incomes who do not have access to a concessionary bus pass public transport may be less affordable, and this group are also less able to afford the costs of car ownership. Langport library is not within cycling or walking distance of Somerton, and so impacts would be relatively significant for this group. Nonetheless, our needs assessment and the community engagement exercise has identified Somerton as a relatively wealthy town,

with higher average incomes than other parts of Somerset. This means that the number of people on lower incomes is likely to be relatively small.

- 11.33. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Somerton, and in recognition of the significant population in Street, and the high levels of library usage, we will provide ongoing financial support to a Community Library Partnership if it can be established. However, if this is not possible, we believe a combination of library outreach provision, mobile library services and digital library services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for people in Somerton who are unable to travel to the library in Langport. In forming this judgment, we have considered the needs of the community, feedback from the consultation exercise, an assessment of the potential impact of closure and the resources available to the council.
- 11.34. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on many people; in particular, children and parents of babies, older people, disabled people, people living in rural areas (who would face longer journey times) and those on lower incomes. Impacts are likely to be particularly significant in Somerton because of the relatively large population of the town, and the lack of cycling access, and decision makers should carefully consider this.
- 11.35. If we are unable to establish a Community Library Partnership in Somerton, Library Outreach Services would be provided to address high social isolation risks identified in the consultation exercise. Mobile Library Services would be provided in Somerton, to provide a borrowing service for people who find it difficult to access Langport library. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Somerton and believe that around 4 stops per month (with stop times of 40 minutes), would be sufficient to meet the likely level of need and demand. We would engage with local stakeholder and elected representatives to determine the best location and timetable. Subject to discussions with the primary schools in Somerton, mobile library provision could include a further stop outside the schools to mitigate, to some extent, the impact of potential library closure on primary school children. Our initial assessment also indicates that there could be a need for new (monthly) mobile library stops at Long Sutton, Kingsdon and Charlton Mackrell, which all currently have relatively high usage of Somerton library. We would engage with community representatives in Somerton and these communities to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary. Digital Library Services would provide a further means of access to borrowing for those who are able to access these services, but who would have more difficulty accessing Langport library.
- 11.36. We have received a number of suggestions during the consultation period about potential income generation opportunities in relation to Langport library. These are likely to result in relatively small income streams which are unlikely to make a material difference to the resources available to the library service as a whole. However, we have a reasonable level of confidence that the budgetary provision for Langport library could be reduced slightly, and we are confident that the income generation opportunities would have no material adverse impact on service users. If the opportunities identified are not capable of implementation, the assessment in

paragraph 11.26 above would be considered and we may consult on a potential reduction in opening hours.

**Library service provision in the rural parts of Area 4:**

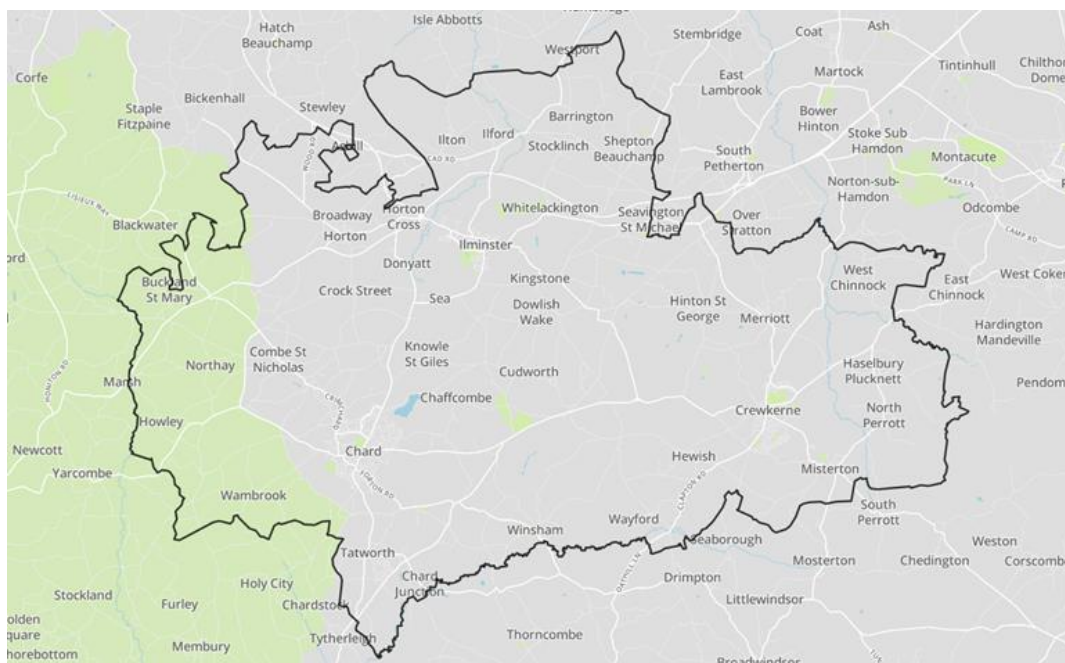
- 11.37. Most of the rural parts of Area 4 have reasonable access to Glastonbury or Langport libraries. Bridgwater, Martock, Shepton and Yeovil libraries also provide access to library services for some of the outlying parts of Area 4. The area to the north west of Area 4, along the Polden Hills and across the Somerset levels to the north has reasonable access to Glastonbury or Bridgwater libraries by car, although driving times from some of the more remote villages are slightly longer than 20 minutes. Sustainable public bus services run through the Polden villages into Glastonbury. Othery and the villages towards Burrowbridge are also linked to Glastonbury by a scheduled public bus service, as well as to Langport, Bridgwater and Taunton. Driving times from the rural areas in the south-west part of Area 4 to Langport are generally well within the 20-minute target time - with some exceptions on the fringes of the catchment. A sustainable, scheduled public bus service links the villages of Fivehead and Curry Rivel to Langport. Away from these main routes public transport is limited, but community and demand responsive transport is available.
- 11.38. The rural area to the east of Somerton is less well connected but has high rates of car ownership (it is one of the least deprived areas of Somerset). Driving times from this part of Area 4 are, again, generally within the 20-minute target range for access to Martock and Shepton Mallet, with one or two exceptions which have driving times that are slightly longer. Compton Dundon, Butleigh, Baltonsborough, Keinton Mandeville, and Kingsdon are on or near to public bus routes which provide access to one of Langport, Yeovil, Glastonbury (with a change in Street) and Wincanton. Community Transport links Long Sutton in the south of the catchment to Martock library.
- 11.39. To summarise, although driving times from some of the outlying areas in the western part of Area 4 are slightly longer than the target time, and public transport access is limited, we believe that needs of the rural parts of Area 4 can be served effectively by a combination of:
- Access by car, community transport or public transport to library buildings in Glastonbury or Langport, with Bridgwater, Shepton Mallet, Yeovil and Martock libraries providing additional access in some areas.
  - The digital library service, for those who have internet access. The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy, with additional stops if required in Walton, Compton Dundon, Long Sutton, Kingsdon and Charton Mackrell.

**Summary proposals:**

- The council's libraries will be retained in Glastonbury and Langport. We will explore opportunities to reduce the cost of Langport library through the provision of other services at the current site.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Street. If we are unable to do this, we would provide Library Outreach Services and a Mobile Library Service to this community, and we would also explore demand for further Mobile Library Services in some communities to the west and South of Street.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Somerton. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Library Outreach Service and a Mobile Library Service to this community, and we would also explore demand for further Mobile Library Services in some communities to the east of Somerton.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

## 12. Area 5: Chard, Ilminster, Crewkerne and Surrounding Area

12.1. The map below shows the boundary of this area. Area 5 includes the western part of South Somerset District, from the Devon border and the Blackdown Hills in the west to the rural catchment of Crewkerne in the east and encompassing the rural catchment of Ilminster to the north, which extends up to the Somerset levels north of Ilton.



12.2. Few people are likely to travel in to the area for work or study from other local authority areas. There are no further education establishments in Area 5. The area borders Dorset and Devon, and some people from these counties may travel to Chard or Crewkerne (or other areas) for work, but we consider that numbers are likely to be limited. We do not consider the provision of access for people whose place of work or who are undergoing full-time education within area 5 to be a material issue.

12.3. Town centre and retail studies published by South Somerset District Council <sup>38</sup> define 3 distinct zones based around the three main towns in the area. Retention of main food shopping trips in each of these areas is high, and retention rates of convenience shopping are also high. Whilst Crewkerne retains a modest proportion of non-food shopping, many residents leave Area 5 (to Taunton and Yeovil) for non-food shopping trips. Nonetheless, evidence from the retail studies and the consultation / community engagement indicates that the three towns in Area 5 are reasonably self-contained, with Crewkerne attracting shoppers from the South Petherton / Martock area as well as its own immediate rural catchment.

12.4. Table 12.4 below shows that nearly 70% of the population of Area 5 live within walking distance of one of the libraries in the 3 main towns. Crewkerne and Chard library catchments dominate, and there is little overlap between these two

<sup>38</sup> See the background paper *Summary of recent retail studies*, referenced in section 17 below.

catchments. Ilminster library catchment overlaps with Chard, Crewkerne and Taunton library catchments, but is the dominant catchment for Ilminster and the rural north of the area.

Table 12.3: Estimated number of people within walking distance of libraries:

Library	Estimated number of people within walking distance (2 miles)	% of Area 5 population
Chard Library	14,328	32.7%
Crewkerne Library	9,138	20.8%
Ilminster Library	6,504	14.8%

12.5. Chard is the largest town (with significant growth predicted), and Chard library has the highest level of usage for borrowing and public computer access. Chard also presents high levels of need and is the most deprived community in the area on most measures. The town has the only pocket of significant deprivation across multiple indices. The area around Chard has a significant risk of digital exclusion, and social isolation risks are very high in many parts of Chard town.

12.6. Public and Community Transport networks are generally less extensive in Area 5. Scheduled public bus routes link the larger villages of Combe St. Nicholas and Tatworth to the south into Chard, and also run eastwards to Crewkerne and north-west to Ilminster (and on to Taunton). The Chard and Ilminster 'Slinky' demand responsive transport service provides access into Chard for people in the Chard area who are unable to drive, or access scheduled public transport.

12.7. It follows that maintaining a principal library in Chard will be effective in meeting local needs and providing reasonable access to library services for this part of Area 5.

12.8. We believe that to meet local needs and provide reasonable access it will also be necessary to maintain a library building in Crewkerne, because:

- Access to Yeovil and Chard is possible by public transport, but journey times are lengthy, and timetables are infrequent. Neither of these alternative libraries are within reasonable cycling distance, and the cost of public transport is significant.
- Car ownership is low in many parts of Crewkerne - this is likely to reflect a population profile which has a higher proportion of older people than the average for Somerset.
- The population of Crewkerne is relatively large, and significant housing growth is forecast. Crewkerne is a service hub for the eastern part of Area 5, and also attracts shoppers from parts of Area 6 to the north (particularly South Petherton). There are two main food stores and a number of other local services which bring people into the town from the surrounding area.
- Although need is not as high as in parts of Chard, there are modest levels of need in some neighbourhoods in Crewkerne. In particular, the needs of children and older people were highlighted by a large number of respondents in what was a significant level of response to the consultation exercise in Crewkerne. Crewkerne has pronounced social isolation risks and a high rate of Adult Social Care intervention, as well as areas with lower incomes and high risks of digital exclusion.

- A significant number of people in Crewkerne currently live within walking distance of a library building, and the cost of public transport to Yeovil or Chard would have a significant impact on a relatively large number of people. Use of the public computer access is significant, and there are a large number of events, including events for parents and young children who may not be able to travel to alternative libraries. Having carefully considered consultation feedback, we do not feel that a combination of access to alternative libraries, Library Outreach Services, Digital Library Services and Mobile Library Services would meet the needs of Crewkerne residents.

*“Closure would impact the community - We need a library to be local. Crewkerne has a large number of elderly people without transport and the buses are useless. And what about the children?”*

*“Closing of the library will effect many elderly people, who may find it difficult to get to Yeovil for instance. there are also many who come to Crewkerne library because they can park here and use other shops easily.”*

*“I have read [the consultation documents] and noticed that the rationale to keep Crewkerne open is more extensive than the reason to close it. The biggest mistake in them is that Chard and Yeovil are easy to get to from Crewkerne. They are not, as our customers repeatedly tell us”*

*Staff consultation response*

12.9. We consider that the needs of Crewkerne and Chard can be met through a single library building, in a central location, in each town. We do not consider that additional outreach services are necessary to meet local needs in either location - these may be provided but would not form part of the statutory service.

12.10. Furthermore, we believe that to meet local needs and provide reasonable access it will also be necessary to maintain a library building in Ilminster, because:

- Access to Taunton and Chard is possible by public transport, but journey times are lengthy, and timetables are infrequent. Neither of these alternative libraries are within cycling distance. The cost of public transport to either location is significant.
- Although the population of Ilminster is not as large as Chard and Crewkerne, we estimate that over 6,000 people currently have walking access to Ilminster library, and significant housing growth is forecast for the town (which is a ‘tier one’ settlement).
- Ilminster is a service hub for the northern part of Area 5, with a main food store conveniently located near the library building. The rural areas around Ilminster have relatively high needs compared to other rural areas in Area 5 (and elsewhere in Somerset) and residents of these districts are likely to travel into Ilminster to access local services. The Chard and Ilminster ‘Slinky’ demand responsive transport service provides access to Ilminster for rural

residents in this part of area 5 who do not have access to vehicles and cannot access public bus services.

- Needs are likely to be lower in Ilminster than in Chard and Crewkerne. However, the provision of children's activities and events, and public computer access, was highlighted by many as meeting important local needs.
- Although not as significant as in other libraries, usage levels of public internet access and activities and events are significant. At this level of usage and considering in particular the needs of the area and the higher expense of public transport from Ilminster to alternative library buildings (compared to, for example, Somerton), we do not believe that outreach models of service delivery are likely to meet local needs sufficiently. Having carefully considered consultation feedback, we have concluded that a combination of access to alternative libraries, Library Outreach Services, Digital Library Services and Mobile Library Services is unlikely to meet the needs of Ilminster residents.

*"Outreach services are simply not adequate for a town with the population of Ilminster. Access to computers for using Gov.uk and finding work websites has to be available. Families can not afford to bus to Chard for children's events and activities"*

*Staff consultation response*

*"All 3 of my grandsons visit the library in Ilminster frequently. The toddler goes to the Toddler Group on a Tuesday and the 6 year old to Lego Club - they both regularly borrow books."*

12.11. However, given the level of resources available, we consider that there may be scope to reduce opening hours at Ilminster library, because:

- The library serves a relatively small population, compared to other library catchments in the proposed network. Although usage of Ilminster library is not insignificant, footfall per hour of opening is relatively low.
- Evidence from retail catchment studies and community engagement suggests that some people in the area are likely to travel to other towns for shopping, work and to access other services, although for other residents Ilminster provides a high proportion of needs locally.

There is no direct proposal in this delivery plan or the covering report to reduce opening hours, and we would only do this as a last resort. Any future proposal to reduce opening hours would be subject to a further period of public consultation. It is noted here as part of the service delivery plan because the plan is intended to have a long-term lifespan.

12.12. A number of income generation and community support opportunities for Ilminster library have been highlighted during the consultation period, and some are being followed up by libraries service staff. These initiatives are small scale and are unlikely to make a material difference to the resources available to the library service as a whole. However, we have a reasonable level of confidence that the budgetary provision for Ilminster library could be reduced slightly, and we are confident that the opportunities identified would have no material adverse impact on service users. If the opportunities identified are not capable of implementation, the assessment in



paragraph 12.11 above would be considered and we may consult on a potential reduction in opening hours.

**Library service provision in the rural parts of Area 5:**

12.13. All of the rural parts of Area 5 have reasonable access to one of Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne libraries. Taunton and Yeovil libraries are also likely to provide access to library services for some rural residents in the north and east of the area. Driving times to access libraries in one of the three main towns are generally around 15 minutes or less in normal traffic conditions. As noted in paragraph 12.6, some villages in the rural area around Chard have public transport access to Chard library. Villages to the east and west of Crewkerne are linked to Crewkerne by the Chard-Yeovil bus service, and (although potentially less sustainable) there is currently a bus linking Merriot to the north of Crewkerne into the library at Crewkerne. The rural area to the north of Area 5 is less well served by scheduled public transport, but community and demand responsive transport services the area around Ilminster reasonably well (providing access to Ilminster library), and the communities of Broadway/Horton have access to Chard and Ilminster by public bus.

12.14. To summarise, although public transport access is limited and may not be sustainable in all areas, we have concluded that needs of the rural parts of Area 5 can be served effectively by a combination of:

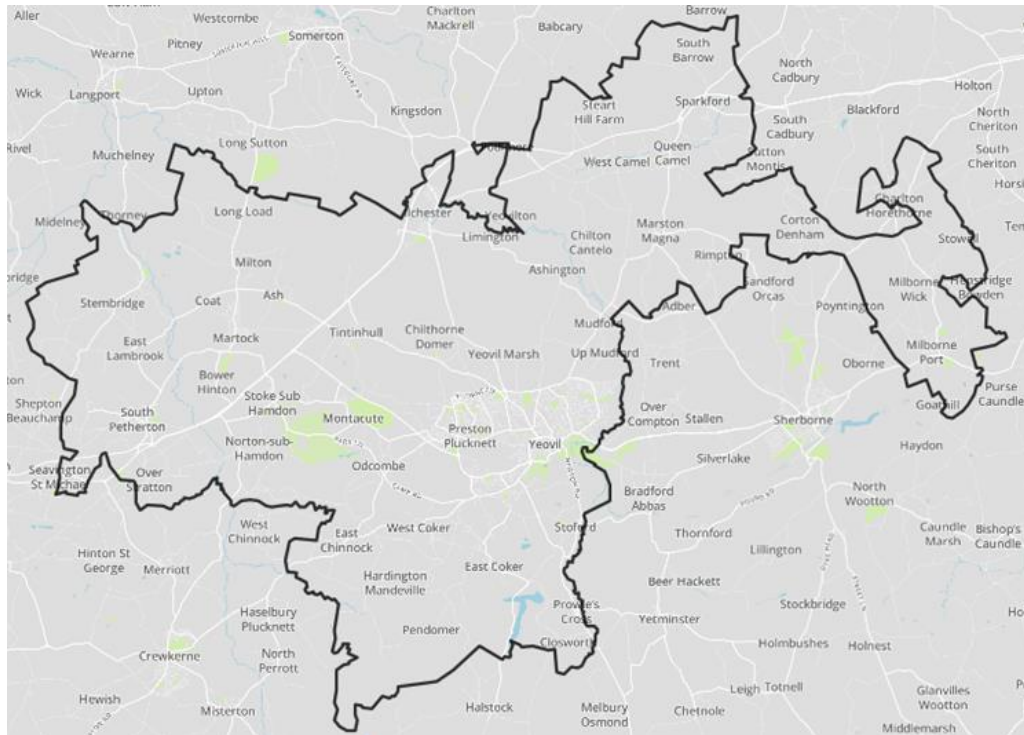
- Access by car, community transport or public transport to library buildings in Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster, with Taunton and Yeovil libraries providing additional access in some areas.
- The digital library service, for those who have internet access.
- The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy.

**Summary proposals:**

- The council's libraries will be retained in Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster.
- We will develop opportunities to reduce the cost of Ilminster library through the community support and / or income generation, or in other ways, with further local consultation if appropriate.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

### 13. Area 6: Yeovil and Surrounding Area

13.1. The map below shows the boundary of this area. Area 6 includes the southern / central part of South Somerset district, focussed on the main town of Yeovil, from South Petherton in the west of the area, Ilchester and Sparkford to the north, and Milborne Port to the east. The Dorset border forms the southern boundary of the area, and the community of Sherborne (in Dorset, outside Area 6) has close links to Milborne Port and Yeovil.



13.2. A number of people are likely to travel in to the area for work or study from other local authority areas, particularly Dorset. Yeovil has a further education college and is a significant employment centre. Many people in Sherborne and other parts of north Dorset are likely to travel to work or study in Yeovil. The provision of access for people whose place of work is within Somerset, or who are undergoing full-time education in Somerset, has been considered below in respect of this community.

13.3. Yeovil is the dominant shopping destination in the area, attracting shoppers from the whole area and well beyond<sup>39</sup>. Other communities in Area 6 retain far fewer shoppers within their towns and are unlikely to attract shoppers from any significant distance away. Martock, South Petherton, Ilchester and Milborne Port do not have any major food stores and services are fairly limited.

13.4. Yeovil town centre library catchment covers the whole area and extends beyond. Usage of Yeovil town centre library is lower in the north-western part of the area around South Petherton and Martock, where these libraries have the dominant catchments. Milborne Port library is the dominant catchment in Milborne Port village.

<sup>39</sup> Please see the background paper *Summary of recent retail studies*, referenced in section 17 below.

Yeovil, Somerton, Castle Cary and Wincanton library catchments overlap in rural areas to the north and east of Area 6.

13.5. Yeovil has the highest levels of need in Area 6. The catchment has by far the biggest population and is surrounded by a densely populated urban fringe which contains a further significant population in Tintinhull, Chilton Dorner, Montacute, East Chinnock, the Coker villages. Yeovil is the only principal town / tier 1 settlement and is likely to see significant housing and population growth. As noted above, Yeovil has a large population of workers (including some commuting from outside Somerset), as well as some students at Yeovil college, many of whom reside in Dorset. The town has high levels of deprivation, particularly in the north-east of the town, in the Westfields area to the west of the town, and around the town centre, but also (to a lesser extent) elsewhere in the town. Yeovil town centre library has very significant levels of usage.

13.6. Public transport routes radiate out from Yeovil town centre to:

- Crewkerne, South Petherton and Martock to the north west, with separate routes to all of these communities which, between them, serve a number of villages to the west, south-west, and north-west of Yeovil.
- Ilchester and Somerton and (separately) Castle Cary and Shepton Mallet to the north, serving some villages to the north of Yeovil and the area around Sparkford.
- Sherborne, Milborne Port and onwards to Wincanton and Gillingham to the east, providing a link between Milborne Port and Yeovil.

All of the main communities in Area 6 are linked to Yeovil town centre by public transport.

13.7. Within Yeovil, a town bus network complements the inter-urban public bus network, linking most of the suburban areas to the town centre. The majority of the built-up area of Yeovil lies within walking distance (2 miles) of the town centre, and a number of cycling routes extend out serving the outlying suburbs and industrial estates. As can be seen from Table 13.7 below, Yeovil town centre library serves the largest population within walking distance in Area 6. Over 50% of the population of the area live within walking distance of Yeovil town centre.

Table 13.7: Estimated number of people within walking distance of libraries:

Library	Estimated number of people within walking distance (2 miles)	% of Area 2 population
Martock Library	6,201	7.8%
Milborne Port Library	2,970	3.7%
South Petherton Library	4,884	6.2%
Sunningdale Library	31,751	39.8%
Sunningdale Library or Yeovil town centre Library	45,610	57.6%
Yeovil town centre Library	41,565	52.5%

13.8. It follows that maintaining a principal library in Yeovil town centre will be effective in meeting local needs and providing reasonable access for a large proportion of the area, particularly because of the relatively good public transport links.

**Library service provision in the urban area of Yeovil:**

13.9. Yeovil is a large town which is currently served by two library buildings in the town centre and at Sunningdale library, a relatively short distance to the north of the town centre. There was a very low response from users of Sunningdale library to the public consultation, reflecting a very low level of usage. Respondents were opposed to the closure of Sunningdale library and noted the difficulty of walking into the town centre, as well as the need to promote services at the library. Some respondents also highlighted social isolation issues for older people and people with disabilities.

*“This library is situated near sheltered accommodation, the users use it for more than a library service ... the librarian is very friendly and helpful. It is so good to have a place like this to go to where you can have a chat.”*

*“This proposal will isolate many people who will not be able to catch a bus into town, but are able to visit Sunningdale library.”*

13.10. We have carefully considered these views and have considered the number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in this part of Yeovil and how the needs of this population can be reasonably met. It is acknowledged that for some residents it is a long walk to the town centre, and that for elderly and disabled people travelling into the town centre is more difficult. However, having considered the feedback from the consultation exercise we believe that Yeovil town centre library provides good access to people in this part of Yeovil. This is because:

- Bus services serve the area well. There is a bus into the town centre from outside the current library site and the surrounding suburbs are served by two loop routes, providing short walking distance access across the vast majority of the north-east part of Yeovil.
- Walking distances into town are relatively short. The town centre is within a reasonable distance for parents pushing buggies, although people with mobility difficulties and younger children are less likely to be able to walk to the town centre. Cycling is relatively convenient for the whole of the urban area, for those who can cycle.
- For older people and people with disabilities, low-floor buses operate regularly into the town centre. Bus travel is free for people who are eligible for the concessionary travel scheme.

13.11. Although the area has high needs, and Sunningdale library provides a very valuable service, which is effective at preventing loneliness for a small number of people, usage and value for money are very low.

13.12. We have concluded that we will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library service in Sunningdale. However, if this is not possible, we believe that in the context of the resources available to the council, a combination of

library outreach provision (from the current site) and digital library services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for people in north-east Yeovil who are likely to find it more difficult to travel to the library in the town centre. In forming this judgment, we have considered the needs of the community, feedback from the consultation exercise, our duties as a best value authority, and an assessment of the potential impact of closure and the resources available to the council.

- 13.13. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, older people and disabled people (especially those with mental health conditions or learning disabilities).
- 13.14. To mitigate the impact on socially isolated older people, particularly those who find it difficult to use the town centre library, health and wellbeing activities for adults would form part of the library outreach provision delivered in this area.
- 13.15. The Westfields area of Yeovil has a range of high needs and is more distant from the town centre library. As part of our strategy to re-focus library provision on high needs areas, where we can make the most difference to outcomes, we will deliver Library Outreach Services in this part of Yeovil, as well as in the Monmouth / Sunningdale area. In both locations, Library Outreach Services would be designed to meet local needs; in particular, the needs of pre-school children, new parents, older children and the digitally excluded.

**Library service provision in the north-western part of Area 6 (South Petherton, Martock):**

- 13.16. We have concluded that it is necessary to maintain a library building in this part of Area 6 to meet local needs because:
- The area has a significant population, in the towns of Martock and South Petherton as well as surrounding villages and rural areas.
  - Although sustainable public transport routes link South Petherton and Martock to Yeovil, bus fares to access Yeovil are significant. We estimate that over 6000 people currently live within walking distance of Martock library, which has high levels of income deprivation to the north of the village. We consider that a population of this size, and need, should have more affordable access to a library building for those who do not have access to a vehicle.
  - A library in this area would provide good access by car for some parts of Area 4 that could be impacted by the closure of Somerton library.
- 13.17. With the notable exception of a pronounced pocket of deprivation in Martock, this part of Area 6, including the town of South Petherton, generally has a lower level of deprivation than many other parts of Somerset. With the level of resources available and given the level of local need identified through the needs assessment, we do not believe it is affordable to maintain two library buildings in this part of Area 6. This is because:
- The two buildings are less than 3 miles apart. Although they are not linked by scheduled bus service, the Martock and South Petherton Slinky service provides a link between South Petherton and Martock for those who do not have access to a vehicle, and the two communities are within reasonable

cycling distance for those who are able to cycle. Access by car between the two communities is convenient.

- The cost of maintaining two libraries in a relatively small area is significant and cannot be sustained in the current financial climate.

It is acknowledged that this approach is likely to have a significant adverse impact, as considered further in the paragraphs below.

13.18. We believe that the needs of these communities, and the surrounding rural areas, will be best served by maintaining a library building in Martock, rather than South Petherton. This is because:

- As set out in table 13.18 below, usage of South Petherton library is low, and is significantly lower than usage of Martock library, across all measures of usage. There is no doubt that a proportion of the difference in usage is attributable to the shorter opening hours at South Petherton, but footfall per hour at South Petherton is still one-third that of Martock library.
- Needs in Martock are significantly higher than needs in South Petherton. Further information on needs is set out in section 9 of Appendix 2; to summarise:
  - Martock has very high risks of digital exclusion and social isolation, and evidence of deprivation across a number of other indices. Feedback in the consultation and analysis of usage measures indicate that public internet access meets a significant need in Martock.
  - Although there is a pocket of social isolation risk in South Petherton, and some evidence of higher rates of disability and digital exclusion risk, needs overall are much lower.

Table 13.18: Selected library usage measures (2017/18 financial year)

Library	Active borrowers in the year	People's Network User hours	Event participation in the year	Footfall in the year	Current opening hours per week	Footfall per hour of opening	Total library catchment population
Martock	1,205	1,365	981	39,871	33	24	16,603
South Petherton	457	331	-	7,292	17	8	5,432

13.19. Feedback in the consultation and community engagement exercises from users of South Petherton library indicated that users of this library felt that the current library should be retained and that a mobile library delivery model would be insufficient. Concerns about the impact on older people (particularly those suffering from social isolation) and the impact of losing public computer access on digitally-excluded people were highlighted by respondents, alongside the value of the library for children. Access concerns were also raised by a number of respondents:

*"I understand why this consultation is required, however I am saddened that one of the last few community spaces is at risk. This loss would be significant to vulnerable adults and children who do not have the means or finances to travel. My choice would be to keep the building open."*

*“If South Petherton loses its library building altogether the negative effect on the local community will be most felt by those without cars: With the County Council's severe cuts to public transport subsidies there are now no longer any bus services to alternatives libraries in Martock, Ilminster, Crewkerne or Chard. And using the only remaining bus service out of South Petherton to get to Yeovil Library could be expensive for young families and difficult for pensioners with limited mobility.”*

*“With no car would have to go to Yeovil - not good.”*

13.20. We have carefully considered these views and have also considered the number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in South Petherton and how the needs of this population can be reasonably met. It is acknowledged that for residents without access to cars in South Petherton, who are unable to cycle to Martock, the bus service to Yeovil is inconvenient and (for those without concessionary passes) expensive. This is likely to impact elderly and disabled people, young children whose carers do not have access to a vehicle, parents of babies, and older children of school age. However, having considered the feedback from the consultation exercise, and particularly having considered the level of usage at South Petherton, we believe that access to a combination of libraries at Yeovil, Martock and Crewkerne, with a mobile library service to South Petherton, would provide good access to people in the urban area of South Petherton, and other users of South Petherton library living in rural areas. This is because:

- Martock library is a short distance away, within cycling distance for those who can cycle, and a short car drive. The Slinky service provides an affordable transport link to Martock library for those who cannot drive or cycle, and for disabled people who find it more difficult to use public transport.
- Many people living in South Petherton are likely to access either Yeovil or Crewkerne town centres regularly for food shopping, and to access other services.
- The scheduled bus service to Yeovil is considered sustainable and provides a free (albeit time-consuming) link to Yeovil library for those who have a concessionary bus pass.
- Usage of events and activities at South Petherton library is very low, and so the impact of a library closure on children and parents with new babies will be much lower than for some other libraries. Borrowing services can be delivered through a mobile library solution.
- Whilst usage of the public computer network access is modest, it is not significant, and we consider that Martock library provides reasonable access to this service for those on low incomes.

13.21. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library building in South Petherton. However, if this is not possible, we believe that in the context of the resources available to the council, a combination of digital library services and mobile library services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for people in South Petherton who may find it more difficult to travel to the libraries in Martock, Yeovil or Crewkerne. In forming this judgment, we have considered the needs of the community, feedback from the consultation exercise, an

assessment of the potential impact of closure and the resources available to the council.

13.22. We acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, children disabled people, and those on lower incomes.

13.23. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for South Petherton and believe that a frequency of 2 times per month, would be sufficient to meet the needs of those who cannot access alternative libraries. We have not identified any further locations where further stops are likely to be necessary. We would engage with community representatives in South Petherton to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

13.24. Furthermore, given the level of resources available, we consider that there may be scope to reduce opening hours at Martock library in this area, because:

- The area serves a relatively low population, compared to other library catchments in the proposed network. Although usage across Martock and South Petherton libraries is not insignificant, footfall per hour of opening is low at both libraries.
- Evidence from retail catchment studies and community engagement suggests that many people in the area are likely to travel to other towns for shopping and to access other services.
- Aside from a relatively small (but significantly deprived) population in Martock, the level of need is low.

There is no direct proposal in this delivery plan or the covering report to reduce opening hours, and we would only do this as a last resort. Any future proposal to reduce opening hours would be subject to a further period of public consultation. It is noted here as part of the service delivery plan because the plan is intended to have a long-term lifespan.

13.25. Options for reducing the overall cost of Martock library have been highlighted during the consultation period. These initiatives are small scale and are unlikely to make a material difference to the resources available to the library service as a whole. However, we have a reasonable level of confidence that the budgetary provision for Martock library could be reduced slightly, and we are confident that the opportunities identified would have no material adverse impact on service users. If the opportunities identified are not capable of implementation, the assessment in paragraph 13.24 above would be considered and we may consult on a potential reduction in opening hours.

**Library service provision in the rural parts of Area 6:**

13.26. Many of the rural parts of Area 6 have good access to Yeovil town centre. Paragraph 13.6 above details the public transport routes into Yeovil town centre and illustrates how many communities around Yeovil are served by public transport, enabling access to Yeovil library.

13.27. The southern and south-western parts of Area 6 mainly lie within a relatively short drive of Yeovil, although traffic congestion can considerably lengthen driving times at



peak times. Crewkerne library provides an alternative option for this area. All areas are estimated to be within a 20-minute drive time of either Yeovil or Crewkerne, with the more remote area south of Hardington Mandeville having the longest driving times, which are on the threshold of this target range. To the west of Yeovil, Martock, Crewkerne and Yeovil libraries all provide access within a maximum driving time of 15 minutes. Rural parts of the north of Area 6 are more distant from library buildings, although the large village of Ilchester (and the nearby Yeovilton airbase) is within a short (10-15 minute) drive of both Martock and Yeovil libraries. The area around Sparkford, Queen Camel and West Camel is more distant. Nonetheless, apart from a few areas which are on the threshold of the target driving time, either Wincanton or Yeovil libraries are estimated to be within a 20-minute drive in normal traffic conditions.

13.28. The area around Milborne Port in the east of Area 6 (including Halse, Lydeard St. Lawrence and part of the Quantock Hills) generally looks to Sherborne or Yeovil for services, although driving times to Wincanton are shorter for the rural part of this area than driving times to Yeovil. This part of area 6 (including Milborne Port) is generally between 20 and 25 minutes' drive (in normal traffic conditions) from either Wincanton or Yeovil. Some small convenience shopping is available in Milborne Port, the only village of any significant size in this part of Area 6. Milborne Port is linked to Yeovil town centre by public bus services and good road connections. A less frequent bus service also provides a link to Wincanton.

13.29. Feedback from the consultation exercise from users of Milborne Port library was limited, reflecting a relatively low level of usage for this library. Respondents strongly opposed the mobile library proposal, citing a range of reasons, including concerns for children and older people, and highlighting the value of the public computer access service.

"The library in Milborne Port is an invaluable resource for the local community. My children have found Love of reading through going to that library. Without it we will not go to a library at all because we don't have time to travel. The staff know the children's names and make them feel special every time we go. It would be devastating to lose Milborne Port ...

"The High Street in Milborne Port is becoming a drive through for Sherborne. I worry that another closure could affect the newsagents and butchers that are opposite. Not everyone has a car to get to Sherborne/Yeovil libraries. Buses have/are being cut and the fares are expensive plus time-consuming for a round trip.

13.30. We have considered the feedback from the consultation carefully and have concluded that we will seek to maintain a library building in Milborne Port through a Community Library Partnership. However, if this is not possible to achieve, we will provide reasonable access to library services for people living in Milborne Port and the surrounding rural catchment through a combination of access to the library

buildings at Yeovil and Wincanton, a mobile library service, and digital library services. This is because:

- usage levels for Milborne Port library are very low, reflecting a relatively small population. Even though the library's overall operating costs are low, it does not provide good value for money. Unit costs are high (the highest cost per visit, and the highest cost per user for public computer network usage, and fourth highest cost per visit in 2017/18).
- Evidence from the community engagement exercise and retail studies suggests that the majority of people living in Milborne Port are likely to make regular trips to Yeovil or Wincanton to access other services.
- Although driving times between Milborne Port and Yeovil / Wincanton are around the limit of the target threshold established (and could be affected by traffic congestion), they are considered reasonable. Levels of car ownership in Milborne Port are, on the whole, relatively high (the percentage of households with no car or van at the time of the 2011 census ranges between 4% and 23% in different parts of the village).
- There is an hourly bus service linking Milborne Port to Yeovil with a relatively short (24 minute) journey time. The bus service is considered to be commercially sustainable.
- Other than a small pocket of moderate digital exclusion risk, needs for Milborne Port have been assessed as being low, with lower than average deprivation on all other statistical measures. Overall, local needs are lower in Milborne Port than in many other communities in Area 6 and elsewhere.

13.31. We acknowledge, and decision makers must consider that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, younger children, older children, older people, disabled people, parents with babies, those living in surrounding rural areas (who would face longer driving times) and those on lower incomes. The high cost of public transport to Yeovil could make impacts more significant for individuals on low incomes who are unable to access the internet, and for families who do not have access to cars (either in the working week or otherwise).

13.32. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Milborne Port, and believe that one stop, once per month, would be sufficient if we are unable to establish a Community Library Partnership in Milborne Port. Subject to discussions with Milborne Port Primary School, mobile library provision could include a further stop outside the school to mitigate the impact of potential library closure on primary school children. We would engage with community representatives to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

13.33. To summarise, although driving times from some of the outlying areas in the south-western, northern and eastern parts of Area 6 could be slightly longer than the target time, we believe that needs of the rural parts of Area 6 can be served effectively by a combination of:

- Access by car, community transport or public transport to library buildings in Yeovil, Crewkerne or Martock, with Wincanton library providing additional access for some areas.
- The digital library service, for those who have internet access.

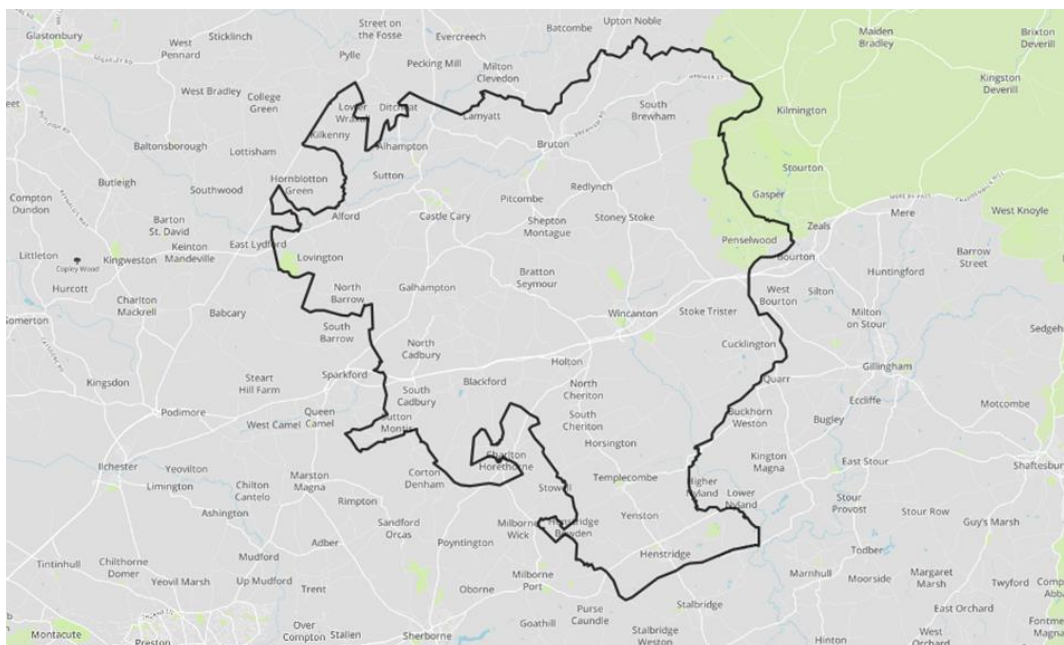
- The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy, with a further stop at Milborne Port primary school (if this can be agreed with the school).

**Summary proposals:**

- The council's libraries will be retained in Yeovil town centre and Martock.
- We will seek opportunities to reduce the cost of Martock library through community support and / or opening hours reductions, with further local consultation if appropriate.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Sunningdale (Yeovil). If we are unable to do this, we would provide Library Outreach Services to this community.
- We will provide Library Outreach Services in the Westfields area of Yeovil.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Milborne Port. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in South Petherton. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

## 14. Area 7: South East Somerset

- 14.1. The map below shows the boundary of this area. Area 7 includes the eastern part of South Somerset district, extending from the Wiltshire / Dorset border across to the rural catchment of Castle Cary in the north west, but excluding Milborne Port and its rural catchment in the south west (because this area of Somerset looks towards Yeovil for services).



- 14.2. Although this area borders Dorset and Wiltshire, we consider it unlikely that significant numbers of people come into Area 7 for work or study. Although each of the 3 towns in the district have employment opportunities, there are no further education establishments, other than the private schools in Bruton (where students do not generally look to local services for library provision). We do not consider the provision of access for people whose place of work or who are undergoing full-time education within area 7 to be a material issue.
- 14.3. Wincanton is the dominant shopping destination in the area, attracting shoppers from the whole area and beyond from Dorset<sup>40</sup>. Wincanton has a main food store and is a hub for other local services. Castle Cary and Bruton also have town centre shopping districts, but local services and shopping opportunities are more limited.
- 14.4. Area 7 has a small population, and relatively low levels of need compared to many other parts of Somerset. With the level of resources available, we do not believe it is affordable to maintain three library buildings in this part of Area 4 and propose that the number of library buildings is reduced to one. The three buildings are a relatively short distance apart (a maximum of 7 miles between Castle Cary and Wincanton libraries), and are linked by a bus service, which is relatively affordable. Community transport provides access for those who are unable to drive and who cannot use public bus services. Access by car between the three communities is generally

<sup>40</sup> Please see the background paper *Summary of recent retail studies*, referenced in section 17 below. This was also apparent from community engagement discussions.

convenient, with relatively short driving times. The cost of maintaining three libraries in a small area is significant and cannot be sustained in the current financial climate. It is acknowledged that this approach is likely to have a significant adverse impact, as considered further in the paragraphs below.

14.5. We believe that maintaining a library building in Wincanton will meet the needs identified for Area 7 and provide reasonable access most effectively, because:

- Wincanton is a hub for public and community transport in the area. Public transport routes link Wincanton to Bruton and Castle Cary, and to Yeovil via the southern part of Area 7. These bus routes are likely to be sustainable; the route serving Bruton and Castle Cary could be affected by reductions to funding, but some provision for public transport access is likely to be maintained. Wincanton is also the hub for the demand responsive transport scheme operated by the South Somerset CAT service. This provides access to Wincanton library for people who are unable to use public transport and do not have access to a vehicle.
- The population of Wincanton is large compared to the other two main communities. We estimate that nearly 6000 people live within walking access of Wincanton library, and significant housing growth is forecast. As noted in paragraph 14.3 above, Wincanton is a service hub for the whole of Area 7.
- Although need is not significant, there is some evidence of need in Wincanton town.
- Usage of Wincanton library is by far the highest of the 3 libraries in the area - nearly 4 times the volume of event participation and over 3 times the level of public computer access usage than the other 2 libraries combined.

14.6. The north-western part of Area 7 (including the small town of Castle Cary, the villages of Alford, Galhampton, Lovington and the surrounding rural areas) is more distant from Wincanton. Some parts of this area (e.g. around Ditchheat) are more likely to look to Shepton Mallet for services as an alternative to Wincanton. In Castle Cary town and the districts to the west and north, Castle Cary library has the predominant catchment at present.

14.7. Feedback in the consultation exercises indicated that users of Castle Cary library, and local stakeholder groups, felt that the current library should be retained. There was strong disagreement with the proposed mobile library solution, which was considered to be insufficient. Access was cited as a significant issue for the town and the rural surroundings. There is a bus service between Castle Cary and Shepton Mallet or Yeovil, but journey times are lengthy and the cost of the bus fare for people without concessionary bus passes is significant (£6.60 return for adults, £4.40 return for children aged 5-15 to Yeovil; higher to Shepton Mallet). An alternative service provides access, via Bruton, to Wincanton. This is currently less expensive and journey times are shorter. The service could be affected by funding reductions, which could have an impact on fare prices and / or frequency in the future.

14.8. Consultation responses also noted that Castle Cary is a growing town, with considerable housing development planned. Our needs assessment has highlighted that there is some income deprivation in Castle Cary town, which also has a high risk of social isolation and digital exclusion (although usage of the public computer access at the library is limited and not well used.). In spite of the lack of structured activities

(which are constrained by the lack of space at Castle Cary library), loneliness and social isolation are important needs being met by the library at present.

*“Another community resource gone. No bank, no library. We are very lucky to still have a post office. However, if money is the issue it will always be a hard call.*”

*“here are many groups of people in Castle Cary at risk of social exclusion, as your own data shows. Taking away a community hub, in a small town with limited community facilities, would make this risk even higher. You cannot fall back on the claim that Wincanton is only a 15-minute drive away. Not only can many people not drive, but that would also take footfall away from our town centre and shops”*

*“I would strongly support keeping the building open since I do not drive and have two young children. We regularly use the services there -- a couple of times per week during the summer holidays.”*

14.9. We have carefully considered these views and have also considered the number of people that are likely to be impacted by any change to library provision in Castle Cary and how the needs of this population can be reasonably met. As part of this assessment we have reviewed usage of the library, and levels of car ownership in Castle Cary town. Usage of the library for activities other than borrowing is very low; whilst for activities and events, this can be explained by the small space available in Castle Cary library, demand for the people’s network is very low - utilisation of the limited public computer access terminal was 25% in 2017/18, with around 100 users using just over 200 hours during the year. The limited public computer access currently provided is unlikely to be meeting identified digital inclusion needs. Therefore, it seems unlikely that there is any significant usage of the library to access unemployment benefit or other critical, regular online tasks. Whilst car ownership in much of Castle Cary town is slightly higher than the average for Somerset, there are two output areas in Castle Cary town which have very low levels of car ownership - up to 39% of households with no access to a car in one part of the town, and over 30% in a further census output area<sup>41</sup>.

14.10. As noted in section 3 above, taking into account the analysis from our equalities impact assessment and the significant financial challenges we face, we believe that inter-urban public transport does offer a reasonable form of access where populations are smaller. Journey times are long, the bus timetable is inconvenient, and fares are expensive, but our view is that the majority of people living in Castle Cary and the areas to the west and north would be able to access alternative library buildings in Wincanton, Shepton Mallet or Yeovil. We have concluded that:

- Many people in Castle Cary and the surrounding rural areas will regularly access Wincanton or other towns for other services, particularly for main food shopping.

<sup>41</sup> Data is from the 2011 census, at Output Area level.

## APPENDIX 1: LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

- Although journey times are lengthy, for those who have concessionary passes, bus services offer a free link from Castle Cary and some other communities in the area to Yeovil town centre and Shepton Mallet.
- Although there are a significant number of households that do not have access to a vehicle in Castle Cary, usage of the library is predominantly for borrowing. Data tells us that car ownership rates reduce with age, and it is likely that a significant number of the people who do not have access to a vehicle are eligible for the concessionary travel scheme, allowing free travel on public transport. However, there are likely to be a number of people without access to a car (particularly during the working week) who do not have a concessionary bus pass. We consider that the borrowing needs of this population can be met effectively through a combination of digital library services and mobile library services.
- Community transport is available in the area to provide access to Wincanton library for those who are unable to drive or use public transport.

14.11. Our impact assessment process has highlighted, and decision makers must note, that there are people who may not have access to a vehicle, who would find it much more difficult to access alternative library buildings. These include children (particularly primary school children visiting after school), those on low incomes, and families / new parents with babies. At an individual level, decision makers must consider carefully the fact that some adverse impacts could be significant. However, considering the overall level of resources available, we are recommending that the needs of this group could reasonably be met by a combination of Mobile Library Services and Digital Library Services.

14.12. Castle Cary library has a moderate level of borrowing use. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Castle Cary and believe that a frequency of around 3 times per month, would be sufficient to meet the needs of those who cannot access alternative libraries. Subject to discussions with Castle Cary Primary School, mobile library provision could include a further stop outside the school to mitigate, to some extent, the impact of potential library closure on primary school children. Our initial assessment indicates that there could be a need for new (monthly) mobile library stops at Alhampton, Ansford, and Alford. We would engage with community representatives in Castle Cary and these communities to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

14.13. It is acknowledged that needs currently being met by the library - in particular, addressing social isolation risks - would not be met locally by mobile library and digital library services. Our impact assessment process has identified some actions to mitigate the adverse impact this could have on those who find it more difficult to access alternative library buildings. However, decision makers must carefully consider the fact that some impacts are difficult to mitigate; in particular, the loss of public computer network access. We consider that, notwithstanding this important point, needs are met reasonably, because there is low usage of the public computer access terminals in Castle Cary.

14.14. We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library building in Castle Cary and, in recognition of the relative difficulty of accessing

alternative libraries for this community, we will provide ongoing financial support to a Community Library Partnership if it can be established. However, if this is not possible, we believe that a combination of mobile library provision and digital library services will provide reasonable access and meet local needs for people in Castle Cary and the surrounding area who are likely to find it more difficult to travel to the libraries in Yeovil, Wincanton or Shepton Mallet. In forming this judgment, we have considered the needs of the community, feedback from the consultation exercise, an assessment of the potential impact of closure and the resources available to the council.

- 14.15. As noted above, we acknowledge, and decision makers must note, that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, children and parents of babies, older people, disabled people, older children, those living in rural areas, and those on lower incomes. The access difficulties (especially the high cost of transport) mean that those on lower incomes who do not have access to a car are particularly likely to be impacted. This could include children and prime carers who do not have access to a car in the day.
- 14.16. We will seek to maintain a library building in Bruton through a Community Library Partnership. However, if this is not possible to achieve, we will provide reasonable access to library services for people living in Bruton and the surrounding rural catchment through a combination of access to the library buildings at Wincanton and Frome, a mobile library service, and digital library services. This is because:
- Levels of need in Bruton have been assessed as low. Bruton is one of the least deprived towns in Somerset.
  - Usage levels for Bruton library are very low. Even though the library costs relatively little to operate, it does not provide good value for money.
  - Evidence from the community engagement exercise and retail studies suggests that the majority of people living in Bruton are likely to make regular trips to Wincanton or Frome to access other services.
  - Driving times between Bruton and Wincanton are relatively short (around 15 minutes) Driving times from the rural districts to the north and west of Bruton are longer (around 20-25 minutes to either Frome or Wincanton), but these districts are more sparsely populated.
  - There is currently a bus service linking Bruton to Wincanton with a relatively short (15 minute) journey time, and community transport is available for people who find it more difficult to access this bus service. Fares are currently affordable. The bus service is heavily subsidised and frequencies and bus fares could be affected by future cuts to public transport funding. However, it is unlikely that the bus service would be removed altogether.
- 14.17. Feedback from the consultation exercise from users of Bruton library was limited, reflecting the low level of usage. Respondents did not support the mobile library proposal and raised concerns about the impact of a potential library closure on the educational development of children. There were some (but relatively few) comments about access difficulties.



*“The loss of the only communal space/ historic building. The loss of my Friday kids sing class.”*

*“This is a small rural community and closing the Library will affect the most vulnerable and elderly people who do not have the means to get to other Libraries due to lack of public transport. I realise that it is probably not the busiest Library.”*

14.18. We acknowledge, and decision makers must consider that this change in service would have an adverse impact on some people; in particular, younger children, older people, disabled people, parents with babies, people living in rural areas (who would have further to travel) and those on lower incomes. We have carried out an initial assessment of mobile library sufficiency for Bruton, and believe that one stop, once per month, would be sufficient. Our initial assessment indicates that there could be a need for new (monthly) mobile library stops at Pitcombe and possibly one further location in North or South Brewham. We would engage with community representatives to design an appropriate mobile library service, should this be necessary.

**Library service provision in the rural parts of Area 7:**

14.19. Many of the rural parts of Area 7 have good access to Wincanton. The other significant communities in Area 7 are Templecombe and Henstridge, which are both linked to Wincanton and Yeovil by public transport. Driving times for most of the area are relatively short; around 15-20 minutes to either Wincanton, Yeovil or Shepton Mallet from all parts of the district.

14.20. To summarise, we conclude that needs of the rural parts of Area 7 can be served effectively by a combination of:

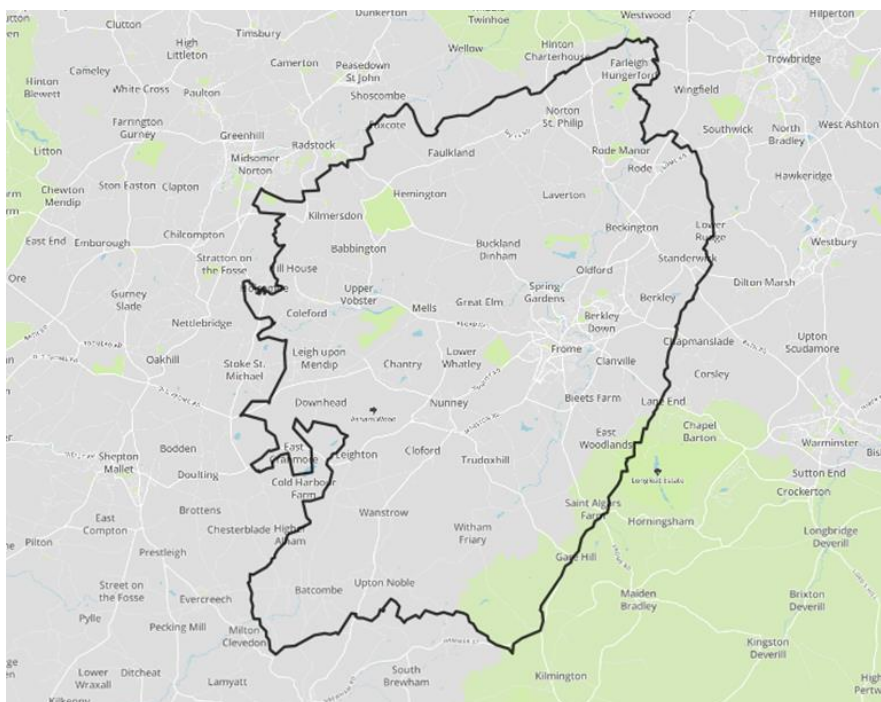
- Access by car, community transport or public transport to library buildings in Wincanton, Yeovil, Frome or Shepton Mallet.
- The digital library service, for those who have internet access.
- The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy, with further stops in the Bruton area and to the west of Castle Cary, as detailed above.

**Summary proposals:**

- The council's library will be retained in Wincanton.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Bruton. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community, and we would also explore demand for further Mobile Library Services in some surrounding communities.
- We will seek to establish a Community Library Partnership to maintain a library in Castle Cary. If we are unable to do this, we would provide a Mobile Library Service to this community, and we would also explore demand for further Mobile Library Services in some communities to the west of Castle Cary.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

## 15. Area 8: Frome and Surrounding Area

15.1. The map below shows the boundary of this area. Area 8 comprises of the north-eastern part of Mendip District Council, occupying the far north east of the county bordering Wiltshire and Bath and North East Somerset.



15.2. The level of cross-boundary movement is notable in this part of Somerset. Commuting and access to services between area 8 and the towns of Radstock/Midsomer Norton, Bath, Trowbridge, Westbury and Warminster was noted as being more significant than access from this part of Somerset to other Mendip towns. Frome is the major employment centre in the area and is likely to be a place of work for some inward commuters from Wiltshire. It is considered unlikely that any significant number of workers commute into Area 8 to work in other locations (though there is likely to be a significant amount of outward commuting from elsewhere in Area 8 to employment centres in Bath and North-East Somerset and Wiltshire). There are no major centres of further education - many students access post-16 study opportunities at nearby Trowbridge College in Wiltshire. Although not considered material, the provision of access for people whose place of work is within Somerset, or who are undergoing full-time education in Somerset, has been considered below in respect of Frome.

15.3. Frome is the dominant shopping destination in the area. Mendip District Council's most recent retail study notes that Frome is the dominant town centre within Mendip<sup>42</sup>. Frome and its surrounding retail catchment retain 83.4% of convenience goods shopping. Frome contains the only main food shopping centres in Area 8 and draws some shoppers from the Shepton Mallet and Wells areas. For more expensive, one-off purchases many shoppers in the area look to Bath or Trowbridge, but retail studies show that Frome is relatively self-contained for most leisure activities.

<sup>42</sup> Please see the background paper *Summary of recent retail studies*, referenced in section 17 below.

**Library service provision in Frome**

15.4. Frome has the highest levels of need in Area 8. It has by far the biggest population and is likely to see significant housing and population growth, and (as noted in table 15.4 below), we estimate that 68% of the population of Area 8 live within walking distance of Frome library. The town has relatively high levels of deprivation, as noted in paragraph 11.6 of Appendix 2, particularly in Trinity ward, but also elsewhere.

*Table 15.4: Estimated number of people within walking distance of libraries:*

Library	Estimated number of people within walking distance (2 miles)	% of Area 8 population
Frome Library	27,727	68%

15.5. Demand-responsive transport routes are orientated towards Frome town centre from the rest of Area 8. Public transport routes run into Frome from Trowbridge / Bradford-on-Avon (via Rode and Beckington) in the north-east, Warminster and Westbury in the east, Shepton Mallet (via Nunney and Leigh-on-Mendip) in the west, Bath (via Norton St. Philip and Beckington) in the north, and Midsomer Norton/Radstock (via Coleford, Holcombe and Mells, or alternatively Buckland Dinham) to the north-west.

15.6. Within Frome, a town bus network complements the inter-urban public bus network and most parts of Frome town are linked to the town centre by public bus routes. All of the built-up area of Frome lies within walking distance (2 miles) of the town centre.

15.7. Maintaining a principal library in Frome town centre will be effective in meeting local needs and providing reasonable access for Area 8.

15.8. No changes were proposed for Frome library in the public consultation, and the consultation response was relatively limited as a result. Nonetheless, an encouraging number of people took the time to respond and supported the ‘no change’ option. Comments about Frome library, and the proposed outreach delivery in the town, were generally positive. Concerns were raised about the use of volunteers, and the changes being proposed elsewhere in Somerset. However, because the only change proposed in Area 8 was to deliver additional outreach services, we received some useful feedback on this aspect of the proposals.

*“There is no doubt we need to keep all the services running in Frome, plus the additional ones. This is a growing and thriving community that needs what you offer.”*

*“I didn’t realise we had a 20% deprived area in Frome but I welcome the Outreach attempts & congratulate the Lib service in recognising & responding to the great need in these areas, despite the financial downturn”.*

“Additional outreach services would mean more people have access to the great services provided”

“Why do you feel the need to take services to areas outside the library premises surely the current building is accessible to all and the mount already provides excellent community services.. Whilst there are many elderly people in nearby villages who do not even have access to borrow books”

“I live in the trinity area, so technology would be of interest”

15.9. As part of our strategy to re-focus library provision on high needs areas, where we can make the most difference to outcomes, we will deliver Library Outreach Services in the Trinity and Mount areas of Frome. In both locations, Library Outreach Services would be designed to meet local needs; in particular, the needs of pre-school children, new parents, older children and the digitally excluded. We will also endeavour to deliver outreach services in other parts of Frome, but this will not form part of our comprehensive and efficient service.

**Library service provision in the rural parts of Area 8:**

15.10. Many of the rural parts of Area 8 have good access to Frome, with Shepton Mallet also providing alternative access in the south-west of Area 8. Paragraph 15.5 above sets out how the main communities are linked by public transport to Frome. Driving times into Frome or Shepton Mallet are not significant and (we estimate) are within the 20-minute target time in normal traffic conditions, with the exception of the far south of Area 9 around Batcombe, which is between 20-25 minutes' drive of Shepton Mallet or Frome.

15.11. The area around Coleford in the north west of Area 8 has the only notable deprivation outside of Frome, with some risk of social isolation and digital exclusion, and income and health deprivation at levels below the average for Somerset. The rest of the rural part of Area 8 has little evidence of need.

15.12. To summarise, we conclude that needs of the rural parts of Area 8 can be served effectively by a combination of:

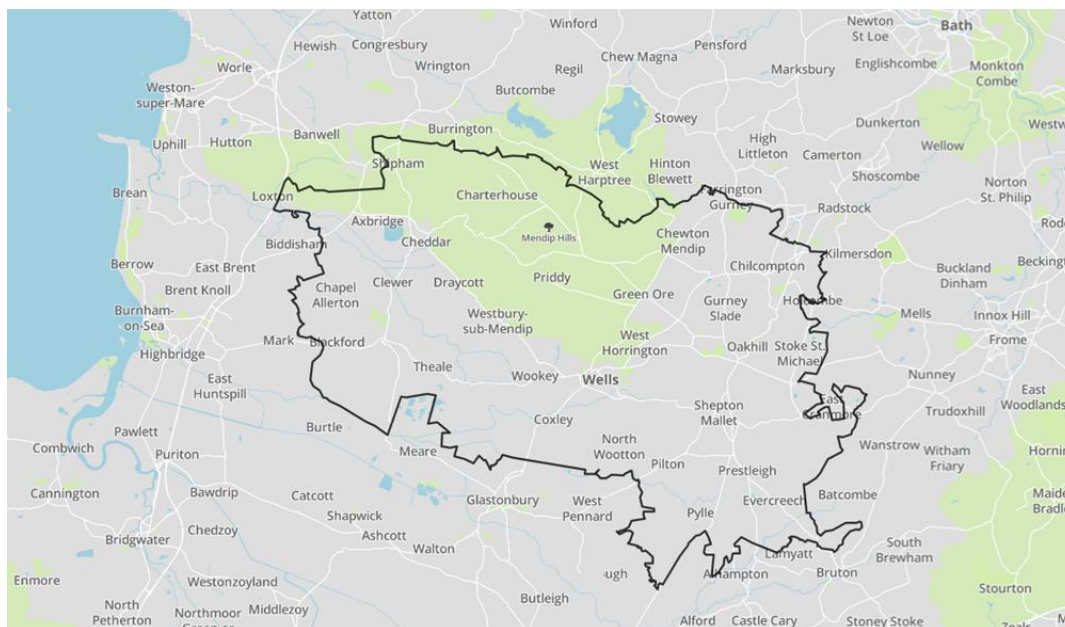
- Access by car, demand-responsive transport or public transport to library buildings in Frome or Shepton Mallet.
- The digital library service, for those who have internet access.
- The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy.

**Summary proposals:**

- The council's library will be retained in Frome.
- We will provide Library Outreach Services in the Trinity and Mount areas of Frome.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

## 16. Area 9: Wells, Shepton and Mendip Hills Area

16.1. The map below shows the boundary of this area. Area 9 includes the north-western and central parts of Mendip District, and the north-eastern part of Sedgemoor District. The Mendip Hills cover the northern half of the area.



16.2. Few people are likely to travel in to the area for work or study from other local authority areas. There are no further education establishments in Area 9. The area borders North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset, and some people from these local authority areas may travel to Shepton Mallet or Wells (or other areas) for work, but we consider that numbers are likely to be limited. There is significant outward commuting from parts of Area 9 into Bristol and Bath. We do not consider the provision of access for people whose place of work or who are undergoing full-time education within area 9 to be a material issue.

16.3. Town centre and retail studies published by Mendip District Council and Sedgemoor District Council<sup>43</sup> define 3 distinct zones based around the three main towns in the area. Retention of convenience goods in the Cheddar / Wedmore area defined by the Sedgemoor study is relatively low at 34%. Although the study was carried out before a new food store opened in Cheddar, it is likely that this area still 'leaks' a large proportion of convenience shopping trips to larger food stores in Weston Super Mare and Wells. The other two retail zones (Wells and Shepton Mallet) have the largest rates of 'leakage' for convenience goods of the 4 zones in the Mendip area, but still retain around 60% of food shopping, largely in the single large supermarket in Shepton Mallet and the main food shops in Wells. The survey carried out to support the retail study found that 46% of shoppers in Wells were not shopping in their nearest centre, illustrating the draw of Wells as an attractive shopping and leisure / tourism destination.

<sup>43</sup> See the background paper *Summary of recent retail studies*, referenced in section 17 below.

16.4. Probably because of a significant town centre appeal, Wells library has the dominant catchment in Area 9, extending across the whole of Area 9 and beyond. Shepton and Cheddar catchments are more tightly defined around these communities to the east and west of Area 9 respectively. Area 9 as a whole has relatively low levels of deprivation compared to other parts of Somerset.

16.5. Table 16.5 below shows that 53% of the population of Area 9 live within walking distance of one of the libraries in the 3 main towns. The remaining 47% represent a relatively large rural population which is a feature of the area - a significant proportion of the population live in villages rather than urban areas.

Table 16.5: Estimated number of people within walking distance of libraries:

Library	Estimated number of people within walking distance (2 miles)	% of Area 9 population
Wells Library	12,926	22%
Shepton Mallet Library	10,971	19%
Cheddar Library	7,008	12%

16.6. Wells is the largest town (with significant growth predicted), and Wells library has the highest level of usage across all measures by a considerable distance. Wells has moderate levels of need, including some areas with moderate deprivation (though not as pronounced as many other towns in Somerset). There are more significant risks of social isolation and digital inclusion in some parts of the town.

16.7. Wells is well-served by a network of sustainable public transport services and is a hub for community transport networks. Commercial bus services run into Wells town centre bus station from Cheddar and villages along the southern edge of the Mendip hills, Chewton Mendip, Chilcompton and Gurney Slade in the north of Area 9, and Shepton Mallet and Street / Glastonbury to the south-east and south-west. Wedmore and villages to the west of Wells, as well as Wookey Hole, are served by a less frequent service funded by parish councils (the council considers this service is less sustainable than the other services above).

16.8. Maintaining a principal library in Wells will be effective in meeting local needs and provide reasonable access to library services for a large part of Area 9, including many of the populous villages around the southern and eastern end of the Mendip Hills.

16.9. We believe that to meet local needs and provide reasonable access it will also be necessary to maintain a library building in Shepton Mallet, because:

- Access to Wells, Frome and Glastonbury is possible by public transport, but timetabled frequencies are less convenient, and the cost of public transport is significant, considering the size of the population that currently have walking access to the library. None of these alternative libraries are within reasonable cycling distance.
- Although need is not as high as in other towns in Somerset, there are modest levels of need in some neighbourhoods in Shepton Mallet, including pronounced pockets of social isolation in the town, and some income deprivation. The rural



area around Evercreech, accessible by public transport from Shepton, has high risk indicators for digital exclusion.

- The population of Shepton Mallet is relatively large, and significant housing growth is forecast. Usage of the library is not as significant as might be expected for a town of this size<sup>44</sup>, however, on all measures (particularly public computer access) the library is well used.
- Shepton Mallet is a service hub for the south-eastern part of Area 9, and attracts shoppers (primarily to the large food store and retail park) from parts of Area 7 to the south and Area 8 to the east. The large Tesco food store draws a number of shoppers to the town from a wide rural area.
- Public transport connections - north to Stratton-on-the-Fosse and Oakhill, to Croscombe in the north west, Pilton to the west, Evercreech, Ditcheat and Castle Cary to the south, and Doultong and Stoke St. Michael to the east - provide reasonable access to a number of villages in this part of Area 9 and bordering parts of Areas 7 and 8.
- A number of people in Shepton Mallet currently live within walking distance of a library building, and the cost of public transport to Wells or Glastonbury would have a significant impact on a large number of people. Use of the public computer access is significant, and although library usage is not as high as in other towns of a similar size, a number of parents and young children make use of the library and this group may not be able to travel to alternative libraries. Having carefully considered consultation feedback, we do not feel that a combination of access to alternative libraries, Library Outreach Services, Digital Library Services and Mobile Library Services would meet the needs of Shepton Mallet residents.

16.10. The strongest message coming out of the consultation feedback from Shepton Mallet was concern about the proposed move to the Shape Mendip Hub. Having considered this feedback and the alternative suggestions made by stakeholder groups during the consultation, the covering cabinet report recommends taking more time to develop an alternative option for a sustainable library location in Shepton Mallet. A key objective will be to improve footfall and usage of the library.

*“Moving the library from town to a council office building will have a detrimental effect on customers. A library is a place for learning and browsing and pleasure. Council offices are for bills, officialdom and bureaucracy. They don't mix.”*

*“Libraries are really important. Shepton Library should definitely be kept in the middle of the town to keep the community together. We only have one bus an hour to Wells. To get a library book from Well would take almost all morning or afternoon and unless you have a bus pass over £5.00.”*

*“It removes the traffic of people visiting the library from this part of town and as a consequence businesses will suffer”*

<sup>44</sup> See paragraph and table 12.10 in Appendix 2 for further details.

16.11. We consider that the needs of Wells and Shepton Mallet can be met through a single library building, in a central location, in each town. We do not consider that additional outreach services are necessary to meet local needs in either location – we do not think they are necessary for a comprehensive and efficient service.

1.1. Furthermore, we believe that to meet local needs and provide reasonable access it will also be necessary to maintain a library building in Cheddar, because:

- Access to Wells is possible by public transport, but journey times are lengthy, and timetables are infrequent. Wells is not within cycling distance. The cost of public transport to either location is significant.
- There was a very significant response to the consultation from people in Cheddar, reflecting a strong campaign which highlighted the value of the library to this community. Although our statistical review of need in Cheddar and the surrounding area suggested that needs were relatively low, compelling evidence was provided through the consultation about the value of the library in addressing locally high social isolation and income deprivation needs. The provision of children’s activities and a wide range of events, was highlighted by many as meeting important local needs for this relatively distant part of Somerset.
- Although the population of Cheddar is not as large as Wells and Shepton Mallet, we estimate that over 7,000 people currently have walking access to Cheddar library, and significant housing growth is forecast for the town (which is a ‘tier one’ settlement). There is a further significant population in the large villages surrounding Cheddar, many of which have access to Cheddar along the public transport route running through from Wells to Weston-Super-Mare.
- Cheddar is a service hub for the north-western part of Area 9, with a reasonable-sized food store and car park conveniently located near the library building.
- Although not as significant as in other libraries, borrowing levels and attendance at activities and events are reasonably high, considering the size of the catchment. The level of usage, and the needs identified in the consultation exercise, the good value for money provided by the library, and the expense of public transport from Cheddar to Wells, we do not believe that mobile library models of service delivery are likely to meet local needs sufficiently. Having carefully considered consultation feedback, we have concluded that a combination of access to alternative libraries, Digital Library Services and Mobile Library Services is unlikely to meet the needs of Cheddar residents.

*“Lots of older people do not drive to get to Wells. To make a visit to Wells Library it would take Cheddar people at least 2 hours by bus. Also many other things go on in the Library most days which makes it a good meeting place for everyone.”*

*“There are currently plans for around 300 new houses in Cheddar, about 100 in Axbridge plus more in surrounding villages, therefore foot fall could increase by up to 1000 people.”*

1.2. However, given the level of resources available, we consider that there may be scope to reduce opening hours at Cheddar library, because:

- the library serves a relatively small population, compared to other library catchments in the proposed network. Although usage of Cheddar library is not insignificant, footfall per hour of opening is relatively low.
- Evidence from retail catchment studies and community engagement suggests that some people in the area are likely to travel to other towns for shopping, work and to access other services, although for other residents Cheddar provides a high proportion of needs locally.

There is no direct proposal in this delivery plan or the covering report to reduce opening hours, and we would only do this as a last resort. Any future proposal to reduce opening hours would be subject to a further period of public consultation. It is noted here as part of the service delivery plan because the plan is intended to have a long-term lifespan.

1.3. An alternative cost-reduction strategy has been put forward by community stakeholders for Cheddar library during the consultation period, alongside a firm offer of community support, and this is being followed up by libraries service staff. The initiative is small scale and is unlikely to make a material difference to the resources available to the library service as a whole. However, we have a reasonable level of confidence that the budgetary provision for Cheddar library could be reduced slightly, and we are confident that the opportunities identified would have no material adverse impact on service users. If the opportunities identified are not capable of implementation, the assessment in paragraph 16.13 above would be considered and we may consult on a potential reduction in opening hours.

#### **Library service provision in the rural parts of Area 9:**

1.4. All of the rural parts of Area 9 have reasonable access to one of Cheddar, Wells and Shepton Mallet libraries. Glastonbury, Burnham-on-Sea and Frome libraries are also likely to provide access to library services for some rural residents on the boundaries of the area. Driving times to access libraries in one of the three main towns are generally around 15 minutes or less in normal traffic conditions. We estimate that the whole area is within the target 20-minute driving time of a library building. As noted above, many of the larger villages have public transport access into Cheddar, Wells or Shepton Mallet. The sparsely populated Mendip Hills area in the north of Area 9 has no scheduled public transport, but car ownership in this area is high, and populations are small.

1.5. To summarise, although public transport access is limited and may not be sustainable in all areas, we have concluded that needs of the rural parts of Area 5 can be served effectively by a combination of:

- Access by car, community transport or public transport to library buildings in Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster, with Taunton and Yeovil libraries providing additional access in some areas.
- The digital library service, for those who have internet access.
- The existing network of mobile library stops, monitored and reviewed through the application of the existing policy.

**Summary proposals:**

- The council's libraries will be retained in Cheddar and Wells.
- The council will retain a library in Shepton Mallet but will relocate the library to improve value for money and reduce costs. We will follow up on opportunities to develop a town centre location for a potential shared library hub in Shepton Mallet as an alternative to the Shape Mendip site.
- We will follow up on opportunities to reduce the cost of Cheddar library through community support, or in other ways, with further local consultation if appropriate.
- We will provide Digital Library Services across the area.
- The existing network of Mobile Library stops will continue, subject to regular reviews under the established policy.

## 2. Background papers, useful links and links to supporting evidence

A wide range of background and supporting documents are referred to in the paper, all can be found online and links are set out here:

2.1. The library service re-design programme is embedded in a clear strategic framework, set through a formal County Council decision in November 2017.

- Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework  
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=566>

2.2. A large range of statistical data has been used to support the assessment, and various technical and methodological approaches have been employed in the analysis. Summaries of the statistical data, and details of the technical approaches employed are set out in a range of documents and datasets that have been developed and produced by the library service re-design project team.

- Library Catchment Mapping Tool  
<https://catchments2018.azurewebsites.net/>

The following datasheets can be viewed in the Evidence and Data section of <http://somersetlibraries.co.uk/redesign/>

- Access assessment Data sheet
- Value for Money Data sheet
- Data Analysis – Methodology and Data Sources
- Summary of recent retail studies

2.3. The analysis has also drawn upon data sources developed by the Somerset Intelligence partnership, and the needs assessment and equalities impact assessment:

- Somerset Intelligence website [www.somersetintelligence.org.uk](http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk).

17.4 The following papers can be viewed in the Redesign Decision section of <http://somersetlibraries.co.uk/redesign/>

- Appendix 2 Needs Analysis
- Appendix 4 Equalities Impacts Assessment

17.5 A public consultation exercise was carried out from 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018 to 13<sup>th</sup> June 2018, and feedback from this consultation has been used extensively in developing this assessment.

- The Consultation Report is Appendix 3 in the Redesign Decision section of <http://somersetlibraries.co.uk/redesign/>

- 17.6 We have summarised some of the recommendations and provided further detail on certain models.
- The following papers can be viewed in the Community Library section of <http://somersetlibraries.co.uk/redesign/>
  - Guidance on Community Library Partnerships
  - Process for agreeing and establishing Community Library Partnerships
- Further information on mobile library services is available in the policy decision paper agreed by Cabinet in 2015 - Cabinet report setting out mobile library policy: <http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/council/board3d/2015%20March%202%20Item%204%20Paper%20A%20Library%20Service%20Review%20Programme.pdf>

Further papers can be viewed in

<http://somersetlibraries.co.uk/redesign/>

- Mobile Library Services - possible frequencies and stop locations
- Library Outreach Services
- Community Library Partnership

2.4. Finally, there are a number of government publications that have informed and guided the approach taken and datasets used:

- Libraries shaping the future: good practice toolkit – see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-shaping-the-future-good-practice-toolkit>
- Longer-term, evidence-based sustainable planning toolkit – see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/longer-term-evidence-based-sustainable-planning-toolkit>
- Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 – see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021>

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