



**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL
COMMITTEE
MEMBERS' QUESTIONS
February 3rd 2006**

1. Questions from Mrs Elise Whiteley on libraries

- 1) Will the County Council please reconsider the threatened closure of the Library in Virginia Water?
- 2) If the County Council does close this library, what will the money saved be used for?
- 3) If the library is closed will Surrey County Council open a day centre for retired people who, as a result of the library closure, will be deprived of a much valued village centre meeting place?

Response from Mr Chris Norris, Head of Libraries

The County Council has not yet made a decision to close any libraries. A decision will be taken by the Council on 11 April, following a period of consultation that will include surveys of library users and public meetings.

The case for closing libraries is based on the need to invest in the improvement of libraries, thus money saved and/or released from the closure of some libraries will be invested in extending the opening hours and improving the infrastructure of other libraries.

The decision to close the library, if taken, will not be coupled to any decisions about day centres for retired people, which in general are the province of the District Councils. The consultation about possible closure of the library will include consideration of alternative service provision.

2. Questions from Mrs Mary Angell on libraries

- 1) The Head of Library Services has told me that New Haw library has been selected for possible closure as it is one of the most valuable real estates sites for

sale, and the money will be reinvested elsewhere in the library service. How do I explain this to my constituents as anything other than asset stripping?

2) New Haw Library is a major social centre, particularly for the Eikon youth project, Adult Education classes, for school children and the elderly - please can you explain how a mere mobile library may be considered an equivalent alternative provision?

3) The Big Lottery has awarded £80 million nationally (to be distributed in June) to adapt library buildings to accommodate additional services e.g. creches, advice bureaux - has Surrey County Council considered submitting a bid for such funds to avoid the closure of the libraries under threat?

4) The Surrey Structure Plan (Policy DN12) states:
"Where development leads to the loss of existing facilities for which there is a continuing need, alternative equivalent provision must be made..... This policy also provides a framework for contributing to the maintenance of existing facilities where threatened by development proposals. When assessing the impact of development proposals on existing facilities, the local planning authority should also take into account the potential for the re-use or sharing of existing facilities".
If SCC wish to dispose of the New Haw library site it would have to demonstrate that the premises were no longer needed for library purposes and could not be re-used by another community facility - do you have sufficiently robust arguments to prove that there is no such potential community use for the premises?"

Response from Mr Chris Norris, Head of Libraries

Any discussion of asset values is commercial in confidence, and if the subject of a committee discussion would be handled in Part 2.

The consultation process is designed to elicit from users their needs and allow officers the opportunity to devise alternative provision should the facility be closed. The options for alternative service delivery include "books on wheels" for housebound people, one or more mobile library stops, a book drop off and pick up point in a shop or a "mini library" in a community venue.

Once the criteria for the Big Lottery Community Libraries programme is published, officers will consider whether or not to make any applications for funding.

If the Library Service relinquishes its use of the building, then officers will work on the case for planning consent for change of use.

3. Question from Mrs Elise Whiteley regarding voluntary sector accommodation:

The voluntary sector is finding it very difficult to find suitable accommodation to continue with their activities. In view of the benefit they provide to the community will the County Council please investigate further the possibility of providing such accommodation?

Response from Mr Ian Cresswell

The Council's scope to provide office accommodation in the Runnymede community for the voluntary sector is very limited at present and unlikely to improve as our rationalisation programme continues to progress and more buildings close. During 2006 the Council will close 2 leasehold offices in Chertsey and will continue to work towards closure of the Runnymede Centre in 2008.

It is widely recognised that accommodation for the voluntary sector is an area of concern and there is a need to engage partners more fully in examining opportunities. Officers believe that the County Council's Voluntary Sector Development Plan (known as Change Up) due at the end of March will provide the means through which future accommodation needs and solutions can be progressed.

4. Question from Mrs Elise Whiteley regarding Station Path, Virginia Water:

Please give a progress update on changes which were being examined for the Station Path from Trumps Green Road to the Railway Station, Virginia Water, to make access to the village easier and safer - residents have informed me that the path needs to be cleaned, and improvements are needed as wheelchairs and perambulators cannot easily access the village centre because of the narrow footway on Trumps Green Road.

Response from Mr Richard Bolton, SCC Transportation Manager for Runnymede

A report will be brought to the next meeting of this Committee to consider pedestrian improvements under the railway bridge on Trumps Green Road. This is as a result of a request by Members (at the Members' tour in 2004) to look at improving pedestrian facilities, following the closure of the Furnival Close pedestrian railway crossing. The intention is to introduce a priority give-way for vehicles and therefore be able to reduce the carriageway width and increase the footway width for pedestrians. Computer modelling is being completed to give a better understanding on the impact this may have on traffic flow. Assuming there are no tangible drawbacks, and subject to Committee approval the intention is to construct this scheme in the financial year 2006/07. It will be funded from the LTP budget with a significant contribution from the central Safer Routes to School budget.

The footpath between Trumps Green Road and Virginia Water Station (footpath 65) was added to the forward programme following the 2005 Members' tour. Assuming staff resources remain consistent, the proposal is to undertake a feasibility study in 2008/09 with construction the following financial year. Any improvements will take into consideration the Borough Council's intention for the continued use of their Bourne Car Park.

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Officers have undertaken a recent inspection of the footpath and in general the level of cleanliness seems satisfactory. Nevertheless residents' concerns will be brought to the attention of Runnymede Borough Council (as the street cleansing authority).