



Ceris Howard,

Head of Library and Customer Services

Brighton and Hove City Council

17 September 2025

Parish Council Response to the Consultation on the Sustainability Plan for Libraries

Dear Ceris,

1. Rottingdean Parish Councillors have carefully considered the proposed Sustainability Plan for Libraries and discussed this at our August public meeting, which was attended by over 50 residents, and at our September public meeting where there was unanimous support for our assessment of the plan as set out below.
2. The Parish Council understands the pressure BHCC is under to reduce expenditure, and we support your stated desire to maintain a sustainable library service. We believe that Councillors do not want to close libraries at a time of concern that young people are turning away from the books to screens and when there is deep concern about social isolation for older people.
3. The closure of Rottingdean library would be a devastating blow to our community. It is more than a place to borrow books. It is a community hub at the heart of the Village and has been so for some for-75 years. A place where young people can be encouraged to spark their imagination by reading and where older people meet to enjoy reading clubs and interact with others.
4. While we understand the need to review all services, including statutory ones, we do not have confidence in the process that has led to development of the Sustainability Plan now being consulted on. We consider that **the review process has not been correctly followed, the financial and policy case for the closure of Rottingdean Library is weak, the impact analysis is incomplete and the proposed mitigation inadequate.** We are therefore urging Cabinet members to think again.

The Review Process

5. We feel that the process in developing the sustainability plan does not meet the requirements set out by the Department of Media Culture and Sports (DCMS)¹ that states that Library authorities should be able to demonstrate:
 - (i). plans to consult with local communities alongside an assessment of their needs (including any projections of need)
 - (ii). consideration of a range of options (including alternative financing, governance or delivery models) to sustain library service provision in their area
 - (iii). a rigorous analysis and assessment of the potential impact of their proposals
6. The plan is clearly predicated on a decision made on the 7th of February 2025 to close at least three libraries prior to any specific impact analysis. The plan therefore focuses only on which libraries to close rather than whether or not to close any libraries. It is not evident that other more strategic alternatives that could maintain the entire network and achieve desired savings were put to Councillors. For example.
 - (i). reducing staffed hours more widely across the network to enable staffed some opening of all libraries
 - (ii). partnering with social enterprises, charities or trusts to deliver the library service
 - (iii). use of voluntary staffing
7. All of these could potentially reduce the current library service running costs in the long term and maintain a comprehensive library service. This type of approach is not unprecedented. BHCC has successfully partnered with the RNLI charity to enable the proposed cuts in the lifeguard service to be avoided whilst also saving money. Other local authorities have adopted similar approaches with their library services thus avoiding closures while reducing running costs. Indeed, in a number of cases this has led to the development of thriving community hubs, for example in Devon and Torbay.

The Financial and Policy Case for Closing Rottingdean

8. The financial case for closure presented was misleading. Part of the rationale for closure states that Rottingdean Library is the most proportionately expensive to

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service/libraries-as-a-statutory-service>

run as it is located in a Grade II listed building – but the building itself is not to be closed and therefore any maintenance savings for one room would be marginal. Two thirds of savings would come from salary costs; insufficient consideration has been given to voluntary staffing options or reducing paid staff hours as an alternative to closure.

9. Closure of Rottingdean library does not make sense in policy terms. Membership and usage are high and very high per head of population with membership of 1609 from a population of 3176. On your analysis Rottingdean Library ranks the sixth most visited in the network, with 29,000 annual visits, and ranks much higher if measured per head of population.
10. Closure would represent a significant loss to Rottingdean of a community hub that has been at the centre of the Village for over 70 years with savings to be realised representing a small proportion of the £215,000 total

Incomplete Impact Analysis and Inadequate Mitigation

11. The initial Equality Impact Assessment does not adequately describe the impact on protected groups. 32% of Rottingdean residents are over 65 with the majority over 70 and nearly half of this group over 80. A bus journey from Rottingdean to Saltdean would mean crossing a major highway, twice and to Woodingdean would require two bus journeys. This would significantly and disproportionately affect the ability of older people and those with mobility issues. The mitigation proposed through the diversion to E services would also disproportionately affect access to books for older people and increase their social isolation particularly in the winter months.
12. An analysis of the impact on young people is absent. There is no mention of the fact that there are two primary schools and two nurseries within 400 meters of the library that make extensive use of the library facilities. Closure could deprive young children living in or attending school in Rottingdean of a valued resource to promote reading. It is entirely unrealistic to expect teachers to transport young children to neighbouring libraries.
13. The analysis does not reflect the changing demographic of Rottingdean. In the last 3 years, housing developments, including the provision of new social housing in the centre of the village, have increased the population by more than 300 that will have changed the age profile and socio-economic profile.

Public Reaction

14. Rottingdean library is more than a place to borrow books. It is a community hub at the heart of the Village. A place where young people can be encouraged to spark their imagination by reading and where older people meet to enjoy reading clubs and more importantly a safe quiet place where they can interact with others. The importance of this resource is clearly evidenced by the dramatic reaction by Village and nearby residents against closure with a petition of almost 3500 signatures, the formation of a save the library campaign group and the attendance of around 200 people at the 9th of September drop-in session.

Reconsidering the Case for Closure

15. In conclusion the Parish Council considers that the guidance provided by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport for local authorities in changing a statutory library service has not been followed. No strategic alternatives to closure have been presented to Councillors, the policy and financial case for the closure of Rottingdean Library is weak and the impact analysis incomplete and proposed mitigation ineffective.
16. For these reasons the Parish Council requests that Councillors **consider carefully the points made in this letter and the responses to the consultation for our residents.**
17. Parish Councillors urge Cabinet members to look again at the case for closing any libraries and particularly Rottingdean Library which would represent the loss of a vital community hub at the heart of the Village supported and valued by all who live, learn and work in Rottingdean.
18. Copies of this letter go to Cllr Bella Sankey, Cllr Jacob Taylor, Cllr Allan Robins, Cllr Bridget Fishleigh, Cllr Mark Earthy, Jess Gibbons CEO, Brighton and Hove, Deb Austin, Corporate Director - Families, Children and Wellbeing, Chris Davidson, Chair, Rottingdean Heritage and Chris Ward, MP.

Yours



Chris Hayes, Parish Clerk, sent on behalf of Rottingdean Parish Council.