

Statement in response to HCC's confirmation to close Fair Oak library – July 2020

The decision of the County Council to progress the proposal to close Fair Oak library is extremely disappointing. As is the response that the Parish Council has had from the County confirming this.

In their letter to the Parish, the County incorrectly states that the Parish Council's suggestions for alternative models came "three months after the consultation". The Parish Council, in its formal consultation response, which was submitted before the consultation deadline stated: -

"The consultation document in recognising the importance of local libraries to the local community states that it would welcome approaches from organisations. In that vein and in seeking to support, enable and empower our local community to be more resilient, the Parish Council asks the County Council to consider the following options:

- 1) *That there be no closure;*
- 2) *That reduced opening hours be applied, condensed into full days, with rest of the building being available for hire by community groups for the provision of community activities (the Parish Council would offer support of bookings management), providing rent to the County to offset the annual expenditure on the service provision;*
- 3) *That the County either gifts the building to the Parish Council/or leases the building at a peppercorn rent, including existing stock, allowing the Parish Council to provide an alternative library model;*
- 4) *That alternative funding options be explored; and*
- 5) *That the library be co-located within an existing centralised community building.*

*The Parish Council requests that the above options be considered fully prior to any final decision being made and **that open dialogue take place between both authorities to explore the feasibility of the options provided.***"

Despite the turmoil of the pandemic, the Council's Library Task & Finish Group continued its work, with emails and formal letters being submitted to the County after the consultation to commence this dialogue.

In addition, whilst the Parish Council understands and appreciates the additional financial constraints Covid-19 has placed on the County, this should not be used as justification for closing a key community asset. The County should look to explore innovative ways and means to work jointly with Parish Council's to help facilitate community-based library models. To dismiss the Parish Council and its willingness to save this essential community asset is extremely troubling and disappointing. As is the dismissal of the expanding population that this Parish will face in the next five years.

Whilst the Parish Council will continue to lobby the County on this matter, it will also look to explore other options and seek support from other key partners such as Eastleigh Borough Council and local voluntary sector organisations. With the effects of Covid-19 being keenly felt by our most vulnerable residents, services which support and aid the community should be retained or re-shaped to ensure the community at large recovers from the devastating impact of the pandemic.

The Parish Council will continue with its efforts, through the Library Task & Finish Group to explore all options to secure essential community facilities in the parish.