

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL LIBRARIES CONSULTATION 2018

RESPONSE ON BEHALF OF WIVELISCOMBE LIBRARY



Friends of Wiveliscombe Library Campaign Group

June 2018

This joint response to Somerset Libraries Service Consultation 2018 has been prepared by the Friends of Wiveliscombe Library Campaign Group and is supported by:

Wiveliscombe Town Council

Chipstable Parish Council

Clatworthy Parish Council

Fitzhead Parish Council

Milverton Parish Council

Upton Parish Council

Wiveliscombe Primary School

Kingsmead School

Wiveliscombe Community Centre

Wiveliscombe Area Partnership

Wiveliscombe Civic and Historical Society

10 Parishes Business Group

Friends of Wiveliscombe Library

We believe Wiveliscombe Library should be kept as it is, run and paid for by Somerset County Council.

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Wiveliscombe library is one of the best used in Somerset and offers good value for money. It has notably high use by the young (5-11), elderly (65+) and females. Many users have the protected characteristic of rurality. People on low incomes are also significant, who would be deterred by high costs of travel to other libraries. The saving to SCC from changing Wiveliscombe library would be small and the description of their financial difficulties may be over-stated by not accounting for business rates retention.
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We dispute the rationale for changes to Wiveliscombe library, which is established and well-used. Its closure would transfer costs to our community which are larger than the savings made. The catchment area is different to that suggested by SCC and has even more rural users with limited access to other libraries. We support the Council’s Vision, but a community partnership or mobile library service are not acceptable alternatives to a council-run library in Wiveliscombe.
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Section 1 'What Wiveliscombe Library means to me':

- **Comments received**
(originals in Book of Protest)

'A haven of peace, a very important meeting place and focal point of notices what's on etc. '

'I love Wivey library because I can borrow CDs for music learning (choir), browse for books and discuss with friends. Also use a PC when mine out of order and get valuable advice. Don't take it away!'

'I am not in and out all the time but I rarely go to Taunton or Wellington so wouldn't be able to use those branches. I use the library to order books that have been recommended and sometimes for research. I wouldn't bother if Wivey didn't have a library.'

'The library has to stay. Our government provides the nation with free education, they cannot take it away from us now.'

'The library is a place where you can relax in peace and quiet while your mind wanders through magical stories. That is what Wivey has and what Wivey needs to keep.'

'Many kids spend too much time online gaming. Books stop this.'

'I've been a library user since I was a child. I remember the joy of finding books and that I could take them home. I brought my own children to Wivey library and they found a love of books. We weren't stuck with a narrow selection. I use the library on a very frequent basis. Getting books I've ordered delivered, seeking out fiction and non-fiction. A valuable resource for music books. I can't go to Taunton regularly due to the cost. Keep Wiveliscombe library open.'

'Job seekers, students, pensioners, children, middle-aged, mums, dads, carers, we all need libraries'.

'Wivey Library has been a godsend to me and my family for the past 19 years we have lived here. Books for all the family no matter what stage or age we are at. A friendly face of staff and other local residents, a true hub of the community. All of us are avid readers and my children have all joined in with the summer reads throughout the years. I love browsing or picking up books I've ordered. We would not be who we are without Wivey Library. Staff (Karen now) are helpful and brilliant about our book group orders. We have had our book group for 12 years now and I love reading books I'd never pick out on my own. Please keep Wivey open!'

'The Library is an important 'place' and 'space'. Even when closed people are inspired and interact with displays and information. As a 'space' it gives people the environment they need - for example reading corners for young children, computer desks for accessibility and an area to browse and explore. The selection and changes in books as is important as the place/space contribution to well-being. As a rural mobile library user as a child (libraries that were eventually withdrawn) my choices were limited and it was not possible to use the space for anything else. It is a neutral space - it puts people on an equal footing - from adult book group users, to children with dyslexia or young people with mood disorders.'

'A friendly place to read or chat. Books are always available, I have ordered specific science related books for my A-levels and science courses. Always helpful staff and a central hub of the small rural community. It is a lifeline for people who are lonely, depressed, old and just about anybody. The heart of the town. Please keep it open for future generations of people.'

'Having lived in Wiveliscombe for 20 years the library has always been a focal point for myself, my daughters and my friends. Whether to simply borrow books, meet friends, use the Internet (very important) it has been a constant. To lose this valuable resource would be a crime. It should be open five days a week and applauded for its dependence and creative warmth even in hard times.'

'Wivey Library is the core place of our community for schools, the Summer Reading Challenge, the author meet and greets, coffee mornings and toddlers as well as providing a quiet and friendly space for anyone. For someone who enjoyed reading at school (which library is awful) it was a place to get books from. And Karen is such a lovely lady! When the library is open it always gets people in showing how vital this library is to Wivey!'

'Wivey Library is an invaluable resource to the community and would be greatly missed if it closed. Particularly valuable to young parents and children.'

'I rely on Wivey Library for my Internet access. The alternative would be to sit in my house - alone.'

'I often use the library with my son - he enjoys coming to choose books for the week. Wellington Library is too far for us to go - (we live in Clatworthy) - so we would struggle to access Library services'.

'It's a great library with more variety than at my school and better service! It's everything you could want a local library to be with personable staff who are very enthusiastic about their work.'

'Essential for my teaching and work with the literary charity and for my interests as an amateur musician.'

‘Essential to be able to access’.

‘The library is part of my weekly routine to return and borrow books. It is a place to meet people and have a chat. It is vital for computer and Internet access. Our book club orders its books monthly through the library. My grandchildren always enjoy visiting and borrowing books when they stay. My husband is recovering from a cancer operation and has relied on the library to keep him supplied with countless books during his convalescence.’

‘I read a lot of books, so the library in the town is important to me. I am able to return books there, select new ones from authors I have not read before and collected books ordered on line. It is a social hub where people meet and find information about what’s going on in the area. Karen is a professional and her expertise is valued. She provides guidance, recommends books, puts on displays on a whole range of subjects and organises talks by local authors. I have a boy with severe autism and, when he was young, the library was the only calm place he could visit in the town. It introduced him to books which he still loves. He could not travel on buses as he couldn’t be close to other people. A local library is essential for all, especially those with disabilities.’

‘As a ‘Wivey’ resident with the library literally a stone’s throw away, the facility of the town library means a great deal to me. As an O. A. P., I recognise the library as a social hub of the town during the day - vital to a town like Wiveliscombe with an ageing population. Youngsters too don’t miss out as there’s a regular ‘Storytime’. It’s also a vital resource for children at the two local schools who are frequently tasked with the research projects, or just need a quiet spot for their homework. Shutting Wivey Library would mean the end of this vital facility. Few would bother to travel to Wellington or Taunton so their life would be impoverished. It’s a vital element of town life - worth preserving.’

‘As a newcomer to Wiveliscombe the library for me has been a valued source of information about the town of Wivey and all the various activities. The library windows are a good source of information on what is happening in the town and I regularly attend the drop-in coffee morning and Poppy Ops groups that utilise the library space. Having the library on my doorstep enables me to borrow books without having to trek into Taunton town centre, a place I usually go to using the park and ride scheme and therefore would not be wanting to carry back lots of books as well as any shopping. As well as being somewhere to borrow books the library has helped me to make new friends in a town where I did not know anyone 6 months ago.’

- **An author’s perspective**

‘Wivey Library is hugely valuable to me in all sorts of ways. For a start, I can reserve books for research and pick them up locally, without having to take a large chunk out of

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my day to travel to Taunton; and I can engage with local readers via author events and book groups. Given that – like most writers – I spend most of my day alone in front of a computer monitor, being able to meet and talk with other readers and writers is most appreciated!

I would not be a writer if I had not benefitted from free local library access when I was a child. My own children love to visit Wivey Library, making themselves comfortable in the children's corner while they read and choose what to take home. On my regular visits I see many others doing the same thing, and I wonder – how many of those children will continue to have free access to good-quality reading material if Wivey Library shuts? They won't all be chauffeured to Taunton and back, that's for sure. And, with the best will in the world, a volunteer-run service just wouldn't provide the same level of expertise to help these children along.

If we are to improve literacy and provide opportunities for local young people, Wivey Library must remain both open and council-run.'

Dr Catherine Hanley

(published by Boydell & Brewer, Yale University Press, The History Press, Pen & Sword, and Widen; avid user of Wivey Library)

Section 2 Organisations, facilities and charities.

Wiveliscombe is an extremely active community with many voluntary and self-help organisations and charities. They include the Wiveliscombe Area Partnership, the Jim Laker Fund, Wiveliscombe Community First Responders, Wiveliscombe Community Swimming Pool, the Rotary Club and Wiveliscombe Consolidated Charities. There is a free local newspaper, 'The Wiveliscombe Messenger', published by the Civic and Historical Society, which comes out every two months, and a community radio station, 10Radio, which is entirely run by volunteers. They, and many more, can all be seen on the Wiveliscombe Area website: www.wiveliscombe.com.

As to churches, there is a C of E church, St Andrew's, a Catholic church, St Richard of Chichester and the Evangelical church. All are well supported. In the wider catchment area of the Library, there are active churches in Brompton Ralph, Chipstable, Clatworthy, Huish Champflower, Langley Marsh and Waterrow.

We also have a popular charity shop which is partly staffed by volunteers.

The Town Council takes an active role in protecting and improving the town and assisting the local community. It has committees which manage the recreation ground, which hosts a number of sports and leisure clubs, public toilets and allotments.

All this demonstrates that **Wiveliscombe takes on a great deal of responsibility for itself**, and the people of Wiveliscombe and surrounding areas give most generously of their time and money. We feel that there is little capacity or appetite to take on yet more volunteer or financial commitment in the shape of a community partnership for running the library. In addition, we do pay for the library through council tax so would argue that **we should not have to pay twice**.

Comments from local organisations

- **Civic and Historical Society**

'Wiveliscombe Library is an integral part of our community, serving not just the town but many surrounding rural parishes. It is also much more than a place to borrow a book - it is a meeting place, a chance for people to learn, a hub for groups to work on projects, a computer access point and also the "home" to many book groups who rely on copies of their monthly reads to keep them discussing. To think of closing such a valuable facility is wrong, unfair to our rural community and without a viable argument. The Wiveliscombe Civic and Historical Society strongly resists any such closure and will do all it can to support the friends of Wivey Library in their fight to keep our library open.' Pauline Homeshaw MBE, Chair.

- **10 Parishes Business Group**

'Many people from the surrounding communities come to Wiveliscombe specifically to use our excellent library, they meet their friends and use the local shops. Without the library many of the local shops and businesses would inevitably lose this important regular trade to Wellington and Taunton.

There are over 1000 people who regularly use Wiveliscombe library, mainly elderly. The free parking and close on-street parking make visiting Wiveliscombe very easy, important things that are not readily available in Taunton or Wellington.

There is no longer a bus service from Wiveliscombe to Wellington, so local people without their own transport would have to make expensive and due to the further reduced service, very time-consuming bus journeys to visit Taunton library. Wiveliscombe is the hub of a rural, isolated and dispersed local community, with many small settlements, hamlets and parishes - our library offers a host of facilities, including access to the internet which many folk do not have at home.

10 Parishes Business Group actively uses the library to promote local activities, most recently to launch our printed directory of 10 Parishes business and services, which has been very well received by the community. To lose our library would deny so many people the use of this wonderful facility.'

- **Wiveliscombe Evangelical Congregational Church.**

'As an Evangelical Church Community, we believe that the Wivey library should remain open and be funded by Somerset Council.

We have found that the library provides an invaluable resource for the local community, as well as a source of reference for us as a Community Church.

We are aware that many of our congregation use and value the library, and as there is no longer a bus service from Wiveliscombe to Wellington, (and a severely cut back service to Taunton) it is often expensive and difficult for local people, without their own transport to make use of the library services there.

We have various contacts who are unemployed, and who have limited internet access, so the library is a vital part of them seeking work. Many people are only able to pay and access their various on-line accounts via the library computer.

Broadly, we are seeking with others to maintain Wiveliscombe as a hub of a rural, isolated and dispersed local community, with many small settlements, hamlets and parishes. We see the library as vital in our desire for the community to remain as a distinctive community in this area.'

Rev Martyn Parry.

- **St. Andrew's Church, Wiveliscombe**

'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.

Libraries are important for all, but in particular the young and older generations, who are the most likely to be limited by transport as above. Reading is a proven way to develop the minds of the former, and keep the minds of the latter active. Both are essential and we have both age categories well represented in the congregation.

Reading is not the sole benefit of visiting the library though, particularly, again for the older generation. The library is manned and this provides an essential and at times sole contact for people. Both the reading above, audio books which are available, and contact are important tools for staving off and combating loneliness, a known factor in health outcomes, and Alzheimer's for example.

A mobile van visiting for a short period of time would not serve at least half of these needs, which in a rural community are not otherwise easily met.

There are many community supported services which Wiveliscombe runs for itself and the surrounding community. Wivey link provides an essential role, is well used and mostly run by volunteers. Lunches and meeting are held for the elderly.

We have in the last 2 years lost our Children's Centre, and though the nursery remains this provides childcare, but does not support families in any other way. The community and church volunteers have again stepped in to the breach as above. Community volunteers run a toddler group, the church run a baby group (actually demand being so high, two end up being run consecutively in the same morning). We honestly cannot run another service filling the gap for something we pay for in our taxes, and others have provided for them.

We are a small community who are quite self-sufficient, but there is a limit to the amount of volunteering possible.

As Christians it is our belief it is our responsibility to look after, and speak out for those in need, the elderly, and those who have no voice. The proposals for the library are not suitable for the needs of the town both from an academic or social perspective.'

Judith Swan, Churchwarden.

- **Milverton Parish Council**

'Wiveliscombe library is the closest library to Milverton, and its loss would be felt by the many parishioners of Milverton who see Wiveliscombe as their closest hub of local

amenities, services and facilities. The loss of any one service or facility inevitably reduces the obvious value of having a comprehensive set of services in one area, and so impacts on the use of all the others. The 'domino effect' where the loss of one service accelerates the decline of others is well documented in many rural communities. MPC believes that retaining the library is an important part of supporting the interdependent network of services that go together to create the vital local hub that Wiveliscombe is for the surrounding parishes.' Russell Jenkins, Chair.

- **Fitzhead Parish Council**

The library is well used by many and would be a huge loss to the community and the surrounding area, especially those who have no or limited transport.

It is important not to allow all the services which have been in existence for many years to disappear. These can be a lifeline for those who have difficulty in getting to the larger towns and can be a social meeting point too for many who may be on their own.

- **Wiveliscombe Town Council**

See appendix B.

Section 3 Wiveliscombe Library

- The Library's catchment area comprises the town of Wiveliscombe and many surrounding **small rural parishes, which look to Wiveliscombe as a hub** or centre for a range of services and amenities.
- The library is situated in Wiveliscombe town square, close to the post office, shops, community offices, bus stop, cafés, 2 public houses, estate agent, hairdresser, chiropodist and launderette. Wiveliscombe Primary School and Kingsmead Secondary School are within easy walking distance. The local Community Centre is the venue for the Monday OAP lunch club, the Saturday morning farmers' / artisan market, the Craft Group and many other groups and events. The doctors' surgery is at Lister House, 5 minutes' walk away, and there is a nursery and pre-school on that site also. There are two car parks nearby.
- The library measures 12m x 8m. It is leased from the Co-op and the lease is due to expire in May 2020. It is open 17.5 hours per week on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.
- Window display - The library has two large windows facing onto the square. The window display changes regularly and reflects seasonal events, such as Christmas or Easter. Local groups, such as the Craft Group or the Town Band have also put displays on in the window.
- Library assistant – we have one library assistant. Not only does she do all the 'day-to-day' business, dealing with the books and helping users on the computers, but she also is very proactive in planning and organising events and activities. She provides an essential part of the library service, giving advice, ordering books, looking after the book groups, dealing with money on behalf of SCC and generally maintaining a great deal of continuity on all aspects of the work of the library. Naturally, she has a thorough knowledge of where the books are in the library, whether they are in the 'Fiction' section, or the 'Crime' section or in a special display and so is able to find books very quickly. **We believe that a paid librarian/library assistant, in the employ of the Council, is essential for the good running of the library.**
- The books – these include a popular Children and Young Person's section, a good selection of general fiction books and a comprehensive collection of crime novels. Non-fiction books include books about Wiveliscombe, local towns and villages, areas of interest such as Exmoor, history, biographies, art, crafts and gardening. There is also information about health and records of the meetings of town and county councils. DVDs are available to borrow and there are two computers, which are in use at least 4 hours a day, and a printer.

- Activities – weekly coffee ‘drop-in’ sessions where anyone, for a charge of 50p, can call in for a coffee and a chat. ‘Poppy Ops’ also meet there – they are knitting and crocheting poppies for Remembrance Day 2018 when they plan to ‘yarnbomb’ the square with poppies and to place poppies on the obelisk in the Rec, to honour the centenary of the end of the First World War. Storytime, for very young children, takes place once a week. The library holds author events around three times a year, where local, published authors speak, the latest being a talk on historical fiction and, the previous one, on science fiction.
- During the summer, **the Summer Reading Challenge** is in full swing, at the end of which there is an award ceremony for the children who have completed the challenge. **In 2017, 86 children signed up for the challenge and 71 completed it.** ‘One-off’ events are also held, for example, a Holocaust Day commemoration.
- Book groups – the library supports **12 active book groups**. Usually a nominated member in possession of the group's library card comes in and asks for a book title and confirms the number of copies required. The fee is £5.50 per title request.
- Volunteers – there is an active Friends group, the **Friends of Wiveliscombe Library** (F.O.W.L.). They organise, or help with, many of the activities described above, raise funds for the library and work to increase the profile of the library. They meet regularly. They have close links with the Primary School and have contributed some funds to the Young Adult book group at Kingsmead and are planning links with other groups in the community. Volunteers work in the library regularly, providing on average 37 hours per quarter.

Wiveliscombe library, whilst physically ‘small’, punches above its weight in influence and impact. It is a ‘hub’ for the surrounding rural areas. **There is a mutual benefit between what else goes on in the town centre and the library.** It is well supported by volunteers and is much loved.

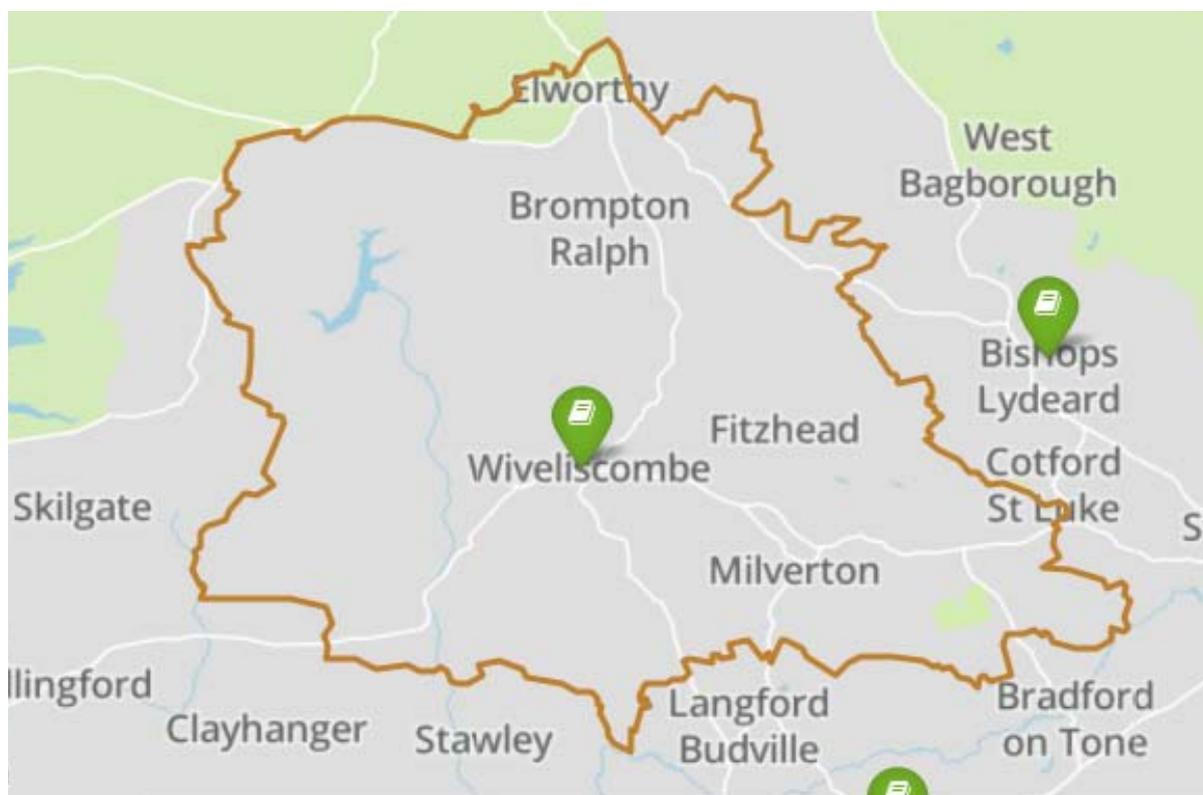
Although well-used by people of all ages, it has a high proportion of users who are elderly or are children. There are activities which cater for them although there are other activities to appeal to all age groups. To lose it would be devastating for the whole community and **not in line with Outcomes in the Vision**, (see section 5) in particular, Outcome 3 ‘*..strengthen and enable communities*’, Outcome 4 ‘*..people (including the vulnerable) enabled to make informed choices on health and wellbeing*’, and Outcome 5 ‘*...contribute to economic growth*’.

Section 4 Finance and Statistics

Library Use in Wiveliscombe

An analysis of County consultation data shows that **Wiveliscombe library is one of the best used in Somerset**, when rated by user ratios per person in the catchment area, as detailed in this section.

Somerset County Council has judged Wiveliscombe library's catchment area to be as shown below.



SCC data shows Wiveliscombe library has 737 active borrowers and 22,961 annual visits. The tables below show both these measures as a per person ratio for the number of people in catchment areas, so that the ranked performance of all libraries can be compared. Libraries with the best performance are at the top of the table and those with the lowest at the bottom. Wiveliscombe library is near the top of both tables, showing that it has high numbers of borrowers and visits for its catchment area.

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| Library | Possible closure* | Hours open per week | Active borrowers per person in catchment |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--|
| Frome | N | 44 | 0.148 |
| Dulverton | N/Y | 19 | 0.142 |
| Porlock | Y | 17.5 | 0.131 |
| Wiveliscombe | Y | 17.5 | 0.107 |
| Minehead | N | 19 | 0.102 |
| Chard | N | 31.5 | 0.095 |
| Crewkerne | N/Y | 29 | 0.094 |
| Milborne Port | Y | 14.5 | 0.094 |
| Williton | N | 28 | 0.094 |
| Wincanton | N | 28.5 | 0.092 |
| Burnham | N | 34 | 0.088 |
| Nether Stowey | Y | 20 | 0.087 |
| Ilminster | N/Y | 21.5 | 0.087 |
| Cheddar | N/Y | 24 | 0.087 |
| Watchet | Y | 17.5 | 0.086 |
| South Petherton | Y | 16.5 | 0.086 |
| Taunton | N | 47.5 | 0.081 |
| Langport | N | 31.5 | 0.081 |
| Martock | N/Y | 32.5 | 0.080 |
| Bridgwater | N | 41 | 0.078 |
| Shepton Mallet | N/Y | 26 | 0.077 |
| Bruton | Y | 12 | 0.076 |
| Castle Cary | Y | 19.5 | 0.071 |
| Yeovil Central | N | 47.5 | 0.070 |
| Glastonbury | N | 46 | 0.067 |
| Somerton | Y | 28.5 | 0.063 |
| Wells | N | 47.5 | 0.060 |
| Wellington | N/Y | 37 | 0.060 |
| Street | Y | 34 | 0.060 |
| Bishops Lydeard | Y | 11 | 0.059 |
| North Petherton | Y | 21 | 0.055 |
| Highbridge | Y | 9.5 | 0.042 |
| Priorswood | Y | 29 | 0.042 |
| Sunningdale | Y | 14 | 0.030 |

| Library | Annual visits per person in catchment |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Dulverton | 5.758 |
| Frome | 3.891 |
| Wiveliscombe | 3.323 |
| Chard | 3.117 |
| Porlock | 2.736 |
| Minehead | 2.613 |
| Williton | 2.549 |
| Martock | 2.540 |
| Crewkerne | 2.504 |
| Wellington | 2.460 |
| Cheddar | 2.083 |
| Glastonbury | 2.042 |
| Ilminster | 1.902 |
| Shepton Mallet | 1.852 |
| Somerton | 1.835 |
| Burnham | 1.827 |
| Taunton | 1.772 |
| Nether Stowey | 1.770 |
| Wells | 1.743 |
| Langport | 1.733 |
| Milborne Port | 1.689 |
| Wincanton | 1.631 |
| Bridgwater | 1.609 |
| Street | 1.556 |
| Yeovil Central | 1.529 |
| South Petherton | 1.335 |
| Watchet | 1.322 |
| Bruton | 1.085 |
| Castle Cary | 1.061 |
| North Petherton | 0.786 |
| Sunningdale | 0.779 |
| Bishops Lydeard | 0.714 |
| Priorswood | 0.669 |
| Highbridge | 0.558 |

* Key for possible closure: N – no change and stays as now; N/Y – may remain unchanged as now or require community support; Y – proposed that community support required to avoid closure.

SOURCE data for calculations: Somerset Library Service Consultation 2018 - Appendix 1: Library Service Proposals for Consultation

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The following table shows active library users, Wiveliscombe catchment and Somerset population in age ranges.

| Age range | % Active library users Somerset | % Active library users – Wiveliscombe | % of Wiveliscombe Catchment population | % of Somerset population as a whole |
|-----------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 0-4 | 5.35% | 2.9% | 4.6% | 5.3% |
| 5-11 | 16.07% | 18.9% | 6.7% | 7.7% |
| 12-17 | 4.32% | 3.5% | 5.7% | 6.8% |
| 18-64 | 44.10% | 37.2% | 51.8% | 56.0% |
| 65+ | 28.81% | 33.3% | 31.1% | 24.1% |
| Unknown | 1.35% | 4.2% | | |

SOURCE: Somerset Library Service Consultation 2018 APPENDIX 3: Equalities Impact Assessment (page 352).

This shows Wiveliscombe library has more active users in the 5-11 and 65+ age ranges than Somerset as a whole, as well as much higher than average rates of use overall.

Wiveliscombe library also has more female active users than Somerset as a whole, as shown below.

| Sex | % Active Somerset library members | % Active library users – Wiveliscombe | % of Wiveliscombe Catchment population | % of Somerset population as a whole |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Female | 61.88% | 62.8% | 50.8% | 51.20% |
| Male | 36.38% | 34.5% | 49.2% | 48.80% |
| Prefer not to say | 1.75% | 2.7% | | |

SOURCE: Somerset Library Service Consultation 2018 APPENDIX 3: Equalities Impact Assessment (page 353).

SCC acknowledge (Somerset Library Service Consultation 2018 APPENDIX 3: Equalities Impact Assessment (page 354-5) that:

- “Many users of Wiveliscombe library are likely to have the protected characteristic of Rurality, and access to services from the west and north of the catchment is difficult.
- “A very wide range of community groups use library premises for their activities, and many of these groups share protected characteristics.”

SCC also acknowledge (Somerset Library Service Consultation 2018 APPENDIX 3: Equalities Impact Assessment, page 364) that:

- For the protected characteristic of Rurality, ‘overarching’ impacts of the closure of Wiveliscombe’s library are “likely to be more significant for individuals in Wiveliscombe than for changes proposed elsewhere, because of the poor transport links to other libraries. The number of people potentially affected is not likely to be large (because of the low catchment population), however there are a reasonable number of current users of Wiveliscombe library living to the north, south and west of Wiveliscombe who are more isolated than many rural areas elsewhere in Somerset. Driving times from these areas to Taunton are relatively long, and Wiveliscombe is used as a hub for the area.”
- For the protected characteristic of Low Income, ‘overarching’ impacts of the closure of Wiveliscombe’s library are likely to apply, as, while “levels of income and employment in the Lower Layer Super Output Area covering Wiveliscombe town, which has many library users, are in line with the County average; evidence from the community engagement exercise also suggests that people with this characteristic are likely to be impacted in Wiveliscombe town. If the consultation proposal was implemented and a community library solution could not be found, the cost of fuel and car parking may also prevent or dissuade people who have access to a vehicle but who have low incomes from accessing alternative Library Services in Taunton. The cost of community transport is high for people on low incomes who do not have a concessionary travel pass.”

As described above, **there would be significant impacts from closing Wiveliscombe library for people on low incomes and for those living outside the town in less accessible rural settings.** For both the protected characteristics of Rurality and Low income, SCC’s expected outcome of the consultation is that in Wiveliscombe “library buildings are maintained” (Somerset Library Service Consultation 2018 APPENDIX 3: Equalities Impact Assessment, page 364).

Value for Money and the Cost of Wiveliscombe Library

The net annual cost in 2016/17 to Somerset County Council for Wiveliscombe library is £21,078 (Somerset Library Service Consultation 2018 - Value-for-money-Assessment-Data-Consultation).

The table below shows the costs per borrower and per visit for all Somerset libraries. These value for money indicators are shown in order with libraries with the lowest costs at the top and the highest at the bottom, so that the performance of all libraries can be compared.

Wiveliscombe is in the top third of Somerset libraries for low costs per visitor and performs well when assessed on value for money.

Somerset County Council Libraries Consultation 2018
 Response on behalf of Wiveliscombe Library

| LIBRARY | Library usage (2016/17 figures) | | Value for Money (2016/17) | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| | Active Borrowers | Footfall | Cost per borrower | Cost per visit |
| Dulverton | 545 | 22,109 | 22.76 | 0.56 |
| Glastonbury | 2121 | 64,759 | 17.95 | 0.59 |
| Crewkerne | 2262 | 60,223 | 17.33 | 0.65 |
| Street | 2530 | 65,711 | 18.55 | 0.71 |
| Wellington | 1671 | 68,531 | 29.97 | 0.73 |
| Chard | 2612 | 85,713 | 25.55 | 0.78 |
| Wells | 4068 | 117,297 | 24.57 | 0.85 |
| Porlock | 267 | 5,593 | 17.99 | 0.86 |
| North Petherton | 452 | 6,495 | 12.91 | 0.90 |
| Frome | 7158 | 188,279 | 24.31 | 0.92 |
| Wiveliscombe | 737 | 22,961 | 28.60 | 0.92 |
| Cheddar | 1310 | 31,541 | 23.92 | 0.99 |
| Somerton | 1228 | 35,674 | 29.55 | 1.02 |
| Taunton | 14267 | 311,400 | 22.48 | 1.03 |
| Martock | 1224 | 38,945 | 33.88 | 1.06 |
| Minehead | 2763 | 70,486 | 30.15 | 1.18 |
| Ilminster | 1141 | 24,980 | 26.09 | 1.19 |
| Nether Stowey | 410 | 8,349 | 25.34 | 1.24 |
| Wincanton | 1671 | 29,564 | 22.21 | 1.26 |
| Yeovil | 8059 | 175,281 | 27.42 | 1.26 |
| Langport | 1702 | 36,390 | 27.67 | 1.29 |
| Williton | 1202 | 32,765 | 35.10 | 1.29 |
| Burnham | 3270 | 67,745 | 30.42 | 1.47 |
| Bridgwater | 6143 | 127,083 | 31.86 | 1.54 |
| Shepton Mallet | 1830 | 43,917 | 41.40 | 1.73 |
| Watchet | 491 | 7,563 | 31.94 | 2.07 |
| Highbridge | 288 | 3,786 | 28.88 | 2.20 |
| Bruton | 355 | 5,096 | 34.35 | 2.39 |
| Castle Cary | 592 | 8,832 | 38.06 | 2.55 |
| Priorswood | 879 | 14,008 | 41.09 | 2.58 |
| Sunningdale | 143 | 3,734 | 68.60 | 2.63 |
| Milborne Port | 356 | 6,402 | 63.97 | 3.56 |
| South Petherton | 464 | 7,237 | 56.41 | 3.62 |
| Bishops Lydeard | 275 | 3,317 | 61.58 | 5.11 |

SOURCE data for calculations: Somerset Library Service Consultation 2018 - Value-for-money-Assessment-Data-Consultation

Somerset County Council has offered £5,000 per annum as a “joint funding arrangement to support a solution” for Wiveliscombe library, which would leave a **net saving to the County Council of £16,000**.

Somerset County Council receives funding through Council Tax, Business Rates and Government grants to provide public services, including for a library service to residents in the catchment area of Wiveliscombe library.

If Somerset County Council expects the cost of Wiveliscombe library to be added to parish precepts in the catchment area, then, assuming that 90% of the £16,000 cost were to be added to the precept for Wiveliscombe Town Council, this would cost Wiveliscombe households close to an extra £13 per annum for Band D properties (£8.50 to £25.50 per household per annum across the band range from A to H). **This would not be fair on the residents of Wiveliscombe and they would be paying twice through their taxes for library services to both the County Council and the Town Council.**

It should be noted that Wiveliscombe already has one of the higher parish precepts in Taunton Deane. Wiveliscombe Town Council has a total annual budget of about £40,000, whereas Somerset County Council’s net revenue budget is approximately £317,000,000. The library cost for Wiveliscombe Town Council would be 40% of its current budget, while for Somerset County Council it is 0.005% of its current revenue budget.

Economic Impact on Wiveliscombe

As stated, Wiveliscombe is a rural centre providing services, shops and employment for the town’s population and for many who live in a large surrounding rural hinterland.

The Taunton Deane Core Strategy 2011-2028 identifies Wiveliscombe as a major rural centre that “will provide the focus for essential facilities within rural communities”. Policy SP4 states that “balanced and sustainable mixed-use communities will be achieved through a focus in the first instance on the Major Rural Centres”. Wiveliscombe is therefore identified as a rural focus for new housing, employment development and local services.

Somerset County Council’s Growth Plan 2017-2030 states as its vision that there will be “vibrant communities in rural and urban areas, with robust physical and ICT infrastructure, a high skilled population, and strong business sectors exploiting their competitive advantages” and that “Somerset’s communities will be vibrant and sustainable, providing a range of retail, leisure, cultural and public services throughout the day and evening “.

Wiveliscombe is a vibrant major rural centre. Many of the town centre retailers (there are c.25 retail and pub/food businesses) are well established independents that have managed to survive the highly competitive high street environment of the last 20 years. However, the town’s vibrancy and sustainability is vulnerable to external factors including online competition, out-of-town retail parks, parking, rent and rates etc. Anything that potentially

removes customers from the town centre will impact these businesses and undermine their viability.

As a major rural centre Wiveliscombe provides rural infrastructure. The library, as part of that infrastructure, is one reason people visit the town. If Wiveliscombe library were to close, some current users, from the town and outside, will visit other libraries instead. This will result in fewer visits to Wiveliscombe, less shopping and less use of other services. This will contribute to a cycle of decline resulting in remaining businesses and services becoming less supported and less viable, and so, possibly, leading to shop closures and further service loss.

The loss of Wiveliscombe library could therefore have a wider economic impact and lead to a decline in the town's role as a rural centre contrary to adopted policy, particularly from the cumulative effect of cuts to services. This will undermine attempts to promote sustainable growth in rural communities and require more travel to reach services in Taunton or Wellington. With the loss of public transport services this travel will be by car, with increases in road usage, CO2 emissions, congestion and pollution in Taunton, road traffic accidents etc.

Already there has been a loss of public services with the Children's Centre closed in 2014, Get Set withdrawing localised services in 2017 and the bus service further reduced in 2018. Private sector services have also been lost, not least NatWest bank which closed in 2014, two estate agents, accountants and solicitors. Wiveliscombe remains a vibrant community but it is also a vulnerable community. Closure of the library will only add to the vulnerability of the community as a whole and its individual residents.

Somerset County Council Finances

There is concern that the County Council has mis-represented or over-stated its financial difficulties for the library consultation. At the start of the online consultation web-pages (somersetlibraries.co.uk/consultation/), the second paragraph includes the following:

"As with many authorities, ... we continue to face challenging financial times. Somerset County Council received £90 million in 2013/14 from central government to support our services. This has reduced to just over £26 million for 2017/18 and is set to reduce to nothing by 2020/21. However, demand for services has increased, particularly in Adults and Children's social care services. We have managed to reduce our libraries budget by 20% since 2011, whilst keeping all of our libraries open. Going forward, we may need to consider more challenging changes in order to keep the libraries service on a sustainable financial footing."

This statement does not mention the government's long-known plans for business rates retention, which has been implemented to accompany, if not properly match, the reduction in local authority funding from central government.

The then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government issued a statement (www.gov.uk/government/speeches/final-local-government-finance-settlement-2018-to-2019-written-statement) on 6th February 2018, that described the government's plans for the local government finance settlement in 2019 to 2020 and later years, which included the following:

"We will ... work towards implementing the next phase of our business rates retention reforms in 2020 to 2021 to support the long held objective for local authorities of greater self-sufficiency and financial sustainability. This will give local councils the levers and incentives they need to grow their local economies.

Local authorities will be able to keep more business rates, to the value of the Revenue Support Grant, the Greater London Authority Transport Grant, the Rural Services Delivery Grant and the Public Health Grant. Overall, this is equivalent to 75% retention at 2019 to 2020 levels. Local authorities will then be able to keep the equivalent share of business rates growth on their baseline levels from 2020 to 2021, when the system is reset."

It is not questioned that local government has suffered from large cuts in central government funding, but Somerset County Council appears to have chosen to mis-represent or over-state the case and to be possibly then seeking to use this as a justification for withdrawing library services.

Section 5 Response to Somerset County Council Proposals

Changes to Wiveliscombe Library

Somerset County Council have proposed the following for Wiveliscombe library (Somerset Library Services Consultation 2018 Summary Proposal, page 5):

Option A - Provide library services through a partnership with the local community to maintain a library building in Wiveliscombe (supported by some funding from the County Council).

Option B - Provide library services through an additional mobile library stop in Wiveliscombe (at least once a month). This would mean the closure of the current library building.

Questioning the Rationale for Changes

The rationale (Library Service Consultation 2018 Rationale for proposals: Area 2 – Taunton, Wellington, page 2) given for proposing changes to Wiveliscombe library (Options A or B) is as follows:

- *“Wiveliscombe library serves a relatively small population, in an area where levels of need are not as high as elsewhere. Usage of the library is lower than other libraries, and a relatively high proportion of the catchment population use other libraries (principally Taunton). Other communities of the size of Wiveliscombe in other parts of Somerset do not have a library building, and delivering services through a mobile library may provide a fairer and more consistent approach.*
- *“Although access to Taunton is reasonable from much of the catchment, some of the areas to the west have poorer access, and public and community transport into Taunton is relatively lengthy and costly from Wiveliscombe compared to other communities in Area 2. For this and other reasons, the changes proposed for Wiveliscombe are likely to have a higher impact than changes proposed in other communities. The current library is well-used relative to the size of the community and provides good value for money, with significant support from a pro-active friends group. Providing some financial support to support a potential community partnership is likely to represent good value for money.”*

We question many elements of this rationale, as detailed below.

Wiveliscombe library is established and very well-used by people within the catchment area (see section 4), with an active friends groups (see section 3). A mobile library could not come close to replacing the existing library in Wiveliscombe.

It is acknowledged by SCC that there are pockets of low income and deprivation within the town of Wiveliscombe (see section 4).

Wiveliscombe library has a high proportion of users in the 5-11 and 65+ age ranges, who will be least able to travel to alternatives, due to the cost and inconvenience of limited public transport now available, with the declining support for buses from Somerset County Council.

It is acknowledged in SCC's rationale that parts of the Wiveliscombe catchment has poor access to Taunton and the public and community transport from Wiveliscombe to Taunton is "relatively lengthy and costly". There is no public transport to another alternative library in Wellington.

For all of these reasons, **the use of library services in Wiveliscombe is likely to plummet if the established and very well used and supported library was closed. Those disproportionately hit would include the young, the elderly, those on low incomes and those in rural areas, which include protected characteristics for equalities impact assessment.**

The rationale for proposing changes to Wiveliscombe library states that "a relatively high proportion of the catchment population use other libraries (principally Taunton)." We believe this is not correct and the assertion may reflect the catchment area selected by SCC (shown in section 4 of this response), which includes at least one parish that is more likely to use other libraries than Wiveliscombe. Residents of Oake, which are included in Wiveliscombe's catchment area, are, in reality, much more likely to look to Taunton or Wellington for their library services. Milverton, Fitzhead and Halse may do so too, but to a lesser extent. Whereas, Skilgate and Upton are not included in Wiveliscombe library's catchment area, but may be likely to look to Wiveliscombe, as well as to Dulverton, for library services. People in the other catchment parishes and in Wiveliscombe are, we believe, most likely to look to Wiveliscombe library and mainly only those on the periphery would possibly look to use other libraries.

With the correct parishes selected for the Wiveliscombe library catchment area, we think that the proportion of the catchment population using other libraries, would be lower and not relatively high, as suggested by SCC. This would be an important change to SCC's rationale for changes to Wiveliscombe library.

Furthermore, with Skilgate and Upton included in the Wiveliscombe catchment and Oake removed, the protected characteristic of Rurality would be even higher for the Wiveliscombe library catchment area, with a higher proportion of people also having difficult access to alternative libraries.

Due to the Rurality of users and the high number of visits for the catchment area size, we believe there is a strong case for SCC to retain and continue to run Wiveliscombe library. This case would be strengthened by a more accurate selection of the catchment area.

SCC also acknowledge that Wiveliscombe library “provides good value for money”.

The saving to SCC from withdrawing full funding for Wiveliscombe library may only be £16,000 (see section 4). **The extra cost imposed on library users from Wiveliscombe by having to travel to an alternative in Taunton could easily exceed the saving being sought by SCC.**

Currently, Wiveliscombe library has 737 active borrowers and about 23,000 visits per year (average of 31 visits per borrower). If active borrowers reduced by 25% to 550 making an average of only 20 visits per year (total of 11,000), 75% travelled by car (24 miles at 45p per mile plus £1 for parking), 25% by bus (£6.60 adult return) and half of all these journeys were part of trips already made (so incurring no extra cost), then the additional costs to users would be about £58,000, which greatly exceeds the potential saving sought by SCC. Inevitably, there is a large degree of uncertainty in this calculation, but it illustrates a real point and it is possible that the alternative cost penalties for Wiveliscombe library users could be much higher. SCC has made no attempt to calculate this real cost transfer, which would inevitably impact most on those on low incomes, without access to private transport, including the disabled, young and elderly, or living in more rural areas.

At the same time, under these assumptions, library use would have plummeted (down by two-thirds) and library users would have lost large amounts of time in travelling to Taunton. Further, an important focus for social events and interaction in Wiveliscombe would have been lost, again disproportionately affecting people who are more vulnerable or isolated, including those on low incomes, disabled, elderly, or living in more rural areas.

Therefore, **SCC’s saving from closing Wiveliscombe library would not only remove a highly valued service from many, it could also transfer bigger cost and time penalties on to those who made the effort to continue using an alternative in Taunton. It would also remove an important local facility from the town, which has many wider social and community benefits.**

Community Partnerships

We have considered the draft document ‘Community Library Partnerships Guidance’ v.1.0 March 2018.

Our comments are:

Option 2: Community funded, staffed model.

To pay for this, a parish precept would have to be raised, which we do not believe is fair on local tax payers and would transfer a tiny element of SCC’s costs disproportionately on to Wiveliscombe Town Council (see section 4). Further, SCC is well placed to manage and

service library staff, the town council and people in Wiveliscombe do not have the same capability or capacity.

Option 1: Community managed, volunteer based

And

Option 3: Hybrid Model

Regardless of the model or however it may be organised, there are many issues that could arise. To highlight some of them:

- Volunteers.

To keep the library open 17.5 hours per week we are probably looking at 25 + volunteers. We doubt that capacity is available here, especially with all the other voluntary activities outlined in Section 2.

- Community responsibilities.

The work that volunteers would need to carry out is relatively complex and requires good skill levels. For example, the Community Responsibility for training support and guidance (see page 10 of the Guidance) requires the community to:

Ensure volunteers or staff employed by the community have the necessary aptitude and approach, in particular:

- *A basic level of computer literacy.*
- *A commitment to good customer service.*
- *A commitment to equal opportunities.*
- *A conscientious approach, with good attention to detail.*
- *Enthusiasm and an interest in library services.*

This describes people who already have the basic skills and the aptitude to benefit from training and who will be working regularly and frequently in the library. Even assuming that SCC training is going to be superb, and the volunteers brilliant, we doubt very much that the performance required could be satisfactorily and consistently delivered.

- Management and risk management.

The responsibilities and skills required for this are similar to those required to run a company. The partnership would need expertise in leadership, people management, HR, health and safety, facilities management, finance, legal, business management, safeguarding, insurance and marketing, or to be able to buy it in. Even if we were

able to find people with these skills it is unreasonable to expect them to undertake such roles as they carry considerable responsibilities.

- Legal Structures.

We are aware that there are various legal structures that could be used to underpin the organisation but again these would require professional help and a great deal of time and work to set up and run. This is confirmed by the Guidance, which states (p20):

It would also be prudent for communities to seek legal advice on the implementation of an organisation wishing to take over the management of a library service.

- Sustainability.

Libraries are expected to go on for years, for lifetimes. We do not believe we could ensure a consistent stream of volunteers, managers and money over this kind of time.

We believe that the functions needed to run libraries are **best carried out by a centrally funded and managed entity – that is, the County Council**. We appreciate that the Council offers to provide some or all of these functions on condition that the community were to provide sufficient funding. However, as stated under Option 2 above, this is not a viable option for us.

The Council (Library Service) has the benefit of experience, trained and skilled management and employees, economies of scale for any procurement, access to specialised professional skills and the mechanisms to raise and manage finances. Community partnerships could not match this.

Mobile Library

Looking at the mobile library timetable, it calls every 4 weeks for fixed periods per location. These range from 10 minutes to 30 minutes. The consultation statistics show that Wiveliscombe Library has a footfall of 22,961 per year, 25 per hour of opening. Clearly, 25 people could not visit a mobile library within even the longest visit time. Of course, the computer users would be deprived of their computers and printer. Parts of our catchment are shown as medium high for digital exclusion deprivation. This conflicts directly with Outcome 2 of the Vision – *'More people are enabled and inspired to make the most of the digital world.'*

The Vision

We agree with the overall vision set out in the Somerset County Council Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework 2017-20121 (page 22):

‘Somerset Libraries are a dynamic, evolving and integral part of the community that open up a world of opportunities for reading, understanding and discovery.’

and we concur with the Outcomes, (listed on pages 31 to 35):

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

However, it is very disappointing that, if the proposed changes for Wiveliscombe library were to go ahead, it would be almost certain that these outcomes would not be fulfilled for people in its catchment area.

Section 6 Conclusion

Keep Wiveliscombe Library as it is, run and paid for by Somerset County Council.

APPENDIX A

Photographs

Drop-in consultation 21 February 2018



Author event



Poppy Ops



Window display Wivey Town band



Drop-in coffee session.



Mass Book Withdrawal Somerset Day Friday 11th May 2018



Somerset County Council Libraries Consultation 2018
Response on behalf of Wiveliscombe Library



APPENDIX B

Wiveliscombe Town Council library consultation response to Somerset County Council submitted on 14th March 2018.

At the Wiveliscombe Town Council meeting on Monday the 12th March 2018 the subject of Wiveliscombe Library was discussed and it unanimously agreed to support the following statement:

Wiveliscombe Town Council believes Somerset County Council has a statutory obligation and is best placed to run library services in the county.

Wiveliscombe library serves a large rural area, as shown by the County Council's catchment population (6,909) for our library. It is also one of the best used libraries in Somerset for its catchment size, with 737 active borrowers and 22,961 annual visits. When compared to other County libraries (by using ratios of borrowers and visits per person in catchment populations), Wiveliscombe library has the fourth highest number of borrowers and third highest visits for Somerset's 34 libraries.

The library in Wiveliscombe contributes to the town's role as an important rural centre, which also includes a range of shops, primary and secondary schools, doctors' surgery and many sports and social facilities. Removing services weakens our role and position as an important centre for the town and wider surrounding rural area.

Wiveliscombe Town Council believes Somerset County Council should continue to run Wiveliscombe library as it is now. The annual cost is £21,078 (2016/17) compared to a County Council Net Revenue Budget which totals £316,881,900 for all services in 2018/19. With the £5,000 offered annually for a joint solution, the net saving to the County from its proposals for Wiveliscombe library would be £16,000 per annum.

It is not reasonable to expect volunteers to run another service in Wiveliscombe. Already they run community transport, a swimming pool, the Christmas lights and many sports, social and youth clubs. The Town Council has already taken over the public toilets at the expense of local Council Tax payers. Libraries are a public service and should be provided by the local authority with the responsibility for their provision.

It is also not reasonable to expect people from Wiveliscombe and the surrounding area to travel to other libraries in Wellington or Taunton. The bus service has recently been cut by a third and the cost of bus fares or car journeys to local people would far exceed the saving made by the County Council from closing our library.

Somerset County Council Libraries Consultation 2018
Response on behalf of Wiveliscombe Library

The people of Wiveliscombe pay for a library service through their Council Tax and Business Rates and they should not be asked to pay again through volunteering or making time-consuming and costly journeys to libraries in other areas.

Wiveliscombe Town Council strongly urges Somerset County Council to carefully consider the consultation responses from Wiveliscombe and not to proceed with the options proposed, but to retain our library service as it is now.

APPENDIX C

From:
The Friends of Wiveliscombe Library
c/o The Coach House, Kingsmead
West Street
Wiveliscombe
TA4 2TG

To:
The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee
Somerset County Council
County Hall
Taunton

28 February 2018

Dear Sirs
Committee Meeting 6 March 2018 Item 5 - Library Service Consultation
Representations regarding Wiveliscombe Library

We request the Committee to take note of our representations when considering the report.

Our current comments on the Proposal itself for Wiveliscombe (Area 2) are as follows:

- Transport – the map shows that Wiveliscombe and its wider rural catchment area, are out on their own to the west of Area 2. Public transport to Taunton is expensive, infrequent and journey times are long. The bus service was cut further at the beginning of February. There is no bus service to Wellington.
- Library Usage - 10.7% of the population are active borrowers (the rest in this area range from 8.1% to 4.2%); and the population makes 3.2 visits per head annually (the others range from 2.5 to 0.7).
- Partnership with local community option – Whilst noting that it is proposed to make possible contribution of about £ 5,000, this is nowhere near the sum of £21,000 it currently takes to run the library. There are many arguments against a community-run library, all of which we endorse – for a start, huge logistical problems, training, safeguarding and management issues.
- Mobile library stop option – The library has a footfall of 23,000 plus per year. We are not sure how often the mobile library would visit, nor for how long, but doubt it could accommodate that number of visits. Furthermore, the library is well used for other events, such a Storytime, Poppy Ops, coffee mornings, Meet the Author and so on which a mobile library could not possibly accommodate.

We've also read through the background information on the consultation website and would highlight the following:

1 Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework 2017-2021

We totally agree with the overall vision statement. However we note that the document states, 'The vision and outcomes framework sets out a high level of ambition for the Library Service ... in particular the likely need to reduce the cost of the service in order to make savings'. We question why the libraries, which are the heart of the system, have been identified as an area for savings.

The Vision also notes that children and young peoples' educational attainment has improved but Somerset's GCSE pass rates remain below average. There is no university and there is a net flow of 18-24 year olds out of the county. Surely a vital aspect of library provision is to support initiatives to improve literacy and opportunities for children and young people - it is difficult to be, or remain, motivated if there is no accessible local library.

We feel that if the proposed changes were to go ahead, it would be difficult to say that the outcomes set out in the Vision would be fulfilled.

2 Overarching Equalities Impact Assessment and Equalities Assessment for Wiveliscombe

We understand this to say that for certain protected groups of people (eg, older people and children, disabled people), the proposed changes would have a significant residual impact after taking mitigations into account. Wiveliscombe has a higher than average proportion of some of these protected groups. One of the proposed mitigations, alternative building-based library services, would not be effective because of poor transport links.

The way we see this document, it repeatedly raises a lot of concerns about the impact of the proposed changes but then seems to dismiss them by proposing the Council's desired mitigations and outcomes. However it seems to us that those mitigations and outcomes do not currently adequately address those concerns.

3 Rationale

The two paragraphs of the rationale seem to be contradictory. We also note that it is acknowledged that, '...the changes proposed for Wiveliscombe are likely to have a higher impact than changes proposed for other communities'.

Somerset County Council Libraries Consultation 2018
Response on behalf of Wiveliscombe Library

As we're sure you're all too aware, this documentation is extremely lengthy and detailed, so the above is our best effort as lay-people simply to highlight briefly the main points that have come to our attention.

We appreciate that we are not the only library you have to consider and would not wish to be instrumental in depriving anyone of their library resources. However, our library in Wiveliscombe is much-loved and well-used, as is evidenced by the turnout of over 100 people for the drop-in events on the 21st February.

We feel that neither of the options currently offered in the proposal would be sufficient to comply with the Council's legal duties, in particular, the Public Sector Equality Duty. We would also question as to whether closing well-established libraries would comply with the Best Value Duty, especially bearing in mind that the population is to increase due to additional housing plans particularly for young families.

Our preference is that the library should continue to be run by the council, as at present. We urge you to bear this in mind in your deliberations.

We have invited Councillor Hall to let us have dates as to when he could join us for a public meeting sometime during late March/early April so that we can enlarge on and put our views forward in more detail and hold further discussions. We also, in January, requested up-to-date information on a number of issues - active users, actual operating costs and so on - which has not yet been supplied and is in fact now overdue.

We plan to submit our detailed response to the Consultation after the public meeting and receipt of the requested information and therefore trust that we have responses to our requests regarding these as soon as possible.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours faithfully

Jane Marchent
Secretary, Friends of Wiveliscombe Library