

Caroline Whitaker's request that her specific concerns are raised at the Steering Group. Previous responses have been prepared by Nigel Gillatt.

The Steering Group are asked to consider the previous responses and to prepare an appropriate response to the outstanding points and suggestions made, which are in bold at the bottom of these Q and A's.

Q. If the land containing the current library is sold can restrictions/covenants be put in place to ensure the building is not demolished as it is a historic and attractive feature of the town?

A. Covenants will be placed upon the sale to ensure that any future development fits into this sensitive area next to the war memorial in the Silsden Conservation Area. These are yet to be agreed.

Q. What will happen to the extra stock of books in the existing library which will not fit into the current council chamber earmarked for its new home? I estimate the number of books available to borrow by Silsden residents will be reduced by at least 50%.

A. There will be a reduced stock of books at the new library, e.g. the reference section will not be replaced as this resource is available through the Council's on-line library services, access to which will be available elsewhere in the Town Hall, other areas of the building will also be used for children's story telling etc at times when they are not being utilised by other users. Stock is a service wide resource and any surplus to requirements in the Town Hall space will be redistributed. Stock from any library in the Bradford district can be requested free of charge.

Q. If the library is to be self service, and there will be no staff present, how will you stop books being stolen or be able to provide IT assistance with the computers (if we will still have any!) ?

A. There are currently no plans to change the library opening hours, the self service element is an additional service that works elsewhere. There will be a staff presence on site for 30.5 hours per week.

Q. What guarantees will be given that Silsden will continue to have recycling facilities equal to those currently located in Wesley Place?

A. It is proposed to relocate the recycling facilities but this has not been dealt with as a priority at this time as it does not become an issue until the open market disposal of the Wesley Place site.

Q. What guarantees will be given that the historic furniture (chairs and desks), roll of honour and mayoral photographs etc currently residing in the Town council chamber will be preserved and kept in Silsden.

A. It will be up to the Town Council to determine which plaques photos etc that they would like to be displayed upon completion of the refurbishment; however unfortunately their furniture cannot be accommodated in the refurbished Town Hall, as the flexible use of space is considered paramount to maximise the halls future success.

Q. When will a new caretaker be appointed to the Town Hall and what hours will they work?

A. There are no plans to re-appoint a permanent caretaker, the scheme is called a transition scheme as it intends to promote more involvement from the community in the running of the hall, hopefully increasing its utilisation. This is proactive scheme that maintains an improved library and public hall in Silsden whilst operating from a lower cost base, which makes them less vulnerable when any future potential cuts are considered.

Q. How will the Town Council be able to meet in the rear room if part of it is to be divided off into a storage room?

A. Discussions are yet to take place with the Town Council as to which space or spaces they may wish to 'block book' for their future meetings.

Q. A big show has been made of how, supposedly, moving services to the Town Hall will make them more accessible to everyone in the town. However all those residents who live in the north of the town will not find it so because for them it will be further away and for everyone it will be less accessible because there will be no adjacent parking. Currently you can't even drop people off outside the Town Hall because of the zebra crossing and the accompanying restrictions and, although I understand there are to be alterations to the crossing, presumably these restrictions will still exist and people will still have to park in Wesley place and walk much further?

A. The Town Hall is, what it is, where it is, some of its constraints cannot overcome through the refurbishment scheme.

Q. You said that the area around Wesley place would have development restrictions placed on it but will the council be seeking specific restrictions to keep the building which currently houses the library?

A. I am happy to talk with any local residents/the Town Council regarding development restrictions. My own personal feeling is that the library building should be retained as its orientation is not towards the War Memorial, and it does not over look it. The access and realignment of the porch could need to be changed too. I think even though they are not in the best condition that the other buildings should be retained too. I have not gone into details yet, and you are the first person I have had a meaningful discussion with on this subject, as my priority is to deliver the scheme which is within this years Capital Programme. Estate Management will work with the local community to make sure any redevelopment is suitable; the Council will not just rely on its planning powers.

Q. Can you explain what you mean by saying that the reference section will be available through an on-line service, as far as I know the online service covers dictionaries and historic newspapers but not local history or other miscellaneous reference books. Does this mean Silsden residents would have to travel to Keighley to access these?

A. The generic books e.g. Oxford Dictionary are readily accessible on-line. The Council maintain its own reference section on-line that customers with a library card can access. This will be available to customers in Silsden Town Hall. The books need to be reviewed if there is local history material the aim could be to retain this in Silsden. Space though is at a premium and most of the stock will be lending stock. The nearest larger library is indeed Keighley where there is a wider range of services and book stock available.

Q. Has the council got any ideas about where the recycling facilities could be relocated to in Silsden?

A. Not yet. I have not looked in to this. The proposal is to replace it elsewhere in the Town, but as yet this is not 'pressing matter'. I need to make sure that this is what is wanted. Someone claimed it was mainly used by commercial enterprises disposing of their waste for free? The relocation also needs to be considered in the context of the Council's waste and waste collection plans, and any consents etc that may be required. I therefore suspect the re-siting of the facility will not be straight forward.

Q. How is Silsden going to be able to keep hold of its historic council chamber furniture if the Town Council will not have a dedicated room of it's own. Will Bradford council be able to provide alternative storage for it within Silsden before it becomes lost or destroyed?

A. The furniture is the Town Council's responsibility, the Council has no plans to provide alternative storage for it.

Q. How can Bradford Council say that the Town Hall will be run by a community team when no steps in this direction have even begun. What will happen if no one comes forward to help?

A. It is inevitable that in the future that the Council will have to operate with a reduced overall budget, early projections show downward adjustments of £32 p.a. million may be required from 2014-5 and a further £54 p.a. million from 2015-6. This scheme is proactive and will hopefully ensure Silsden is 'best placed' to retain a library and public hall, whatever happens. In the extreme this could be dependent upon greater local involvement, therefore it makes sense to encourage greater public participation at this time, but the refurbishment is not conditional upon this.

Will you please pass on all my comments from this email, and my last, to the Steering Group Meeting next Wednesday?

A.Yes.

Q. You said that the value of the buildings on Wesley place is diminishing as time passes but is this not outweighed by the overall increase in the value of the whole package of land?

A. If covenants are agreed that ensure refurbishment rather than redevelopment, the vacant buildings are deteriorating so their value will be diminishing. I have not however speculated on the general property market and whether it will rise or fall in the short to medium term.

Q. If the money raised by the sale of the land is larger than the £300 000 earmarked for the refurbishment of the Town Hall will it be used to financed other essential work in the town or will it be siphoned off to pay for schemes in other areas of Bradford?

A. The capital receipt will not be 'ring fenced' to Silsden.

Q. I understand that the Town Council are not attending the Steering Group meetings because they claim this will mean that they will end up having financial responsibilities for running/maintaining the Town Hall in the future. Could you comment on this please?

A. There is no obligation upon the Town Council or anyone else to take over the running of this building. The scheme will:-

- Leave the Town Hall in good repair making it a nicer place to go
- Ensure that it is as compliant as is possible within the physical constraints of the building
- Enable that the Library and Town Hall operate with lower overheads
- Increase the flexibility and reduce the amount of under-utilised space.

Unanswered questions that the Steering Group are asked to respond to.

The Steering Group considered the additional points raised

I appreciate the current financial constraints that Bradford Council is under but I believe that the scheme you have proposed is not going to serve the town well in the long run.

This scheme does not preclude any alternative community development in the future and the Council would be willing to work with the local community to help support this.

The alterations to the Town Hall and the relocation of the library will temporarily solve some problems but will create many others.

The existing users long term concerns can all be addressed. The closure will inevitably cause some temporary disruption, which cannot be helped, but this has to be offset by long term benefits.

I have heard that various user groups, including the majorettes and those who need wheelchair access, have not really been listened to and that the refurbishment is charging ahead before various issues (both within the building and in Wesley place) have been resolved. If this happens money will be wasted rather than saved.

All user groups have been listened to including the majorettes, all of their longer terms concerns have solutions which manage these. The building will meet minimum legal access standards for disabled persons and will be a great improvement on the current standards. Everyone has been listened to. The building has to be refurbished within its physical constraints, it can not be designed to meet specific individual requirements. The building will be as accessible as is reasonably possible.

The scheme has been put back approximately two months the Council will continue to listen to individuals suggestions, in this period and hopefully the final scheme will be all the better for doing this.

One of my personal concerns is that I still can't see how any meaningful library service could be maintained in such a restricted space and this will ultimately mean that the people of Silsden will be forced to travel to Keighley for most of their needs.

Access will be available to the whole library catalogue, there are no plans to change the staffed hours in addition to this self service will be available out of hours. The library will utilise other space in the hall for ICT access, children's book reading etc.

The self service, co-located model is one we are adapting for many of our libraries in line with changing ways of service delivery, budget constraints, and a desire to retain a service in communities rather than close altogether. This model is currently in operation at Bolling Hall Museum where East Bowling Library relocated, and will be in operation at Idle, Great Horton and Allerton by March 2014 – all to be relocated into co-located premises.

It also seems unfair that Silsden assets can be sold off from under our noses and that the money will ultimately be used elsewhere in Bradford - possibly to refurbish the Odeon.

The Town Hall, the Library and Wesley Place land and buildings are all Bradford Council assets. It is up to Bradford Council what it does with its assets, which it sells and where it spends it money. The Capital Programme has provision for £300,000 investment in Silsden. In addition it is going to do priority maintenance on the Town Hall during the shut down period.

I propose that essential repairs only be carried out to the Town Hall and the Library (which possibly could be community run as I believe it is in Addingham- a much more feasible task than running a whole Town Hall) and that the sale of Wesley Place be put on hold to give the town a chance to come up with an alternative, accessible, community resource - funded in other ways, because once the land is sold there will be no other central site available for such a project.

Alternative schemes have been considered but dismissed on cost grounds. This scheme has the funding in place and is ready to go, so subject to permission will be delivered in July. The Council has met with a representative of the Town Council accompanied by a member of the public, to discuss a potential sale of the library and Wesley Place land and buildings to the community at market value. The Council will continue to work with the local community to help it achieve its aspirations.

The four libraries that are community managed are done so in buildings that the council formerly leased rather than owned. The library could be managed by the community within the Town Hall.