

PETITIONS REQUESTING THE REVERSAL OF THE PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE UXBRIDGE LIBRARY TO THE CIVIC CENTRE

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Eddie Lavery
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Residents' Services
Officer Contact(s)	Darren Deeks, Place Directorate
Papers with report	Uxbridge Library – relocation and proposed floor plan

HEADLINES

Summary	To inform the Cabinet Member that three petitions have been submitted from Hillingdon residents and library members, opposing the upcoming proposal to relocate Uxbridge library from 14-15 High Street (UB8 1HD) to the Civic Centre (UB8 1UW).
Putting our Residents First Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026	This report supports the ambition for residents / the Council of: An efficient, well-run, digital-enabled council working with partners to deliver services to improve the lives of all our residents. This report supports the commitment to residents of: A Green and Sustainable Borough.
Financial Cost	There are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations to this report.
Relevant Select Committee	Residents' Services Select Committee
Relevant Ward(s)	Uxbridge

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet Member for Residents' Services:

- 1. Meets with petitioners and listens to their request to cancel plans to relocate Uxbridge Library;**
- 2. Notes that the Council has yet to agree on the proposals, but that the Library Service Strategy references exploring relocation of services to make them sustainable; the Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in May 2023;**

3. Subject to the outcome of the above, decides whether to instruct officers to proceed with the completion of the Cabinet Paper for December for Cabinet decision, to defer the paper or to cancel the proposed plans to relocate Uxbridge library.

Reasons for recommendations

The Petition Hearing will provide a valuable opportunity to hear directly from the petitioners regarding their concerns and suggestions.

Alternative options considered / risk management

None at this stage.

Select Committee comments

None at this stage.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Petitions

In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, there are three petitions that the Council has received on this matter, listed below:

- 1) [A Change.org petition](#) currently live, but which, upon receipt on 14 November 2023, had 2624 signatories (of those circa. 800-900 signatories indicated that they reside in the Borough*). The petition has the following preamble:

"I am writing this petition to express my deep concern and opposition to the proposed closure of the Central Library in Uxbridge, which is set to be moved to a slimmed-down version housed in the Civic Centre. This decision by the council threatens to diminish a vital community space that serves everyone in Hillingdon.

As a resident of Uxbridge, I have personally experienced and benefited from the numerous advantages that our Central Library offers. It is not just a place for borrowing books; it is an essential hub for education, culture, and social interaction.

Firstly, our library plays a crucial role in supporting students' academic pursuits. Many students rely on this spacious facility as a quiet study environment where they can concentrate and access valuable resources. By closing down this library, we are depriving them of an essential space for learning and personal growth.

Moreover, our Central Library has been instrumental in fostering intellectual curiosity through its regular exhibitions and talks that are free for all visitors. These events provide opportunities for individuals from all walks of life to expand their knowledge and engage with diverse topics. Losing such enriching experiences would be detrimental not only to individuals but also to the overall cultural development of our community.

Additionally, members of U3a (University of the Third Age) utilize our library as a venue for

various events catered towards seniors who seek intellectual stimulation during their retirement years. The friendly atmosphere within these walls creates an inclusive environment where people can connect with others who share similar interests or passions.

It is disheartening that at every turn, our council seems determined to cut services that benefit everyone within Hillingdon. We cannot allow them to disregard the importance of accessible spaces like our Central Library which contribute significantly towards education, culture, social cohesion, and community development.

Therefore, I urge you all fellow residents of Uxbridge - students seeking a quiet place to study, individuals hungry for knowledge, seniors yearning for social engagement - to join me in signing this petition. Let us send a strong message to the council that we will not stand idly by while they strip away valuable resources that are essential to our community's well-being.

Together, we can make a difference and ensure that our Central Library remains open and thriving for generations to come. Sign now and let your voice be heard!"

- a. **change.org petitions do not mandate full addresses and postcodes for checking residence validity. However, the Council's petition scheme permits electronic petitions where it can be identified that those signing live in an area of the Borough.*

2) A second [online petition currently live on the Council's website](#). At the time of preparing this report on 14 November 2023, it had 106 valid signatures of Borough residents, with the following preamble:

"Uxbridge Library Petition (North Uxbridge Residents Association). We the undersigned petition Hillingdon Council to ensure Uxbridge Public Library remains permanently open in its current location at 14-15 High Street, Uxbridge. This is a modern, purpose-built facility in a very convenient position in the centre of Uxbridge. We do not want Uxbridge Public Library to be hidden away in the much less accessible (and very unwelcoming) Civic Centre.

Put Hillingdon residents first and leave Uxbridge Library where it is."

3) A third, paper petition, with a total of 125 valid signatures of Borough residents, was received by the Council, with the following preamble:

"Proposed relocation of Hillingdon's Central Library service from its prime, purpose built, Uxbridge High Street location to a smaller site in the Civic Centre at the far end of town.

This proposal should be DELAYED and RECONSIDERED in conjunction with the Uxbridge Town Centre Masterplan. Recent research for this - 'Voices from Uxbridge' has already shown the importance of the library in its current focal location to residents and visitors to the Town Centre. Moving the library at this time could be highly detrimental to the development strategy of the Town Centre Masterplan.

*This proposal appears to be in conjunction with the Civic Centre Transformation Project and therefore **not** primarily about the best site for the library in Uxbridge."*

Background

The [Library Service Strategy 2023-2027](#) was approved by the Cabinet in May 2023 and formally adopted in June 2023.

Under Ambition 5: Sustainable Service Delivery, it is stated the intention to:

- a. *review use of all buildings to fully utilise assets – make the most of commercial opportunities, co-locating services within an existing library building, **relocating a library to a new building**, or remodelling a library to maximise its potential*

A public consultation was conducted in March and April 2023, receiving over 860 responses. 70% of respondents to the consultation felt Ambition 5 was clear, and 74% felt there was nothing missing from the Ambition.

Following the approval of the library service strategy, plans for relocation of Uxbridge library were developed.

No decision has been made by the Council's Cabinet at this point to relocate Uxbridge library from its current location to the Civic Centre in Uxbridge. Proposed plans are in an advanced stage but still in draft. However, subject to this petition hearing, a report is scheduled for the December Cabinet meeting, to make a decision on the proposal. The report will outline the reasons behind it, including cost efficiencies, improved disabled access and reducing the Council's carbon footprint. More details on the proposed plans are set out below in the consultation section and attached in the Appendix.

Hillingdon has previously relocated two libraries – Ruislip Manor in 2007 (from Victoria Road to Linden Avenue) and Hayes/Botwell Green library in 2010 (from Golden Crescent to Botwell Green Leisure Centre). In both cases, these were new build facilities rather than relocation to an existing building, but both branches saw an increase in footfall due to improved facilities and colocation with other services and it is the Council's expectation that footfall would increase at a relocated Uxbridge library for the same reasons.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

It is expected that if the library does relocate to the Civic Centre, this would enable the Council to offer a flagship library in Uxbridge in a manner that is more cost effective than from its current location, contributing to the MTFE through the full utilisation of assets, maximising commercial opportunities and co-locating of services.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities

To allow the Cabinet Member to consider the petitioners request – and for petitioners to have their say on the matter.

Consultation carried out or required

No public consultation is required for the relocation of a library within the same area, but a public engagement exercise is underway to provide residents and library visitors with details of the proposals, comprising the draft plans, artist's impressions of the new spaces, maps and text detailing the continuation of service provision and the new facilities proposed. This information was made available from 10th November 2023 at Uxbridge library and on the [Council website](#), due to remain on display for four weeks. An extract of the Council's website and proposed design and floorplans is attached as an Appendix.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs that there are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Legal

The Borough Solicitor confirms that there are no specific legal implications arising from this report. Further legal advice will be given as necessary, should the Cabinet Member instruct officers to take any further action in connection with this petition.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Library Service Strategy 2023-2027](#)
- Petitions received

Appendix - Council website and proposed plans and designs

Relocation of Uxbridge Library

As part of our mission to continue delivering outstanding services in more efficient and innovative ways, we have plans for Uxbridge Library to undergo a modernised and climate-friendly transformation and relocate to Hillingdon's Civic Centre in spring 2024.

New state-of-the art library

The council's plans for an upgraded central library, which will be considered by Cabinet in December, will include new facilities, such as:

- study pods
- dedicated laptop/device charging bars
- hireable meeting space
- a dedicated space for the popular Tovertafel (interactive tabletop projections).

There will also be:

- exhibition and event space
- a learning centre
- a dedicated children's library
- a large book collection.
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The new location has a bus stop directly outside plus disability access, making it more accessible to members of the public.

The plans

The council's plans for an upgraded central library, which are set to be considered by Cabinet in December, include facilities not currently provided in its existing building, such as study pods, hireable meeting space and a dedicated space for the popular Tovertafel (interactive tabletop projections).

The plans preserve exhibition and event spaces, a learning centre with public computers, charging points for laptops, a dedicated children's library and of course, a large book collection.

The plans will also be available to view in the current Uxbridge Library building soon.

Your questions answered

1. **Is the council proposing to close Uxbridge Library?**

No. The council is committed to retaining its 16 libraries in Hillingdon. Uxbridge is one of 3 flagship libraries. The proposal is not to close the library, but to relocate it approximately 300 metres down the road from its current location to the Civic Centre.

2. **Why is the council proposing to relocate Uxbridge Library?**

The council is bringing the service 'in house' as part of its mission to continue delivering outstanding services in more efficient and innovative ways as a result of the ongoing budget pressures being experienced by all local authorities, and as part of the organisation's commitment to being more sustainable to meet its carbon reduction target of net zero by 2030.

While the library's current location in Uxbridge High Street remains popular, the building itself is one of the council's assets with the highest carbon footprint and with underused spaces.

The current building opened in 1987 and since then, library usage has changed. The expectation to provide fully accessible spaces for people of all ages and abilities means a relocation can help visitors to get the most out of their visit. For example, being located in a step-free, one-floor location allows people with disabilities to make full use of the facilities and in the event of an emergency evacuation, all visitors can safely leave the building.

Uxbridge Family Hub and Uxbridge Adult Education Centre have already been successfully relocated to the Civic Centre. Moving the library helps to make the Civic Centre a one-stop shop for residents.

3. **How far from the current library is the proposed library?**

The distance from the current address to the proposed address is approximately 300 metres, a 3 to 5 minute walk.

4. **Won't moving the library make it harder to access?**

The proposed library is step free and on one floor, which improves access within the library.

Library visitors arrive from different directions, so while relocating it could increase travel time for some people, it will decrease it for others. The bus stop outside the Civic Centre serves 5 different routes.

5. **Will the library be hard to find in the Civic Centre?**

No, the library will be accessible through the current Main Reception and will have very clear signposting.

The main space is in what is currently The Middlesex Suite. This means the library is at the front of the Civic Centre building and can be accessed via the main steps or the ramp.

6. Will the new library be smaller than the current library?

While the total footprint is smaller than the current library, the plan provides more features and makes full use of the space available. There will be no loss to services or facilities, and enhancements will be provided to improve the experience to library visitors.

A reduction in 'dead' stock (books that have not circulated for over 2 years) will enable the library to make effective use of shelving space without affecting the experience of book borrowers.

7. What features and facilities will be available at the proposed library?

The library will continue to have an exhibition space, learning centre, photocopier and printer for public use, large book collection, dedicated children's library and study/relaxation space. The children's library is proposed as an enclosed space to reduce noise in the rest of the library and to improve safeguarding. Public toilets will be provided, including baby changing facilities and a disabled-access toilet.

A full café with easy seating and laptop charging will be introduced outside the main library space, and study pods to help students to focus on their revision inside the main library.

The popular Tovertafel, which projects interactive games onto a tabletop for people with dementia and neurodiverse learning difficulties, will be given its own dedicated space.

A meeting room for community hire and a multipurpose space for library activities will be introduced.

8. Are public computers still included in the proposed new library?

The number of machines is based on usage and the increase in laptop charging spaces is in recognition of the fact more people want to use their own devices inside the library. However, the library will continue to provide computers that are free for visitors to use. Printing facilities will also continue to be provided.

9. Will Local Studies and Archives be part of the new library?

No, Local Studies and Archives will stay in Uxbridge but will not be in the proposed new library. The new location is to be decided.

10. Will the Home Library Service still operate from the new library?

Yes, the Home Library Service for housebound and vulnerable residents will have a new home at the Civic Centre. As with the current provision, this will be a staff-only area.

11. What will happen with the current library building if the relocation goes ahead?

The future of the current Uxbridge library building has not yet been finalised. However as one of the council's least energy-efficient buildings it is not considered sustainable to retain it if the council is to succeed in its ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030.