

# DISLEY PARISH COUNCIL

**Richard Holland** *Disley Parish Clerk*

Tel: 01663 762726

Email: [admin@disleyparishcouncil.org.uk](mailto:admin@disleyparishcouncil.org.uk)

Web: [www.disleyparishcouncil.org.uk](http://www.disleyparishcouncil.org.uk)

Twitter: [@disleypc](https://twitter.com/disleypc)



## **Response to Cheshire East Councils' Pre-Budget Consultation 2018/21**

### **Community Library Provision - Proposal to close Disley Library - Outcome 6 - Item 79**

In response to Cheshire East Councils Pre- Budget Consultation 2018/21, Disley Parish Council wishes to lodge strong opposition to the proposal to close Disley library as set out under Outcome 6 - Item 79 in the consultation.

The Parish Council's response to this part of the consultation takes into full account strong representations made to the Council from residents both via a "Save our Library" campaign, set up by residents in response to the proposal, and public representations subsequently made at a Parish Council meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017. A paper petition, ePetition and leaflet drop have been organised by residents independently of the Parish Council and the results of these will be forwarded directly to Cheshire East Council.

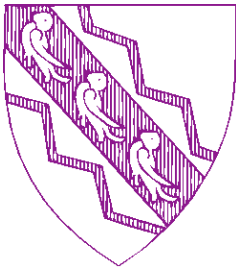
Disley Library offers a substantial number of activities and services for all ages, many of which are vital to local residents. These include:

Weekly:	Mega Blocks, Rhymetime, Lego Club, Homework Support
Monthly:	Adult - Keen Cooks Book Group Children: Youth 'Books & Beyond' Group
Termly:	Saturday Craft event
Half Term:	Craft / Author events and Treasure Hunts
Evening events:	Author Events / Speciality events (2/3 per annum) Brownies / Cubs visits
Annually:	Class visits from Disley Primary School Visits from Disley Under 5's, Blue Grass Purple Cow nursery, Brownies and Cubs (for Reading Badge)
Outreach:	Post Natal Group Disley School for Summer Reading Challenge

There are also events to help people become more IT literate: On-line security, Get on-line weeks, Ancestry sessions, IT Buddy sessions, iPad help/taster sessions

The attendance figures for these clubs and events show that they are expanding.

April 2016 – March 2017	1943 participants
April 2017 – December 2017	2312 participants



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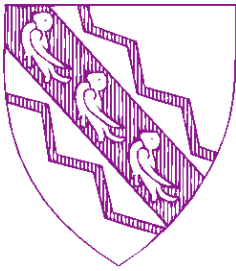
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In 2017 four Duke of Edinburgh Awards pupils from Poynton High School attended the Library to complete their training. A number of these pupils continue to volunteer at Disley Library events.

The reasons for the Parish Councils' opposition to the proposed closure of Disley Library, on behalf of the Disley community, are set out below. Cheshire East Council has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all in the area that want to make use of it. The reasons are not listed in any order of priority.

- 1) The proposal to close Disley library works against Cheshire East Council achieving Outcome 5 - People Live Well and for Longer set out under the Consultations Priorities namely: Local people have healthy lifestyles and access to good cultural, leisure and recreational facilities. Care services focus on prevention, early intervention and physical and mental wellbeing. A report published by the Arts Council in 2015 entitled "The Health and Well Being Benefits of Public Libraries" concluded – Quote: *"Library Services play an important role in the quality of life of both library users and non –users. As for society, library usage is associated with reduced medical expenditures. Ultimately, these benefits should be assessed against the costs to society of running and maintaining library services, but the evidence presented in the report suggests that extended or increased provision of library services should have a valuable positive effect on the lives of people in England."*
- 2) Whilst Disley Parish Council understands the proposed increase in the budget/Council Tax to address the increasing demands on Adult Social Care, it holds the view that in comparison, the very small budget for Disley library should be retained and recognised as an investment in prevention to achieve longer term savings in providing reactive care services.
- 3) The Pre-Budget Consultation proposal (Item 79) states that: "The Council would welcome proposals from local community organisations to deliver these libraries as community managed libraries as an alternative to closure". Discussions with Cheshire East Officers have identified that attempts to run community libraries in other local authorities have not proved successful, so this would not be a sustainable option for maintaining any level of library service in Disley. However, the Parish Council would support initiatives to increase volunteer involvement in Library Services wherever possible.
- 4) Disley and Newtown has a population of 4,372 (Cheshire East Council 2016 Ward Profile) with a higher percentage of elderly people than the Cheshire East and national averages. This is evidenced by Office for National Statistics data used within the Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan [Housing Advice Note](#). The library facility provides the only remaining lifeline for the elderly of the village to access Cheshire East services, such as Senior and Disabled Railcards, Senior and Disabled Bus Passes, Blue Badges, Benefit and Council Tax Claims as well as advice and internet connectivity. Figures provided by Cheshire East Council show that 29.4% of



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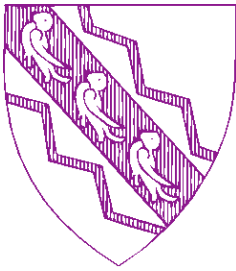
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active Disley Library members are over the age of 60 and 46.3% of registered users over 60, are active members. Apart from the practical services offered by the library, the opportunity for social interactions and health and well-being benefits offered by library staff and other users cannot be underestimated.

- 5) Cheshire East figures show that 33% of all active Disley Library members are 11 years or under and 63.9% of registered users under 12 are active members. This is a clear demonstration of the importance of the Library to the youngest members of Disley's community. Outcome 3 of the Pre-Budget Consultation highlights that Cheshire East will focus on, "securing the best start in life" and that pupils will have "a firm foundation for a good education..." Closure of the library would remove an essential source of material to help children achieve this. As an example of the library's engagement with young residents, its' 2017 Summer Reading Challenge had 119 children participating with 70 completing the Challenge and many attending the Awards Ceremony held in the library.
- 6) Items 4) and 5) demonstrate that the closure of Disley Library would have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable members of our community, the youngest and the oldest. Almost two thirds (62.4%) of active library users are under 12 or over 60 years old.
- 7) The simple league table approach used to determine the three "smallest" libraries in the Borough for the purposes of revenue savings, takes no account of the human element and the negative impact on health and well-being of residents using the facility. Furthermore, closure of the library would remove the potential for introducing new initiatives to address problems such as social isolation. Given the population demographic referred to in Point 4, the figures presented in the league table show that Disley Library has higher usage per head of population than other libraries such as Knutsford, Alsager, Middlewich, Handforth and Bollington
- 8) With Disley being located at the far north-east edge of the Cheshire East boundary it is already difficult for elderly residents, in particular, to access any cultural, leisure or recreational facility provided within Cheshire East. Since the direct Cheshire East bus service to and from Macclesfield was withdrawn, and more recently a bus service operated by the High Peak authority going to Macclesfield no longer visits Disley, there is now no direct public transport access into Cheshire East from Disley.
- 9) The proposed library closure reinforces a long-held resident perception that Disley's geographical location on the edge of the Borough leads to lower investment and poorer service provision from Cheshire East Council.



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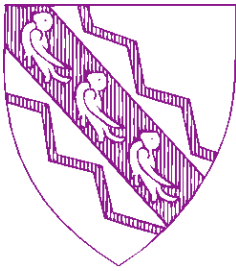
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- 10) Whilst Disley is a member of the Poynton Area Community Partnership where preventative services and initiatives are available, again due to the transport problems referred to in Item 8 (above), it is not possible for Disley residents to easily access any of these activities and many attempts to secure health and well-being outreach services into Disley have failed due to lack of funding. A recent example of this was Everybody Leisure's Falls Prevention Classes in Poynton. The suggestion that residents could access Poynton library and other services is therefore, not practical.
- 11) It is noted that High Lane Library, located in the neighbouring Stockport Borough Council area, is suggested as an alternative venue, but this does not offer Cheshire East services e.g. bus passes and Blue Badges. No other Local Service Centre library has a non-Cheshire East library offered as an alternative and neither Cheshire East Council nor Disley Parish Council would have any influence on the future plans of High Lane Library. As referred to above, Disley residents have no easy access to any Cheshire East Council Leisure and Cultural service so suggesting the use of an adjoining Borough Council facility would undoubtedly raise questions regarding value for money on the Council Tax.
- 12) The suggestion that Disley residents could access other library facilities also has a potential negative environmental impact as it encourages more use of cars. Disley has an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) declared along the A6 corridor and there are already major concerns in the community about the effect of projected future increases in traffic on the A6 from the new MARR when opened in 2018. Cheshire East Council are proposing to work with the Disley community to develop a new AQMA Action Plan and a part of this process will be to identify how the local community and organisations collectively can contribute to improving air quality. Closure of the library service would be construed as a very negative start to this process from one of its chief promoters, Cheshire East Council.
- 13) A recent new housing development in Disley, of over 200 houses, has increased the population significantly and Disley Primary School has been expanded to accommodate more pupils. The second phase of this housing development is currently underway, and the family housing offered will increase the village population and younger age group considerably. The Disley School PAN increased by Cheshire East Council in April 2017 from 30 to 40. The number of places at the school increased from 210 to 280 and there is still pressure to further expand the number of school places. The library is well used by young families and for after-school activities and with the increasing number of children in the Parish, the library offers an important community facility to accommodate future growth and a continuing link to Cheshire East youth services.
- 14) Disley has recently submitted a Neighbourhood Plan to Cheshire East Council for the final stages of consultation and referendum. Cheshire East has yet to declare further housing allocations for Local Service Centres which may also contribute to future growth in Disley.



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- 15) In developing the Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan the extensive consultation of all households in Disley and Newtown informed the inclusion of a “Community Facilities” policy to ensure retention of community facilities in the village with the following underpinning justification:

Quote from Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan 2017- 2030:

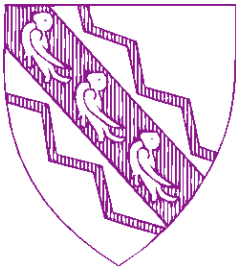
*“Disley and Newtown is fortunate to have a wide range of community facilities and services, as befits its role as a local service centre. These include a community centre, library, primary school, playing fields, play areas, football pitch and tennis courts, a sports club, doctors surgery, dentists and scout hall. Consultation events and surveys have highlighted the value that local residents place on these facilities. In order to ensure the continued vibrancy and vitality of Disley and Newtown, and that the parish remains an attractive place in which to live and work and to visit, it is essential that the loss of facilities is resisted where possible, and that the improvement and enhancement of facilities is supported”.*

- 16) Disley Parish Council has recently relocated its Parish Offices to the Disley Community Centre to work alongside the library so that other local services including the PSCO and Community Hall are located together as a “Disley Community Hub.” The rationale being to provide both easy access to all services and new opportunities in working together under one roof. This move has the potential to increase activity in both the Centre and footfall in the library. Figures provided by the library show an 8% increase in footfall since the Council moved to the Centre in September 2017, compared to the same period in 2016. The proposal to close the library came as a shock and a huge disappointment to the Parish Council as, having worked closely with Cheshire East Officers throughout the relocation process, no suggestion of a closure was intimated. Further improvements and an extension to the Community Centre may be jeopardised by the proposed library closure.

- 17) The Parish Council took over the management of the Community Centre, following a threat of closure, from Cheshire East in 2012 and whilst operating costs have reduced and revenues have increased, it continues to run at a loss which is funded through the precept. Closure of the library would only compound this and would potentially increase the burden on the taxpayer. A Community Asset Healthcheck report was commissioned through Cheshire East in 2012 to show how the Centre could benefit the community in future. This report included a SWOT analysis which identified opportunities referring to the library including:

- To integrate library and community services
- Cross pollination of services between the library and community centre
- Prevention and health information services.

One of the recommendations in the report was to relocate the Parish Office to the Community Centre to help deliver these opportunities. The closure of the library would be contrary to these opportunities and recommendations.



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The Community Centre hosts activities for all sections of the community including parent and toddler groups, Cuppa an' a Chat coffee mornings, keep fit, handicrafts and local societies. The potential to integrate these activities with library services and expand both would be a real missed opportunity.

- 18) In terms of Disley Library and Disley Parish Council sharing the same building offering new opportunities for working together under one roof, there is much scope for cost savings of shared services e.g. broadband, waste management, cleaning services, fire equipment servicing, PAT testing, vending machines etc. There may be other options for cost savings utilising the shared building, while retaining currently library services and opening hours e.g. through changes to lone-working arrangements.

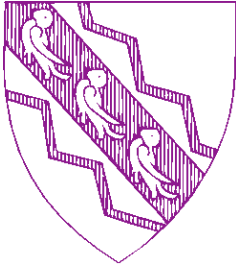
The Parish Councils' opposition to the proposed closure of Disley Library for the reasons detailed above is intended to support fully retaining the library service in Disley at its current level. Should this not be possible in Cheshire East Councils' final budget, then, in the interest of maintaining substantial library services in Disley, the Parish Council has resolved to continue exploring cost-saving options that have already been discussed with Library Officers. This demonstrates the Parish Council's commitment to working with Cheshire East Council to retain library services.

The Parish Council has recently invited the Cheshire East Portfolio Holder for Health to visit Disley and see the Library and the Community Hub, to discuss the community's concerns and demonstrate the importance of the library to the community.

Representatives of Disley Parish Council are due to attend the Cabinet Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> February and the Council Meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018 to reiterate its position on this issue.

## **Summary**

Disley Parish Council has taken a strategic view of the future development of the Community Centre. It is in the process of selling the previous Council Offices and is hoping to develop a thriving community hub in response to the recent increase in population size, the increase in over-65's in the community, and the importance attached to improving community facilities as evidenced in the Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan (currently under Regulation 16 consultation). The closure of Disley Library would undermine the efforts of Disley Parish Council to develop a community hub in the heart of the village that the population wants and would put plans for the future of the Community Centre at risk.



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Disley Parish Council is fully committed to working in partnership with Cheshire East to increase awareness and usage of the library and developing joint initiatives.

Disley Parish Council would be grateful if Cheshire East Council would give this consultation response the serious consideration it deserves.

**Cllr David Kidd**

**Chairman of Disley Parish Council**