Library Transformation 2030 – Detailed Consultation Findings

Rationale and approach to the development of the proposals for consultation

The proposal put forward for consultation was as follows:

- Reducing the number of libraries from 15 to 11. With the proposed of closure of four libraries – Aspley, Basford, Bilborough, and Radford-Lenton.
- Reduction in opening hours across the network by 123.5 hrs per week, Full details of proposed changes is set out in Appendix 1
- Staff reductions
- Reducing the budget for books, IT and operating costs.

The measures proposed were projected to save £1.5m, allowing the Council to deliver a sustainable library service.

The key principes for determining the consultation proposal and revised recommendations.
- Usage and performance of library (Visits, book issues, computer use)
- Building costs and maintenance issues (Condition, adaptability and accessibility)
- Restrictions/ Matters linked with premises of occupation of the building (Leases, restrictions, funding agreements)
- Needs assessment of the area (Demographics, deprivation, education, employment, public health)
- Accessibility/ Transport links to other facilities (Bus/ tram routes, other community provision)
- Financial performance (cost of service, cost per user, value for money)
- Outcomes from the consultation

Consultation Findings

Summary analysis of findings from the consultation

The council's financial position means that all expenditure must be reviewed to ensure it is being used in the most efficient and effective way i.e. to meet the Council's duty of best value.

Headlines

A 12-week consultation held between 28th May and 19th August 2024 was undertaken. The principes of the consultation were as follows: No decisions had been made. Responses to the consultation will be considered before any decisions that Nottingham City Council will take about the future of Nottingham libraries. The consultation involved working with organisations and networks across the city to ensure as many people as possible who live, work or study in Nottingham had the opportunity to engage. The consultation was also designed to seek innovative solutions, asking citizens and partners to propose alternative ideas for delivering an efficient, comprehensive library service within the budget constraints.

During that period Nottingham City Council invited responses to the consultation via an online survey[1] or paper copy of the survey available at all libraries or on request. 5,378 people responded to the survey. 4,360 people/ organisations responded to the main online survey, 624 people completed the main paper survey. 394 children and young people completed the young people version[2] of the survey either online or on paper. Forty-two organisations responded and 149 of the responses were from Nottingham City Council staff.

In addition to the survey three public meetings were held (2 in person, one online) and 2 drop-in sessions. One stakeholder workshop and two staff workshops were delivered. The team wrote to 160 schools and nurseries encouraging participation in the consultation and completion of the young people's survey and wrote to 132 stakeholders[3] in Nottingham with an interest in libraries. Five emails were sent to library members during the 12-week period, this resulted in 36,135 unique opens and 50 social media posts were done (across Facebook, Instagram and X) with a reach of 34,819.

The feedback from the consultation has been considered in determining whether and how to proceed with the proposal for the library service put forward during the consultation process.

Headline analysis (survey, staff, stakeholders and public meetings)

85% of those who responded to the main survey were Nottingham City Library members and 36% visited a library in Nottingham at least once a week to once a month. 22% visited more than once a week and 17% visited monthly.
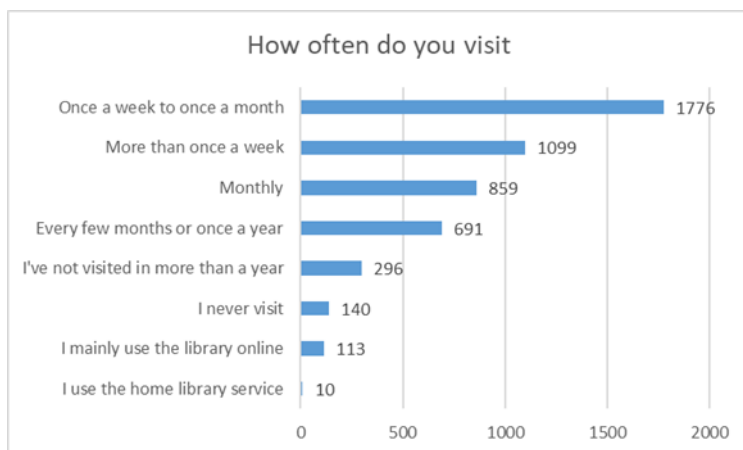
On the children's and young people's survey 30.5% of the respondents went to the library more than once a week. Children were also asked what would make them go to a library more often. Responses suggested that young people are interested in more events, workshops, and activities at the library, as well as improvements in facilities such as more comfortable seating areas. Several respondents also highlighted the need for extended or more flexible opening hours, particularly to accommodate visits after school. Other suggestions include better book selections and creating a more engaging community atmosphere through clubs and social activities.

On the main survey the most used services were borrowing books 22%, printing or photocopying 9%, a place to study 8% or to go to an event or activity for adults 8%. A sizeable number mentioned attending specific events or workshops that cater to niche interests, such as local history sessions,

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[1] See appendix x for survey questions.
[2] See appendix x for young people survey questions.
[3] See appendix x for a full list of the stakeholders written to

creative writing groups, or technology tutorials. Others used the library primarily for accessing resources like local archives, genealogy materials, or specialised reference collections. Several respondents emphasized the importance of the library as a social space where they meet friends, participate in community activities, or simply enjoy a quiet, safe environment. Additionally, some individuals pointed out that they visit the library mainly to use it as a workspace, especially for group studies or meetings, taking advantage of the library's infrastructure like meeting rooms and free Wi-Fi.
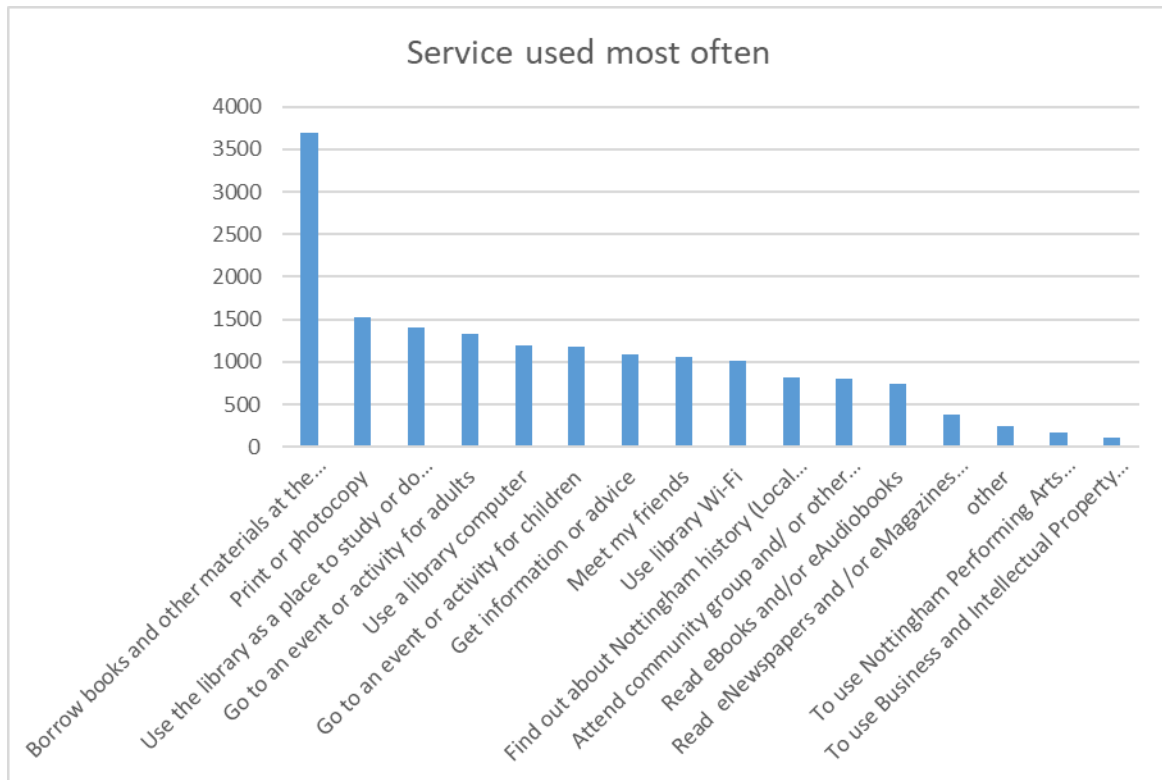
The most important reason for visiting was a good choice of books 33%, library staff on hand for help or advice 14%, a quiet place to study/ read 11% and to go to a library event 10%. A lot of the 'other' comments were reiterating their selection(s) or stating, "all of them." Some emphasized the importance of libraries as quiet and accessible spaces for studying, research, and professional work, particularly for those who may not have such environments at home. The social and cultural benefits that libraries bring via events and workshops was mentioned in several comments.

Most important services (select three max)
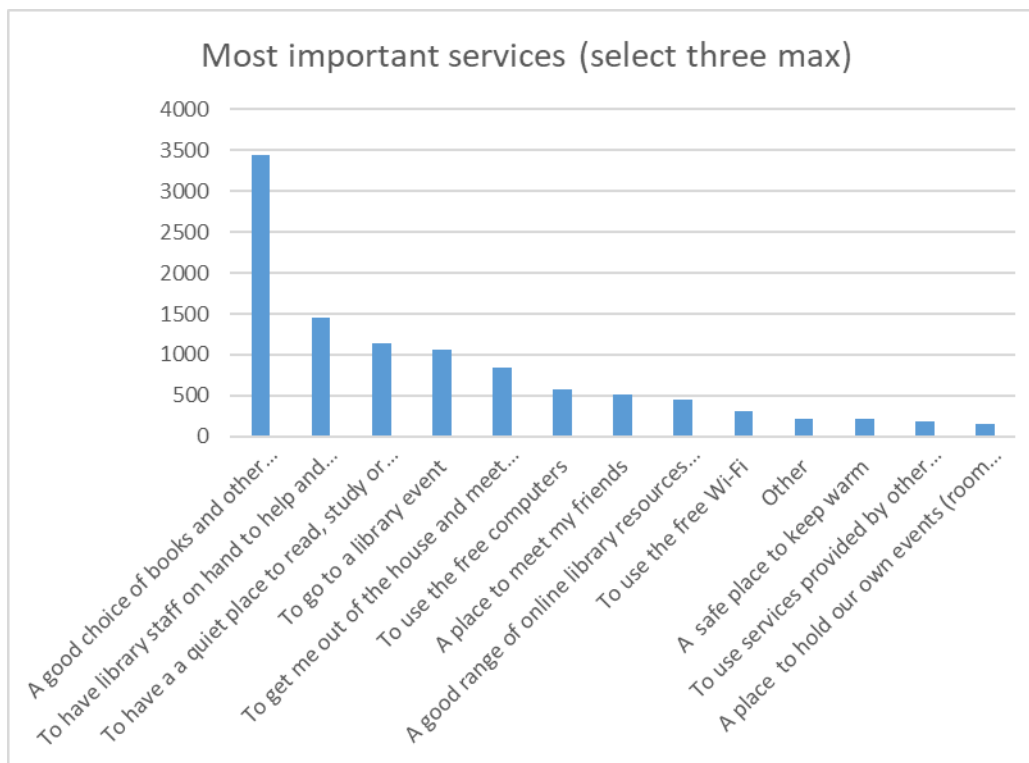
On the main survey we asked respondents to identify which libraries they visited in the last year and could select up to three. The most visited by far was Nottingham Central Library with 29% of respondents (2,581) saying they had been there in the last year. (NOTE: Nottingham Central Library opened on Nov 28th, 2023, and so has not even been open a full year). The next most visited by survey respondents was Wollaton, Bulwell and Basford. (NOTE: This is not in line with usage patterns – Basford according to physical visit statistics collected over the last 5 years is the 13th most visited library out of the fifteen libraries, the high number of responses from Basford users is likely due to Basford being under threat of closure)

Which libraries have you visited in the last year?
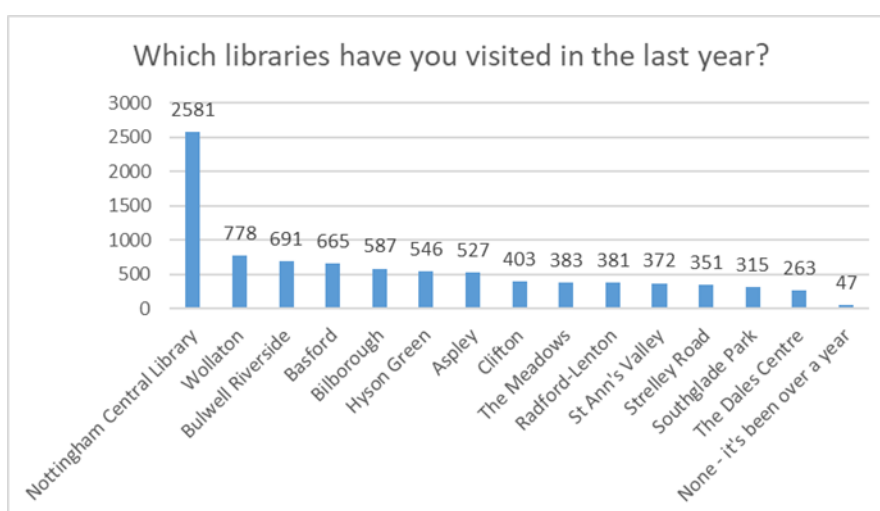
On the children's and young people's survey there was a slight difference to the most visited libraries with Central library coming out top (45.5%) followed by Radford-Lenton (27%) and Bilborough (16%) the high numbers for Radford-Lenton may be because a local school completed the survey as a school activity or Radford-Lenton as one of the libraries facing closure may have seen a greater take

up of adults encouraging children to show their support to protect the service. We asked on the young people's survey who did they usually go to the library with? Most responded with their parent/s/guardian/s (50%) followed by my family (brother/ sister/ cousin/ grandparent) 37% and my friends 32%.
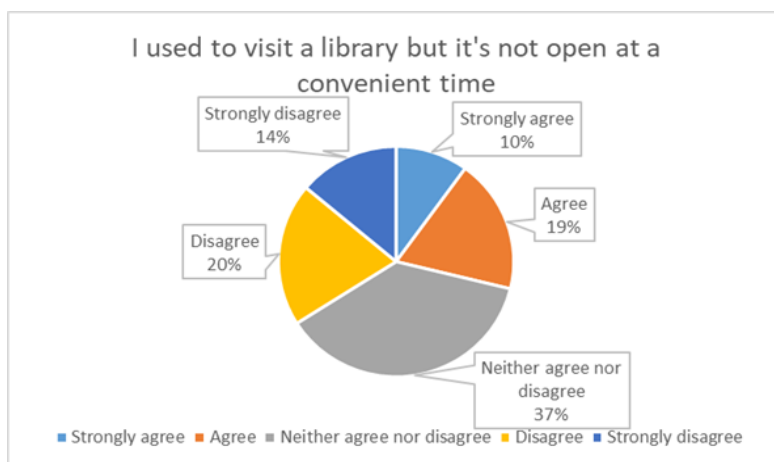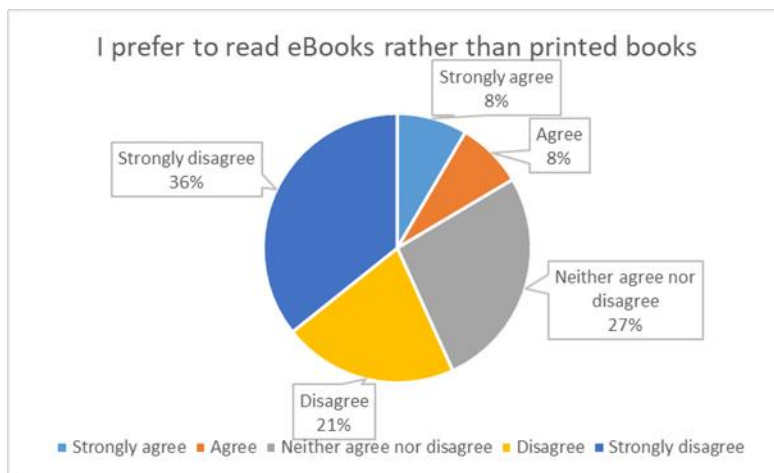
We also asked how people travel to library – the most popular option was to walk (46%) followed by bus 22% and car 21%.
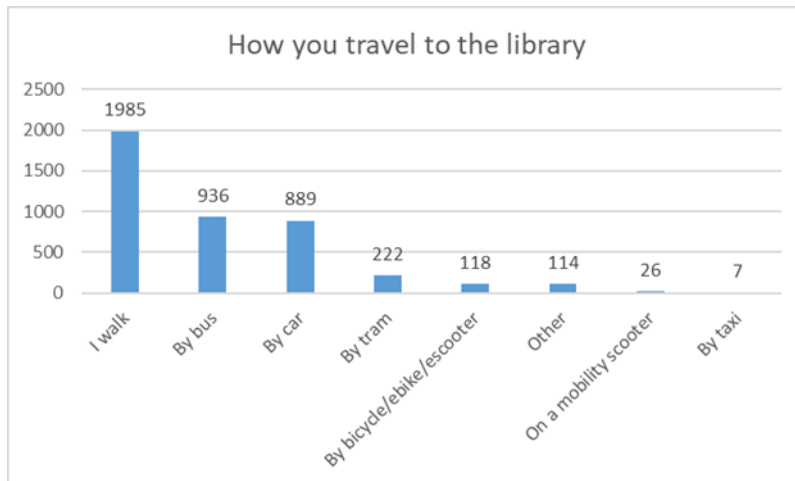
Barriers to Library Use

We also wanted to know if people did not visit the library – why they did not. 11% of those who responded said they had not visited a library in more than a year, never visit or mainly use the library online. The main reason was Other 20%, I can find what I need online 19% or it is difficult for me to get to a library. In terms of 'other' many respondents expressed concerns related to personal circumstances, such as time constraints due to work or family commitments, which make visiting a library difficult. Some mentioned a lack of awareness about the library's offerings, feeling that they were not well informed about the services, events, or new acquisitions available. Others pointed out that the physical environment of libraries, such as outdated facilities, uncomfortable seating, or inadequate lighting, discouraged them from visiting. A few respondents also mentioned that they prefer alternative forms of entertainment and learning, such as online courses or streaming services, which they find more convenient and accessible than visiting a physical library. Additionally, some highlighted issues related to health or mobility, indicating that they are unable to visit due to physical challenges. These varied responses reflect a mix of personal preferences, logistical challenges, and perceptions about the library's environment and services.

We asked low/ non-library users if their reasons for not visiting was because they preferred to read eBooks or if opening times were a barrier to use. Interestingly neither seemed to be the reason for not using they physical library offer.

I prefer to read eBooks rather than printed books

Strongly agree 8%
Agree 8%
Neither agree nor disagree 27%
Disagree 21%
Strongly disagree 36%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

I used to visit a library but it's not open at a convenient time

Strongly disagree 14%
Strongly agree 10%
Agree 19%
Disagree 20%
Neither agree nor disagree 37%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

We then asked if there was another reason why they did not visit a Nottingham City library. Among the respondents who provided additional reasons for not visiting a Nottingham City Library, several key themes emerged. Many individuals mentioned that they prefer using digital resources, finding them more convenient than visiting a physical library. Some respondents indicated a lack of interest or need for the services offered by libraries, either due to personal preferences or because they find alternatives that better fit their lifestyle. Others cited practical barriers such as poor accessibility, parking difficulties, or inconvenient library locations as significant deterrents. Health concerns were also frequently mentioned as reasons for avoiding public spaces like libraries. Additionally, a few respondents shared that past negative experiences, including unfriendly staff or outdated facilities, have discouraged them from returning. These responses highlight a mix of convenience, personal preference, and situational factors influencing their decision not to visit the library.

We then asked all respondents what the impact of the proposal would have on their ability to do the following:

	It will make it much easier	It will make it a little easier	It won't make much difference	It will make it a little harder	It will make it much harder	Not sure
Visit a library close to where you live, work or study	11.4%	1.3%	30.6%	15.9%	36.4%	4.4%
Visit a library at a convenient time for you	11.1%	2.0%	20.5%	20.4%	41.8%	4.2%

Access other council services or community activities at the library	9.3%	2.4%	26.7%	15.8%	36.2%	9.7%

Unsurprisingly most stated the proposed changes of less libraries and fewer opening hours would make it much harder for them to visit a library close to where them, visit at a time convenient and access services/ activities at the library.

We then asked three open ended/ free text questions.

Proposed Library Closures

What comments do you have on the impact of the proposed closing of Aspley, Basford, Bilborough and Radford-Lenton libraries?

The responses reflected deep concern and disappointment among the community. The most frequent objections were due to the levels of deprivation and disadvantage already existing in those communities that library closure would only exacerbate. Many respondents emphasized the vital role these libraries play in providing access to educational resources, especially for children, the elderly, those with disabilities and low-income families who may not have alternative access to books, the internet, and other services. The libraries were also described as essential community hubs that foster social interaction, support social and mental wellbeing, and offer warm, safe spaces for all, particularly in areas with limited public amenities. The potential closures were seen as a significant loss, not only in terms of resources but also for the sense of community and support these libraries provide. Respondents urged the council to reconsider the decision, highlighting the long-term negative effects such closures could have on social equity, education, and community cohesion. Many expressed concern about the difficultly or cost associated with travelling to other libraries if their local one were closed and some expressed concern that closure would have a negative impact on the remaining network putting greater pressure on existing services.

Based on the comparison between the overall responses and those from people who specifically visited the Aspley, Bilborough, Basford, or Radford-Lenton libraries, a notable difference in sentiment emerges: Respondents who had visited these libraries expressed a much stronger and more personal opposition to the proposed closures. Their comments often highlighted deep emotional connections to these specific libraries, describing them as vital parts of their daily lives and integral to their communities. They were particularly concerned about losing access to essential services and the negative impact on community cohesion.

A minority 2.5% were in favour of closures or recognised it would be worth closing under used libraries to protect the wider library network and a small number suggested the closure of other libraries instead – particularly those in what are perceived as more affluent areas. A number of comments suggested the closing of libraries not part of Nottingham City's network – highlighting the need for clarity on what is the responsibility of the City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and privately owned libraries.

Respondents made a number of suggestions which were also reflected in the responses to the next two questions. These included asking for more resources/ applying for funding, reduce hours instead of close buildings, use volunteers, encourage/ promote greater library use, free or discounted travel to other libraries, a mobile library, maximise income opportunities, work with partners, move libraries into other community buildings.

Opening Hours

The next question was What comments do you have about the impact of the proposed reduced opening hours across the libraries?

LIBRARY OPENING HOURS WITH 4 CLOSURES: ASPLEY, BASFORD, BILBOROUGH and RADFORD LENTON								
LIBRARY	**COMMENTS**		**MONDAY**	**TUESDAY**	**WEDNESDAY**	**THURSDAY**	**FRIDAY**	**SATURDAY**
Nottingham Central Library	10-5.30 Mon-Fri, 10-4 Sat	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-7.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-4.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.30	10.00-5.30	10.00-5.30	10.00-5.30	10.00-5.30	10.00-4.00
Aspley Library	Closed to public but retain building to become a hub for NPALS, Local Studies overflow, Hamper delivery service, stores.	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-6.00	9.00-1.00
		Proposed hours	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Basford Library	Closed	Current Hours	9.00-1.00	2.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-1.00
		Proposed hours	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Bilborough Library	Closed	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-6.00	9.00-1.00	9.00-1.00
		Proposed hours	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Bulwell Riverside Library	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9am-6pm. Closure on Saturdays.	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00 - 1.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	Closed
Clifton Library	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9.30am-5.30pm. Closure on current half day (Wednesday).	Current Hours	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-1.00	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-1.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00
The Dales Centre	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9am-5.30pm. Full day opening on current half day (Tuesday).	Current Hours	9.00-5:30	9.00-1.00	9.00-7.00	Closed	9.00-5:30	9.00-1.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00
Hyson Green	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9am-6pm. Closure on Saturdays.	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00 - 1.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	Closed
Meadows Library	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9am-6pm, half day opening on Fridays and 1pm closure on Saturdays.	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-6.00	2.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	10.00-2.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	10.00-1.00
Radford - Lenton Library + NPALS	Closure. NPALS relocated to an alternative library that will remain open	Current Hours	9.00 -1.00	Closed	9.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-1.00	9.00-1.00
		Proposed hours	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Sherwood Library	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9am-6pm.	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-6.00	9.00-1.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00
Southglade Park Library	Change full days to half days, close on Fridays and open 10-1pm on Saturdays.	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-1.00	9.00-1.00
		Proposed hours	2.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-1.00	2.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-1.00
St Ann's Valley Library	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9am-6pm. Closure on Saturdays.	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00 - 1.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	Closed
Strelley Road Library	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9am-5.30pm. Full day opening on current half day (Tuesday).	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00 - 1.00	9.00-6.00	Closed	9.00-6.00	9.00 - 1.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00
Wollaton Library	Reduce full days to 10am-5pm, instead of 9am-6pm. Closure on current half day (Wednesday).	Current Hours	9.00-6.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-1.00	9.00-7.00	9.00-6.00	9.00-1.00
		Proposed hours	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	Closed	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00

Many respondents emphasised that reduced hours would significantly limit their ability to access library services, particularly for those who rely on libraries for studying, working, or accessing digital resources outside of traditional work hours. The reduced hours were seen as especially detrimental to families, students, and working individuals who may only be able to visit during evenings or weekends. Some respondents also expressed worries that reduced hours could lead to a decline in library use, which might further justify future cuts or closures, creating a negative cycle. Additionally, there was concern that the reduced availability could disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including the elderly, low-income families, and those without internet access at home, for whom libraries are a crucial resource. There was also concern about the cost/ difficultly of travelling to another library. Also a worry was the impact on people's social and mental wellbeing and increased risk of loneliness, opportunities for people to access places of learning, literacy being reduced, a loss of opportunity for reading for pleasure and fostering a learning/reading culture and how reduced accessibility of libraries will impact communities and the future aspirations of children.

Overall, the sentiment was that reducing library hours would erode the accessibility and effectiveness of these essential community hubs.

A small number of those who responded to this question (110) agreed with the proposal and some thought it better to reduce opening hours than lose a library (481). 630 people suggested alternative opening hours to the proposal. These included:

- 1 or 2 late night openings during the week
- Earlier opening hours
- Seasonal hours – afternoons/ evenings in the summer, daytime in the winter
- Increase evening/ weekend and reduce morning opening.
- Stagger hours/ evening opening across libraries.
- Nottingham Central library to retain or increase opening hours.
- Respond to community need at individual libraries rather than having consistent opening times across the network.
- Extend opening hours through technology enabled opening (TEO) or use of volunteers.
- Increase income opportunities to offset retaining opening hours.
- Close half days for more full days and
- Longer hours in school holidays

Alternative Ideas and Suggestions

The final question asked 'what other suggestions do you have to improve library services without additional cost to the Council? (This question received the lowest number of responses of the 3 (2,740 provided comments compared to 4,984 who answered the first question about the proposed closure of 4 libraries). The responses to the question revealed a strong community interest in preserving and enhancing library offerings through creative and collaborative means. Many respondents proposed greater involvement of volunteers, including themselves or community groups to assist in running libraries, organizing events, and maintaining operations. Others suggested forming partnerships with local businesses, schools, and non-profits to share resources and responsibilities, potentially hosting joint programs or sponsored activities. Ideas for generating revenue were also common, such as holding community fundraisers, charging small fees for special events, libraries having cafes or pop-up shops, or encouraging donations. Additionally, several respondents recommended optimising existing spaces for multiple community uses, such as meetings, workshops, or exhibitions, to maximise value without extra cost. There was also a sizeable number of comments saying that they believe volunteers are not the way forward and that libraries need librarians/ skilled library staff to run effectively.

We then looked specifically at how organisations responded to this question. The suggestions were varied and reflective of the specific missions of each group. Organisations often suggested leveraging their existing resources or networks to support library services. For example, educational institutions offered to collaborate on joint educational programs, while community-focused organisations emphasized their ability to mobilise volunteers to help run library activities or maintain facilities. Some organisations also proposed partnerships to host events or workshops that could draw more community engagement to libraries, thereby supporting their sustainability. A few organisations with a focus on digital resources suggested ways to integrate more online services, potentially reducing physical costs. These responses highlight a broad willingness among organisations to contribute to the continued success of library services in their respective communities.

Personal data

Considerably more females responded to the survey (66%) and the best represented age group was 35-44 (21%). Ethnic minorities were slightly underrepresented compared to Nottingham 2021 Census data with 8.4% of main survey respondents identifying as being Asian/Asian British (Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Kashmiri, Pakistani or Other), 4.7% identified as Black/ Black British (African, Caribbean, Other). 3.7% Identified as Mixed (White & Asian, White & Black African, White & Black Caribbean, Other). There was good representation of those who identified as disabled (16%).

Full analysis of the responses and feedback to the consultation has now taken place and the views and concerns raised by individuals and organisations are carefully considered in the final recommendations being put forward. The decision needs to enable the transformation to a sustainable library service that remains relevant and responds to the financial position of the local authority. The key themes that emerged from the consultation that are taking forward for further development/ investigation include:

- Opportunity for Community / voluntary sector management of library buildings as an alternative to closures
- Improved co-ordination with other services delivered at the neighbourhood level with potential shared use of community spaces and stronger partnership working.
- Taking a more considered and tailored approach to respond to needs of the community and to reflect the cost of that delivery particularly in relation to opening hours.
- The development and more effective use of technology and digital access realigning buildings, staff, and resources to respond to evolving need and demand.
- Secure funding for future developments whilst maximising existing and new income streams.