

TITLE	Polehampton Community Facility / Twyford Library
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 th July 2019
WARD	Twyford, Charvil, Hurst, Remenham Wargrave & Ruscombe;
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Locality and Customer Services - Sarah Hollamby
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Regeneration – Charlotte Haitham-Taylor

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To signal the Council's commitment to supporting the development of a new library (community facility) within Twyford on the site of the Old Polehampton Boys School, which is consistent with the Council's overall approach to service delivery.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive

- 1) Agree in principle to support the development of a new library on the site of the Old Polehampton Boys School in Twyford,
- 2) Authorise the Director of Locality and Customer Services to determine accurate costs and timing for delivery of the library;
- 3) Authorise the Director of Locality and Customer Services to keep the planning permission alive by resubmitting or whatever else may be necessary
- 4) Authorise the Director of Locality and Customer Services to enter into negotiations with the Polehampton Trust to achieve a long lease at a peppercorn for the building
- 5) Note that the Director of Locality and Customer Services will prepare a detailed proposal for the new library (Community Facility) for consideration at the Executive meeting in September 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Polehampton Trust is a Twyford based charity who actively provide funding for local activities (approx. £60K each year) and are the owners of the Old Polehampton Boys School building, located in Polehampton Close, Twyford. Part of the Old Polehampton Boys School building has already partially been converted to residential use. The Trust has a longstanding aspiration to develop the rest of Old Polehampton Boys School building into a community facility, and in December 2016 the Trust received planning approval for their plans to do this. The Trust have been unable to make any further progress on this.

Wokingham Borough Council has operated the library in Twyford since it took over the responsibility for library services in 1998. The current library is located in a modular building in Polehampton Close on the opposite side of the road to the Polehampton building. The provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service is a statutory requirement for the Council as specified in the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964.

The library in Twyford remains well-used. However, the limitations of the building place some risks on the ability of the Council to continue to operate the library service within Twyford and the surrounding parishes that is consistent with the expectations of the Council's 21st Century service delivery model.

This report shows how the Council will accurately scope the costs and the benefits to the Council supporting the Polehampton Trust in their ambition to create a new community facility in Twyford. A detailed business case for this project is to be presented to the Executive in September 2019.

BACKGROUND

The Polehampton Trust are the freehold owners of the Old Polehampton Boys School (OPBS). In the recent past, the OPBS has been let to an amateur theatrical society giving a small income to the Trust. The theatrical society have now vacated the site and have moved into Loddon Hall on a permanent basis.

In October 2016 the Trust received planning consent to renovate the existing OPBS site and build an extension that would provide a much larger community facility for Twyford (see below). Since obtaining this consent, the Trust have been trying unsuccessfully to secure funding to deliver the new community facility, which they have estimated at £1.25M.



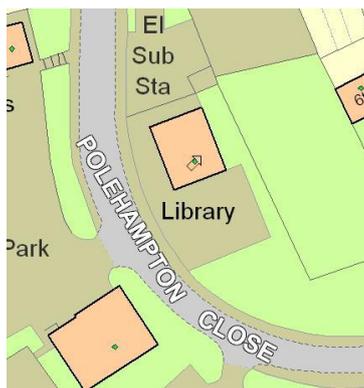
The planning consent for the renovations and redevelopment are valid for three years, and as such will expire before the end of the year.

An option exists for the partial implementation of the approved planning consent to only conduct the renovations to the existing OPBS building to create a smaller community facility approximately the same size as the existing library building in Twyford. This option would be substantially cheaper than the costs estimated for the full delivery of the planning consent.

Wokingham Borough Council are the freehold owners of the majority of the land adjacent to the OPBS, including a disused toilet block, the Polehampton Close car park, and the existing library.

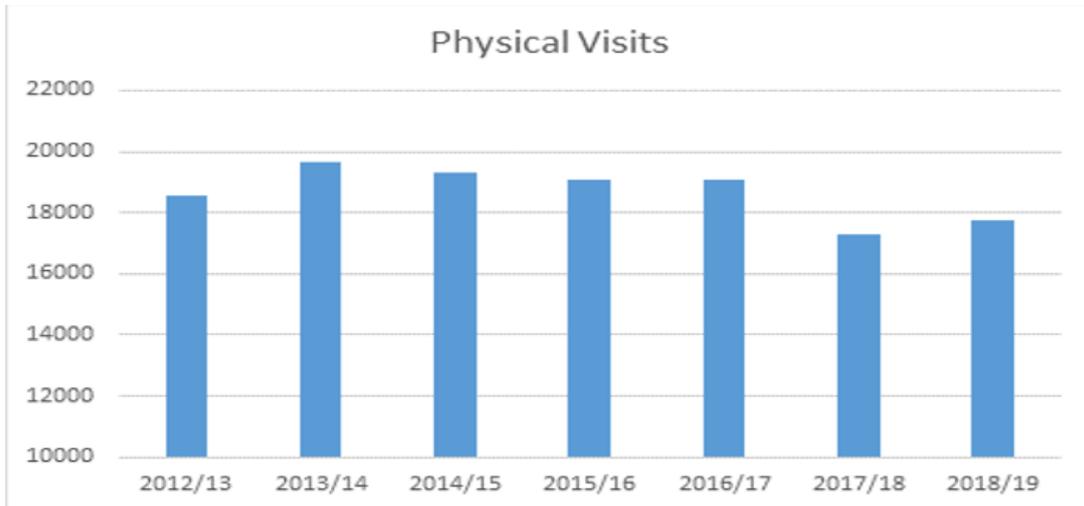
Twyford Library

Twyford Library is located in Polehampton Close in the centre of Twyford. In addition to its own dedicated small car park, it is adjacent to larger WBC pay and display car park.



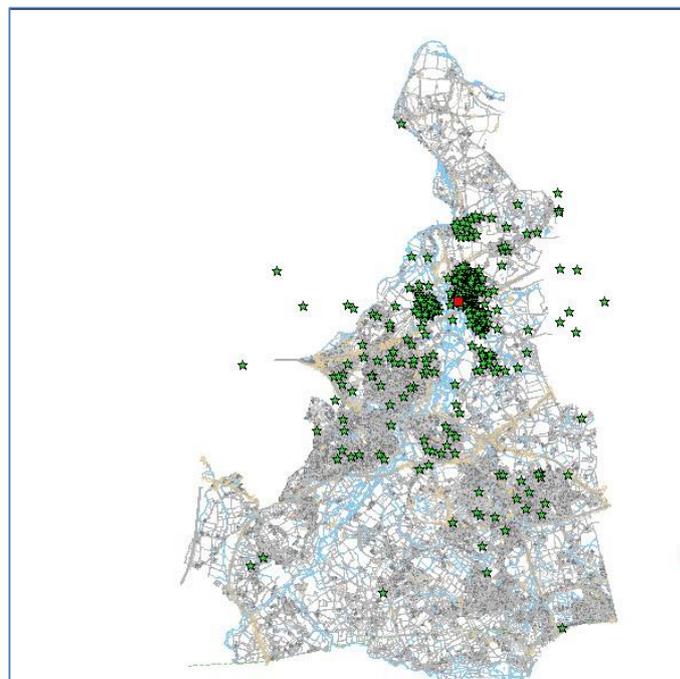
Twyford Library provides a range of services normally available within our libraries. This includes the lending library, self-service kiosk, computer facilities, free Wi-Fi, study area and a dedicated space for children’s activities.

The graphs below show recent trends for library visits, books issued and active library users (library members who have borrowed an item in the last year):



These figures show us that Twyford Library has maintained a steady level of usage in recent years.

We know from usage data within the library service that residents make use of different libraries across the borough to suit their personal circumstances. The map below shows the general catchment area of usage for Twyford Library.



Twyford Library Users

Twyford can be classified as the main library for the northern parishes within the borough as the only other library in the area is the small facility in Wargrave. This means that it is the nearest point of service for around 17,000 residents.

A key driver for increased usage of our libraries is been the availability of space for a range of different activities. These range from additional activities for children and families, I.T. access and research space, and usage by local groups and societies for meetings and events. Whilst Twyford Library does have a modest amount of space for additional activities, its overall size is not sufficient to drive increased usage.

A New Community Facility in the Old Polehampton Boys School Site

The full or partial delivery of the new community facility proposed in the Old Polehampton Boys School will improve the ability of the Council, local charitable and voluntary organisations to deliver community-based activities in Twyford. It will also bring back into use a currently unused historic building, which was left to the residents of Twyford.

BUSINESS CASE

At this stage it is difficult to correctly present the estimated costs of providing a new community facility in Twyford as its proposed uses and size are not yet know.

The cost estimate for redeveloping the Old Polehampton Boys School site is approximately £1.25M, but this was produced in 2016 and would therefore need to be reviewed.

Should the library move from its existing location options for utilising the current site could include the ability to generate capital or revenue income for the Council. A larger library facility will increase the running costs of the library service in Twyford, and there may also be increased staffing costs should opening times be increased.

It is therefore recommended that the financial elements of any proposal be brought back to the Executive in September for consideration.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Yes	N/R
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	Yes	N/R

Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	Yes	N/R
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Other Financial Information
The financial implications following the completion of the business case will be presented to the Executive in September.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
The Library Offer consultation concluded that local residents value the library provision in Twyford and welcome the co-location of library services with other community services.

List of Background Papers
None

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