

Kensal Rise Library Intervention Plan

1. Context

In November 2010 Brent Council set out its Libraries Transformation Project which proposed closing six of the borough's twelve libraries. The plans invited public engagement, and in response our local community has mobilised to create the Friends of Kensal Rise Library (FKRL).

FKRL questions a number of the assumptions contained in Brent's plans and questions the evidence offered for including Kensal Rise among the libraries to be closed. (See section 5 below)

2. Overview

In response to the Libraries Transformation Project, FKRL has put together this counter-proposal.

It is important to state at the outset that we do not believe it is sensible or sustainable for a group of part-time volunteers to run a key public service. Such an approach might work as a temporary measure for running a library in an area with a high proportion of affluent, retired residents, but not in Kensal Rise.

We believe it will be possible for residents to raise funds to regenerate Kensal Rise Library, refurbishing the upper floors for letting out to partner organisations and generating revenue that will in large part cover the library's operating costs.

Alongside the use of volunteers to reduce staffing needs and improve opening hours, this will greatly reduce Brent Council's expenditure and deliver lasting social benefit to the area.

The plans outlined here are still at an early stage but we hope they make clear the seriousness of residents' commitment to preserving their library and the importance of granting a reprieve from closure while the arrangements proposed are firmed up and the relevant deals put in place.

3. All Souls College

The freehold to the land on which the library stands was gifted to the local authority (then Willesden District Council) by All Souls College, Oxford in 1900. The gift was subject to a covenant whereby the building was to be used as a library or reading room "and for no other purpose whatsoever". If the library ceased to function or the purposes of the building changed, the freehold would automatically revert to All Souls.

Friends of Kensal Rise Library

FKRL believes that, in proposing the closure of Kensal Rise Library, Brent should as a matter of priority have formally approached All Souls to establish their intentions if the closure went ahead. Brent did not make such an approach. FKRL has been in communication with All Souls College since the end of 2010. Until recently they have responded non-committally by saying that the terms of the Covenant are a matter of “fact and law”.

However we are glad to report that the latest letter from the Estates Bursar who is handling the matter, Thomas Seaman (dated 22 February, 2011) expresses a strongly positive attitude towards the future of Kensal Rise and Cricklewood libraries. ‘We look forward to hearing from both the residents and the Council, ideally speaking with one voice, regarding a proposal for the best way forward in terms of maintaining the buildings in Kensal Rise and Cricklewood as libraries. We have no interest...in seeing the buildings revert to the College’s ownership....We would be delighted to see both libraries flourish in the future. We hope the local residents and the Council can work together to ensure this happens.’

All Souls has been considerably enriched by its holdings in the Kensal Rise area. We are glad that it is supportive of our efforts to maintain a key local amenity that exists thanks to their initial generosity and, as a place of literacy and learning, is in accord with their purposes and ideals.

4. Phases of the Plan

The plan we propose would have three Phases. All phases are proposed in the spirit of the existing covenant.

Phase I

In Phase I (from May 2011), the Friends of Kensal Rise Library, by now registered as a charity, would form a joint venture with Brent Council. (One option would be to form a mutual body: we are in ongoing discussions with Co-operatives UK¹, who would be in a position to assist with advice on loans and finance, among other things.)

We have volunteers from the community ready to help operate the library day-to-day, which would both significantly reduce the current staffing cost and, we hope, allow us to extend the library’s opening hours. Our proposal is that the library would be run with one librarian and one assistant librarian each working three hours a day, with these paid staff supplemented by volunteers.

¹ The coalition government has been working closely with the cooperatives movement. The cooperative ideal is founded on a mutual system based on multiple stakeholders, such as councils, users associations and staff. Kensal Rise would be the first library to take advantage of this support, that has already been given to schools and other publicly-funded bodies.)

Friends of Kensal Rise Library

At the same time, we will reorganise the library's ground floor, using existing resources and donated labour, to create a more practical and congenial multi-purpose space that would be used to extend the activities already aimed at children and young people, for example:

- toddler readings;
- after-school homework clubs;
- language classes;
- weekend craft sessions;
- creative writing workshops;
- book clubs; and
- IT and other classes.

Opening for longer hours and encouraging more young people to visit will re-energise the library as a meeting place and focus of the community.

During Phase I, we will harness the fundraising expertise of our committee members to raise the capital necessary to convert the upper floors. We will apply for grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other grant-making trusts (we have already had a grant of £1,500 from the Laura Ashley Foundation); seek sponsors and benefactors willing to make large-scale contributions; and formalise a programme of tiered donors. (See Appendix III)

Phase II

In collaboration with Brent, Friends of Kensal Rise Library will commission the architectural design, planning, project management and construction work necessary for converting the upper floors to public use, as well making essential maintenance repairs. This design and building work will comprise Phase II which, we estimate, will last between 12 and 18 months, with a target completion date of September 2012. (See Appendix II)

The completed renovations will include DDA access to the upper levels and a lift to the first and second floors. We hope to keep the library working as a skeleton service throughout the building process, and will develop a detailed phasing plan to allow access.

Phase III

The conversion work would make available two new spaces for occupation in Phase III. The majority of the first floor (including the space currently used for a newspaper archive) would be converted to a learning space; the most likely tenant-partner for this space is the Brent branch of IntoUniversity, a charity dedicated to helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attain university places.

IntoUniversity currently rents rooms in St Mark's Church at the other end of Bathurst Gardens from the library – a space that it has outgrown. We have had several positive meetings with the Project Manager of IntoUniversity, who has viewed the first floor and expressed an interest in renting at commercial rates from September 2012.

The second floor, a large rectangular attic with striking views, will become an open-plan space for hire. Our preference is to make the space available to the community: schools, clubs, classes, workshops, events, readings and exhibitions. We have many potential tenant-partners interested in making use of this space, including local primary schools, youth clubs, the Brent Artists' Resource, the Rock 'n' Roll Public Library and the Intervention Gallery. We would anticipate a healthy revenue from such activities (see Section 5 below).

However, if we want to maximise revenue, the second floor could be rented commercially as open-plan office space ("hot desks") for self-employed residents and small businesses. We have researched this option and a conservative estimate of revenue from such a venture would be £39,000 per annum.

5. Costs and Revenue

Brent Assumptions

In the Libraries Transformation Project, Brent bases its decision to close Kensal Rise Library on the low number of visits, and the relatively high cost per visit. This is calculated based on an assumed expenditure in 2009-2010 of £186,100, and a total number of visits of 45,755, calculating to a stated cost per visit of £4.00.

However, it would appear that the stated costs for Kensal Rise Library in 2010-2011 were significantly lower, at £162,468. Notably, this is the least expensive library in the borough. This is true not only in terms of total cost: by our analysis, Kensal Rise's cost per hour open is the cheapest of all Brent's libraries at £94.68.

Nonetheless, the closure of Kensal Rise Library is justified on the basis of a high cost per visit. Assuming that visits remained static, this calculates to a significantly lower cost per visit of £3.40.

Friends of Kensal Rise Library

Upon further inquiry to Brent Libraries, it is apparent the stated cost of £162,468 is not a true reflection of the actual cost of running Kensal Rise Library, and, in particular, the supplies, support and development costs must be revised downward.

	2009-2010 (Assumed)	2010-2011 (Stated)	2010-2011 (Revised)
Staffing		£92,800	£92,800
Premises		£25,500	£26,250
Supplies		£2,400	£1,550
Support		£8,100	£3,823
Stock		£19,500	£19,500
ICT		£12,371	£12,371
Development		£1,797	-
TOTAL	£186,100	£162,468	£156,294

Based on observed staffing and new stock, both of these line items still seem surprisingly high, but we have been unable to obtain accurate figures. And there is no revenue listed, despite revenue being generated by late returns, DVD rentals and book sales, among other things.

The accuracy of these figures matters for two reasons. Firstly, critical decisions must be made on a rational and transparent basis. Perhaps more importantly, the Council should be aware that closing Kensal Rise Library will not realise the savings alleged in the Libraries Transformation Project proposals.

According to the Libraries Transformation document, the financial implications of the closure of Kensal Rise Library are as follows:

Annual Operating Costs saved	£186,100
Building Market Value	£772,034
20 Year Repair Costs saved	£488,000

Of course, these figures do not at all accurately reflect the actual savings associated with closing Kensal Rise Library. In addition to the inaccuracies in the operating costs already identified, Brent cannot realise any of the £772,034 in building market value as the freehold of the building will immediately revert back to All Souls College, Oxford should the library cease to operate. And it is far from clear that Brent can avoid all liability for repair costs even if the freehold reverts.

Despite proposing to close six community libraries, the Libraries Transformation Project, surprisingly, does not expect to reduce the cost of Brent Libraries headquarters, which we understand to be £481,105 per annum.

Friends of Kensal Rise Library

FKRL Offer

FKRL is, in this proposition, offering to help Brent realise a large measure of these savings, while maintaining and indeed expanding the offering of Kensal Rise Library. Section 5 sets out our anticipated budget in the short and long term.

The FKRL proposal essentially offers the following:

1. To take over the capital costs of repairing the building; indeed, it will be renovated to make the upper floors usable and accessible;
2. To secure community partners in order to maximise possible revenue from the upper floor spaces, albeit in accordance with the restrictive covenant. Notably, the generation of income was a priority identified for 2007-2008 in the 2008-2012 Libraries Strategic Plan;
3. Through the use of volunteers to supplement staff, to significantly reduce the staffing cost, while expanding the opening hours of the library;
4. By increasing both the hours of operation and the use of the building through community partnerships, to significantly increase the number of visits to the library.²
5. By doing so, within three years, we expect Kensal Rise Library to be the most efficient library in Brent, at a cost of approximately £0.80/visit.

² Notably, our figures conservatively assume an increase of 50% based solely on increased opening hours.

Friends of Kensal Rise Library

<u>Kensal Rise Library</u>	Brent Figures	PHASE I Immediate	PHASE II Next	PHASE III Vision
Opening Days a Week	4	4	6	6
Hours Open per Week	33	33	54 ³	54
Revenue				
Ground Floor				
Book Sales/Late Returns etc.	5,000	5,000	5,000	6,000
Fundraising Events				6,000
First Floor Rental				15,000 ⁴
Second Floor Community Use				24,048 ⁵
Total Revenue	5,000	5,000	5,000	51,048
Costs				
Staffing	92,800	22,171	33,256	33,256
Premises ⁶	26,250	26,250	31,475	43,825 ⁷
Supplies	1,550	1,550	2,325	2,325
Support	3,823	3,823	5,735	5,375
Books ⁸	19,500	500	500	7,000
ICT	12,371	12,371	12,371	14,227
Total Costs	156,294	66,665	85,661	106,376
Net Profit (Cost)	(151,294)	(61,665)	(80,661)	(55,319)
Visits	45,755	45,755	68,633	68,633
Net Cost per Visit	£3.30	£1.30	£1.10	£0.80

³ Open 10am to 7pm, 6 days a week = 54 hours a week.

⁴ Based on preliminary conversations with Into University.

⁵ Based on usage as a community space, assuming it is used 4 hours per day, at a price of £20 per hour (local research suggests that similar spaces, rented at this average rate, are in use almost every hour of the day). A more lucrative alternative would be to use the top floor as a hotdesking area; based on our research this area could earn in the range of £39,000 per annum, but such use is more likely to fall foul of the All Souls Covenant.

⁶ Includes business rates, utilities, security etc.

⁷ Assumes that Into University will cover many of its premises expenses, but includes increased costs for second floor space.

⁸ Kensal Rise Library should remain as part of the Brent's system. In the short term, the acquisition of books would be managed by donations, with a modest allocation for the cost of barcode and RFID tagging. In the future, a modest books budget of £7,000 is proposed.

6. Conclusion

Kensal Rise Library was opened by Mark Twain in 1900. It has survived two World Wars, several depressions and recessions, as well as previous attempts by Brent Council to close it down. It is a local landmark, the most architecturally distinguished building in the area. As Philip Pullman has said, “the idea of closing down a library that Mark Twain opened is preposterous, unthinkable, absurd.”

The threat of closure has made residents realise that we cannot take our library for granted. We have to use it, love it and revive it. It is at the heart of our community and if it is lost, we will pay a terrible social price. The strength of feeling and passion in our community has been reflected in the most extensive local and national media coverage given to any threatened library in Britain.

Closure would be a brutal blow to the social cohesion of Kensal Rise, not just for us but for coming generations. That blow would fall most heavily on the least advantaged, those who rely on the library most. It would be unforgivable – and those who inflicted it would not soon be forgiven.

On the positive side, though, we have the advantage that Kensal Rise Library is an inspiring building with a wealth of space that is at present barely used. Our proposals involve big challenges in terms of fundraising, getting the right partner bodies involved, and redeveloping the building’s upper floors. But if we can meet those challenges, the institution we pass on could be a thriving cultural hub for the south of the borough, of which the library would be one part.

This vision deserves the chance to be made real. The All Souls covenant means a closure would be irreversible. At the very least, Kensal Rise Library merits a stay of execution to allow further research, more professional input and detailed discussions with potential partners. In short, FKRL needs time and Brent’s support: we hope the members of the Council will grant both.

Appendix I: Additional data

In Brent's Public Library User Survey 2009 Kensal Rise scored incredibly highly. Two key findings stand out:

- The standard of customer care at Kensal Rise was rated the best in the borough, with 98% of respondents rating it as good or very good
- On the question "Taking everything into account what do you think of this library?" 83% answered very good or good – the third best in the borough.

According to Brent's Libraries Strategy 2008-2012 Kensal Rise Library has by far the highest proportion of users in the borough who have indicated that they are disabled.

Kensal Rise is an area with a very high population of young children. There are four nurseries, five primary schools and three secondary schools within 1km of Kensal Rise Library. For four of the primary schools, Kensal Rise Library is the closest library, and those four have a total student population of 1,718, including 130 nursery places and 124 special needs pupils at Manor School. The four nurseries have a total of around 125 places.

Brent has suggested that if Kensal Rise Library closes residents will be able to make use of other nearby libraries. As our slogan says: 'Little Legs Need Local Libraries!' The libraries remaining will not be local. If Kensal Rise were to close journey times from two sample locations would be as follows:

Journey times for a resident in Hazel Road, NW10 5PP

Kensal Rise Library 8 min walk
Kilburn Library 25 min walk
Harlesden Library 25m walk
Willesden Green Library 32m walk uphill

Journey times from Victor Road NW10 5XB

Kensal Rise Library 14min walk
Kilburn, 34m walk
Harlesden, 27m walk
Willesden 33m walk

These times are based on a fit adult walking, not children in pushchairs, mobility-impaired people or the elderly.

Brent has argued that Kensal Rise Library is not located in an area of high footfall. It is in fact a key crossroads for the area: a survey of pedestrians crossing the junction counted over 350 people passing the library at peak times.

Appendix II: Building works

Capital costs

Building repairs	£488,450.00 ⁹
DDA compliant lift	£17,478.00 ¹⁰
Interior fit-out	£ TBC ¹¹

Building repairs

LB Brent's own survey identifies the need for extensive building repairs at a cost of nearly £0.5M spread over 20 years in several phases. We believe that savings overall could be made if, wherever possible, these works were carried out in a single phase and combined with any interior fit-out works that would be needed to allow public use of the entire building.

Fire safety

In investigating of the feasibility of our redevelopment plan we have taken advice from Brent Building Control Consultancy Services who have recommended a strategy of creating a series of spaces that can be accessible to the public whilst ensuring safe occupancy and means of escape. As part of the fire safety strategy all spaces would have independent escape routes via a central protected route that would be created from 2nd floor down to exits at ground floor level.

Improved access

We propose the inclusion of a lift to access all floors and widening the old narrow doorways so that all rooms can be accessed by wheelchair users. A ramp is already in place in front of the library but this needs to be improved with the addition of a handrail.

Other improvement works

With an architect appointed in Phase II, a thorough investigation of the required scope of works would be undertaken. At this early stage we can envisage the following basic provisions:

- Improved lighting and electrical services
- Interior redecorations throughout
- Improved heating throughout
- Insulation of the Second Floor roof
- Improved WCs, including allowance for wheelchair users and a parents & baby room

⁹ LB Brent survey ref. AMP Surveys/Package 3B3/77 (Brent's 20 year repairs estimate)

¹⁰ Platform lift company.

¹¹ We have commissioned a local surveyor who is due to report on costs.

Appendix III: Fundraising strategy for capital works

Basic structure of capital fundraising effort

We will need to raise a capital sum, at least £250,000, to carry out necessary repairs and renovation of the building.

Fundraising to date has been on a small scale. We have not asked for serious money yet, either from local businesses, benefactors or the community. Nonetheless, we have received countless approaches from people wishing to donate, and informal 'pass the bucket' events have been very generously received. We have so far raised over £3,000 without much effort.

We intend to adopt a pyramid structure. The following is an example showing how we would raise, say, £400,000. This is not adopted as the expected figure for capital fundraising, but simply by way of a simple example. We would look for:

1000 donors giving £100 each =	£100,000
100 donors giving £1,000 each =	£100,000
10 donors giving £10,000 each =	£100,000
1 donor giving £100,000 =	<u>£100,000</u>
Total:	£400,000

We will seek to recognise donations in an appropriate permanent form within the building, possibly adopting a model similar to the “Supporting Wall” deployed so successfully at Shakespeare’s Globe theatre.

Where donations will come from:

We will approach individuals, businesses and organisations that may be willing to donate based on one or more of the following:

- (i) A desire to support libraries
- (ii) A desire to promote literacy
- (iii) A desire to support literature and the arts
- (iv) A connection with the local area even if they have moved away from it
- (v) A connection with or interest in Mark Twain
- (vi) A connection with Oxford
- (vii) A connection with All Souls College, Oxford

We will also apply to other sources of public funds. We would hope to receive £10,000 per annum from Ward Working in each of the three wards adjoining the library (Kensal Green, Queens Park and Brondesbury Park). We have met with the Mayoral Advisor on Arts and Culture, Munira Mirza, in order to access any future funds that may be available from the proposed pan-London libraries trust.