

East Sussex Library Service Consultation: Supporting Paper

What are these motions about:

East Sussex County Council have announced that (subject to consultation) from April 2018 they will close the mobile library service (which serves Hurst Green) and instead expect to rely on the Parish Council to provide a library, complemented by the library service's online e-library and volunteer-run home library service for those with ill-health, a disability or caring responsibilities.

Hurst Green Parish Council notes:

Local Authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 '*to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons in the area that want to make use of it*'¹.

To deliver this statutory duty, each authority is responsible for determining, through consultation, the local needs and to deliver a modern and efficient library.

At the September 2017 meeting of this Council, County Councillor John Barnes informed this Council that East Sussex County Council were undertaking a consultation², running for 12 weeks, ending on the 14th of December 2017 with a view to implementing any changes from April 2018.

The key changes that East Sussex Libraries are proposing to implement are:

- That they will provide an enhanced online 'eLibrary';
- To provide a greater focus on outreach provision by working more closely with other County Council services and partners;
- To close 7 libraries, reducing the number from 24 to 17³;
- To stop the Mobile Library Service;
- To no longer supply books to the Northiam Village Library;
- To provide recognised members of the community, such as members of a Parish Council, with a community library card that would allow them to borrow a large number of items from the library to make available in a community setting for a prolonged period of time.

The cornerstone of the Libraries consultation is that East Sussex County Council believe that the remaining 17 library buildings and an enhanced 'eLibrary' will provide 'a high level of accessibility to library services for rural communities' as a more efficient way to meet needs for library services in these areas.⁴

Current State of Nearby Library Facilities

The East Sussex mobile library visits Hurst Green for 45 minutes every three weeks on a Thursday afternoon, between 12:15 – 13:00pm⁵.

¹ Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

² Minutes of the Hurst Green Parish Council meeting held on 26 September 2017

³ ES Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy Technical Appendix 4 Property Assessment

⁴ East Sussex Libraries, The Way Forward, Strategic Commissioning Strategy, 2018/19 to 2022/23 consultation paper

⁵ Mobile library schedule (July to December 2017) retrieved on 9 Oct 2017

Outside of these times, the nearest libraries to Hurst Green are at Battle and Wadhurst, both approximately 15 minutes away by car, or at Heathfield and Mayfield, both around 25 minutes away by car.

Following a reduction in 2016 of opening hours, the opening times for these libraries are:

- Battle Library is currently open on Tuesdays for five hours, three hours on Wednesday and seven hours on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. [29 hours a week]⁶.
- Wadhurst Library is currently open for 2.5 hours on Monday and Friday afternoons, three hours on Wednesday and Saturday. It is closed on a Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. [11 hours a week].
- Heathfield Library is currently open for three hours on Monday, seven hours on Tuesday, four hours on Thursday, six hours on Friday and three hours on Saturday. [23 hours a week].
- Mayfield Library is currently open for three hours on Tuesday, four hours on Thursday afternoon and four hours on Saturday. [11 hours a week].

In addition, Northiam Village runs a village library [20 mins by car] which is open four hours a week - two hours on Thursday and Saturday afternoons. East Sussex County Council have said they plan to no longer supply Northiam with books under the current proposal.

The nearest public library to Hurst Green is actually Hawkhurst Library run by Kent County Council, an eight minute car ride away, or an approximate ten minute bus ride⁷. However, this library is unavailable to most of our residents unless they work in, or have formerly lived in, and/or worked in Kent.

Usage of Library Facilities

As of April 2017 East Sussex Council reported that there were 239,636 registered members of the East Sussex Library and Information Service. This is approximately 44% [of the 545,448⁸] population of the county.⁹

As of October 2017, East Sussex Council reported that 236 residents within the Hurst Green Parish are registered with East Sussex Libraries¹⁰, just under 14% of the estimated parish population¹¹.

The consultation states that at 31 March 2017, there were 62,027 active members of the East Sussex Library service and that the number of active members of the service was decreasing, by comparison with 31st March 2015 when there were 74,176 active members.

In addition to lending services, the library service provides a number of community children's activities at a number of their physical library locations. In 2016/2017 Rhymetimes were attended by 10,980 children and parents/carers and Storytimes by 2,165 people.

The library service also provides a home library service where volunteers select and deliver books and other items, such as CD's and DVD's to meet the individual requests of people who are unable to visit libraries themselves due to mobility issues, illness or their caring responsibilities. As at April 2017, 173 customers use this service, provided by a pool of 186 volunteers.

⁶ Library opening times retrieved from <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/libraries> on 15th Oct 2017

⁷ From Hurst Green, the George stop, using the 254 service followed by a 3-4 minute walk

⁸ East Sussex ESiF data service, estimated population project 2017

⁹ Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy Technical Appendix 3 Service Description and Analysis

¹⁰ Response from a Freedom of Information request to East Sussex Council, received on 10 Oct 2017

¹¹ 1481 residents, from Office for National Statistics, [Civil Parish population 2011](#), retrieved 7 October 2015

Two online services are provided by the library service, a digital eLibrary [called Overdrive] which was used by 2,948 people in the last year (Oct 2016 - 2017), and a magazine service [called Zinio] which was used by 1,927 people across the County in the last year (Oct 2016 - 2017). Combined these services cost around £35,000 a year to run¹².

Usage of Library Facilities by Hurst Green Parish Residents:

According to East Sussex County Council, from Hurst Green Parish (including Swiftsden and Silver Hill) in the last year (from 1st Oct 2016):

- 47 residents had borrowed an item or placed a reservation at an East Sussex library¹³ or approximately 3% of the estimated parish population.
- Four residents had downloaded an eBook from the OverDrive online service.
- One resident [of the four who had downloaded an eBook], had additionally downloaded magazines from the Zinio online service.
- An average of six residents¹⁴ use the mobile library service every three weeks when the service stops at Hurst Green, who made 97 visits in the last year¹⁵ (Oct 2016-2017).
- The library service has no registered volunteers who live within the Parish to provide the home library service, but does have two volunteers nearby¹⁶.
- One resident [of the two who are registered] used the home library service in the last year (Oct 2016-2017)¹⁷, this also entitles them to extended loan periods and family members or friends can collect books on their behalf.
- As mentioned previously, the nearest library to Hurst Green is actually in Kent. 26 residents are registered with the Kent Library Service, with 12 residents using the Kent provided service in the last year, 5 of whom used the library in Hawkhurst¹⁸.

Hurst Green Parish Council believes:

Councillor Brown visited the mobile library service on 12th October 2017 during its 45 minute visit to Hurst Green. Far from being found empty, there was a continual stream of mostly older and some elderly, residents using the service.

Adult residents were observed returning books, taking new ones out on loan, picking up leaflets, and also engaging with each other and the librarian. In addition to myself, three other residents also joined the library that day.

Aside from the physical presence of the library vehicle during its short visit, it was surprising that there was no permanent visible marker, advertisement or notice for the service nearby, and this I feel is at the heart of this issue. Residents of this parish are probably unaware of the mobile library service, and even if they are, the current service is simply inaccessible. Providing a service for just 45 minutes every three weeks on Thursday in the middle of the day means the current service heavily favours residents who are either retired, or parent(s) that stay at home.

This is reinforced by the statistics, just some 14% of residents of the Parish are registered to use Library services, some two thirds less than could perhaps be reasonably expected based

¹² Response from a Freedom of Information request to East Sussex Council, received on 25 Oct 2017

¹³ Response from a Freedom of Information request to East Sussex Council, received on 10 Oct 2017

¹⁴ Response from ESCC Libraries Services, average 7 people over 2016/2017 and average of 5 people (Apr-Aug '17)

¹⁵ Response from a Freedom of Information request to East Sussex Council, received on 25 Oct 2017

¹⁶ Response from a Freedom of Information request to East Sussex Council, received on 25 Oct 2017

¹⁷ Response from a Freedom of Information request to East Sussex Council, received on 25 Oct 2017

¹⁸ Response from a Freedom of Information request to Kent County Council, received on 25 Oct 2017

on statistics for the rest of East Sussex - suggesting that East Sussex's provision to communities such as Hurst Green, and beyond the County's larger towns is already lacking.

Indeed, the libraries services own figures show that, perhaps due to inaccessibility of its services that it has lost 12,149, or some 16% of its active library users over the last two 2 years.

We also know that, perhaps due to poor access and promotion that less than 3% of residents use the services at present, so having to travel further is hardly going to encourage adults and children to make full use of the library service. The idea that it is reasonable for Hurst Green residents with access to a car to make a 40-50 minute round trip to reach a library is preposterous, while promoting the use of facilities far away from the village can hardly be seen as providing a place where the community comes together, nor can it be sensible to add traffic to the already congested A21.

From my research, Councils all over the UK and in the South of England, including our neighbours, West Sussex and Kent provide mobile library services, and it would appear, do so at a lower cost than East Sussex. For example, Kent's mobile library service costs approximately £45,000 per vehicle¹⁹, compared to East Sussex's approximate figure of £70,000.

Far from cutting services, other county councils with rural communities have a different view. For example, Buckinghamshire County Council states that "*mobile libraries provide a highly-valued and personal service to people who don't find it easy to get to a branch library*" and Cambridgeshire County Council say '*[mobile libraries] are a great place for catching up with friends and colleagues whilst supporting a local community resource.*'

I am inclined to agree, it strikes me that the mobile library is, by its very nature is far more adaptable as a service than a fixed building. The current vehicle is wholly owned by East Sussex Council and whilst old, has clearly not yet reached the end of its useful serviceable life, therefore it would seem sensible to only review its operation at that time, or when a viable set of alternatives is in place.

The proposed enhancement of the eLibrary seems out of touch with the desires of the individuals most likely to use the library service at present. It would also appear to be competing with the like of commercial services, including a popular online retailer, which offers its customers amongst other services, free use of thousands of ebooks, digital magazines and audiobooks.

The online statistics are staggeringly low, showing just four Parish residents had downloaded an eBook from the OverDrive online service in the last year, and one resident [who was one of the four who had downloaded an eBook], had additionally downloaded magazines from the Zinio online service. These facts state one of three possibilities, that residents are simply not aware of the service, or that East Sussex Libraries are not fulfilling their statutory duty to encourage all adults and children, regardless of place of residence, to make full use of the library service, or perhaps that the service just isn't required. Therefore if cuts have to be made, it would seem that these digital services, which may well be required in the future, but as subscription services, could be cut and reinstated subsequently when needed.

In summary, the East Sussex County Council consultation seems flawed and whilst perhaps sticking to a strict interpretation of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, appear to be based only on meeting the needs of the existing few users of the current service, not on meeting the needs of those who might like to be able to use the library service, either now or in the future.

¹⁹ Figure shown is adjusted for inflation and based on a Kent County Council release in 2016 that the mobile service used eleven vehicles at a cost of £367,000 would be delivered using just five vehicles saving ~£150,000 per annum.

By only asking those that use the existing library services (in the case of Hurst Green Parish this consultation is only aimed at some 3% of the residents who would have picked up the consultation in a library), rather than asking the more fundamental question about the accessibility and awareness of existing library services to the nearly 97% of residents who have not had any interaction with the library service in the last year, and I would notion for probably considerably longer.

Whilst East Sussex County Council is undoubtedly under considerable financial pressure, the Libraries Service limited interactions with residents and this Parish Council, is something that needs to be highlighted, and demonstrates that:

1. Sections of the community have not been consulted
2. The outcome of this consultation appears predetermined
3. A suitable needs assessment has not been completed
4. Fundamentally that there has not yet been appropriate consideration of different options to sustain a library service to Hurst Green residents.

I therefore move that the following resolutions be considered by this Council.

Hurst Green Parish Council resolves:

Proposed Motion: "That Hurst Green Parish Council is concerned about the accessibility and awareness of all current library services provided by East Sussex Libraries to residents of this Parish, and the subsequent low levels of engagement. This Council calls upon East Sussex Libraries to fulfil its statutory duty to encourage all adults and children, regardless of place of residence, to make full use of the library service, including its physical and digital offerings, by undertaking measures to significantly raise awareness of its services to residents of this Parish."

Proposed Motion: "That Hurst Green Parish Council believes that the mobile library service provided by East Sussex County Council provides an essential service to residents of the Parish, which aids community cohesion by providing an interaction point with the County Council, as well as an accessible source of information, and that this must be maintained until such time that there is clear evidence that all residents are both able to, and would rather use, a digital service."

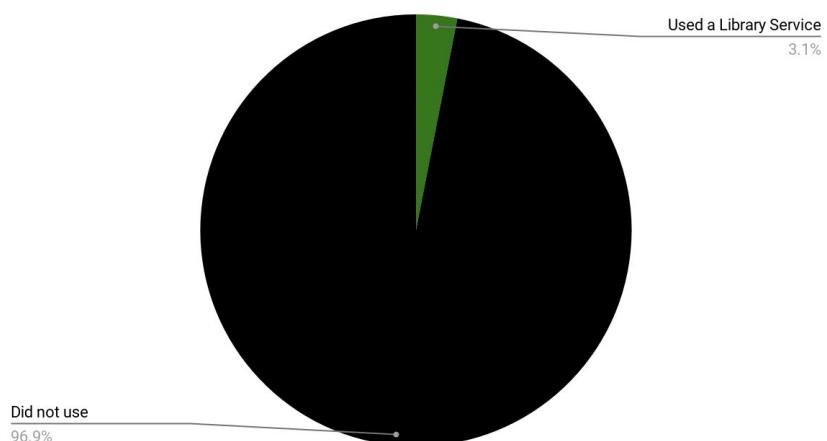
Proposed Resolution: "That Hurst Green Parish Council will respond to the East Sussex Libraries Consultation in accordance with the related resolved motion(s) and that once the outcome of the East Sussex Libraries Consultation is known, that Hurst Green Parish Council will, if required set up a working party to best manage the resource for local needs."

Councillor Brown
Hurst Green Parish Council
October 2017

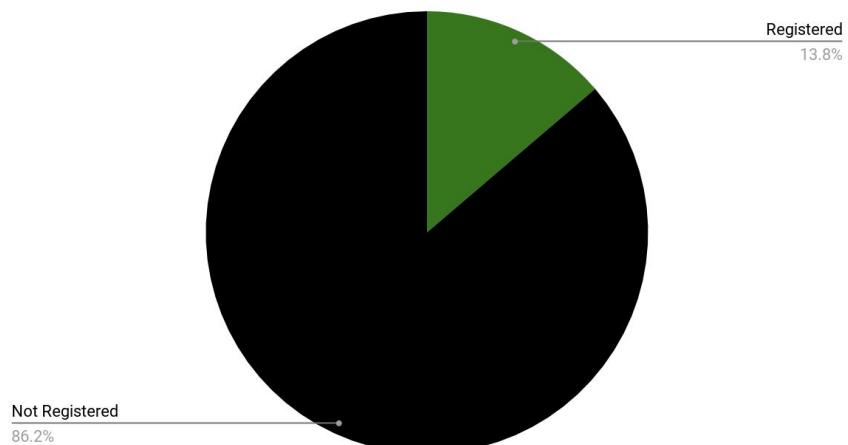
Note: Information obtained via the Freedom of Information Act has kindly been agreed for reuse within this paper by East Sussex County Council on the 25th October and by Kent County Council on the 27th of October 2017.

Appendix 1: Graphical Representations

Parish residents who used a library service (2016-2017)



Parish Residents registered with East Sussex Libraries (Oct 2017)



Parish Residents using the eLibrary service (2016-2017)

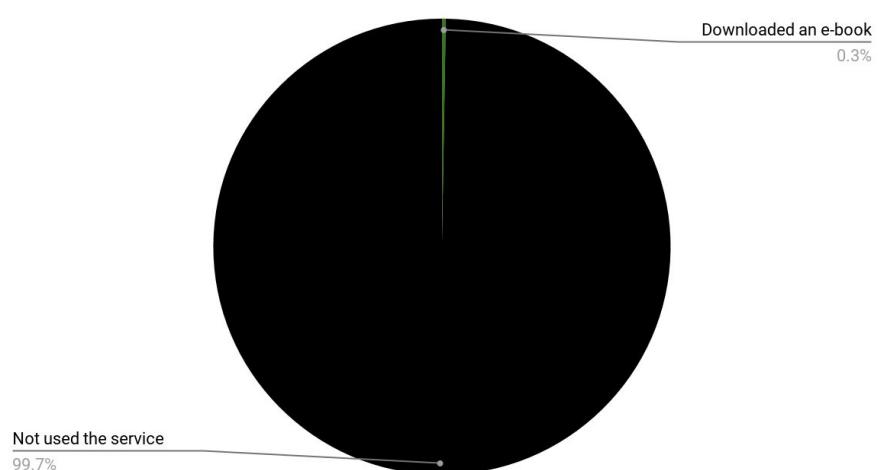


Figure 2: Interior of East Sussex mobile library vehicle



Interior of East Sussex Mobile Library (taken at Hurst Green stop, October 12th 2017 just prior to the vehicle leaving)

Figure 3: East Sussex mobile library timetable for Hurst Green

THU week 1	Route 12 Robertsbridge Robertsbridge, nr. George Inn Ewhurst Green Bodiam, Levetts lane Hurst Green, Village Hall Burwash, Rother View Burwash, Christ the King Burwash Weald, nr. Scout Hut on brow of hill	09:45 – 10:15 10:40 – 11:10 11:30 – 11:55 12:15 – 13:00 14:10 – 14:30 14:40 – 15:10 15:20 – 15:45	20	10, 31	21	12	2, 23	14
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Snapshot of mobile library timetable (July-December 2017)

Parish Council Clerk Observations:

Parish Council RFO Observations: