

Old Library refurbishment – Open Day and public survey feedback

Shetland Islands Council decided in 2016 to refurbish the old Library /Museum building on Lower Hillhead, which is in a very poor state of repair. Once complete, the public library - currently housed across three buildings - will move in.

To find out what was important to people about the library refurbishment, Shetland Library service held an Open Day on 2 July 2016, which included tours of the old library. We issued a press release, published information on our website, and shared news of the project on Radio Shetland, Facebook and Twitter. We surveyed people who attended, and also collected verbal comments.

After the Open Day, we retained an exhibition of photos and information in the Old Library foyer. We also ran and promoted our survey for a further two months, available at all our branches or online.

Open Day and online survey feedback

- 84 visitors attended the Open Day
- We did 16 group tours of the old museum
- 17 people filled in a survey form on the day.
- Many did not submit a form but made comments which were recorded by staff.
- Of those who submitted a form, all were library members and about 60% were regular users. The majority were in the 31-60 age group.
- Several attendees were very familiar with the building's history or architecture and some had worked in the building when it was a Library/Museum.
- A further 73 people filled in our survey during July and August 2016
- 96% were Library members and 80% were regular users
- 49% were in the 31-60 age group; a further 38% were over 60
- Survey feedback included 125 written comments

We have noted the percentage results for the Open Day and online survey below. The results are not significantly different, but it is worth recording them separately for interest, since the Open Day participants had time to see round the building, browse the exhibition and talk to staff.

1. We identified the 'Top Three' issues from our annual customer surveys and asked how important these were to people.

How important are the issues below to you? (Online survey figure in blue)	Very Important	Quite Important	Not important
More books on display	50% / 64%	37% / 32%	13% / 4%
Bigger children's area	35% / 40%	41% / 49%	24% / 10%
More quiet space/study space	56% / 46%	31% / 40%	13% / 13%

2. We explained we already use half the old library building for 'back room' and events space.

During the refurbishment, we will have to move out which will make some things more difficult to do. We asked for opinions about this.

During decant (approx a year) services will be affected. How inconvenient are these issues? (Online survey figure in blue)	Major issue	Minor issue	Not important
Some of our reserve books will be stored off-site, so won't be available right away and will have to be reserved in advance.	13% / 0%	53% / 61%	34% / 39 %
Bookbug will have to be held either in the main library or at a location outwith the library.	0% / 4%	33% / 53%	67% / 43%
Book groups, workshops and events will all have to be moved off-site or held in the main library.	0% / 3%	60% / 55%	40% / 42%

Library commentary: Most people who responded didn't think the inconveniences would be too bad, but we know of course that the reality might feel a bit different as time goes on. At this stage we do not know how handy our 'decant' premises will be, so access to reserve stock might be time consuming. Holding events like Bookbug in the main Library will be noisy, though it will be a chance to reinforce the Library connection for families.

3. Written and verbal comments - summary

Comments made clear that you wanted discrete areas and flexible space so that folk could comfortably use the Library for different functions.

- Study place came out as very important, though people had different priorities – some were looking for quiet and privacy, some like the social aspect and just want more table space to lay out books etc.
- Children were a high priority – people wanted more space, but more specifically *better* space where parents did not feel uncomfortable about disturbing other users.
- Strong desire for more books on display rather than in the reserves.
- Concern to ensure plenty of computers are still available and that staff are nearby to support users – some people also wanted computers in a quiet area
- A desire too to retain welcoming social space
- Wish to retain areas where events can be held and keep space flexible
- Other wishes included: facilities outside e.g. seats and a smoking shelter; clear signage; meeting rooms to hire; community information

"ICT equipment is becoming ever more important so would have to make up a big part"	"Comfortable spaces for silent reading/reflection with pleasant surroundings - a home from home?"	"More spacious with many more books (if not all) books out."
"Important for study space to be properly separated from the rest of the library, especially children's area."	"A chilled space for teens/young adults to sit. Somewhere where they could sit and chat without other people complaining."	"More space in general would be fine, but failing that just keep it flexible as needs keep changing."

Library commentary: It was impressive how respondents appreciated the many different functions of a modern library and the needs of different people. The refurbishment will not give us a great deal more overall space than we have now, but will let us organise things differently and all under one roof. We are trying to make sure our ‘backroom’ working areas can operate very efficiently so we free up as much space as possible for customer use.

4. Concerns and complaints

Most people were very positive about the plans and were keen to see the old library/museum building restored. A few folk didn’t like the building, but most had good memories of it and were pleased it would become a library again. Of concerns expressed the main ones were:

- Design – concern about cutting corners on design and not respecting the classic 60s architecture of the building
- Specific mentions of the need to value this example of a ‘floating pagoda’ and ensure lighting highlights the design + retain internal glazing and staircase
- Windows – former users of the museum described how the heat and light from so much glass had been very uncomfortable and damaged artefacts
- Budget – several thought it too small to do a proper job
- Concern that the cost of the project would mean cuts in the library service
- Concern about budgets cuts in general and where this project fits in
- Queries over whether the first floor could take weight of books and whether asbestos removal was a problem
- Questions about what would happen to St Ringans – some wanted public access maintained, even to keep it as part of the library service

“I am concerned about all the windows upstairs - lovely but could be too hot when sun shines”	“I’m worried about cuts to the library service. I hope savings made on buildings help to cut the budget without cutting the service.”	“Refurbishment of the old library is good but such a beautiful ‘new’ library [St Ringans] should remain open to the public!”
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Library commentary:

There is a lot to do, especially on the top floor – e.g. replace the roof, windows, curtain walling and install a lift. The priority is to get the building energy efficient and brought up to modern standards. The problem of excess ‘solar gain’ from the windows is one we have to solve, not just for the comfort of residents but so that books aren’t damaged by light. At the same time the project team needs to respect the original design. So yes, there are challenges!

The budget is a capital one for property upgrade, so does not come directly from Library running costs. The Library has to find ongoing spending cuts just like other Council services, however. A more efficient building can help reduce our running costs. It is expected that other Council services will use St Ringans and the Learning Centre, but there is no definite decision about which yet.

5. Memories

We asked folk for their memories. Again a small minority of folk disliked the building, but there was obviously a lot of affection and nostalgia. When it opened in 1966, the Library/Museum was a long awaited, modern community asset - until then, Shetland had no museum and the library had been housed in very basic premises. Comments centred on:

- The wood and glass panelling; how light and modern the building felt
- The big children's area in a dedicated room
- The old reference room, with big tables to lay out newspapers
- The Shetland Room and some special collections in locked bookcases
- Lots of memories of particular items/services – pictures to borrow; the record listening booth; the museum's working model of a watermill. Perhaps most popular was a light-up map of oil rigs that many folk recalled!

"Space, light, masses of books, open plan (making it easy to find what you were looking for) peace, calm, unhurried feeling about the place. A very pleasant place to be. A welcoming haven."	"The layout was very clear and books were easy to find. Having a separate children's room was relaxing for the children and their parents."	"I love the building but please just make it work for modern standards - that is more important than looks."
"Loved it. Lots of space for the study area and children were allowed their own space to be children."	"I liked it but it was too hot. I'd like to keep some glass panelling and the nice open stair."	"Entrance foyer was nice, but library space very utilitarian."

Library commentary: This time round the public library will be on both the ground and first floors and we are spending a lot of time thinking about the best layout within the limitations of the budget. There is a lot of nostalgia for the old library, and it is clear that while libraries have changed a lot since 1966, many things are no different. A Library needs to be a welcoming space that serves folk of all ages. Thanks for all your comments and memories, which will really help to make the most of this lovely building.

6. What next?

- The SIC Capital Programme project team is proceeding with detailed design work.
- The original timescale had us moving out in April 2017 for work to begin, but there is likely to be some delay due to external circumstances.
- Meanwhile, Library staff will continue to plan for the move and revise interior plans to get the most practical and flexible layout.
- We will carry out further consultation with stakeholders, partners and customers. We didn't get many survey responses from children and people under 30 so we will find better ways to engage with these groups.
- We will update our website with further information as we have it.