

Redditch Library Consultation Analysis Report

March 2023

Produced by Business Intelligence Team

Redditch Library Consultation

This report contains the analysis of results of the public consultation about moving the location of Redditch Library. The scope of this consultation did not cover wider Redditch town centre proposals.

1. Background

Worcestershire County Council currently provide library services in Redditch town centre at Redditch Library in Market Place. The library is well used with just over 6,000 active users borrowing books or using computers in the library in the 12 months to the end of January 2023, making it the second most used library in Worcestershire after The Hive. When taking into account the full range of services offered by the library, including events, groups, and use of meeting rooms, it is thought that there are just over 11,000 active library users across all library services in Redditch.

Redditch Borough Council have developed a series of proposals for the development of the town centre and Town Hall areas of Redditch. The town centre proposals comprise of two parts. Part one involves transforming Redditch Town Hall into a community hub. Redditch Library has been invited to be a part of this hub. If the library does move into the community hub at the Town Hall, the proposals then involve the redevelopment of the existing library site into a new shopping and leisure plaza.

Worcestershire County Council carried out a public consultation to understand local residents' and library users' opinions, and the impact of a possible relocation of the library service in Redditch. The consultation was open from 7th November 2022 to 24th February 2023.

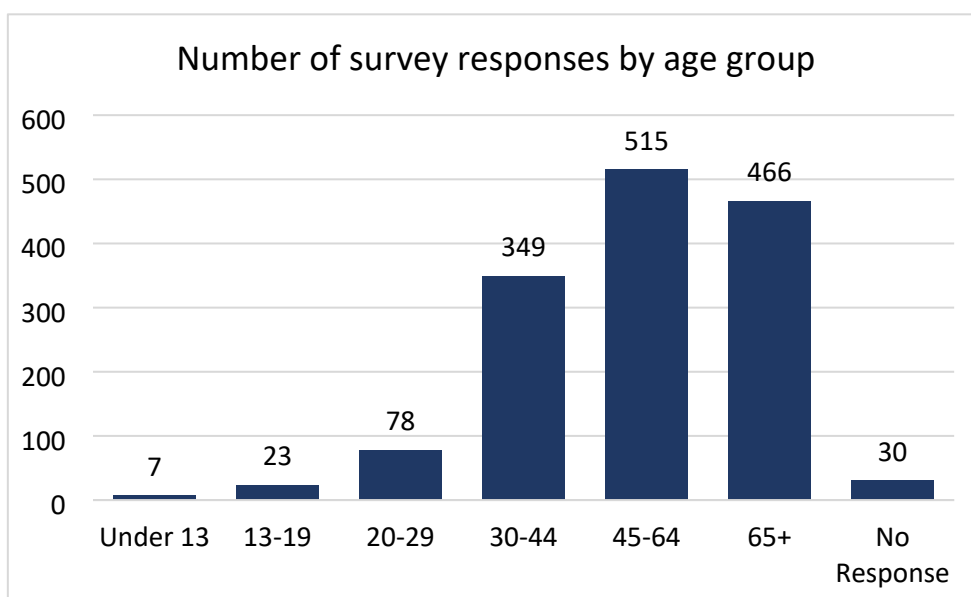
The consultation consisted of, provision of background information to the proposals, a survey (available online and on paper), and two public face-to-face meetings held at Redditch Library. The full survey is available in Appendix A. The survey was available to complete in English, Polish and Urdu.

The consultation has been widely covered in local press.

2. Survey Responses

There were a total of **1467 responses** to the survey. This represents 2.2% of the Redditch population aged over 19.

There was good engagement and response to the survey for people aged 30 or over. There were fewer responses received for younger people aged under 30.



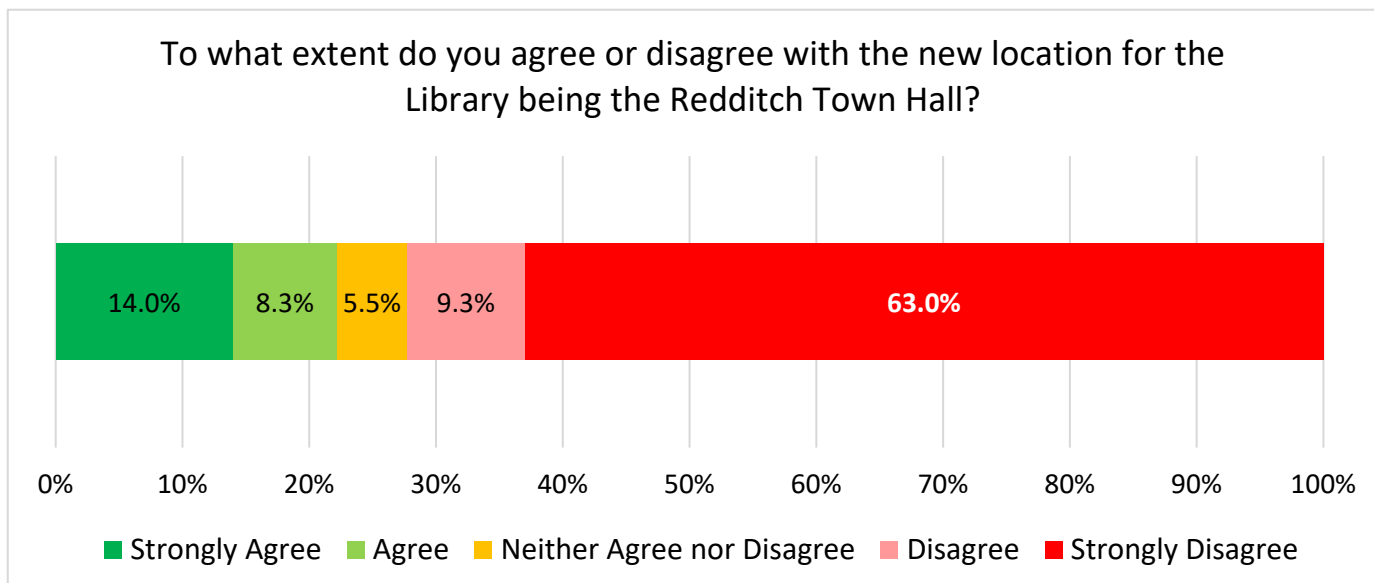
81% of survey respondents said they were library members.

The most common use of the library was to borrow books (73% of respondents), followed by 'to find out information', 'to read/relax', 'to research/work/study' and 'to use free public computers and internet'. This mix of services is also reflected in the priorities that respondents had for the library service.

More detail about uses of the library, priority library services and additional services respondents would like to see in the library can be found in Appendix B along with further breakdown of demographics.

3. Agreement with relocation to the Town Hall

Respondents are asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the new location for Redditch library being the Town Hall. 72.3% of respondents said that they disagree to some extent.

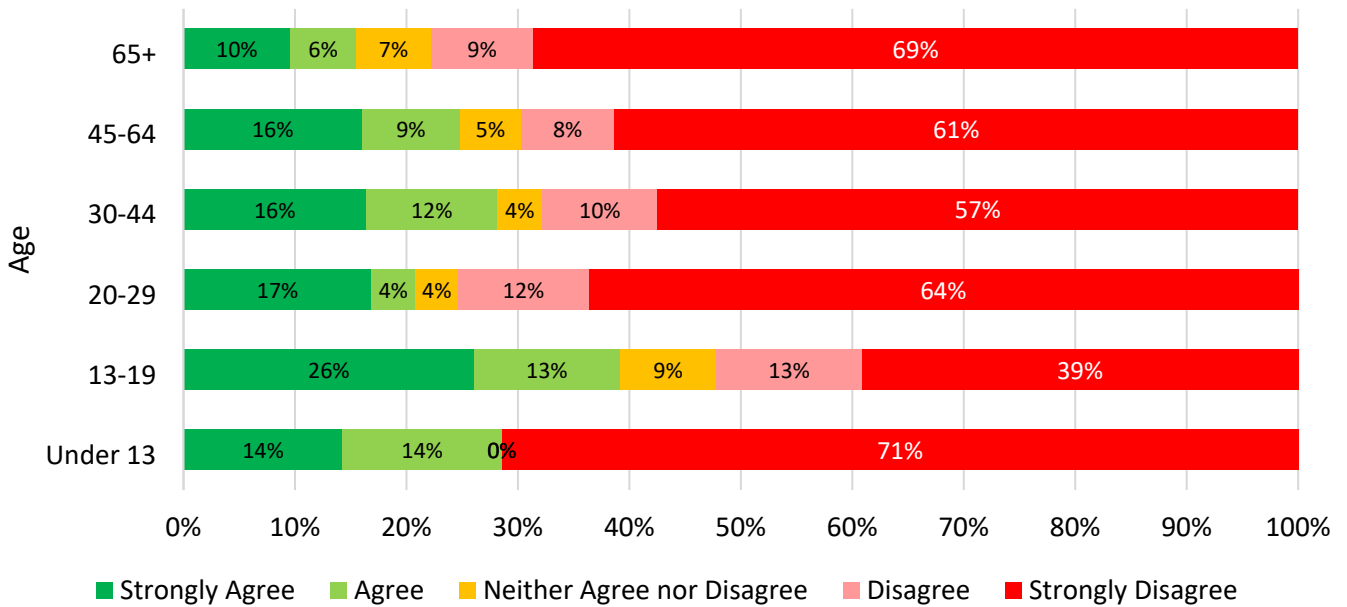


3.1 Agreement with Relocation by Age Group

There is little difference by age group about whether a respondent agrees or disagrees with the proposal to move the library to the town hall for anyone aged 20 or over.

Note: There are much smaller numbers of responses in the Under 13 and 13-19 age groups than in other age groups.

Agreement with Relocating Library by Age Group



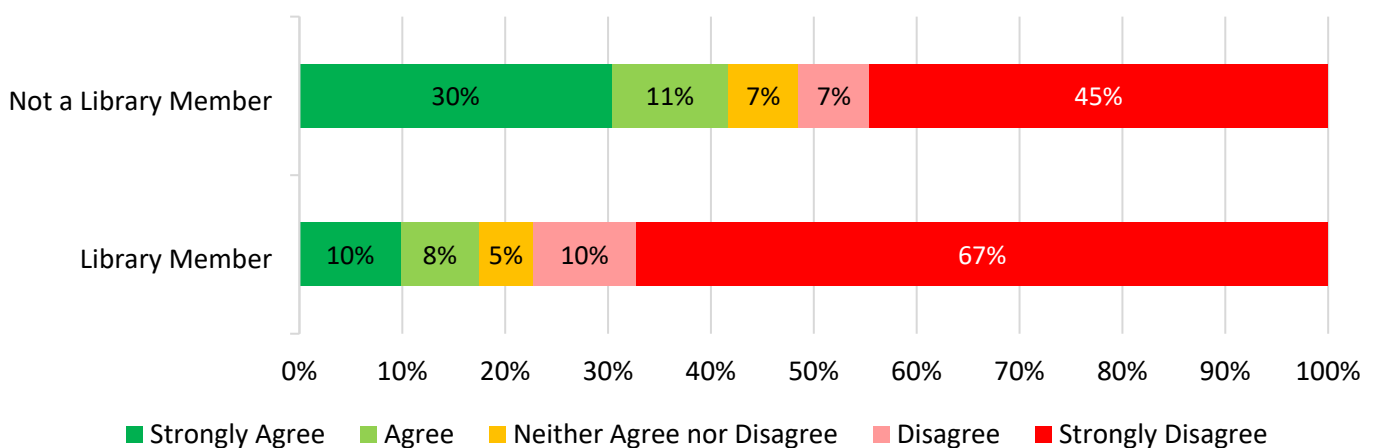
3.2 Library Members

Library members are slightly more likely to disagree (77%) with the plans than non-library members (51%).

Comments suggest that non-library members have responded to the consultation as local residents with an interest in the impact on the town centre proposed by the plans.

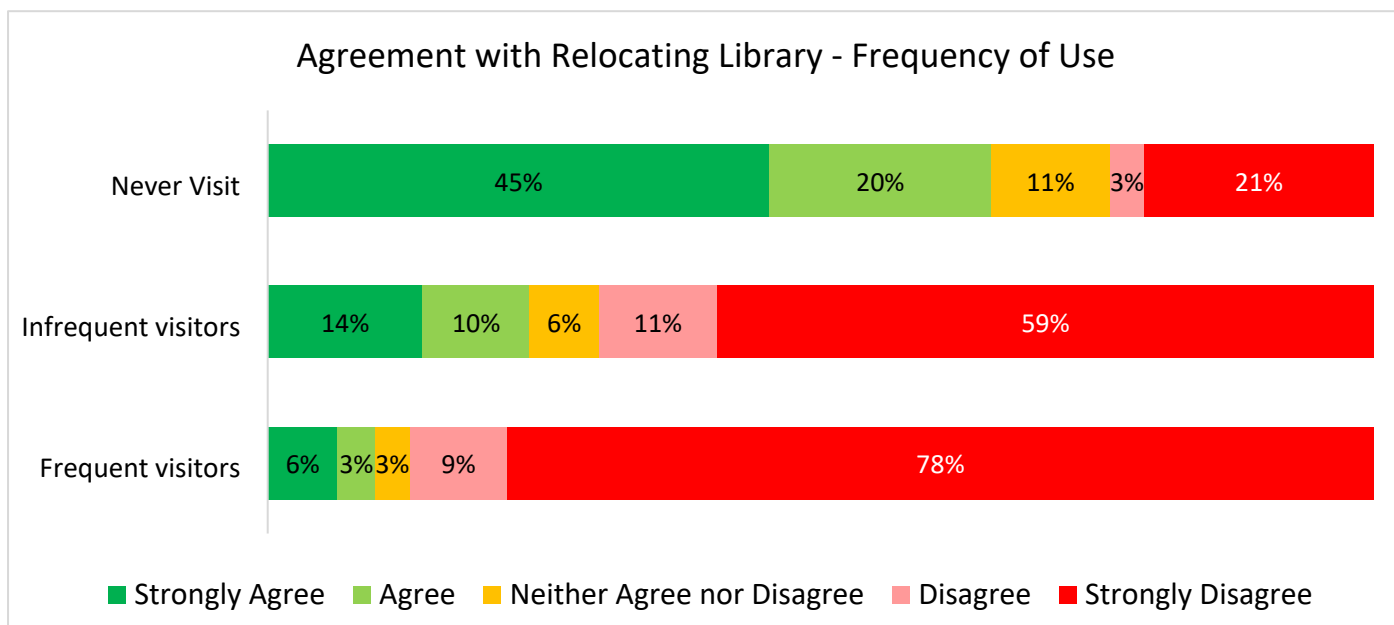
Note - Some comments mentioned the safe, welcoming space that the library provides without a requirement to spend money and how it is not only open to members – therefore some non-members may still be library users (just not borrowing books).

Agreement with relocating Library - Library Membership



3.3 Frequency of Use

Frequent users of the library were more likely to disagree with the library moving into the Town Hall building with 87% disagreeing with the move compared to just 24% of respondents who said they never visit the library.



4. Reasons why respondents agree or disagree with the new location for the library

Respondents were asked to give reasons as to why they agree or disagree with the new location for the library. 1425 comments were received. The full set of comments for this and all free text response questions can be viewed in Appendix C.

All comments were read and then grouped into themes. Each comment may have contained more than one theme.

Themes were focused in two areas:

- Factors related to the proposed new location for the library
- Factors related to the wider town centre proposals including the benefit and funding of this

While the second set of factors are not directly in the scope of this consultation, they are still closely linked with the decision to move the library.

4.1 Themes – New location for the library

The three most common themes given by respondents in relation to the proposed new location for the library were:

1. The proposed location for the new library is not as good

This includes comments about how it is further from the town centre, further from the bus and railway station, further from car parks and involves walking down and up a hill to get to.

“The Town Hall is quite a bit further away from public transport than the library is now and crucially it is downhill meaning that people with restricted mobility have to climb a hill to get back to their bus.”

“It is too far away from the bus station and car parks and would invoke a lot of extra walking which is difficult for the elderly and disabled especially in winter as there is no covered walkway.”

2. Concern that there will be a reduction in the facilities offered by the new location

Respondents were concerned that the move to a new location might lead to the degradation of facilities and services offered by the library. Some comments state that the information provided at the consultation stage is not sufficient to reassure them that facilities will not be lost.

This theme included concerns about the relocation of some of the archives to Worcester so they will no longer be available in Redditch, but also about some other facilities in the new library such as the provision of meeting rooms.

“Have not yet seen any specific plans regarding the library. Concerned it may lead to a reduction in what is available in the library.”

“I believe the consolidation of three library meeting rooms and two council meetings rooms into three shared meeting rooms represents a degradation to the library service.”

“I object to any removal of Redditch's archives from the town; these are our archives and should be accessible to all residents. Redditch is where they belong.”

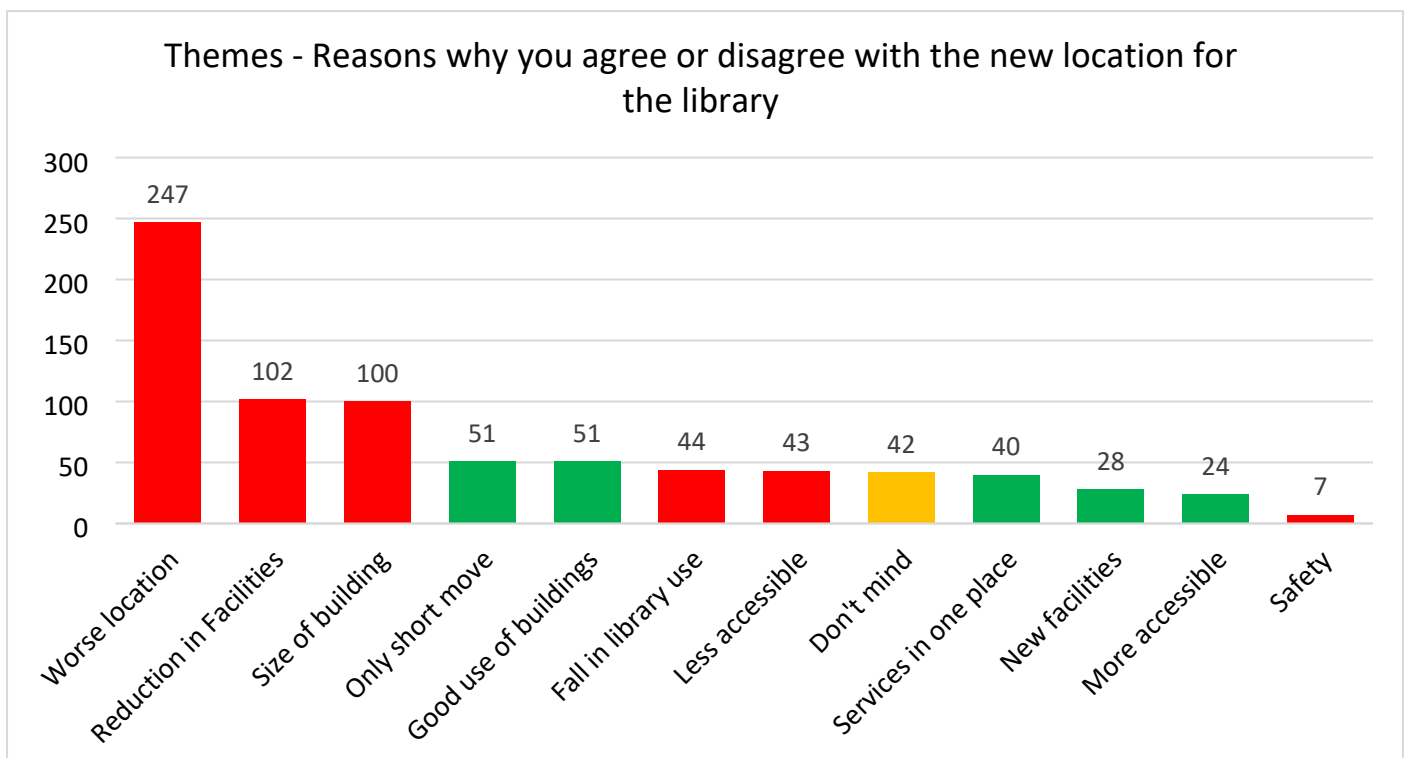
3. Concern that the relocation will result in a reduction in the size of the new library

This theme included a range of comments from respondents that the new library within the Town Hall would result in the reduction in the size of the library, having an impact on how they use the building to read, relax, work, or attend with children.

“The proposal move for the library is to move into the town hall is downsizing and downgrading the library. The proposal shows that the space is not anywhere near what we currently have as a library, especially for a town with a bustling college.”

“I'm not sure the Town Hall will have the right amount of space for books, desks, computers etc.”

“It sounds like it's going to be shrunk and stuck in a basement as an afterthought a library should be every town jewel.”



Other common themes around why respondents disagree with the Town Hall as an appropriate location for the library included:

- Concern the new location would lead to a fall in library use
- Concern the new building might be less accessible, e.g. steps, steep ramps etc.
- Safety of the area around the Town Hall and on the approaches to it.

“The library in its current position has great footfall. If it is moved to the Town Hall, footfall will drop dramatically because it will be away from the Town Centre.”

“I for one would not like to walk past the pubs or away from the safe areas. When it’s dark and late is a higher risk.”

There were also several common themes as to why respondents agree that the Town Hall would be an appropriate location for the library, such as:

- The new location is only a very short distance away
- It is a good use of buildings
- They are happy to have the library as part of a hub with services all in one place
- The idea that a move to a new location could include new, modern facilities
- The new location could be more accessible

“It’s only few yards away from the current location, therefore I have got no objections.”

“I think that it is a really good idea to pull all of the services together into one building which can be accessed by all.”

“It makes sense to co-locate and share services across public sector. A lot of the activity that people go to the Town Hall to undertake may increase library footfall, usage and raise awareness of what other services are on offer there.”

“I love the idea of a community hub, all services under one roof.”

“I don’t like that in the current library I have to use a lift to get the pushchair to the children’s books. Moving the library gives the opportunity for this to change.”

“I also think that the library has been drained of resources and new books for a long time so if this is the boost it needs to refresh the available resources for all the community then I am all for it.”

4.2 Themes – Wider town centre proposals

This set of comments were given as reasons why respondents agree/disagree with the Town Hall as the new location for library but deal with the wider town centre proposals and the costs and benefits of moving the library at all.

The four most common themes given by respondents were:

1. The current library building and location is ‘fine as it is’.

This theme includes comments of how well used and liked the current library is and how suitable the location is near to the town centre and the Kingfisher Centre.

“We have a perfectly good library which functions well in its current position.”

“I believe the library is ok where it is at present, the building is modern, accessible to all, closer to the town centre, and it is really unnecessary.”

“I feel that a library is better suited to its own premises, and the Redditch Library is a perfect building for such a library. It would be a shame to get rid of the building when it is so suitable for its current function.”

2. The proposals are a waste of money

Comments in this theme talk about moving the library, and in some cases the wider plans, as a waste of 'taxpayer's money'. This was often linked with comments about the current library being already located in 'perfectly good building'. There are also comments about how the current library has relatively recently been renovated.

"There are more pressing needs for our Council to consider before spending such huge amounts of money on this move."

"Why waste money demolishing the library building, when that money would be better spent improving the town centre, the Parade opposite the church being just one area that might benefit."

"The library has just had an enormous amount of money spent on refurbishment. Why would you just dismiss that? Is money that easy to come by? It is a purpose built stand alone library. Perfect! as it is. There is no need to waste more money on a service already perfect."

3. The town centre needs development

There were a range of comments made about the town centre needing improvement and development. These were often made by people who agreed that the library should move to the Town Hall, although not exclusively.

"The town is desperately in need of revitalisation and in particular the area of the current library and the current town hall."

"Redditch Town Centre is desperate need for regeneration and investment. The current Library building does not allow for the vision of the Town Deal to be achieved and therefore the library needs to be relocated to the Town Hall."

"I support the wider regeneration of the town centre and understand the relocation of the library can help to facilitate this."

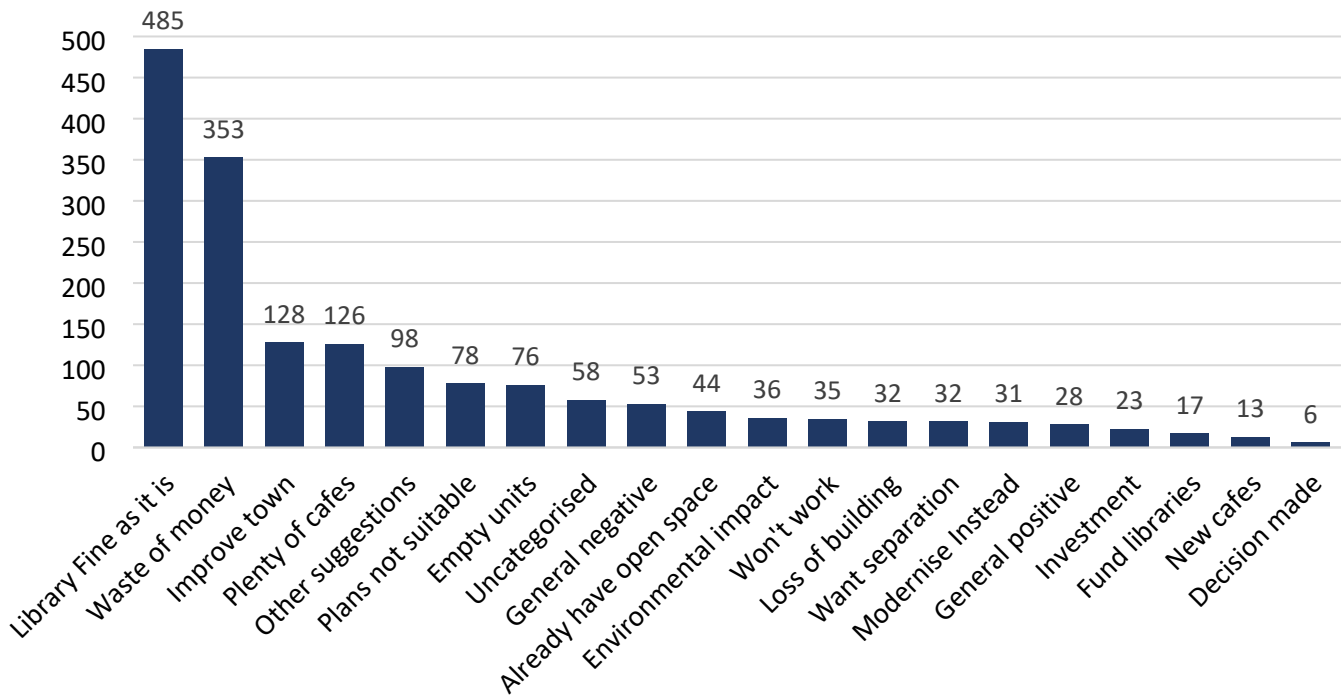
4. Redditch already has plenty of cafes and coffee shops

A range of comments were made on the town centre development proposals and views and benefits of the proposed changes. One area in particular was not popular, and this was around the vision of new café facilities around the redeveloped plaza area. Respondents thought that Redditch town centre already had enough cafes for its needs.

"We have plenty of Coffee shops and eateries in Redditch already as whenever a shop closes down, it becomes a cafe. We do not need an outdoor eating area as has been proposed as we do not have a same weather conditions as on the continent."

"There are already dozens of cafes and the like in the town centre and Kingfisher centre. Citizens will not drink more coffee or eat more buns just because there are more places to do that."

Themes - Reasons why you agree or disagree with the new location for the library



Comments also touched regularly on these themes:

- Other suggestions for the use of the money or the development of the town centre – commonly involving the market.
- That the town centre development plans are not suitable for the area, weather, demographic of Redditch etc.
- There is plenty of available commercial space in the town centre already without creating more
- The current open space in the centre is sufficient or could be enhanced to be sufficient
- The environmental impact of demolishing the library and the development plans
- Loss of a building with distinctive brutalist architecture

“It is far from following the green agenda to demolish buildings and release CO2 into the atmosphere when it is not absolutely necessary!!”

“Your environmental impact assessment fails to consider the enormous environmental cost of demolishing a healthy and suitable building. The majority of greenhouse gases that are produced from buildings come not from occupation, but from manufacture of building materials and construction. The concept of improving environmental sustainability by moving to a more efficient building while demolishing the old one is a folly. Furthermore you have not included the environmental impact of remodelling the town hall. I believe that demolishing and rebuilding the library contravenes the council's environmental pledge.”

“The library is a classic example of Brutalist architecture in the West Midlands and needs to be kept up and preserved as much as possible, so that the unique character of the region is retained.”

“The proposal intends to replace the Library with an empty space, there is plenty of space in the town centre, we do not need more.”

5. Things that might prevent use of the library in the new location

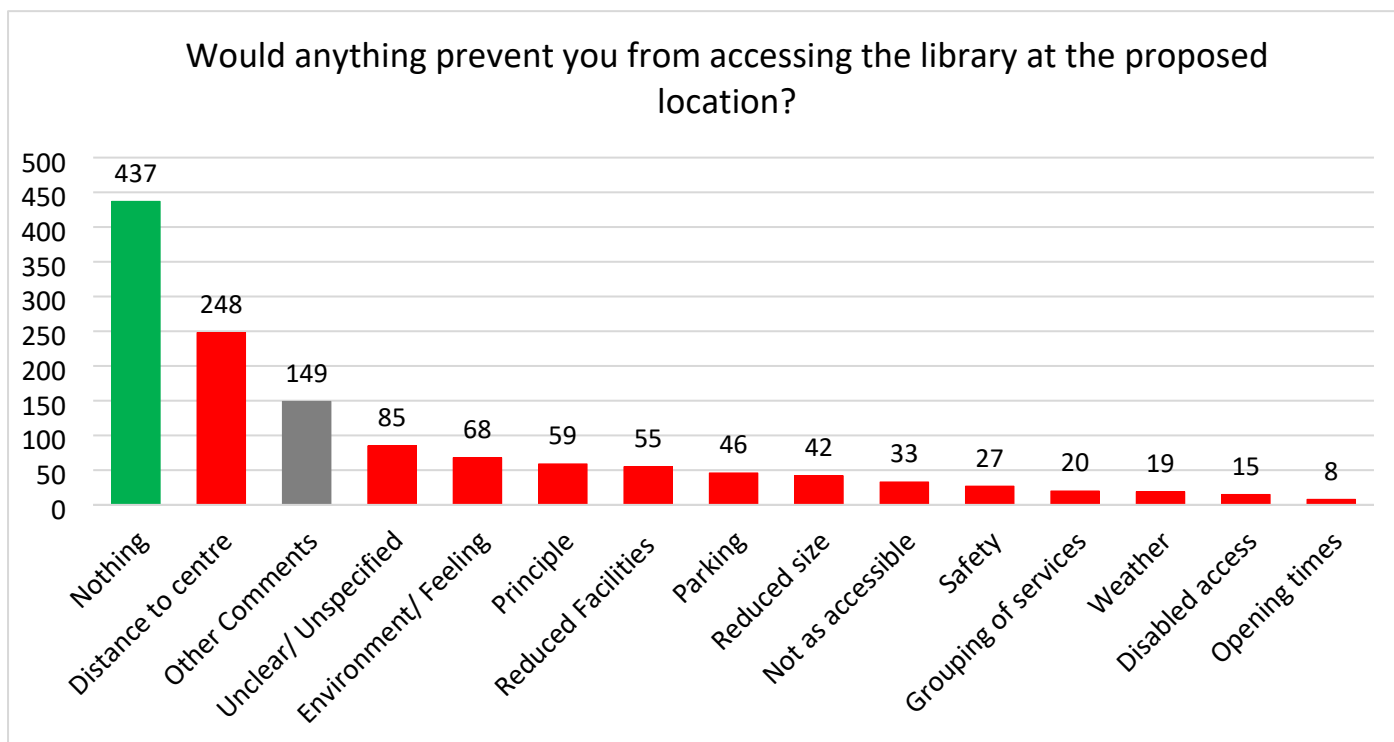
Respondents were asked whether anything would prevent them from using the library in the new location at the Town Hall. 1204 people responded to this question. The most common response to this question, by 36% of respondents, was that nothing would prevent them from using the library in the new location.

“No as it is virtually next door.”

“No. Not at all. I think it can only be a positive thing for Redditch. We are not losing anything only gaining.”

“I would be happy to continue to use the library in its new location”

“Probably not, subject to decent access arrangements e.g. opening times.”



The most common reason identified which would prevent use of the library in the new location was its distance from the town centre.

“Yes. The new location is further away to walk to and is isolated from the town shopping centre.”

“Too far to walk for a lot of people. Not easy just to pop in while in town doing other things if you move it further away.”

“It is too far for me to walk as I use a mobility aid.”

Other reasons given that might prevent use of the library if it were located in the Town Hall included:

- The environment or feeling of the new building
- Wouldn't use out of principle/boycott
- Reduced facilities of the new building (in particular if the local archives were not here then could not use them)
- Availability of parking nearby

“This is not about me, but I can see many that would not feel comfortable attending, not all have a good relationship with Redditch Town Hall, the library is a safe place a welcoming place you cannot replicate it in the town hall.”

“Wouldn’t use it on principle. Will find alternative ways to get what I need.”

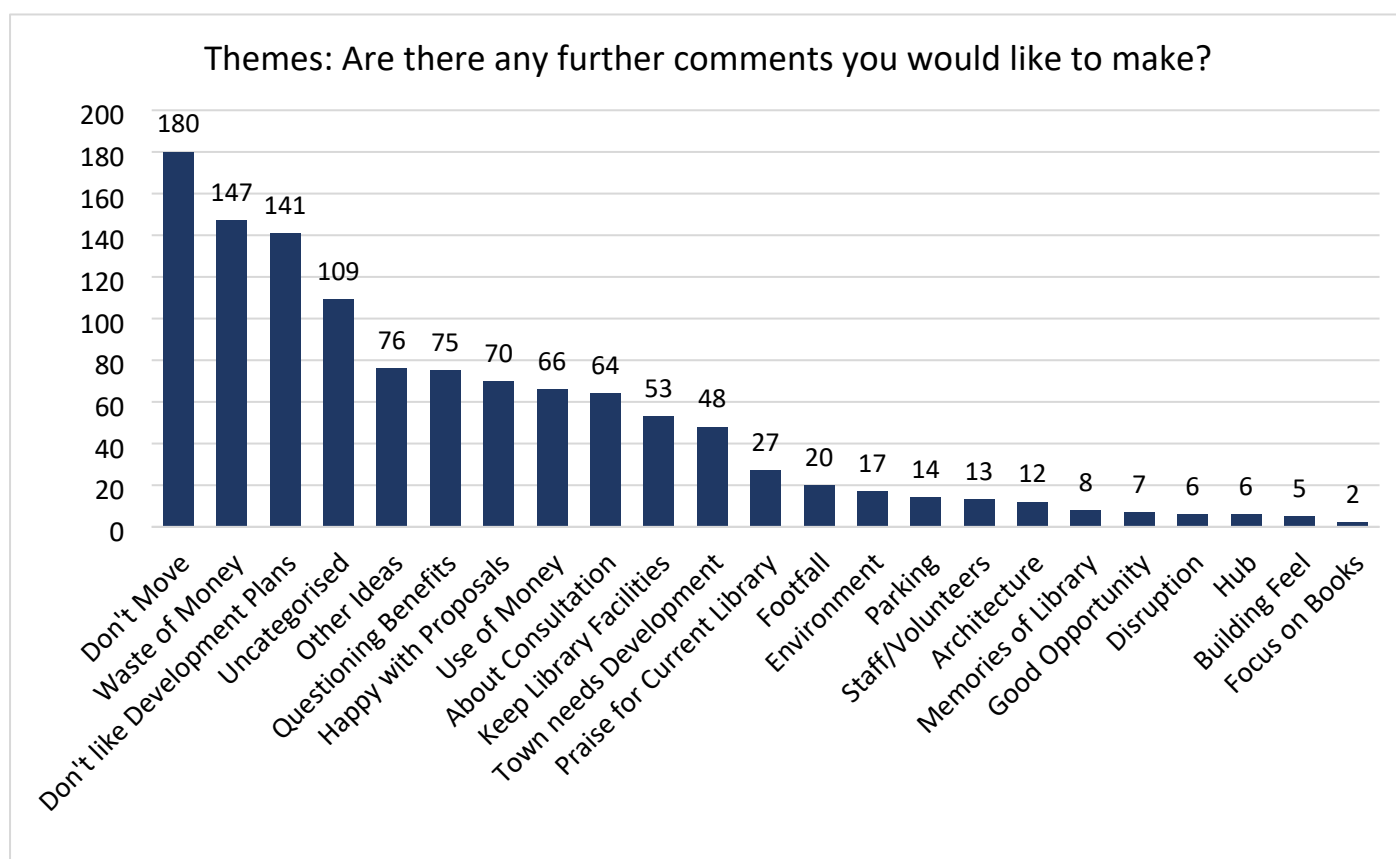
“Yes, it will be too far away from where I park the car as a Blue Badge holder and there is never enough disabled parking at the town hall.”

“The new library appears to be less well equipped than the existing one. I'm not sure if I will bother.”

“I am autistic and I struggle with change and processing information. I have been coming to the library since 1984 and I know it. I would struggle with using a totally different space.”

6. Have your say

Respondents to the survey were also offered a final opportunity to make any further comments about the proposals to relocate the library to the Town Hall. 840 comments were received.



The most common responses picked up on themes already discussed such as a desire for the library to remain in its current location and that they consider the relocation to be a waste of money. However, this section was also used to comment on the town centre development plans, including providing other ideas for the town centre or for how the money might be spent.

“To move the library from the site it is on already is a big waste of Redditch tax payers money, as the site it is on at present suits all people who want to use the library and close to centre so we want get to wet and cold in bad weather.”

“The library is vibrant and popular in its present spot, it already brings hundreds of people a day out of the Kingfisher and onto the high street. Will a fountain do the same? It was the first place I visited as a new resident for info, and being central and obvious helped this. It is used all the time by

vulnerable people who was struggle to walk the further distance, which is much further from the bus station and central car parks. I am very much against this proposal.”

“The current position of the library could actually enhance that area. By using the money to add to the unused areas around the library you could actually increase footfall to the library and encourage people to use the outside areas with food and drink outlets along the front where the unused British heart foundation shop is.”

“Moving the library to the town hall site will give the chance for a cafe pavilion area. As mentioned in the plans. I would be less interested in large retail chains using that space. I would like to see small local ethical businesses trading in that area. Maybe with some cooperative community based ventures. Such as a community lead bakery perhaps with the opportunity of on-site learning/ baking skills courses. Also the chance to extend the market area and perhaps have a monthly farmers market.”

Some people used this section to express how happy they were with the proposals.

“I appreciate the work that is being done to improve Redditch and feel that we should not be held back by staying with what is familiar, just because that is more comfortable. While it will cost a considerable amount to make the changes, it will open up other possibilities to improve Redditch.”

“People want to see the town get its well deserved upgrade. It is absolutely vital that the towns bid money is used to enhance the town and the relocation of the library will bring much needed regeneration to a town that at the moment is pretty much on its knees Please - you must allow this project to be undertaken for the sake of safeguarding our town for generations to come.”

A number of respondents praised the current library and reinforced the value and importance of keeping library services in Redditch

“Whatever happens with the location, please keep the library and all the activities that currently happen there. It is a fantastic community facility!”

Finally, some people used this section to comment on the consultation itself.

“I think that this consultation is very important and the issue at hand has garnered a lot of public attention, so it would be great if our opinions and thoughts were actually heard and taken in consideration. This feels like a done deal but I hope I’m wrong and that this consultation isn’t just a thing you have to do but don’t have to listen to.”

7. Feedback from Face-to-Face Public Meetings

Two public meetings were held as part of the consultation giving residents the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns to a panel with officer and member representatives from Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council. Just over 100 people attended these meetings.

Many similar themes were dealt with in the public meetings as have been expressed in the survey comments such as not wanting the library to move, how it would be a waste of money and the suitability of the Town Hall as a location for the library service.

“If you move the service down to the Town Hall, there are a lot of people with kids, older people with mobility issues – when it is pouring with rain. Are you going to build a covered walkway for people? Can you change the access from the front to the side, make sure you can access from a flat surface with no steps?”

“I am concerned about the money it will cost to demolish the current building plus the money to improve the Town Hall. Why can’t that money be saved by improving the existing building, create a

plaza either side of the library. I don't understand the money that is being wasted to demolish this and improve that."

"It seems too obvious that this is all about money. This library could be a focus of the plaza, with café services on the ground floor, opening on to the square outside. We could open up the place more. With millions to spend on it, it could be made lovely. This shouldn't just be another commercial exercise."

The meetings also provided members of the public to seek further detail and clarification on aspects of the consultation and wider plans.

"For clarification – you say you want no diminution of the library service. It looks like the square footage of the new space is more than the current, but no space has been given for computers, business space, study space. Looks to me like we are moving to a smaller space and losing out because of it – the paper shows zeros for things when they are not zeros!"

"There are a lot of events on at the same time, is there enough space in the new library for that to happen so they are not interfering with each other?"

"The benefit of doing this needs to add value to what there is because it is going to cost a lot of money. What value will this money spent be adding to the services?"

"If money is not spent by 2026 has to go back to central government, can this be delivered in time?"

"Concerned that the move from point A to point B. RBC have said that services are going to be bigger and better, but I am worried that the process of the move will allow the opportunity to remove those services... .. The more things that move, the more chances there are to cut a corner here. Look what happened in COVID, corners were cut and we lost out on a lot of things."