



Colton Parish Council

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THE FUTURE OF CUMBRIA'S LIBRARIES

Response to consultation from Colton Parish

Introduction

Our rural parish is one of the largest by area in Cumbria (about 50k²). There are seven villages and many smaller settlements. The population consists of a mixture of farmers, a large proportion of retired people, families and residents who mainly work outside the parish and a sizeable number of holiday homes.

Observations

1. The Mobile Library

For most parishioners, the nearest library is 8-10 miles away so the Mobile Library has always been an important facility, particularly for older residents. Apart from the obvious value of giving good access to books, the library also serves an important social function in bringing people together. We therefore note with concern the likely demise of this service.

2. Community Libraries

That said, we recognise that locating a library within a community could offer an interesting alternative. We are keen to develop our **village halls as community hubs** offering a wider range of facilities and services and library provision may well be a good way of drawing people in. One village in the parish already manages a well-supported Book Swap and Café. Locally sourced second-hand books are donated to make up a small library and it would be good to augment/diversify the provision by loans from the central library stock of books and other resources.

The **challenge of managing this** will need to be carefully thought out as village halls are likely to have extra costs associated with the new responsibility e.g. heating, provision of shelving, insurance. The scheme will be more attractive to village hall committees if there is a payment associated with becoming a Community Library.

The management of such a system will need careful consideration. It is likely there will be volunteers locally who will be happy to support it (though in small communities there can be danger of 'volunteer fatigue!'), to sort, shelve and issue books. They may feel less comfortable chasing overdue ones or tracking missing ones. The support role of a **Community Outreach Librarian** would be a significant factor in the success of the venture.

3. The Virtual Library

It is possible the Virtual Library will be of value to some parishioners but issues of broadband speeds, computer access and IT skills remain challenges. Having an **internet access point in a village hall** could be a real step forward but we are aware that the associated costs of broadband installation, insurance and security may make this problematic.

Conclusion

We recognise that the time has come for libraries to review service and provision in the light of changing circumstances. We hope that the needs of small, isolated and rural communities will be given close consideration in forming the new strategy.