



THE RT. HON. PRITI PATEL MP

WITHAM

HOUSE OF COMMONS
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Ms Liane Rowland
Parish Clerk and RFO | Wickham Bishops Parish Council
The Village Hall
Church Road
Wickham Bishops
Essex
CM8 3JZ

Our Ref: ZA53739

15 February 2019

Dear Ms Rowland,

Wickham Bishops Library

I have been in frequent contact with the Leader of Essex County Council, Cllr David Finch, over the consultation and proposals on the Essex Future Library Services Strategy 2019-2024 (<https://libraries.essex.gov.uk/libraries-consultation/>).

As the Parish Council will know, the library at Wickham Bishops has been given a Tier 4 classification and I know that this has caused serious concerns about its future. Indeed, across the Witham constituency seven of the eight libraries have been placed into Tier 3 of Tier 4 categories and I am keen to work with local communities and Essex County Council to maintain services and look and new ways of providing library and community services.

In this spirit of cooperation and collaboration I would like to share with the Parish Council the letter attached from Cllr Finch in response to correspondence from me about finding ways to maintain Tier 3 and Tier 4 libraries. As you can see, Cllr Finch has commented that the Council is keen to support the development of community library services and are accepting in-principle expressing of interest from now until June 2019.

Soon after the current consultation process concludes on 21 February 2019 I am going to be meeting with Essex County Council to discuss the options to maintain local library services and facilities. In advance of those discussions, I would be happy to hear from the Parish Council its views on the future of the library at Wickham Bishops and how the services and facilities can be maintained and enhanced.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Priti Patel
Member of Parliament for Witham

Putting the Witham Constituency, Essex and Britain first.

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The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
House of Commons
London
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Date: 15 February 2019
Your ref: ZA52840
Our ref: ECC6188004 02 19

Dear Priti

Thank you for your letter of 1 February enquiring about the possibility of working with you and the Witham communities on alternative delivery models for libraries.

Amongst the alternative models of delivery that have been used by other authorities are local authority trading companies, transfer to commercial companies or charitable trusts and partnering in joint ventures. Our intention has been to keep the library service in-house (albeit that community and Tier 3 libraries will be run by partner organisations), so we have not pursued those alternative delivery models at this time. However, we are open to new approaches and will continue to review options over the life of the strategy. We are mindful of the valuable work being done in this area by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Libraries Taskforce.

Over the past few years we have attempted to increase the quality and impact of the library service in various ways. These included an income generation programme and co-location with other services. Two examples of the latter within your constituency were when Silver End Library relocated to the Village Hall, co-locating with the Children's Centre there, and the piloting at Witham Library of an arrangement with the Ministry of Justice to provide a remote-working hub for their staff. Hiring out of rooms and spaces within libraries is generating some income to support the service, and under the new strategy we are keen to explore future opportunities for co-location to make the most efficient use of public buildings, whether owned by the council, public bodies or community organisations. Unfortunately, initiatives so far have not delivered required sustainability to budgets or stopped the decline in usage of library services.

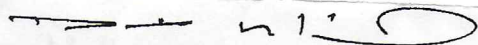
We are keen to support the development of community based library services and have invited community groups to engage with us to develop sustainable proposals for delivery of library services in community settings. We aim to provide some initial one-off and ongoing support to community or partner organisations running Tier 3 libraries; we propose that these would include Coggeshall, Stanway and Tiptree. Support for Tier 4 libraries, where in our view there is low evidence of need is likely to be one-off in nature. In your constituency, as you are aware, these include Hatfield Peverel, Kelvedon, Silver End and Wickham Bishops. However, the precise level of support will be worked out in negotiation with each community group. At this stage we are not expecting community groups to submit detailed bids, but are encouraging them to submit an in-principle expression of interest between now

and June 2019. More information for groups interested in setting up a community library is available at <http://libraries.essex.gov.uk/libraries-consultation/your-questions-answered/>

We are also engaged in detailed design work on a programme of outreach that will take library services out into community settings, such as community hubs, working with ECC services and partners to reach communities and individuals with the greatest needs. This will be part of our core service in the future.

We welcome your constructive approach. Once the consultation is closed on 20 February (21 February for online surveys), if you would like to discuss piloting new delivery models with you and your constituents, please let me know and I will put you in touch with the team leading on this work. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Cllr David Finch
Leader, Essex County Council