

**Central
Bedfordshire
Libraries**

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Biggleswade Library Road Map

Find out more at:

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/libraries

The library today

Biggleswade Library is situated in a building built in 1968 about a quarter a mile from the town centre. It is in need of external refurbishment. Internally the ground floor appears crowded and requires a new layout. The situation of the library outside the immediate town centre is a challenge when considering how to increase usage, although a free car park opposite the building is of benefit to visitors. The library may feature in town re-development plans in the future.



People and Place

Biggleswade has the highest number of issues of the current area libraries and average use of the Peoples Network Internet PCs. Biggleswade has fewer visitors than Flitwick Library or Houghton Regis Library.

Biggleswade Library serves villages to the east and west of Central Bedfordshire with higher proportions of users coming from Northill and Langford. It has a relatively large catchment area which may be due to the fact that it is the largest shopping centre in the east of the authority and also has additional facilities such as a JobCentre Plus. Northill ward has a 'comfortable' older demographic with no significant deprivation or unemployment issues. Stotfold and Langford ward has no significant deprivation or unemployment issues.

The library largely serves 'comfortable' older people and families with school age children. Children aged **0-14** are more likely to be library users than average. Biggleswade has some areas of social need including a higher proportion of people aged **65+yrs** living in income deprived households, more children receiving free school meals, more people with no access to a car, more young people aged **18-24** unemployed and, lower levels of skills and qualifications than the Central Bedfordshire average. The library needs to extend its reach to some of these groups and ensure that they are reflected in the library demographics.

The population is set to grow from **16,420** in 2009 to **17,910** in 2014.

'Libraries for the Future' consultation – what people said

45% of respondents wanted the library to be a 'Family Library' followed by **20%** for a 'Read and Relax' Library. The library was deemed to be least successful at providing access to advice and support services like CAB, council services or advice about jobs.

'Big Library Debate' – what people said

Most participants wanted the library to remain as it was although there was some fear of library closures which may have prompted this response. There was support for improvements to opening hours (**21%**), more choice of lending material (**16%**), provision of toilets (**36%**) and **11%** for self service.

Short term improvements

Biggleswade is a well-used library but there is potential to increase active users, extend the user base, increase the number of activities and develop greater community participation. Older people with low incomes are under-represented in overall library usage as are people with other social requirements and this needs to be addressed. Greater community engagement could involve the use of volunteers in outreach, activities, IT sessions etc.

The installation of RFID, self service technology provides the opportunity to examine internal refurbishment and re-modelling and there is an empty garage area attached to the building which could be developed to house a heritage collection for Central Bedfordshire.

A feasibility study of the building is required in order to consider the long term capital investment required which is dependent on town planning. This will impact on the possible future use of the garage space and options for housing a Central Bedfordshire Heritage Centre.

Opening hours should be examined in consultation with the community, especially as the Thursday closure is unpopular. As a larger library Sunday opening could be explored as a 'family day'.

The building has the potential to be used out of hours for small groups, surgeries and advice sessions. This should be examined with the help of Facilities Management and the local community.

Long term opportunities

Town centre planning may result in possible new locations for the library in the future; this will require careful consideration in respect of capital investment in the building in the short to medium term.