

**Central
Bedfordshire
Libraries**

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Dunstable Library Road Map

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The library today

Dunstable Library is situated in a two storey building opened in 1966. Externally the library looks very tired. The library is part of larger Council owned building, the adjoining offices are now vacant and require significant external maintenance. Dunstable Library currently forms part of a town centre re-development scheme, which is incorporated within the Dunstable Town Centre Masterplan and adopted in March 2011 by the Council.

The biggest challenge is the continuing need to maintain a building, which is looking increasingly in decay. Due to the town centre re-development it is financially prudent to carry out only essential repair work although this does not provide an enticing customer experience. The library is also in need of internal decoration and maintenance.



People and Place

Dunstable Library has the second highest number of active users within the authority and the highest visitor count. It has the joint second largest use of the People's Network Internet PCs in the authority. The library engages well with teenagers and has a good reputation for its work in this area (Dunstable has a higher proportion of teenagers than the Central Bedfordshire average).

The library is largely used by 'comfortable' families and older people and larger families living in deprived areas. Children aged **5-14** are more likely to be library users than average. The library is not reaching older families on moderate incomes and older people on low incomes. Dunstable Library has a wide reach across the authority and extends as far as Ampthill and Millbrook in the north and Studham in the south. This may be because of the presence of Central Bedfordshire College and an Asda supermarket nearby. Caddington, Kensworth and Tottenhoe are areas of high usage.

Dunstable has some social issues including unemployment rates, benefit claimants, numbers of unskilled workers, children living in income deprived houses, residents with no access to a car, all of which are higher than the Central Bedfordshire average. Dunstable also has a number of areas that are amongst the most deprived in Central Bedfordshire. Levels of qualifications are lower than the Central Bedfordshire average for both adults and children.

Dunstable has a similar ethnic breakdown as the rest of Central Bedfordshire however in 2010/11 there were **1,504** applications to the UK Border Agency (UKBA) from postcodes in Central Bedfordshire and a cluster of these applicants were in the Dunstable area.

The population is set to grow from **35,120** in 2009 to **36,670** in 2014.

'Libraries for the Future' consultation – what people said

42% of respondents wanted the library to be a 'Family Library' followed by **23%** for a 'Read and Relax' Library. Respondents thought the library was best at providing a place to learn and study and least successful at providing advice and support services. Many respondents were in favour of café facilities and were in favour of zoning of activities.

'Big Library Debate' – what people said

Many 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 more lending materials at **18%** and improvements in opening hours, **11%**. **44%** of respondents wanted public toilets and **17%** advice and information services.

Short term improvements

Dunstable is a well-used library but there is potential to increase active users, visitor footfall, issues, advice and help surgeries, learning opportunities and, community participation. The planning of a new library offers opportunities for engagement with all sectors in the community – users, non-users, partners and stakeholders.

The building would benefit from a modest refresh of decoration and layout and this can be achieved through the installation of RFID, self service terminals which requires a re-modelling of space and minor refurbishment works.

There is the potential to create a 'read and relax' area to improve the ambiance of the building with refreshments. Options to look at zoning of activities and/or time slots for activities should also be examined.

Opening hours should be examined in consultation with the community. The Thursday morning closure is unpopular with users. Sunday opening could also be considered due to the presence of the nearby Asda Store which is open on Sundays.

The library is considered to be successful at providing a place to learn and study and this should be extended to provide support for residents, particularly in view of the social requirements within the town. Joint working with the Central Bedfordshire College and other learning providers should be explored.

Work with teenagers and young people should continue and be extended.

Long term opportunities

The Dunstable Town Centre Masterplan offers an opportunity to provide a new library within the proposed redeveloped town centre. This provides opportunities to examine joint library facilities with Central Bedfordshire College and to share these facilities with the Council and other local organisations.

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