

Appendix 6

REVIEW OF LIBRARY PROVISION IN CAMBRIDGE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA – INTERIM REPORT

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To present the results of an initial review of library service provision in Cambridge and the surrounding area.

2. Background

- 2.1 As part of the overall Library Service Review, Cabinet agreed to a review of provision in Cambridge City and the surrounding area, to reflect the enormous positive impact of the new Central Library and to take account of future development and population growth. At the same time Cabinet members made it clear that they wanted to avoid library closures as far as possible. The standard assessment methodology (as detailed in Appendix 5 to the main Cabinet report) was used to carry out this assessment.
- 2.1 It should be noted that service points in Cambridge were excluded from consideration for closure in the comprehensive Library Review of 2002, pending the redevelopment of the new Central Library. It was rightly anticipated that these libraries would absorb much of the customer pressure arising from the closure of the Lion Yard site, and reduction in service capacity at that point would have been untimely.
- 2.2 Independent consultants, Kentwood Associates, concluded that no decision should be made about library provision in the city until the impact of the Central Library's reopening on the five branch libraries in the city was clear, and they suggested the following analysis:

"If they return to the previous levels of declining use there may be a business case to consider the viability of Milton Road, because of its proximity to both the Central Library, and Arbury Court Library." (8.10)

"When the new developments in Cambridge East and Cambridge southern fringe are completed there may be a case to re-examine the position of Barnwell Road and Rock Road Libraries, but at the moment we believe it is too soon to reach any conclusion. We do not see any reason to close or relocate Arbury Court or Cherry Hinton Libraries." (1.5)

Since this view was taken the national picture with respect to Local Government funding has radically changed.

3. Library Assessment: Community Need and Performance Factors

- 3.1 This paper considers the five libraries located within the city boundaries, (Arbury Court, Barnwell Road, Cherry Hinton, Milton Road, and Rock Road) and six libraries (Bar Hill, Comberton, Cottenham, Great Shelford, Histon, and Willingham) which are close to Cambridge and likely to be affected by proposed housing developments on its fringes and at Northstowe.
- 3.2 When all 25 community libraries are considered, of those in the Cambridge area, Comberton, Willingham and Cottenham fall into the lowest quartile on the basis of their scores for community need and performance.
- 3.3 If the same methodology is applied just to the eleven libraries in the city and on its fringe, Comberton, Willingham and Rock Road Libraries fall within the lowest group in terms of both community and performance factors.
- 3.4 Successive reviews and reports have drawn attention to the fact that Milton Road Library is just over 1 mile from the Central Library and less than 1 mile from Arbury Court Library. However, the scoring of both Milton Road and Arbury Court Libraries on the agreed basis does not place them in the most at risk group. Milton Road and Arbury Court libraries each have a distinctive character of their own, with a long and distinguished history, a fiercely loyal clientele, and the capacity to generate a great deal of value for the communities they serve. Despite their proximity to each other and Milton Road's proximity to the Central Library, these two libraries have a combined annual footfall of 60,990.

4. Impact of Growth

- 4.1 Proposals for the development of library provision in the city and surrounding area, in response to the impact of proposed developments on the fringes of the city and at Northstowe, have been drafted. These are based on the existing County Council policy on library service levels, which determine the need for the provision and size of libraries related to population catchments.
- 4.2 Owing to the sensitivity of these proposals and the need for them to remain flexible in the face of changing plans, they have not been finalised. However, in essence they focus on the provision of new facilities, firmly based on the principles of self-service, co-location and integrated operations with other public services, focussed on Northstowe, Cambridge East, Cambridge North West fringe and Cambridge Southern fringe. The timescale for the implementation of some of the major developments around the city is unknown. It is quite clear that these developments will have an impact on Bar Hill, Histon, Cottenham, Willingham, Cherry Hinton and Barnwell Road Libraries, but

at this stage it is not possible to provide a delivery plan or timescale. It is clear, however, that closing libraries in advance of the provision of alternatives, or commitment to do so, could potentially make the council's position in relation to the developers more difficult to argue. However, the Council has little choice given the immediate size and 'front loading' of savings.

- 4.3 The announcement by Marshall Aerospace about the continued operation of the airport is likely to have a significant impact on the plans for the Cambridge East development. An important consideration is that if, as envisaged, the parts of this development North of Newmarket Road and North of Cherry Hinton go ahead, the catchment populations of Barnwell Road and Cherry Hinton Libraries will be significantly increased.

5. Impact of the re-developed Central Library

- 5.1 A view that the new Central Library potentially could and would replace the city branches when it reopened is not supported by the reality of performance since October 2009. Since that time use at the majority of city branches has returned to a level of visitors and loans which matches performance prior to the Central library closing. This forms part of Cambridgeshire 'bucking the trend' of a national decline in library usage.
- 5.2 Furthermore, Central Library is resourced to serve the whole county, providing a higher level of services and stock – both in terms of range and depth - and providing a location where specialist interest collections (local history, literature, music, and foreign language material) can be held and exploited efficiently. This is a different role from that served by the community libraries throughout the county, which are essentially community hubs providing an appropriate range of popular services to meet the day-to-day needs of users. Therefore, there would have to be changes to the range of services offered by the Central Library in order to mitigate any re-design elsewhere in the city.

6. Links with Other Strands of Library Service Review Options

- 6.1 The prospect of the development and implementation of alternative service delivery models for community libraries may change some of these assumptions. Both the reduction of the costs of running individual service points, and the increased emphasis on the views and input of local communities regarding their operation may impact on the way the library network around Cambridge is viewed going forwards.
- 6.2 The position of the County Council, as agreed by Cabinet, that it would close libraries only as a last resort, if other initiatives fail to deliver the required savings, means that a similar approach must be taken in the city.

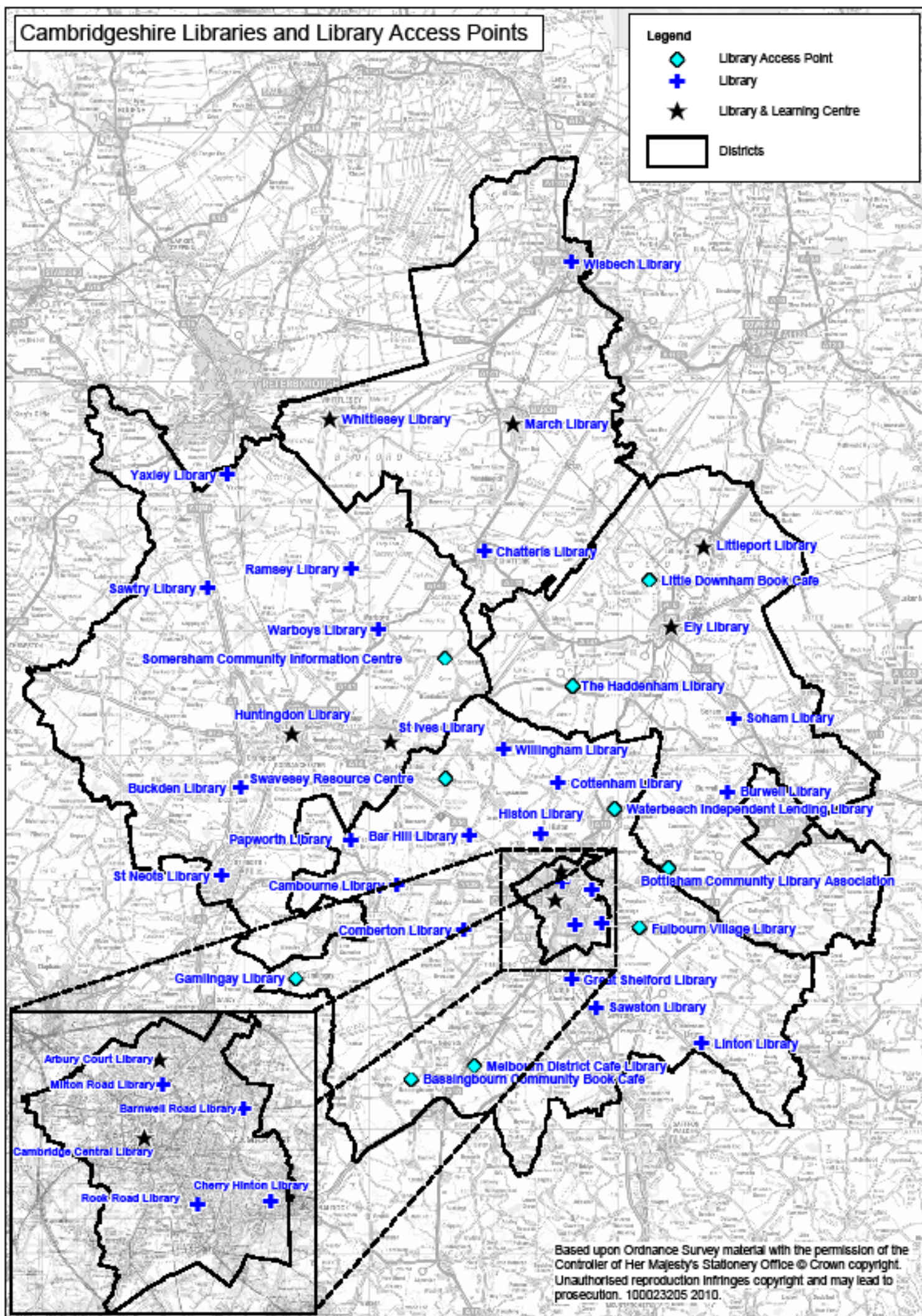
7. Conclusion and recommendations

- 7.1 The outcome of the community needs assessment show that there are two city branches, Milton Road and Rock Road, which have relatively less community need although their levels of performance remain good. If priority is to be given to those libraries which serve communities that have greater community need then there is a need to review these libraries in the next stage of consultation and engagement. Without prejudicing the outcome of this further, it is not possible to consider either integration of buildings or conversion to a supported Library Access Point model, if there are changes made to the range of services offered by the Central Library.
- 7.2 There is capacity in the Central Library to make these changes – but it would restrict the space available for other community uses and income generation. This may preserve library services across the city, but not necessarily buildings.

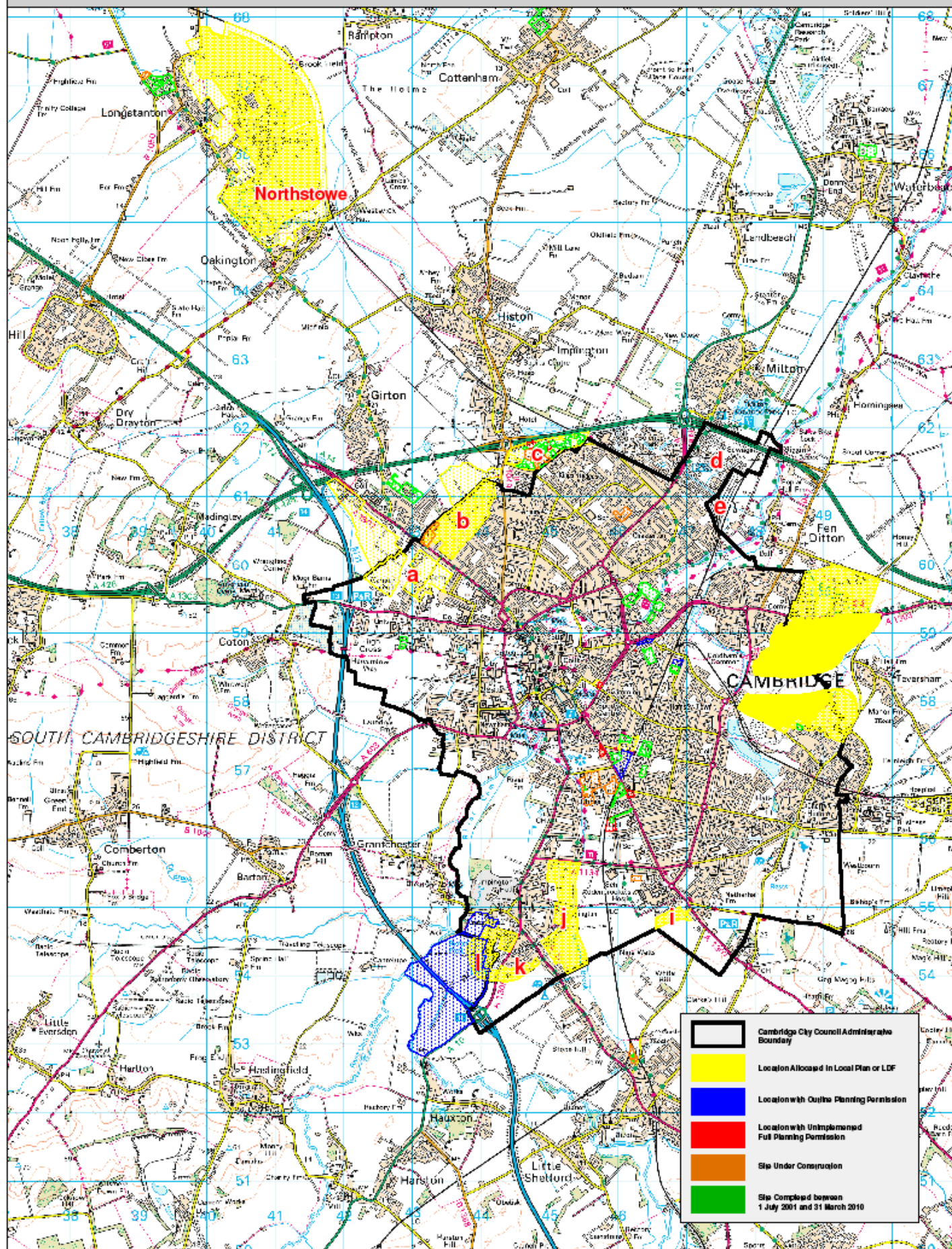
Cambridgeshire Libraries and Library Access Points

Legend

-  Library Access Point
-  Library
-  Library & Learning Centre
-  Districts



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