

ST HELENS BOROUGH LIBRARY STRATEGY 2023-2028

Consultation and equality impact assessment summary

Key Consultation findings

- There has been a significant response to the consultation with almost 6,000 people taking part in on-street interviews, drop-in sessions or completing the open survey questionnaire online or on paper. This represents roughly 1 in 25 of the St Helens adult population.

Who responded?

- People from across St Helens have responded, including a significant representation of people from those communities whose libraries are proposed to close.
- Respondents from every adult age group and each gender have responded, including those with protected characteristics associated with health and disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and gender reassignment.
- As might be expected, there has been a significant representation of regular library visitors responding to the self-selected, open survey, demonstrating the considerable interest in the Library Service and its future.

What do we know about their use of the Library Service?

- The findings indicate that many library users visit more than one library with 1 in 4 visiting 2 or more libraries frequently.
- Most visitors currently walk to their local library and of the remainder, the majority use a car. Use of public transport is quite limited.
- For the majority it takes less than 15 minutes to get to their library (door to door).
- Half of visitors visit with a child or children at least some of the time.
- Visitors with children are twice as likely to attend an event or activity than those without.
- The most popular services are to borrow books, followed by using the IT services.
- At least a quarter of users visit the library for social purposes.

What did they say about the proposals?

- There is mixed opinion about the rationale for targeting greatest needs, with those who were consulted in person more likely to agree and those whose libraries were planned to close being more evenly split on the matter.
- The significant majority of respondents disagreed with the proposed closures, most notably those whose local library were one of them.
- There was more agreement regarding the proposed opening hours, particularly amongst the more representative sample of respondents to the on-street survey and older adults. Working age adults were more likely to disagree.
- As might be expected, there is a clear correlation between the levels of agreement with the proposals for each library with whether the library will close or not. The significant majority (84% and above) of visitors to Garswood, Rainhill, Rainford and Parr and who visited Billinge Library strongly disagreed with the proposals.
- Asked about their preferred alternative, proximity is a clear factor, albeit that those consulted in person were more certain about what they would do. 2 in 3 respondents to the open survey did not know or indicated none.
- There is likely to be a significant reduction in the proportion walking to their library, which may have an environmental impact that needs considering. Also, many did not know how they would get to an alternative library, highlighting an information/communication need.
- The majority indicated it unlikely that they would visit St Helens Library, many citing access (lack of free car parking and/or proximity to the town centre) as a barrier.

- There is mixed opinion on the likelihood of visiting a Community Managed Library (CML) with those whose nearest library is planned to close, more likely to do so.

What about the personal impact of the proposals?

- Two questions were asked of those responding to the on street and open survey to establish and compare the impact of the proposals on different respondent groups: what course of action they would take as a result of the proposals and how this would impact on them personally.
- Over a third of those whose libraries were proposed to close would stop using the service, with a further 1 in 5 using it less frequently than they do currently.
- At least three quarters indicated that the proposals would have an impact on them, with well over a quarter indicating they would be significantly impacted (the figures are much higher amongst the open survey respondents).
- The main reason for being impacted was access and/or lack of transport, including lack of/limited bus service, not being able to use public transport/drive, the extra distance, cost or time this would involve.

And the equality impact?

- The on-street research undertaken by the Murray Consultancy identified 4 groups most impacted by the proposals:
 - residents in those areas where libraries are proposed to close or have closed
 - 65+ year olds and to an extent, 55 – 64 year olds
 - those with a long-standing illness or health condition
 - those suffering with mental health conditions
- The analysis of the open survey responses supports these findings and specifically identify the following groups as most likely to be significantly impacted:
 - residents whose local library is proposed to close or has closed
 - 65+ year olds
 - Disabled people, including those with a long standing illness/health condition, mental health conditions and physical disabilities.
- The findings also suggest that other groups that may be adversely impacted are ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities) and minority faiths/beliefs.

Feedback from the drop-in sessions

- A summary of the feedback from the drop-in sessions, at which over 400 individuals and group representatives were consulted, is set out on page 30.
- It is clear from this that the libraries are considered to be at the heart of communities and that library staff are highly regarded.
- The key concerns raised at the sessions include the potential impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups, loss of warm, social and safe places, and evening and weekend closures.
- There were also many questions about how the CML might work and about what will happen to the library assets otherwise.

Longer term impacts

- A number of potential longer term impacts have been identified from the many comments made from those responding to the surveys, including the impact on local communities (their resilience, potential alienation and prosperity).
- Other adverse impacts referred to include those on reading and literacy levels (particularly amongst children); on digital access and capability; and, on meeting the socialisation needs of individuals.
- Finally, some respondents offered constructive comments on the possible mitigations, a summary of which can be found on page 34.

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The purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to summarise the results of an analysis of St Helens residents' response to the Borough Library Strategy consultation, undertaken between May and July 2023. It draws on the findings from the separate on-street research undertaken by The Murray Consultancy Ltd¹; an analysis of the open survey responses; and, a series of drop-in and group consultation sessions to which library users and user groups were invited.

Consultation aims & process

There were a number of aims for the consultation as follows:

- to raise awareness of the draft Library Strategy amongst residents and other stakeholders;
- to explain the rationale for the proposed changes, developments and opportunities arising out of the strategy;
- to encourage library users to consider new ways to access library services;
- to ensure everyone has opportunity to have their say and contribute to the new Library Strategy & service; and,
- to ensure that those with protected characteristics have their say, so their needs and the impacts on them are understood and considered.

Communicating the proposals

The consultation process involved a number of activities to increase awareness of the proposals amongst St Helens residents, businesses, and stakeholder groups. They included a social media campaign, media relations activities and a dedicated St Helens Library Strategy webpage, links to which were included on public computers in the libraries.

The social media campaign was led by the Council's Communications Team with help from the Library Team. It included content that stakeholders could use to share and to advertise the consultation. Social media adverts were also distributed across the Borough with signposting to information and response mechanisms shared via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. The campaign was launched on 1st May 2023 and ran throughout the full 12 weeks of the consultation period.

Media relations activity involved press releases that referred to the consultation and details of how to respond being issued to the main local publications.

The dedicated consultation web page included a summary of the draft strategy and links to the online survey for residents to respond.

¹ St. Helens' Library Services User and Non-user Consultation 2023, The Murray Consultancy Ltd.

Encouraging responses

Several consultation methods were used to ensure that everyone had opportunity to respond to the consultation and that people from all communities were represented. They included the following:

The on-street survey was conducted to elicit feedback from a representative sample² of residents with both users and non-users of libraries asked to respond. The survey was undertaken by The Murray Consultancy Ltd with professional market research interviewers being briefed on a daily basis to ensure that the agreed sampling quota by gender and age was met. The interviewers complied with the Market Research Society interviewing code of conduct and were supervised throughout.

The survey questionnaire included a detailed preamble about the proposals to ensure that respondents could provide an informed response. It included questions to gain insights about their existing library usage, their reactions to the proposals, the rationale behind them and the impact the changes would have on them, the services they would use and means of accessing them. The questionnaire also included questions relating to the eight protected characteristics, responses to which informed the assessment of equality impact.

The street-based interviewers took place between May and June 2023 at sampling points for each of the 13 local libraries. In total, 2,003 questionnaires were eligible for inclusion in the final analysis

An open survey was set up online which anyone could complete. It included the same questions as the on-street survey and was issued via the dedicated consultation webpage, social media platforms and public media channels. All library members whose contact details were on file were sent a notification of the consultation and a link to the open survey. They were also informed of where they could complete a hard copy version which was available in all libraries and main council buildings (including the Town Hall and customer contact centre). The questionnaires were available in other languages and formats on request.

The open survey was available from the start of May to the end of July 2023, over which time a total of 3,572 people responded.

For both the on-street and open survey, responses were categorised as being from active users (who had visited a library at least once in the preceding 12 months); lapsed users (who had visited a library within the last 5 years but not within the previous 12 months; and non-users who had either not visited a library within 5 years or couldn't remember when they last had. In the analysis of the open survey results the responses from people who neither worked, studied or lived in St Helens were separated out.

A series of Drop-in consultation sessions was also run enabling face to face engagement and providing opportunities in libraries for users and user groups to meet

² Quotas for 13 sampling points in each library location on a proportion-to-population basis were used to ensure all geographic areas, age groups and genders were represented.

council officers and find out more. The dates and time of these were posted in each library and added to the Council's website. User groups were contacted directly to inform them of the sessions, and, where possible, sessions were scheduled to coincide with library activities and groups.

Over 400 individuals attended the sessions which took place in 12 of the 13 Library locations. No sessions were run at Peter Street as the community is served by three other libraries within 1.5 miles proximity).

Drop in session attendees	Date	Visitors
Billinge Parish Hall	24/07/2023	29
Chester Lane Library	12/05/2023	54
Eccleston Library	16/05/2023	48
Garswood	09/06/2023	80
Haydock Library	15/06/2023	6
Moss Bank Library	19/06/2023	9
Newton Library	26/06/2023	7+
Parr Library	05/07/2023	5
Rainford Library	12/06/2023	60
Rainhill Library	23/06/2023	80
	22/05/2023	11
St Helens Library	17/07/2023	9
Thatto Health Library	24/07/2023	10
All drop-in consultation events		408+

In addition to the surveys and drop in sessions, a number of **public stakeholder groups were invited by email to comment** on the draft strategy as part of the consultation. Some of these groups had already been consulted and/or involved in the development of the draft strategy and were given a further opportunity for formal comment during the consultation period. They included library staff and volunteers, local businesses, elected Members and council officers, MPs, local schools (primary, secondary and SEND provision), early years providers, FE colleges, St Helens Chamber, Job Centre Plus, local arts, culture and heritage organisations, Torus and other housing providers and Arts Council England.

Consultation action plan for younger people

Recognising the need to ensure that the interests of children and younger people were captured, a consultation action plan aimed at engaging local schools, college students, teenagers, the LGBT community and family members of library users was delivered.

Primary, Secondary and Specialist schools were contacted and encouraged to highlight the consultation amongst pupils, parents and carers; to display QR code posters; and, to encourage sixth form and college students to complete the survey forms. Free book give-aways, QR codes and hard copy forms were distributed to teenagers attending Pride events; and, a number of partners such as Young Carers, St Helens Chamber, the Music Service and Youth Justice Service were contacted.

Library staff were also briefed to actively encourage family members, particularly younger people, to complete the survey and to ask parents/carers to complete it on their child/children's behalf.

Number of consultees

In total, almost 6,000 individuals responded directly to the consultation (roughly 4% of the adult population) and of these, 5,230 provided valid postcodes on which some of the results herein are based.

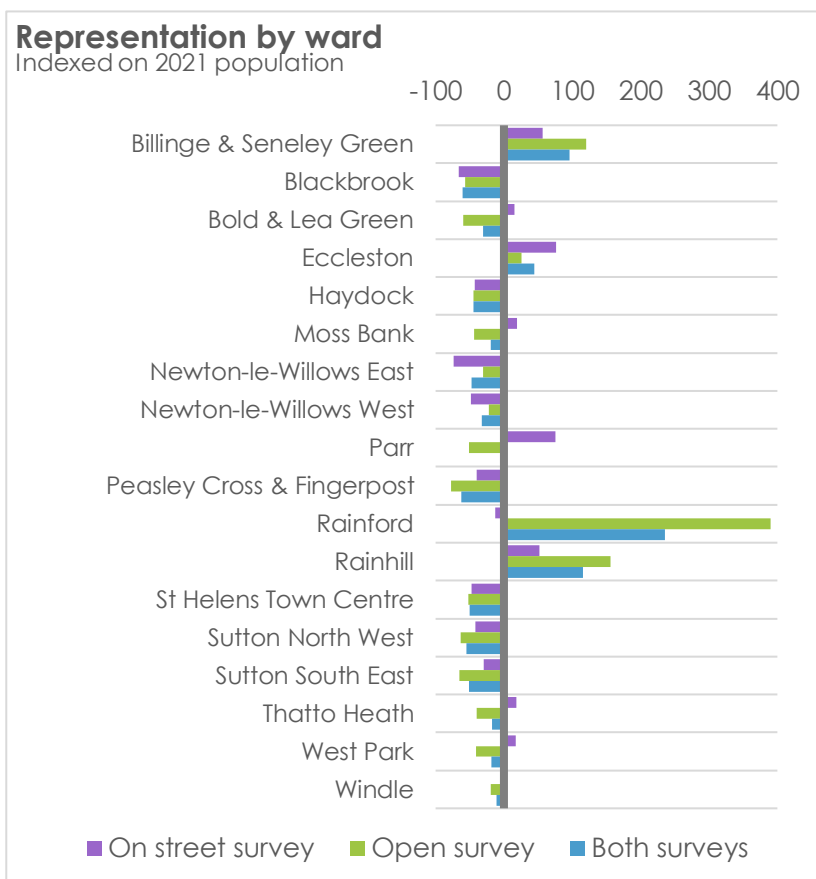
Consultation methods	Responses	Responses with valid postcodes
On Street	2,003	1,954
Open survey	3,572	3,276
Drop-in sessions	408	
Total consultees	5,983	5,230

Who responded?

The consultation response rates demonstrate both the success of the communications campaign and a considerable level of interest in the Library Service and Strategy. To understand more about the people who responded, where they lived and how representative they are of all residents, their postcodes can be mapped, and their protected characteristics compared with those of residents more generally.

Geographic representation

All respondents to the in-street survey lived and/or worked in St Helens, with the significant majority (99.5%) living in the Borough. The clear majority (95%) of respondents to the open survey were also residents, with most of the remaining (4% of all respondents) working or studying in the Borough. Less than 1% of responses were from people who did not live, work or study in the Borough.



The maps overleaf show that people from across all Wards in the Borough have responded. The chart aside uses an index to show how the distribution of responses differs from that of adult residents in the Borough³. The bars extending to the right of the vertical line illustrate an over-representation from that Ward and those extending to the left, an under-representation).

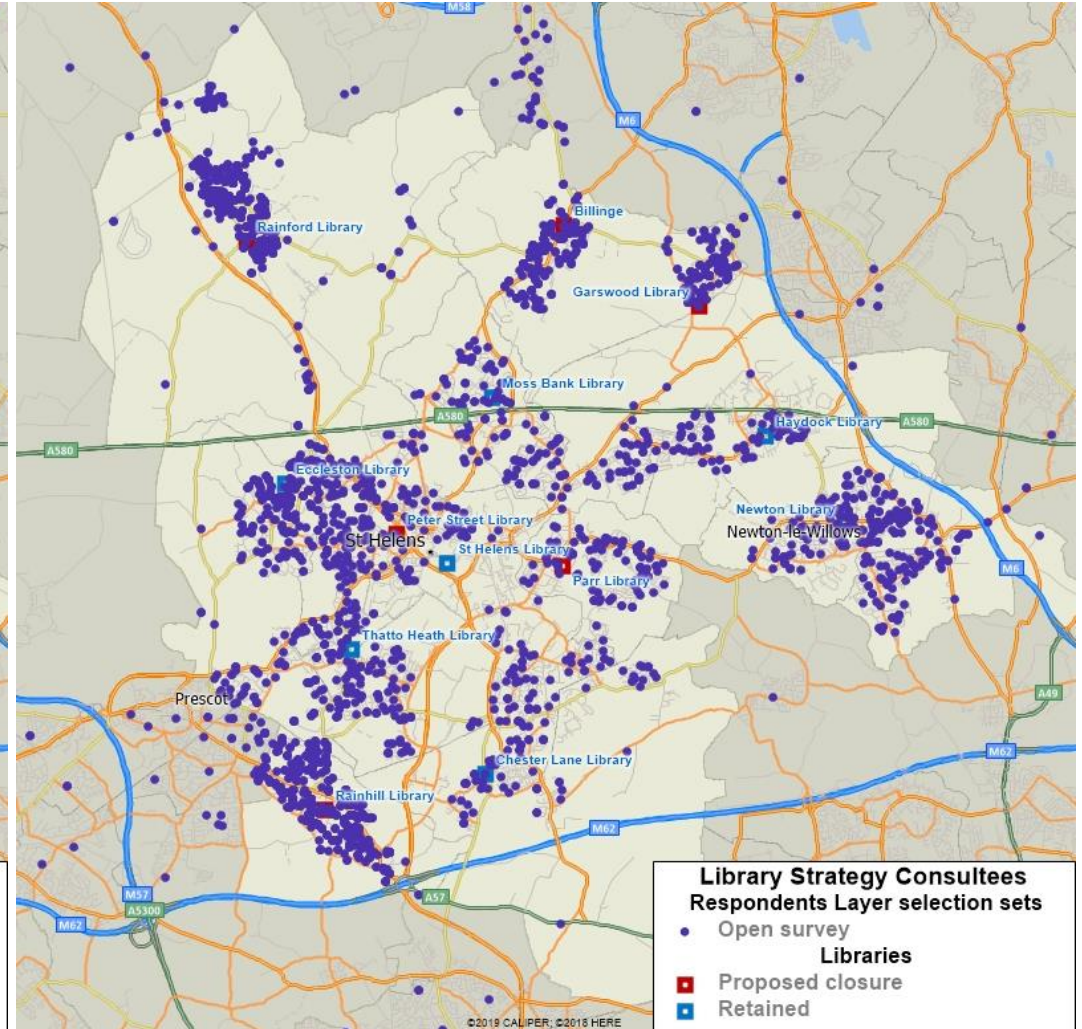
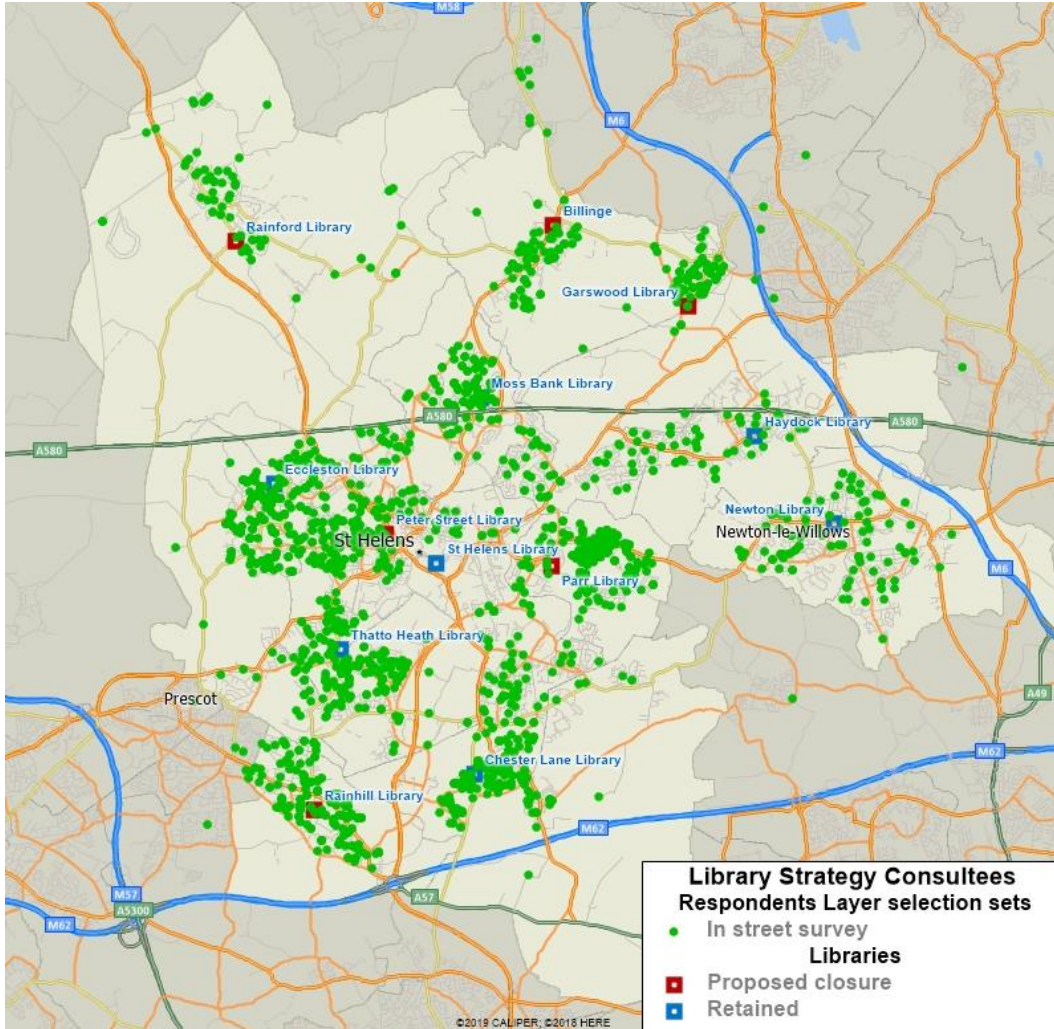
As expected, the on-street survey captured responses from a more representative sample, albeit that some areas were better represented than others (including Billinge, Eccleston, Parr and Rainhill).

However, there has been a lot more skew in the response to the open survey with significant over-representations of residents in those areas where libraries are proposed to close; particularly Rainford, Rainhill and Billinge whose residents accounted for almost half (49%) of open survey responses.

The comparisons suggest that whilst the on-street survey results will provide a better picture of residents' views overall, the open survey results will be a better indicator of the levels and types of impact of the proposals on those people most affected.

³ All resident population data used to contextualise the results are taken from the St Helens Local Authority 2021 Census Area Profile extracted via NOMIS, <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

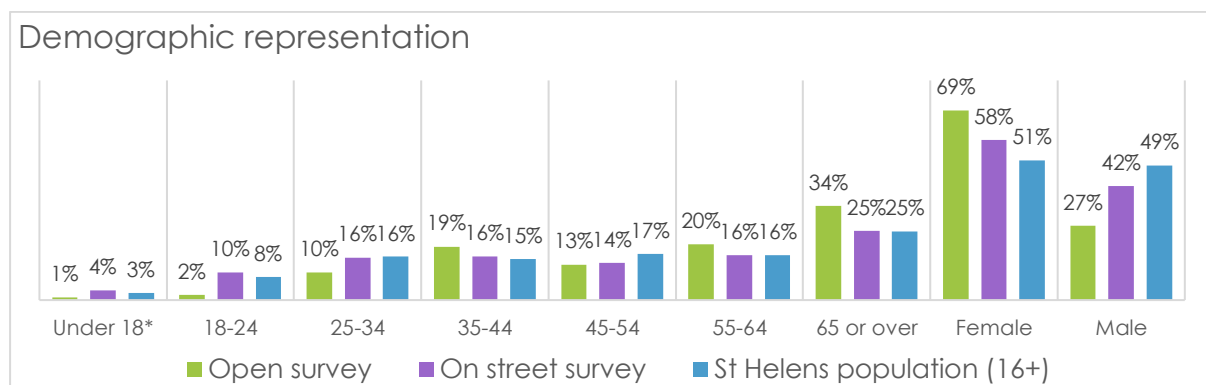
Respondent distribution maps



Demographic representation

As the chart below illustrates, people from across the age groups responded to the surveys. The on-street survey secured a near representative response from the different age groups albeit that more females and fewer males responded than we might expect.

The open survey elicited a more skewed response with older age groups (aged 55+) and females over-represented and males significantly under-represented.



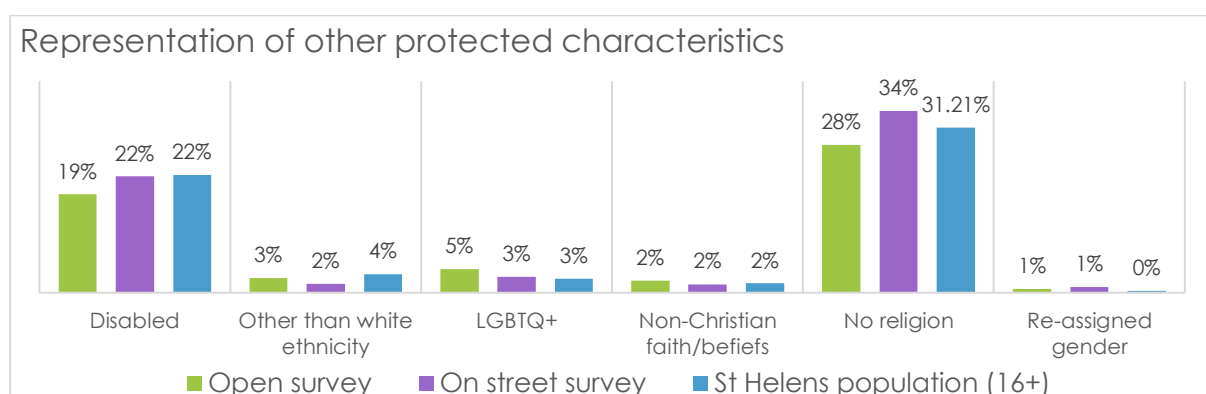
* 16 to 18yrs

Representation of children and young people

The chart also shows that adults aged under 25 years were slightly over-represented amongst respondents to the on-street survey accounting for 14% of all responses. Although the proportion of open survey responses from this age group is less, it should be noted that the interests of younger adults and children under 16 years have also been captured through the responses from other age groups (including from parents, grandparents and teachers) almost 60% of who visit the libraries with a child/children at least occasionally.

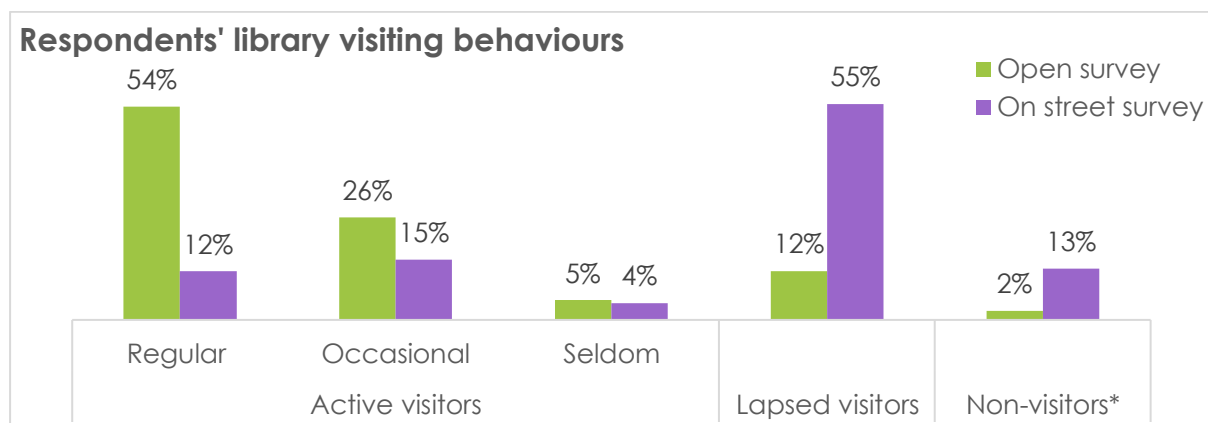
Representation of other protected characteristics

The chart below compares the proportions of respondents with other protected characteristics with those for the adult population in St Helens. People from all groups have responded to each survey with a slight under-representation of ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities) for both surveys. Although there are also under-representations of disabled people and people with no religion amongst the open survey respondents, at 19% and 28% of the total, there is a reasonable level of confidence that the views of people with these characteristics have been captured.



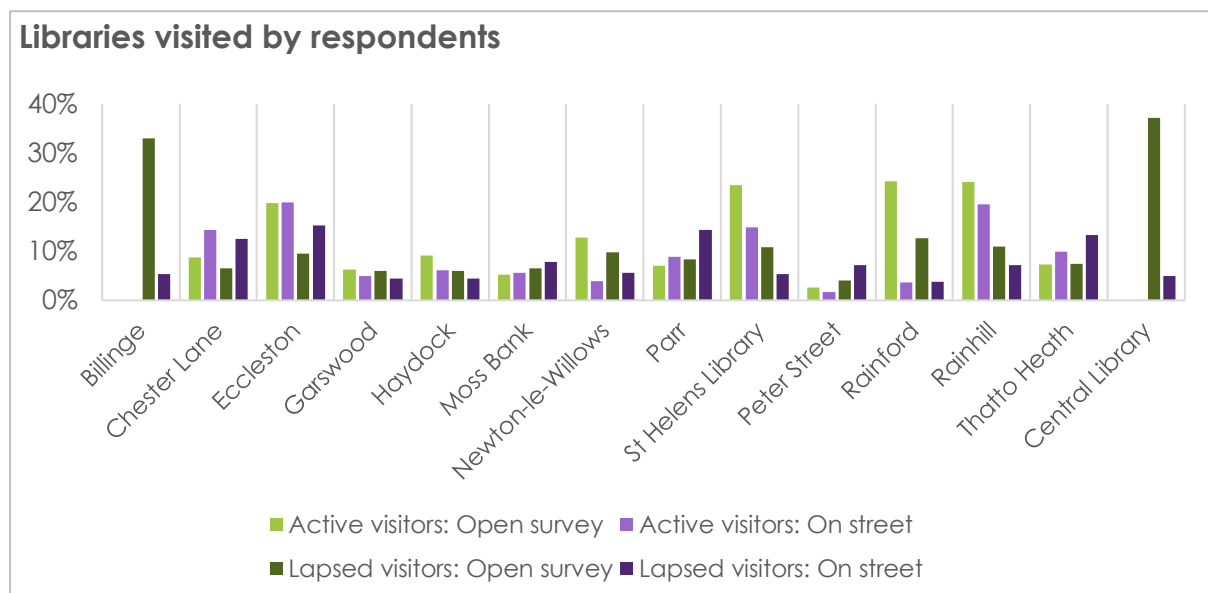
Representation of library users

Differences in the survey samples are also apparent in the recency and frequency of visiting the libraries with active, regular visitors (visiting weekly or monthly) representing a much greater proportion of open survey respondents. Since we know that those responding to the on-street survey are likely to be representative of the population, the comparisons further demonstrate the significant skew in the open survey response towards those people who actively and frequently use the service and, therefore, the most likely to be impacted.



*Including those who could not remember

This is even more apparent when we compare the libraries visited by respondents to each survey (see chart below). Amongst those responding to the open survey, there has been a significant representation of past visitors to Billinge Library and active visitors to Rainford and Rainhill.



If respondents whose most frequently visited library prior to its closure was Billinge are added to those respondents whose most visited library is planned to close, this equates to well over half (54%) of the total survey response. Again, the results suggest that we can be confident that we have secured a good representation of views of those most likely to be impacted by the proposals.

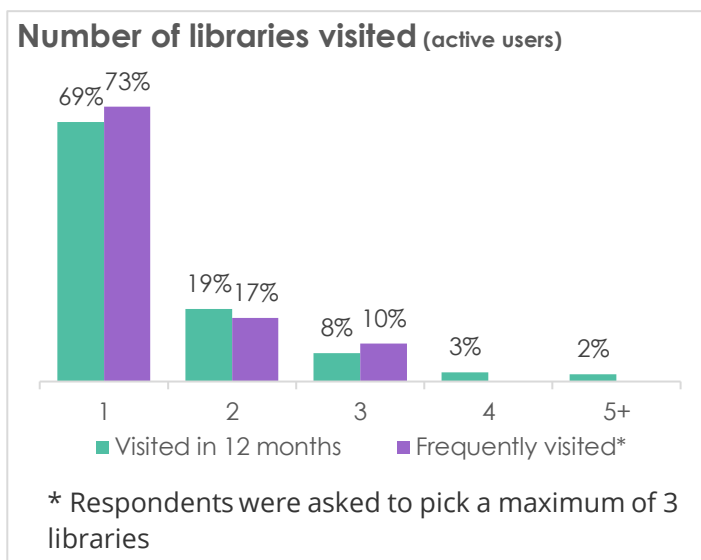
What do we know about visiting behaviours?

Respondents to both surveys were asked a number of questions about which libraries they had visited, what services they had used most recently, how they travelled and how long this took and the extent to which they visited with a child or children. We can draw a number of insights from their responses as follows.

Many people visit more than one library

The chart aside draws on the open survey responses and shows that more than 3 out of 10 active users had visited 2 or more libraries within the last 12 months and just slightly less than this (27%) had visited 2 or more libraries frequently.

The results suggest that there is a degree of choice currently for some library users, albeit that 7 out of 10 tend to visit the same library each time.



Most visitors walk to the library

From the on-street survey we know that 7 out of 10 active users walked to the library they most frequently visited (all or most of the time). The figure is almost as high amongst those responding to the open survey at 6 out of 10. The significant majority of the remainder (3 in 10) used a car, at least some of the time; and, just 5% (4% of those responding to the open survey) used the bus some or all of the time.

For most, it takes less than 15 minutes to get to their library

The significant majority of active visitors (87% from the on-street survey and 77% from the open survey) indicated that it took them less than 15 minutes to get to their most frequently used library currently.

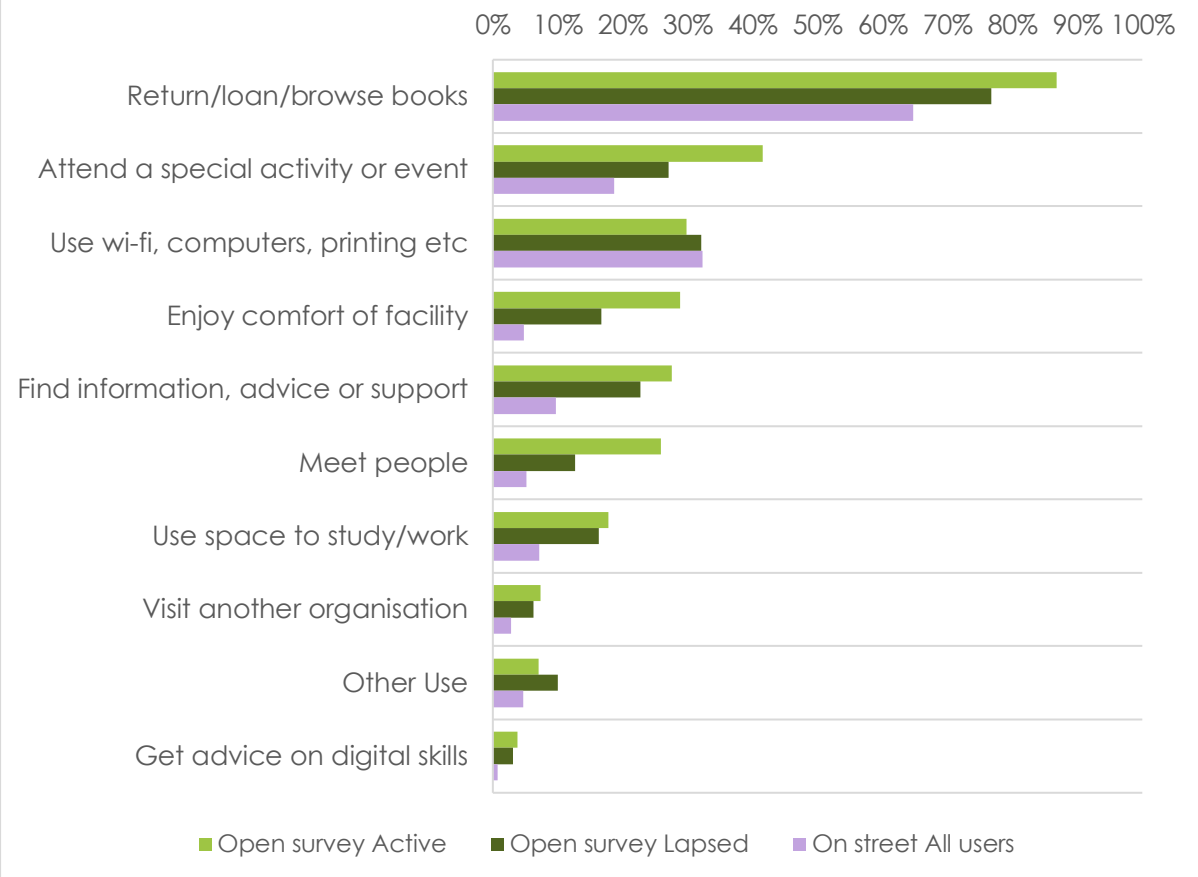
Half visit with a child (at least some of the time)

1 in 3 active visitors from the on-street survey indicated that they visited with a child on all visits with 52% doing so at least occasionally. The figures are similar for the open survey with 1 in 4 visiting all the time with a child and 57% doing so at least on occasion.

Visitors with children are twice as likely to attend a special activity or event

Parental age visitors (25-44) are more likely to visit with a child (on-street survey respondents) and those who visit with a child are twice as likely to attend special activities or events than other visitors.

Library services used



The most popular services are to borrow/browse books followed by IT services

As the chart above illustrates, the 3 most popular uses are to borrow/browse books, attend activities & events and use IT services, with lapsed users more likely to use the latter than active users.

The chart also shows that the open survey respondents typically use the libraries for a wider range of purposes which is another indicator that they represent those most affected by the proposals. With active users citing 2.8 uses on average and lapsed users citing just 2.2, it also appears that active users use more services than lapsed.

At least a quarter of active visitors use the library for social purposes

Active users are also most likely to attend special events, meet people and use comfort of building/facility than lapsed. Over a quarter responding to the open survey indicated they used the libraries to meet people, highlighting how much they were relied upon for social interactions.

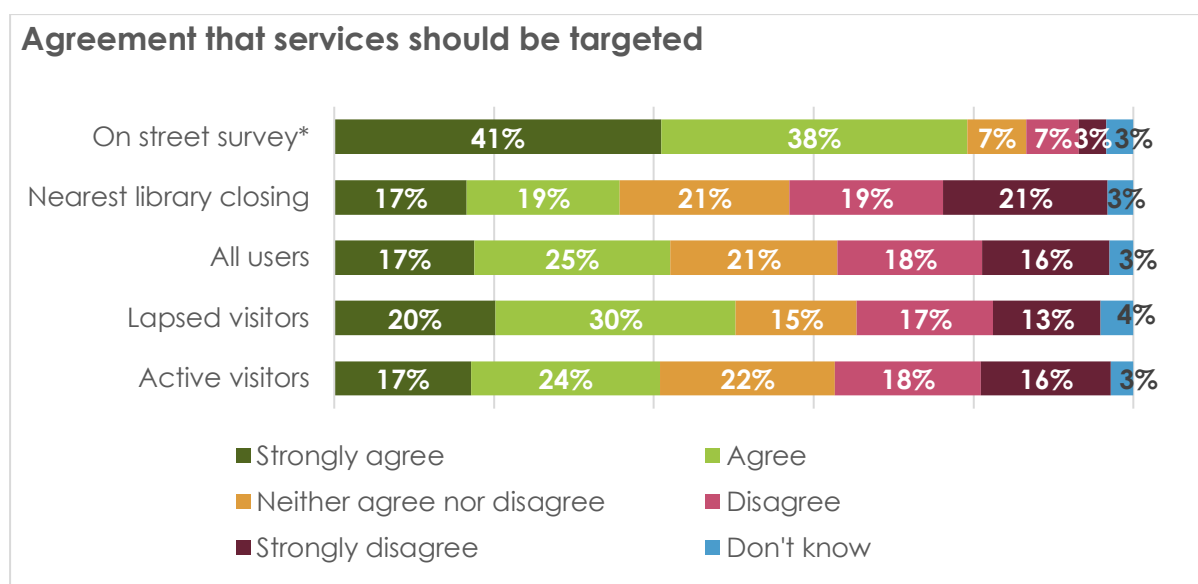
Many elderly people use Rainford library as a community space. They meet people there and, in the winter, it was a designated warm space.

What did they say?

Respondents to each survey were asked a number of questions about the proposals and how they would impact on them as follows.

...about targeting greatest needs

There is a clear distinction between those responding to the on-street survey and open survey in their levels of agreement with the targeted approach. Amongst those whose library was planned to close, almost 80% of those respondents to the street survey agreed to some extent. However, less than half this proportion of open survey respondents whose local library will close agreed with the approach. This is reflected in many comments that refer to deprivation not being an indicator of need, affluent areas becoming less affluent as a result of the cost of living crisis and access to public transport and other council services needing to be factored in.



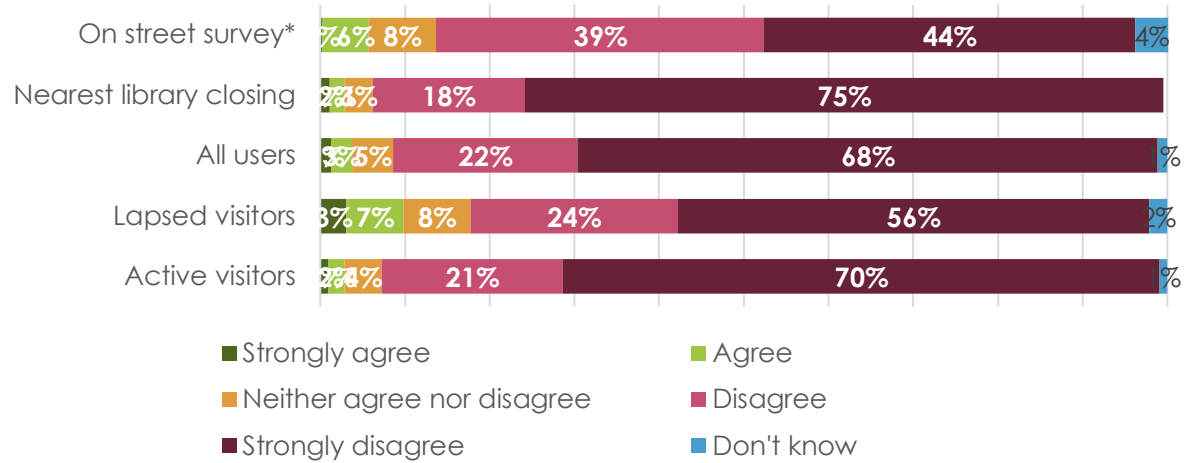
*users whose library is proposed to close & non users

...about reducing the number of libraries

There is much more disagreement with the proposal to reduce the number of libraries from 13 to 7. Amongst those responding to the open survey, 90% of all users (92% of active users) disagreed to some extent. Amongst those respondents whose nearest library were proposed to close, the proportion is greater at 93%.

Notably, those responding to the on-street survey were a lot less likely to strongly disagree, highlighting the potential bias in the response to open survey towards people who felt more strongly about the proposals. The feedback from the drop-in sessions suggests that there was more understanding of the need for the proposed changes amongst those attending who had had opportunity for the proposals and rationale behind them explained or for questions answered.

Agreement that number of libraries is reduced



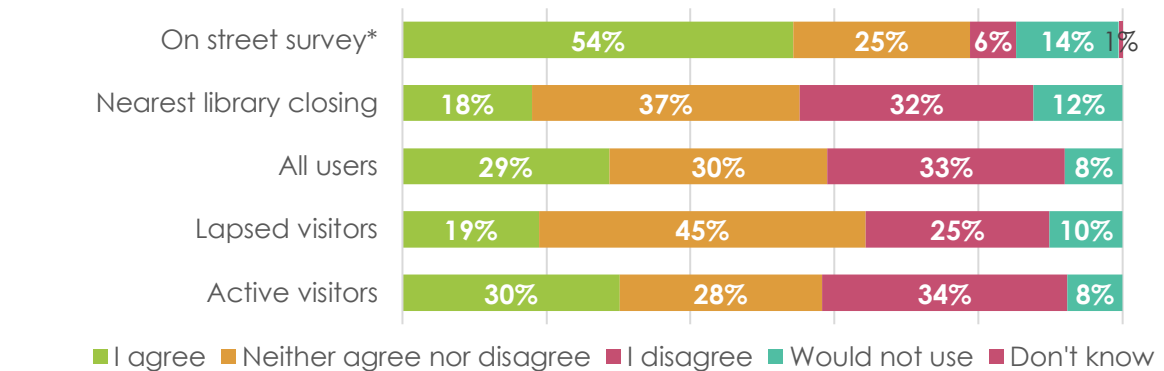
*users whose library is proposed to close & non users

...about the proposed opening hours

There are also differences in the levels of agreement that the proposed opening hours would meet their needs, with almost double those responding to the on-street survey agreeing. Notwithstanding this, a greater proportion of those responding to the on-street survey whose local library were closing said they would not be able to use the library.

Those respondents of working age (25 to 44 from the on-street survey and 25 to 54 from the open survey) disagreed most with the opening hours. Whereas older adults (65+) were most likely to agree that the proposed hours met their needs (39% of those responding to the open survey).

Agreement that proposed hours would suit needs



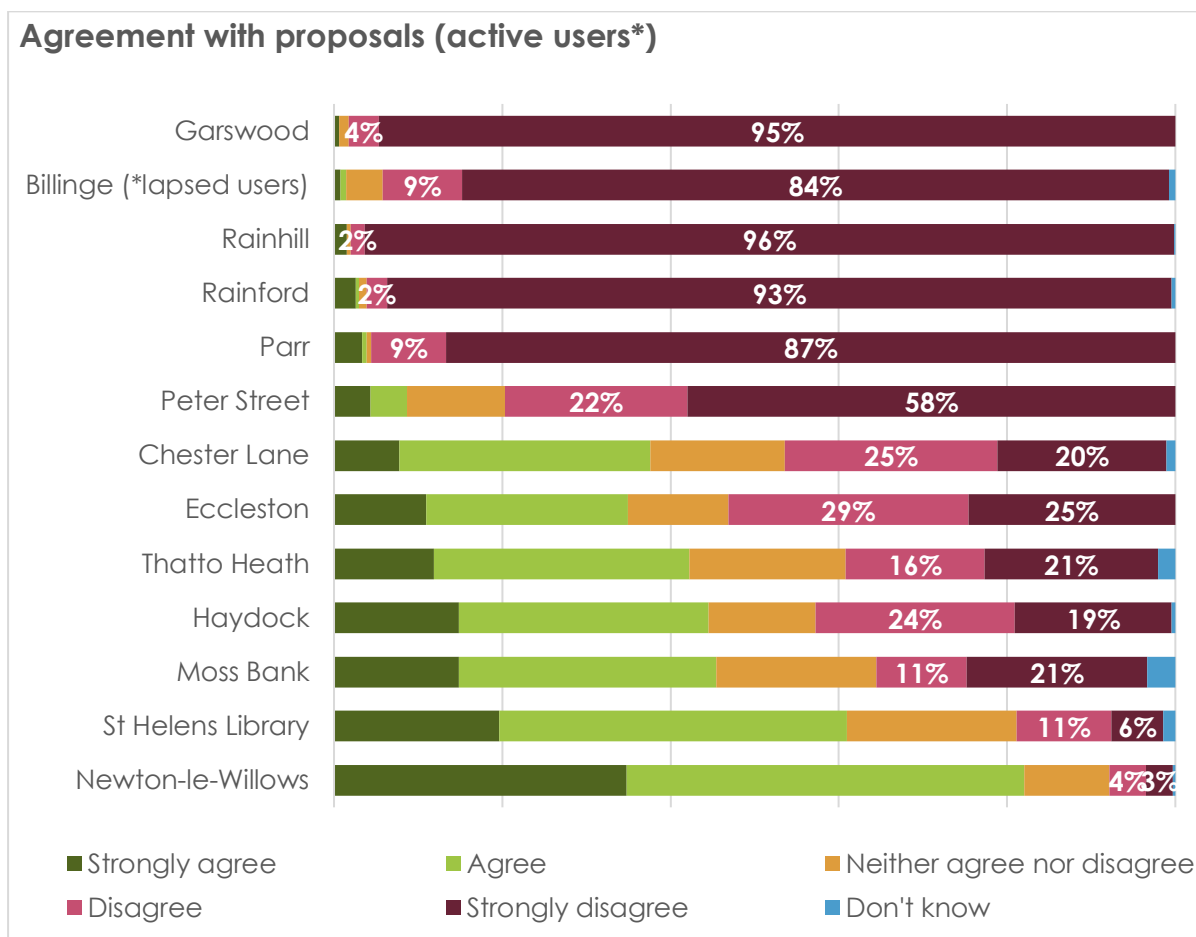
*users whose library is proposed to close & non users

would be preferable to keep a library with reduced opening hours or to use voluntary staff rather than lose the facility altogether.

please also have 10-1 Saturday opening hours. This would allow people working 9-5 weekdays to also bring their children.

...about the proposals for each library

Respondents to the open survey were asked how much they agreed specifically with the proposals for the libraries they most used (up to a maximum of 3). The chart below compares their responses and shows the clear levels of disagreement amongst those who use the libraries proposed to close. Excepting Peter Street (where 4 in 5 visitors disagreed), at least 90% of library visitors to these libraries disagreed with the proposals for each library. The strength of disagreement is clear in the proportions strongly disagreeing.



* Respondents who frequented each library in the last 12 months (and over 12 months in the case of Billinge Library)

The chart highlights a mixed opinion on the proposals for the remaining libraries with similar proportions of active users of these libraries agreeing and disagreeing with the proposals. Amongst those who use St Helens Library and Newton-le-Willows library, however, most agree with the proposals for those libraries.

A difficult situation and not one that can offer a "one size fits all" solution.

...about their preferred alternative library

Active visitors responding to the on-street survey were asked which would be their preferred alternative library now that their usual library was closing. Their responses can be compared with those of the open survey active visitors whose closest library is closing as set out below.

There are differences between the survey respondents and between each library visitors, with respondents to the open survey much more likely not to commit (either because they didn't know or had no preferred alternative).

Amongst those naming a library, proximity is a clear factor with the most popular alternatives being the nearest library remaining open, followed by St Helens Library at the Word of Glass. The latter being most preferred amongst those living closest to Parr and Peter Street Libraries.

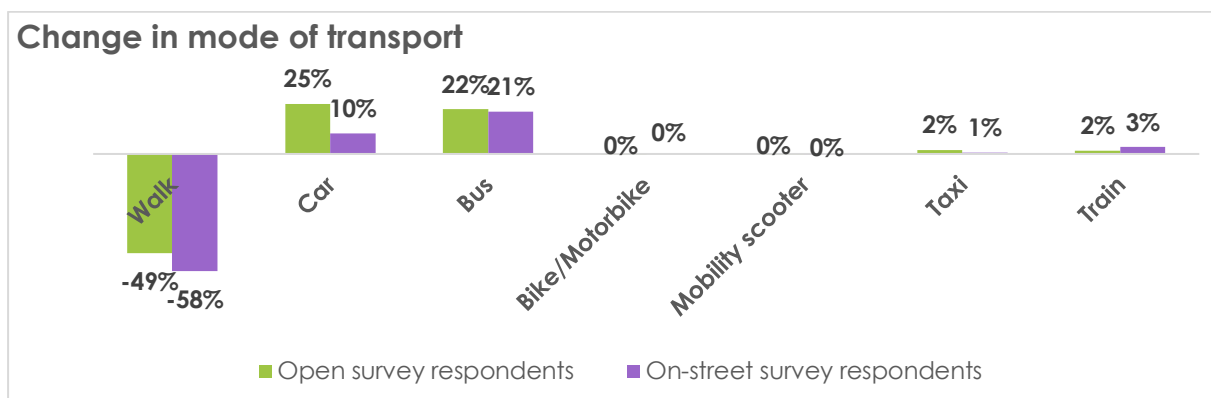
Preferred alternative library	Active visitors whose nearest library is closing							On street survey
	Billinge	Garswood Library	Parr Library	Peter Street Library	Rainford Library	Rainhill Library	Total	
Don't know/none	40%	69%	36%	20%	70%	77%	64%	23%
St Helens Library at the Word of Glass	21%	13%	41%	40%	11%	5%	14%	27%
Eccleston	5%	0%	1%	34%	17%	2%	10%	10%
Thatto Heath	0%	0%	1%	2%	0%	13%	4%	17%
Moss Bank	28%	2%	2%	1%	2%	0%	3%	4%
Haydock	4%	14%	11%	1%	0%	0%	2%	7%
Chester Lane	2%	0%	6%	1%	0%	3%	2%	3%
Newton-le-Willows	0%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%

...about changes in their mode of travel

Visitors who indicated that they would visit an alternative library following the closure of their current library were asked what mode of transport they would use. Their responses have been compared with the mode they currently use, and the differences illustrated below.

Amongst both sets of respondents, there is likely to be a significant reduction in the proportion walking to their library, countered by significant increases in the proportions using a car or public bus. Slightly more will use trains and taxis, but use of a bike/motorbike and mobility scooter will remain the same.

Notably, 1 in 4 respondents to the on-street survey who indicated they did not know, highlighting an information need that might be fulfilled prior to the closures.

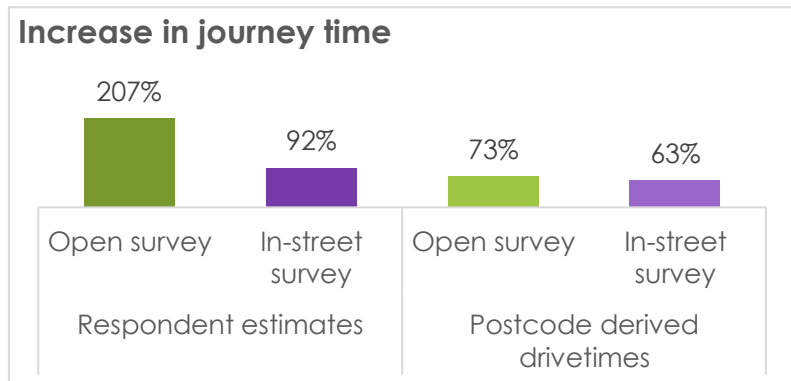


...about the extra time it would take

The increased use of public transport to travel to the library is evident in respondents estimates of the time it will take them to access an alternative library. Amongst the open survey respondents this is more than triple their current journey time and amongst the on street survey respondents, almost double.

The change in postcode derived drivetimes of those whose local library is closing to the nearest alternative paints a slightly better picture, albeit that journey times (based on milage) are still much greater, increasing by 73% amongst open survey respondents and 63% for those who responded on street.

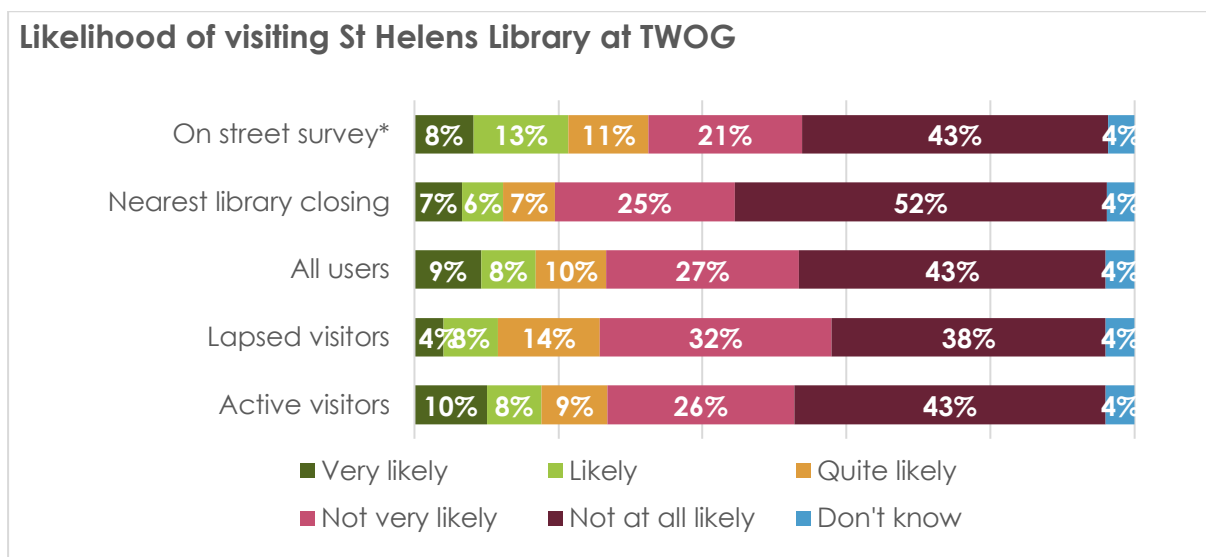
The results suggest that there may well be an additional environmental impact associated with the closures (specifically in the carbon emissions of those who use a car to travel) that may need costing into the proposals.



...about their likelihood of visiting St Helens Library

Asked about their likelihood of visiting St Helens Library at the World of Glass (TWOG), the majority of respondents (at least 64%) indicated it to be unlikely. Although lapsed users were less definite about whether they would visit, the proportion indicating it unlikely was similar to that for active users.

Amongst those respondents whose local/current library as closing there is a clear difference between the surveys, with the open survey respondents least likely to visit St Helens Library and on street respondents more likely. Again, this may be influenced by the proposals being better explained in person.



*users whose library is proposed to close & non users

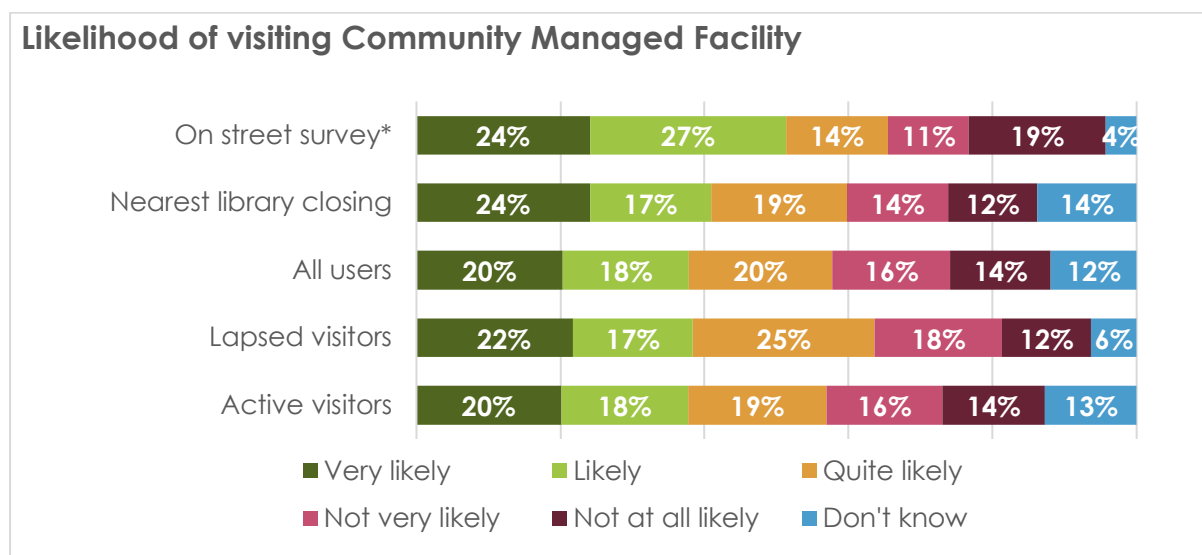
Having the library in the World of Glass is out of the way for many, hence why I have never used it since it went there.

Now I have to get on a bus to the bus station, then walk for twenty minutes to the World of Glass.

...about the likelihood of visiting a community library

Asked about their likelihood of visiting a community run facility, the responses were a lot more positive with 3 in 5 open survey respondents indicating it, at least, quite likely. Amongst those whose local/current library were proposed to close, the results of similarly positive, particularly the on-street respondents, 2 in 3 indicating it at least quite likely and 1 in 4, very likely.

Notably, 2 in 3 lapsed visitors responding to the open survey also indicated it, at least, quite likely that they would visit a community run library, which is also positive.



*users whose library is proposed to close & non users

30% of all visitors indicated it unlikely they would visit a community library: their reasons including it being less reliable than a council run service, that volunteers would not be able to do the job of a professional librarian and that there was less volunteer capacity in certain areas. Amongst those that did support the model, many referred to provisos, including the availability of training, systems and ongoing support.

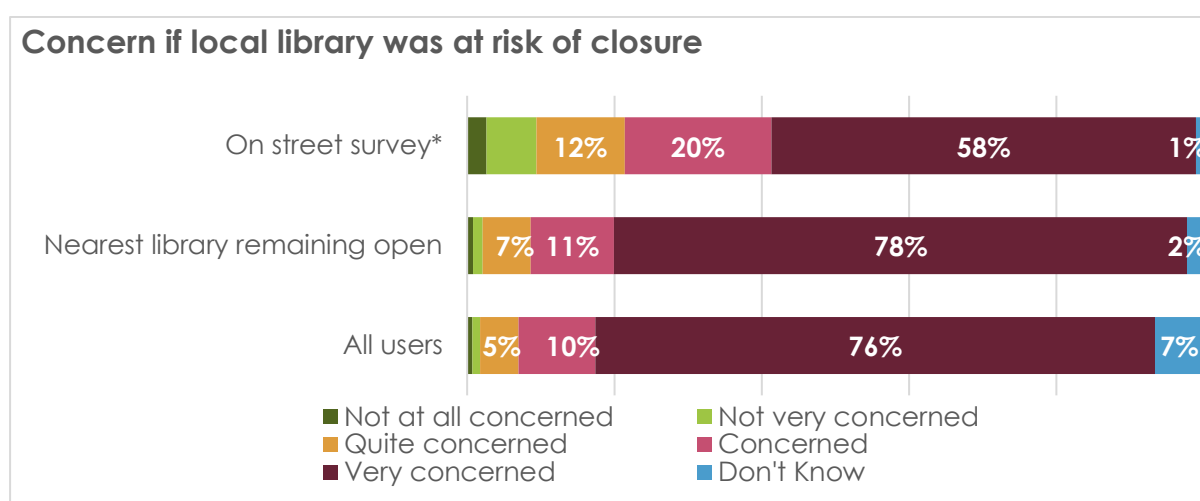
A community led service is not a sustainable option for most places, where volunteers are thin on ground and already undertaking roles like keeping planters in bloom, village tidy, clearing churchyard, running local clubs...

I do think having volunteers run resources is a good idea in those communities where the local libraries are set to close, however, as usual, it feels that volunteers are having to prop up areas where the government should be protecting.

I think any community or volunteer-based library needs to be aware of issues about data protection, safeguarding, the reliance of the local communities on libraries as the "face" of the council, anti-social behaviour, helping vulnerable people and be appropriately prepared for this.

...about concerns of future closures

The extent to which respondents were concerned about future library closures is evident from both surveys. 9 in 10 of those respondents to the open survey whose local library were not proposed to close at this point indicated that they were concerned, with the significant majority of these being very concerned. And, whilst proportionately less on street survey respondents whose libraries were remaining open were concerned, well over half (58%) indicated that they were very concerned.



*Active visitors whose library isn't proposed to close

The differences between those responding to the open and on-street surveys are notable and suggest that whilst both groups show a great deal of concern, those who had in person contact seemed slightly less so.

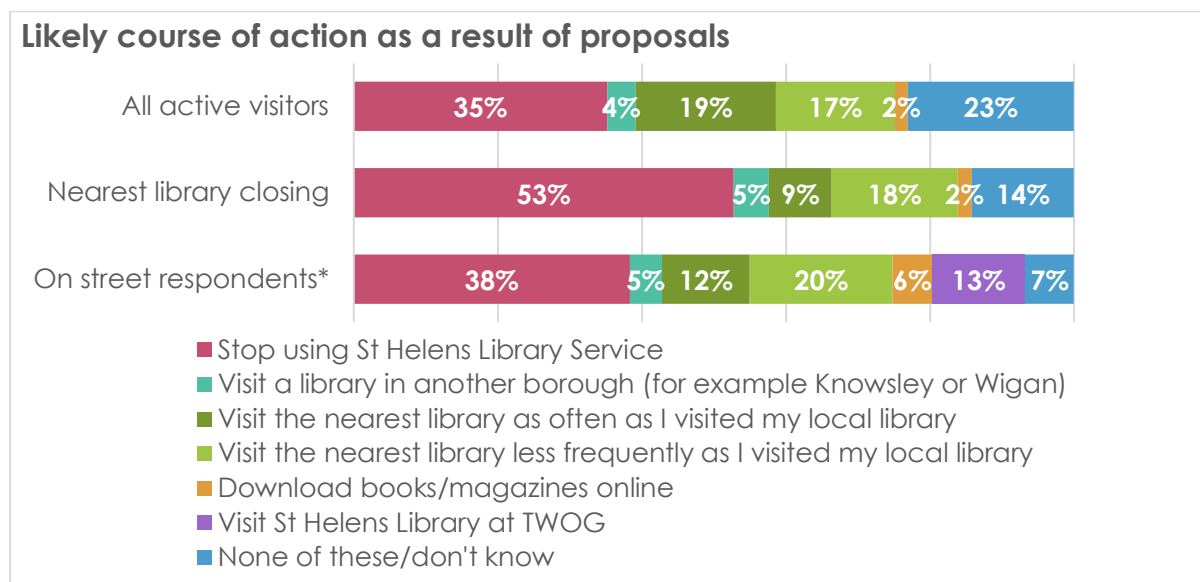
Closing libraries is not good. I personally have found my library (Eccleston) a life line. It has helped me fight mental illness and avoid isolation when on maternity leave and during COVID restrictions.

...about the impact of the closures on them personally

Respondents were asked two questions to help inform an equality impact assessment, the results of which are summarised in the next section. They focussed on the likely course of action they would take as a result of the proposals and the extent to which the proposals would impact on them personally. All active visitors responding to the open survey were asked these questions. However, those active and lapsed visitors whose libraries were closing were asked them in the on-street survey. To draw comparisons, the responses from those active visitors responding to the open survey and whose closest library is closing (including Billinge Library) have also been extracted (referred to as 'nearest library closing').

Likely course of action

As the chart below illustrates, the most popular course of action likely to be taken by the different respondent groups is to stop using the Library Service. Amongst those on street respondents whose current library is proposed to close, at least 38% indicated that this is what they would do, whereas 53% of those responding to the open survey whose local library is set to close indicated that this would be the case.



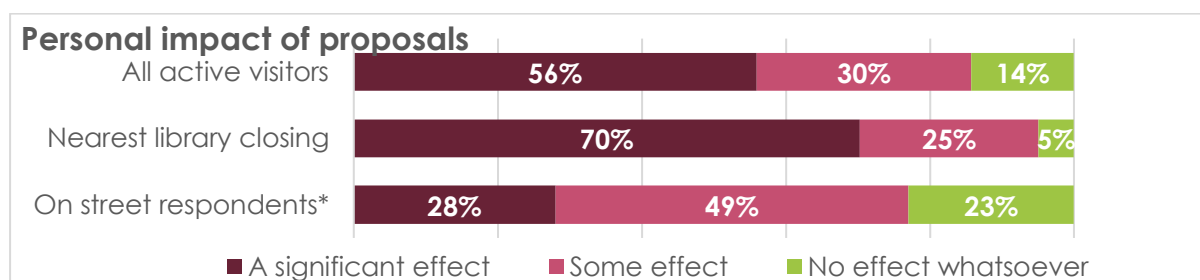
*Active & lapsed visitors whose library is proposed to close

The on-street survey analysis indicates that 65+ year olds and residents of Billinge Garswood, Rainhill and Rainford are most likely to stop using the service. The open survey results correspond with the latter but suggest that working age adults (aged 25-44) are also amongst those most likely to stop using the service.

Both surveys indicate that significantly more visitors would visit less frequently than currently than would visit as often as they do currently, with registered disabled people particularly likely to do so. And, respondents to the on-street survey were also asked if they would visit St Helens Library in the World-of-Glass, to which 1 in 8 indicated they would.

Overall impact

Amongst the on-street survey respondents whose library is proposed to close, 3 in 4 indicated that visiting another facility would have an impact on them. The proportion is considerably greater amongst those responding to the open survey whose local library is proposed to close with 7 in 10 indicating it would have a significant impact.



*Active & lapsed visitors whose library is proposed to close

Amongst those responding to both the in street and open surveys, disabled people and residents of Garswood, Rainford and Rainhill were most likely to indicate that they would be impacted. Respondents aged 45+ to the on street survey and respondents aged 65+ to the open survey were also amongst those most likely to be impacted.

As a disabled pensioner my library is vital to keep in touch with my local community.

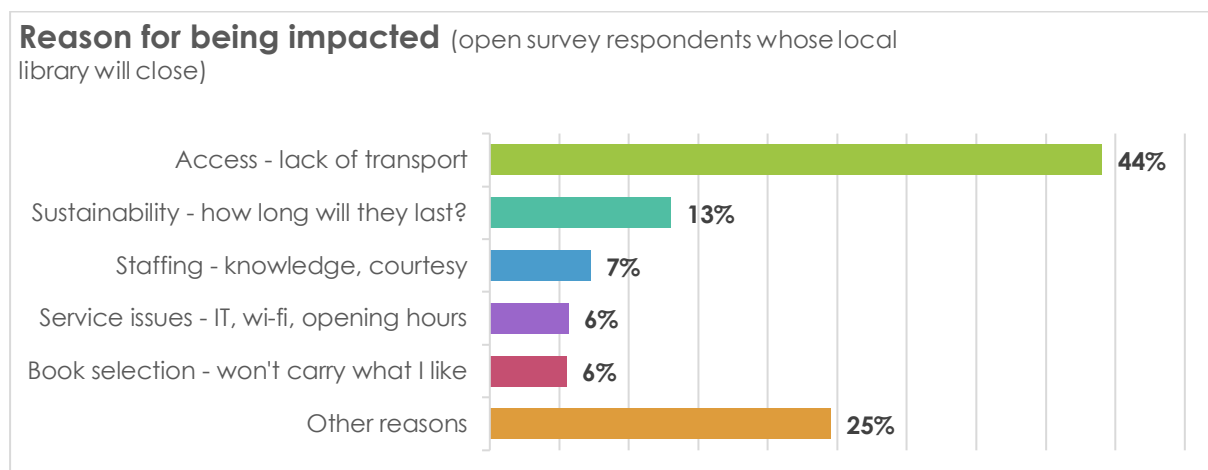
The libraries you propose closing affect elderly and disabled people the most. Leading to isolation of these groups who rely on the services given for an opportunity to socialise and interact.

Respondents gave a number of reasons as to why they would be impacted, most notably access and/or lack of transport, referred to specifically by over 40% of those responding to the open survey and almost 70% of those responding to the on-street survey. In many comments, respondents referred to the lack of or limited bus service, not being able to use public transport or drive a car, the extra distance they would need to travel, the costs that this might involve and the time this would take.

I do not have a car to get to other libraries, cannot travel by public transport and cannot afford taxis.

I don't have time to travel to a different library.

I am over 60 female and disabled. We have 1 bus an hour and I cannot use Garswood Station as it does not have step free access.



Amongst those respondents to the open survey, those most likely to cite access transport included older people aged 55+, disabled people and those whose local library is Garswood, Rainhill or Rainford.

Beyond access/ transport, the main other reasons for being impacted were sustainability (particularly amongst Peter Street visitors and younger age groups) and staffing (particularly amongst Rainhill visitors and older age groups). Many of the other reasons cited involved a combination of the above.

Equality Impact Assessment

The on-street research undertaken by the Murray Consultancy identified a number of geo-demographic groups most impacted by the library closures as follows.

- Residents of Billinge, Garswood, Rainhill and Rainford
- 65+ year olds and to an extent, 55 – 64 year olds
- Those with a long-standing illness or health condition
- Those suffering with mental health conditions

The responses to the open survey can be used to identify whether these same groups and/or those with other protected characteristics are likely to be most impacted, based on the feedback from this self-selected sample.

Likely course of action by different respondent groups

The tables and charts that follow draw on the open survey responses of all active visitors. The tables on pages 23 to 24 use an index to show how different groups of visitors compare with the average for all active visitors. Any number above 100 (shown in increasingly deep shades of green) indicates that that group is more likely to take that course of action and any number below 100 (shown in increasingly deep shades of blue) indicates that that group is less likely to take that course of action.

Although they have been included in the tables and charts that follow, there are a few groups for which the samples are too small to draw conclusions from the results: the under 18 and 18 to 24 age groups, groups with specific disabilities/ impairments and those respondents whose closest library is St Helens Library (marked *).

Respondents by proximity, age & gender

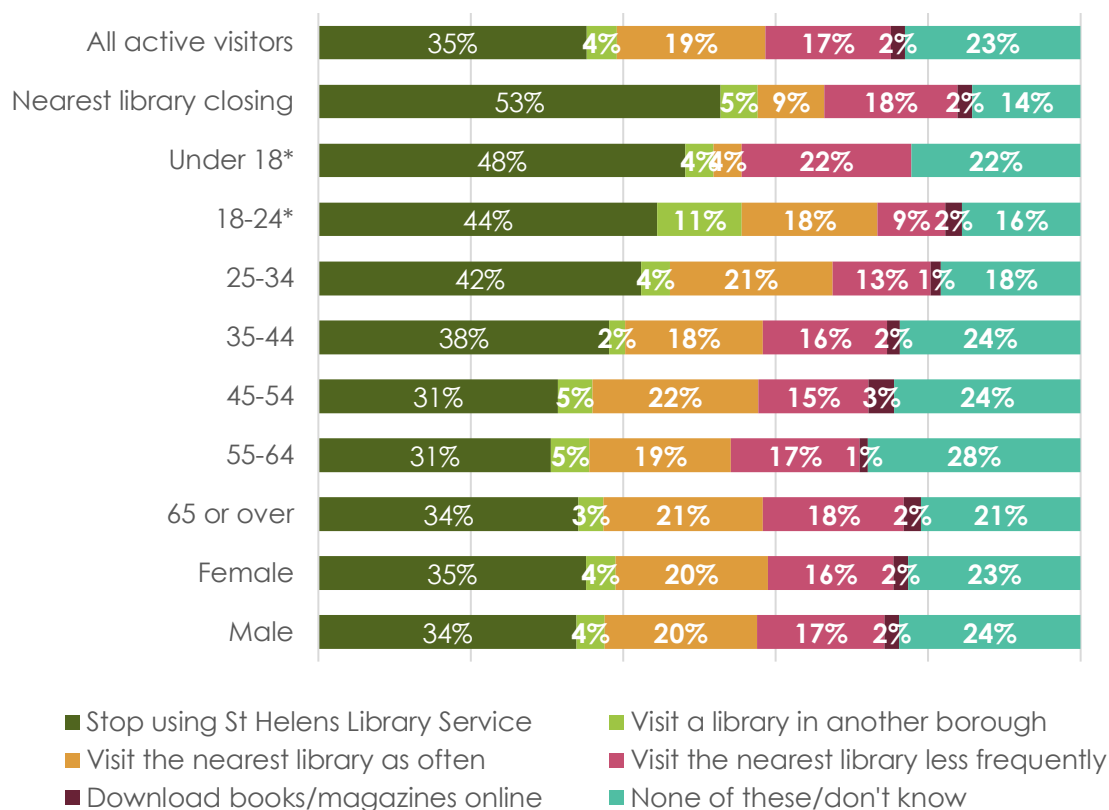
As the chart overleaf and tables on page 23 and 24 show those most likely to stop using the St Helens Library Service are those whose nearest library is closing (over half indicated that this would be the case).

There is no significant difference between the course of action likely to be taken by female and male respondents with just over a third of each indicating they would stop using the service and just under a quarter indicating that they wouldn't follow any of the options or that they did not know. 1 in 5 indicated that they would visit the nearest library as often, and 1 in 6 indicated they would use the nearest library less frequently.

Across the age groups (please note small samples *) younger age groups tend to be more likely to stop using the service and older age groups tend to be less likely to do any of the options offered or didn't know. There are slight differences in the proportions that would visit the nearest library as or less frequently or download materials, but there are no obvious trends relating to age.

This library is the only library that I have ever been to. The staff are lovely and helpful. There is a great range of books also. If you did shut it down I would probably go to Knowsley library service instead of St Helens library services.

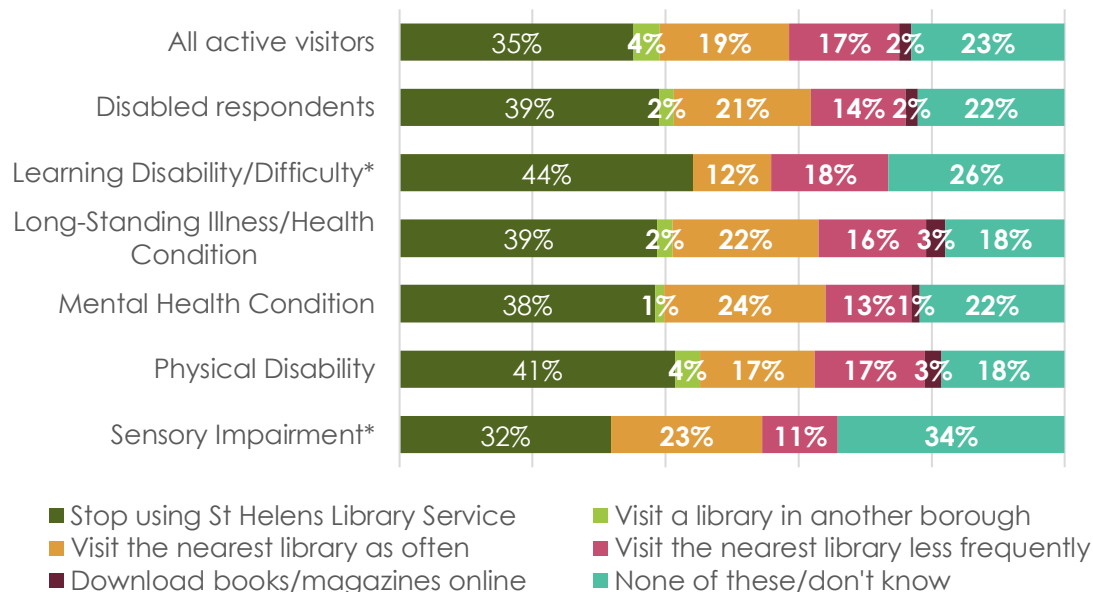
Likely course of action: proximity, age & gender



Disabled respondents

As the table on page 23 and chart below shows, disabled people are slightly more likely to stop using the service. Although some samples (marked *) are small, there are some differences between respondents with different types of disability/impairment. Respondents with learning disabilities/difficulties and/or a physical disability were most likely to stop using the service and respondents with a sensory impairment were more unlikely to take any courses of action mentioned or not know what they would do.

Likely course of action: disabled respondents

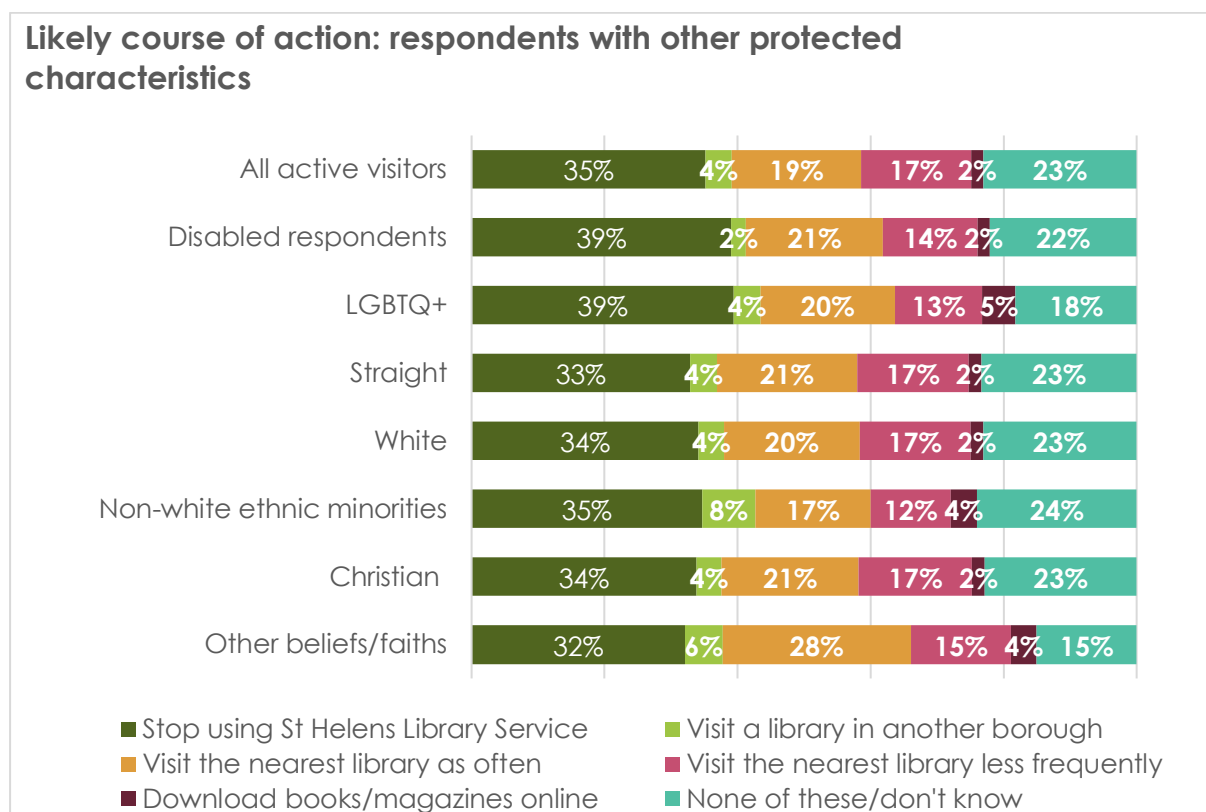


The previous chart also indicates that those with long standing illnesses or health conditions are most likely to download books and magazines and those with mental health conditions more likely to frequent their nearest library as often as they do currently.

Respondents with other protected characteristics

The table on page 23 and chart below compare the courses of action likely to be taken by other groups of respondents. It should be noted that although these have been grouped to avoid drawing conclusions from small samples, doing so limits our ability to explore differences within the groups. Notwithstanding this, the results indicate that whilst respondents from LGBTQ+ communities overall have a greater propensity to stop using the service, they are the group most likely to use other means to access books and magazines.

The main differences between white and white minority groups and those from other ethnic minorities is the greater proportion of the latter that are likely to visit a library outside the borough and download books and magazines. Similarly, respondents with other beliefs/faiths to Christian were most likely to visit their nearest library as often as they do currently, to visit libraries elsewhere or download books or magazines online.



Index of likely course of action: demographic & other groups		Stop using St Helens Library Service	Visit a library in another borough	Visit the nearest library as often as I visited my local library	Visit the nearest library less frequently than currently	Download books/magazines online	None of these/don't know
All active users		100	100	100	100	100	100
Nearest library closing		150	124	45	106	105	62
Age	Under 18*	137	95	19	135	0	96
	18-24*	126	284	91	54	120	68
	25-34	120	95	110	78	73	79
	35-44	108	53	93	99	92	103
	45-54	89	116	112	88	180	106
	55-64	87	129	95	102	61	121
	65 or over	97	83	107	112	121	91
Gender	Female	100	99	102	100	106	98
	Male	96	94	103	101	103	103
Disability	All disabled respondents	111	56	106	86	100	96
	Learning Disability/Difficulty*	125	0	60	107	0	115
	Long-Standing Illness or Health Condition	110	59	113	98	156	78
	Mental Health Condition	109	33	125	78	69	95
	Physical Disability	118	98	88	100	138	80
	Sensory Impairment (Hearing or Sight)*	90	0	117	69	0	148
Sexual orientation	LGBTQ+	112	103	104	80	273	79
	Straight	93	104	108	102	105	101
Ethnic group	White	97	98	105	101	105	100
	Ethnic minorities	98	205	89	73	217	104
Faith/religion	Christian (inc RC)	96	98	106	103	103	99
	Other faiths/beliefs	91	145	145	91	204	66

* Unreliable small samples

Key: Most unlikely Average Most likely

Index of likely course of action: current local library		Stop using St Helens Library Service	Visit a library in another borough	Visit the nearest library as often as I visited my local library	Visit the nearest library less frequently than currently	Download books/magazines online	None of these/don't know
All active visitors		100	100	100	100	100	100
Active visitors whose local library is...	Billinge	100	215	65	168	136	58
	Chester Lane Library	42	63	148	80	134	165
	Eccleston Library	29	22	193	91	23	156
	Garswood Library	164	125	38	79	88	67
	Haydock Library	33	90	195	118	48	115
	Moss Bank Library	21	0	186	135	173	134
	Newton Library	8	28	172	58	120	219
	Parr Library	83	77	104	182	244	55
	Peter Street Library	24	59	196	153	207	96
	Rainford Library	172	85	25	88	95	65
	Rainhill Library	186	178	7	84	46	50
	St Helens Library*	0	0	299	101	0	109
Thatto Heath Library	55	124	140	115	184	114	

*Unreliable small samples

Key: Most unlikely Average Most likely

Relative impact on different respondent groups

The tables on page 26 and 27 draw on open survey respondents answers to the question about the extent to which they will be impacted by the proposals, similarly using an index to illustrate how different groups of respondents compare against the overall average.

As previously, the results need to be considered in the context that the majority of all respondents indicated that they would be impacted by the proposals, so anything indexing 100 or above would indicate a high level of impact.

Again, it should be noted that strong conclusions cannot be drawn for certain groups for which the sample sizes are too small for us to have any confidence in the results.

The results confirm the findings from the on-street research undertaken by the Murray Consultancy. Specifically:

- residents whose local libraries include Rainhill, Rainsford, Garswood and Billinge⁴ are most likely to be significantly impacted by the proposals;
- the age group most significantly impacted is that of those aged 65+; and,
- disabled people are more likely to be significantly impacted, including those with long standing illness/health condition, mental health conditions and physical disabilities.

Although the samples are too small to draw strong conclusions (based on the responses of 89 and 64 people respectively), the findings also suggest that other groups that may be adversely impacted are ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities) and minority faiths/beliefs. As these groups have a greater propensity to download books/magazines online, developments in digital services may help to mitigate against these.

The online BorrowBox service is outstanding. Much more needs to be done to highlight this as lots of people have access to the internet. I use this service every single day and it's worrying that this survey doesn't even mention it.

⁴ It should be noted that as Billinge Library has been closed for over 12 months, the results are likely to underestimate the overall levels of impact that these library users will experience and which we might expect to be closer to those of Rainford and Rainhill.

Index of personal impact: demographic & other groups		A significant effect	Some effect	No effect whatsoever
All active users		100	100	100
Nearest library closing		126	83	34
Age	Under 18*	93	100	130
	18-24*	107	82	109
	25-34	104	90	107
	35-44	94	108	108
	45-54	96	110	95
	55-64	92	107	118
	65 or over	107	93	86
Gender	Female	100	99	101
	Male	96	106	104
Disability	Disabled/impairment	114	76	93
	Learning Disability/Difficulty*	116	79	82
	Long-Standing Illness or Health Condition	106	89	101
	Mental Health Condition	105	86	108
	Physical Disability	133	58	60
	Sensory Impairment (Hearing, Sight or Both)*	91	82	171
Sexual orientation	LGBTQ+	98	87	133
	Straight	95	106	106
Ethnic group	White	96	103	107
	Ethnic minorities	116	79	82
Faith/religion	Christian (inc RC)	98	104	100
	Other faiths/beliefs	111	77	103

*Unreliable small samples

Key: **Most unlikely**  **Average**  **Most likely**

Index of personal impact: current local library		A significant effect	Some effect	No effect whatsoever
All active visitors		100	100	100
Active visitors whose local library is...	Billinge	116	99	40
	Chester Lane Library	70	127	161
	Eccleston Library	58	126	213
	Garswood Library	132	82	11
	Haydock Library	77	133	123
	Moss Bank Library	43	140	241
	Newton Library	59	94	273
	Parr Library	87	130	89
	Peter Street Library	51	147	195
	Rainford Library	133	80	11
	Rainhill Library	149	53	7
	St Helens Library*	15	112	408
	Thatto Heath Library	73	146	112

*Unreliable small samples

Key: Most unlikely Average Most likely

Feedback from drop-in consultation sessions

The feedback from the drop-in sessions supports many of the results from the on street and open surveys. This is summarised on page 30 and included feedback about the proposals for specific libraries, the overall strategy, potential future developments/needs and from individuals and third parties interested in having a future role (whether as volunteers/and or otherwise).

...about consultees' own libraries

A number of common themes run through the feedback associated with specific library proposals: relief where they were planned to stay open and objection/disappointment where they were planned to close, in many cases the libraries were considered to be at the heart of their communities and the library staff are clearly valued.

The staff at all the libraries I have gone to are knowledgeable, friendly and supportive and helped me to make the most of each visit.

As with the survey respondents, the issue of access was a common concern, including availability of free parking, and questions were raised about what would happen to the facilities, building and stock when libraries were closed.

...about the overall strategy

Amongst the concerns and issues raised about the strategy overall, include whether the proximity of other council facilities had been considered; the impacts on vulnerable groups and of losing safe, warm, social spaces; and the need for evening and weekend opening. Questions were also asked about whether proceeds from any closures would be invested locally.

Eccleston does not have too much in terms of communities (council led) as they are all moved to other areas which mean we have to travel outside our local area.

Echoing many of the comments from open survey there is mixed opinion about the St Helens Library at World of Glass, considered limited and/or inaccessible (including lack of free parking) by some, yet accessible and a necessity to others. Similarly, there was mixed opinion about the proposals to re-open Central Library at the Gamble, some questioning the cost to benefit whilst others valuing the familiarity and better access.

The main Library in St Helens at the World of Glass is pretty barebones and tiny and has opening hours similar to a village's library

If World of glass stays open at least that is accessible by train from Garswood.

The main library needs to go back into the Gamble Institute so that's it's easy access from the bus station like it used to be.

The reopening of Central library is key to answers I have provided. If this was to be further delayed or mothballed, then my answers would be to disagree with the plans

Of further note from the drop in sessions is that having had it explained to them in person at the time, a few individuals understood the rationale behind the proposals.

...about the future

It is clear from the feedback from the sessions and many survey respondents' comments that there are many questions about how the CML might work and what support would be made available. Respondents and consultees also referred to a need for better quality buildings; improved and additional capacity in the home delivery service; opportunities for the buildings to be used for other community purposes; and, a need to increase awareness of existing services such as Borrowbox, which is clearly valued by those who use it.

My own personal preference currently is to use the Borrowbox facility, which allows me to download books and I think this could be a great asset for older, less mobile people providing they have the facility to download and can master the technology to do this.

Drop-in sessions summary

My library

- It will be difficult to get to an alternative (access, cost, time)
- I'm relieved my library isn't closing
- What will happen to the building, stock, heritage and other assets?
- There is strong objection and a lot of disappointment
- It is the heart of our community/ village life
- There are parking issues with alternatives (space/ cost)

Overall strategy

- There aren't any/many other Council facilities nearby
- Will the proceeds be re-invested locally?
- The service is great and staff are really helpful
- There is a lot of concern for older people, disabled people & young families
- We are losing safe, warm, social spaces
- What about extra costs of transport, buying books etc with the cost of living crisis
- You need to promote the service more
- We need evening & weekend opening
- There is mixed opinion about Word of Glass and the Gamble

About the future

- We expect/want any capital receipts to be re-invested locally/ in local library provision
- We need better quality buildings
- We need better home delivery services and more capacity
- Will there be training, support, IT and other systems for CMLs?
- What about hosting community groups that will pay to use spaces?
- There are potential spaces for CML (e.g. Rainhill Station/Village Hall)
- We need more information on CML option (costs, support & systems available)
- We need more information & publicity for existing services (e.g. Borrowbox)

Interested parties

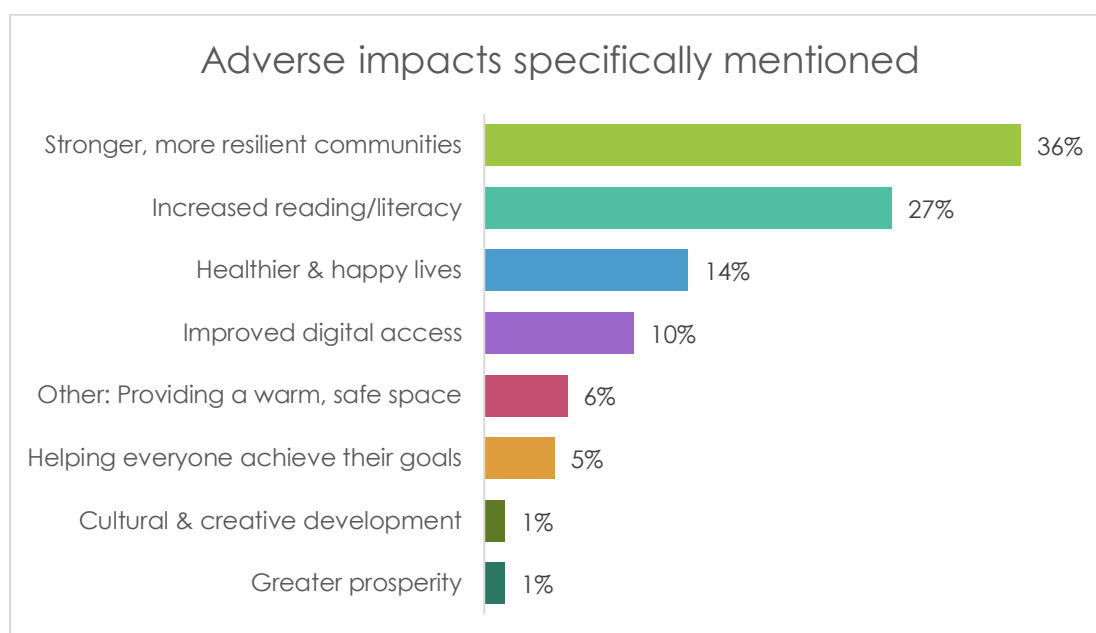
- Book-recycle
- Some interest in volunteering
- Rainford Heritage Society
- Rainhill Civic Society (Railway book collection)
- Rainhill Railway & Heritage Society

Longer term impacts

The Murray Consultancy report identified a number of longer-term sociological impacts resulting from the on-street survey as follows

- The education of their children
- The impact on local communities
- IT and book access among households who cannot afford them
- Socialisation needs among certain demographics
- The alienation of out-of-town communities regarding the perception of the Council's ability to provide

These are reflected in the open survey results and in the majority of the 1,997 additional comments made by respondents, from which it is very clear they feel very passionately about the Library Service and its future. These have been categorised according to the seven outcomes for libraries as set out below.



...on communities

Over a third of those respondents whose comments were coded referred to the impact the proposal would have on local communities. They refer to them being an 'essential community hub for all ages', a 'lifeline for communities with very little else' and that by 'closing libraries you are not just limiting people's access to knowledge, but you are closing a community hub'.

Library is a key part of our local community, providing vital services to all in our community, but especially our most vulnerable.

A public library is a living symbol of what people believe is important in their community.

Linked to this outcome area, is the role that many considered that the libraries play in providing a warm, social and safe place for the most vulnerable of society.

Many elderly people use Rainford library as a community space. They meet people there and, in the winter, it was a designated warm space.

Libraries are safe spaces, warm spaces and meeting spaces for those who are vulnerable,

...on increased reading/literacy

A clear theme running through the responses to the consultation and of concern to almost a third of those providing comment is the reduced access that many believe they will have to books, reading materials and knowledgeable staff. Many also refer to how losing access to Read & Rhyme sessions, school activities and after school and weekend opening times will be detrimental to their children's development.

Children do not read using computer, tablet, e-book. They love to replicate what they have at home and school. A printed book that they can handle and look through over and over again.

Standards of literacy will fall further if children do not have access to their local library from an early age. Fiction should feed their imagination and non-fiction should stimulate their minds.

The dedicated staff at Rainford Library provide crucial reading and literacy teaching to young children which cannot be overstated in its importance.

...on healthier and happier lives

It is clear from the feedback that many also fear the increased social isolation they or members of their communities will face as a result of the proposals. This is the subject of 1 in 7 of the additional comments that have been categorised that refer to how 'libraries promote social mobility and wellbeing', how they have 'a positive impact on well-being and mental health', and how they are 'a lifeline' to many who live alone and/or have limited social contact otherwise.

Perinatal illness is a big issue so for mums and babies to have rhyme time in local libraries is a good idea.

The library was used as a meeting place for older people which helped with mental health and loneliness.

Visiting the libraries has made a significant positive impact on me and my daughter's life, it has helped me attend groups, read more, improve my own mental health and help my young child to socialise

Surely in this age of increased mental illness, isolation and loneliness more libraries should be being opened not closed.

...on increased digital access and literacy

1 in 10 of those respondents whose comments were categorised referred to the potential impact of the proposals on digital access and literacy. They refer to 'not everyone having a computer' and/or not being able to afford to have internet-access; the increasing need for people to have access to the internet and know-how to be able to access many public services; and the valuable role that having a trained librarian to hand has in building IT confidence or being able to access content.

When I was unemployed, I found the library internet and computer services invaluable as I could not afford internet at home. Although I no longer need those services, it concerns me that other people in a similar situation will lose them.

There are also a growing number of asylum seekers living in Rainhill who rely on the library to use internet and do homework etc.

Many people are still unable to afford internet access which is needed due to Gov.uk services primarily online.

I live alone, if my computer breaks down, I can go to the library and use one.

...on helping everyone achieve their goals

1 in 20 respondents whose comments were categorised raised concerns about the proposals impacting on people's life chances, career prospects or informed decision making. They refer to the role libraries play in combatting low levels of literacy, how the opportunity to access information has helped them secure employment or further their education, and how having a quiet, warm space to study has been invaluable.

The library has been invaluable to us - it's helped me study to gain a qualification which has led to me secure a much better job.

The literacy skills of many in this town is poor, keep our libraries open and run courses for unemployed people to improve their skills. Things like this would help keep the libraries in use and help our townspeople.

...on culture & creative development and greater prosperity

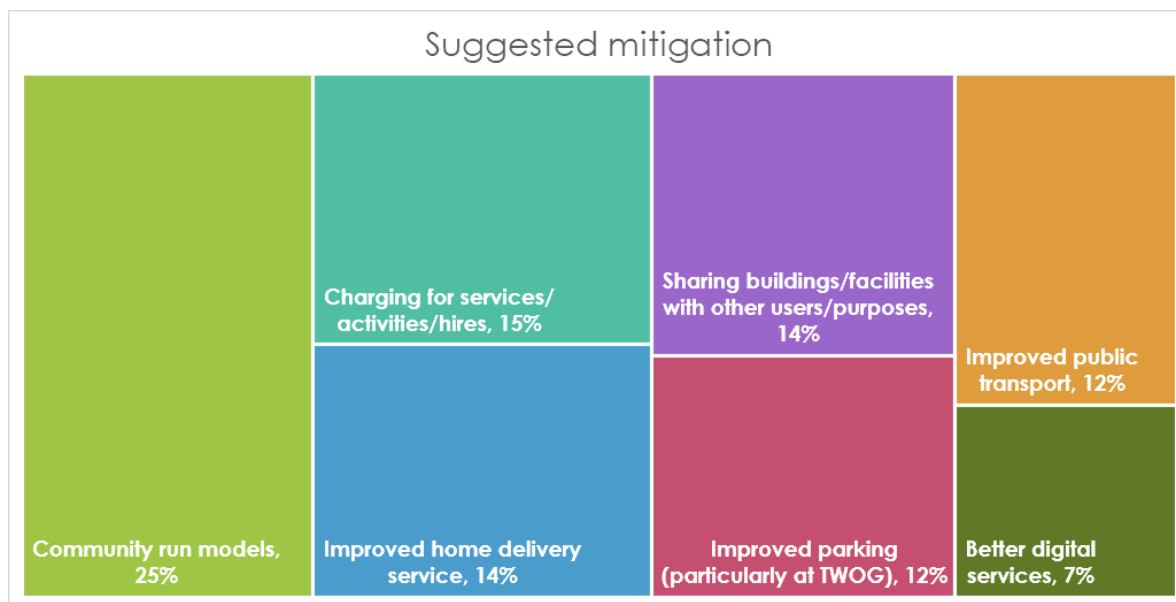
Although fewer in number, concerns were also raised about the impact on outcomes associated with culture and creative development as well as the prosperity of the areas where libraries were proposed to close.

From the multitude of pre-school sessions, cinema shows, craft sessions through to the summer reading challenges we've participated in, the library has been a safe and welcoming place.

closing local libraries would lead to the loss of jobs and negatively impact the local economy.

Suggested mitigations

Finally, and although not specifically asked, some respondents provided suggestions to help mitigate concerns. They tended to fall into one or more of seven categories as set out below. The most popular of these (albeit amongst a small number of respondents) was to consider and/or introduce CML in those areas where libraries are proposed to close, the proviso being to ensure they are fully supported and resourced.



Everything should be done to keep these libraries open which serve a purpose way beyond lending books, if needed, volunteers should be used.

maybe a community led library staffed by volunteers would work. As a local Rainford volunteer, I would be interested to help.

I was treasurer for a community run library. It was only possible because another charity shared the building and took on responsibility for building costs and relied heavily on goodwill from local volunteers.

I don't see a problem with using volunteers to run libraries, why not?

I would contribute books and volunteer time if the community was allowed to run Rainhill library.

Visited Isle of Wight last year where village libraries were run very successfully by volunteers. A librarian trained volunteers up. Better than closing a library

The suggested model of volunteers running the libraries sounds great in theory but how would that work in practice? For example, how great would their knowledge of books be? Also, whilst I'm sure that the majority of volunteers would be reliable, what would happen if they did not turn up at the library sessions or if there were a shortage of volunteers?