

KCC response to key themes and alternative proposal and idea consideration

The below table provides a summary of the key themes from the Lake Market Research Consultation Report (Appendix B) and KCC's response to these themes.

KCC's response to feedback from the consultation on the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been detailed separately as part of Appendix D.

Consultation response theme	KCC response
<p>This is more than about saving money / KCC should look at bigger picture</p>	<p>KCC recognises the depth of feeling towards both the Grace Hill building and Library service in Folkestone and that there are different views on the way forward as demonstrated through the response to the public consultation. However, the reality is that KCC cannot ignore the financial challenges it is facing and is having to make very difficult decisions and cutting services and making savings across all of its service delivery. This is the context the council faces. It is therefore essential to find a long-term and crucially financially sustainable solution for the Grace Hill building which is in the best location for the Folkestone library and registration town centre service.</p> <p>KCC remain open to exploring viable and deliverable options for the Grace Hill building and are committed to finding a town centre location for the library and registration service.</p>
<p>Grace Hill should be repaired / restored / renovated and remain a library</p>	<p>Given KCC's challenging financial situation and the number of buildings it has across the county it cannot justify funding the £2.9m currently estimated to repair the building. It is also about more than just repairing</p>

	<p>the building it is also about maintaining it so that services could be reliably delivered from it and being able to use the space as effectively and efficiently as possible</p> <p>Given the maintenance backlog that exists for KCC across all its buildings and the potential future needs of the building, even if repaired we might still find ourselves in the same situation. Unfortunately, this is the reality. . The Grace Hill building is a listed building of great character that means a lot to many in Folkestone but we have to be realistic about what can be done. This is why a key consideration has to be the ability to deliver a reliable and sustained service from whichever building the library and registration service is located in. KCC remains open to exploring viable and deliverable proposals for Grace Hill that could see it repaired and restored and the library service continue at this location.</p>
<p>Grace Hill is historic / part of heritage / iconic / landmark /beautiful / listed</p>	<p>KCC recognises this but cannot afford the repair or ongoing maintenance. KCC remains open to exploring viable and deliverable proposals for Grace Hill that could see it repaired and restored, and the library service continue at this location.</p>
<p>Grace Hill has been left to deteriorate by KCC / KCC has neglected Grace Hill</p>	<p>KCC has temporary closed Grace Hill as it is no longer safe to occupy. Maintenance works have been completed in the past and emergency maintenance have been recently carried out to stop ingress of rainwater, KCC has consulted with the Conversation Team at Folkestone and Hythe Council due to the listed building status of the building as works have been undertaken.</p>

Concerns about what happens to the Grace Hill building if the library moves location and how the building could still be repaired and used by the community	If it were decided that the library would permanently be relocated and the Grace Hill building was to be disposed of by KCC, there would still be an opportunity for the community and local groups to come forward and take it on. The building is listed as an Asset of Community Value which means if KCC wants to dispose (including a long lease) of the building this triggers a process that includes a period of up to six months to enable groups to develop proposals to take the building on. This could see a sustainable new community use emerge.
Library needs to be in a good / central / town centre location	KCC is committed to finding a town centre, viable, location for the library and registration services. A high street location located with or near other community or local services represents the best location for the service. Accepting that town centres are struggling we see the library wherever it is located as key anchor points for supporting high street recovery. KCC acknowledges there was mixed feedback from consultees about the location of the library, with some preferring the current location and others expressing support for a location on the high street.
Make better use of Grace Hill building with other community uses, café, venue hire	When the building was open the service looked to maximise its use. We previously looked into bringing other services in, the Skills Plus centre

	<p>and using the first floor space for community groups are examples of this. Wherever the library and registration service is located we would continue to look at this potential. Some consultees suggested that other uses could be made of the space at Grace Hill (e.g. venue hire and a café) as a way of raising revenue but given the estimated cost of repairs we do not consider that this would raise sufficient funds to enable us to restore and re-open the building.</p>
<p>Seek alternative funding for Grace Hill repair</p>	<p>KCC has looked at the external grant funding options available for repairing the building but has not found any that meet the building's needs. . There are funds like National Heritage Lottery funding that could have potential but money from these funds is not awarded for simply repairing the building, there needs to be a significant service development alongside. Additionally these are schemes that need years of development and there is no guarantee at the end that you will get the funding, you are competing with other worthwhile projects. As such KCC does not see this option as viable to guarantee repair of the building. It may be that other community or charity bodies would have better opportunity to lever in quicker more appropriate funding sources that are not available to KCC.</p>
<p>The Grace Hill building belongs to Folkestone community not KCC</p>	<p>While recognising this is a building of importance to the people of Folkestone, the building is owned by KCC.</p>
<p>Concern for the Grace Hill building being left vacant if no one comes forward to buy or lease it or what happens if someone does buy it as to what they do to the building</p>	<p>If there was no one else who wanted to lease or buy the building, KCC would manage the building as a vacant building. If the building is acquired by a third party, any changes where appropriate will require Planning Permission and or approval from Folkestone and Hythe Heritage Team given its Listed building status which will still apply if the</p>

	property is not in the ownership of KCC.
KCC should explore other town centre locations for the library and registration service. Suggested other locations; former Wilkinsons building, Bouverie House (SAGA), Bouverie House Business Centre (above Burger King), alternative KCC building, old job centre, former retail units in town centre, Queens House, Civic Centre	KCC have looked into all of these alternative town centre locations to see if any other town centre and high street options are viable. Some have been ruled out as they do not meet the requirements for the LRA service. Those with potential will be explored further as part of the future decision making
New location would attract more people / higher footfall / passing foot traffic / be more visible.	This is one of the reasons KCC has put forward the option of relocating to a High street location, potentially FOLCA or another High Street location as may do this.
Library needs to be a community hub	We agree and view all our libraries as key community hubs.
Not viable that the library could move to FOLCA as not agreed with Folkestone and Hythe District Council	Discussions with Folkestone and Hythe District Council officers on the potential for the library to move to the FOLCA have progressed positively and had taken place before the public consultation. It is correct to say there no agreement between both councils has yet been reached and nor would it be right to do so when KCC is consulting on potential options for the service and for 2 Grace Hill. Conversations had progressed to the point it was a viable option to put in the consultation document.
Creative Folkestone idea should be considered further	This idea has been considered and will be the subject of ongoing engagement with Creative Folkestone. KCC is mindful of allowing all potential proposals for the building to come forward, which could involve a local group buying or leasing the building. KCC is open to considering proposals from other individuals or groups, should any such proposals

	be made (including through the ACV process).
Need new library / modern / up to date facilities / spacious	Whatever location the library takes up permanently there is inevitably going to be a period where works are required before the library can move in and open. This will enable the service to look at the space, look at opportunities to modernise and design a library space that will meet local needs. If located with other services in a building we would also look to make use of shared spaces like meeting rooms for other activities and community use.
Concern about the loss of the Sassoon Gallery space	The Sassoon Gallery had a regular programme of displays that people could access for free as part for the Grace Hill building. When looking at future space requirement in any building the library and registration service occupies we have to make sure that we prioritise space for the statutory library and registration service. The Gallery is not a statutory function for the library service or KCC. While KCC recognises the support for a gallery, KCC has to balance that against cost of space as well. In that context we are not looking to re-provide the Sassoon Gallery space as a must-have space requirement. We will continue to explore the potential to work in partnership with others to see if there are other options to providing community gallery space in Folkestone. A gallery remaining at the Grace Hill building may come forward as part of the ACV process work with Creative Folkestone or any proposals made by other individuals or groups.
Lack of temporary children's library in the town centre	We do have the children's libraries and their activities in the other Folkestone and Hythe district libraries as our temporary provision. We

	<p>are mindful however that any longer term solution to providing the town centre library and registration service is realistically some years away so KCC is exploring options for further temporary library provision which could include a children's library to see us through this transition period.</p>
<p>Concerns about cost and time of converting FOLCA or another town centre site into a library and registration service</p>	<p>Folkestone and Hythe District Council is developing the proposals for the FOLCA project and there is government Levelling Up grant funding towards works needed to FOLCA. There will be time needed to complete all the works required for the building but this would be the case whatever building option we pick, if we repaired Grace Hill or moved to another town centre site for example. We do recognise the time needed which is why we will look to explore any other options available to strengthen our current temporary library and registration service offer to mitigate for this.</p>
<p>Concerns about the condition of FOLCA and the maintenance needed</p>	<p>Folkestone and Hythe District Council recognise that at present there are a number of condition issues that would need to be addressed with the FOLCA building. It is important to reflect that the former Debenhams is made up of two buildings and it is only one that is proposed for the scheme. As part of the potential project it is proposed that all the building issues would be addressed so that FOLCA is fit-for-purpose for services to move into. Folkestone and Hythe District Council own the building so this will form part of their considerations but we have already highlighted this feedback to them and agreed this response.</p>
<p>Concern that KCC would be renting a building / selling off a building</p>	<p>KCC use a mix of freehold and leasehold buildings across the county and will continue to operate the estate on that basis.</p>
<p>Library service and space would be reduced at FOLCA</p>	<p>KCC said at the time of the public consultation that whatever location we provide the library and registration service from, that the library and</p>

<p>or another town centre location</p>	<p>registration service would be the equivalent of what was at Grace Hill. That does not mean that we would have the same amount of space as the whole of the Grace Hill building. We are not looking for example to re-provide the gallery, and we would look to reduce back-office and storage areas. The public spaces that people use for the library or to attend a birth and death registration appointment would be equivalent to the Grace Hill building.</p> <p>The same range of public library services will all be provided wherever we are located and this will include books for all ages, children's library, events and activities, computers, study space, local studies, information and birth and death registration appointment rooms. We would look at opportunities to develop the service, for example we may look to increase the size of the children's library to best deliver the events and activities we put on.</p>
<p>Concern that Grace Hill was purpose built for a library and could be moving somewhere that was not</p>	<p>KCC accepts that Grace Hill was a building designed to hold a library and while this still can work as a library that does not mean that other buildings could not be designed to be a library either. The service has evolved and we have good experience in Kent of many projects designing spaces to be fit for purpose modern libraries. If the service was to move to the FOLCA or another town centre location there would be the opportunity to design the space so it worked.</p>
<p>Permanent library facilities required as soon as possible</p>	<p>KCC recognises that the town centre library has been closed since December 2022 and that we all want to find a way forward. Accepting that any permanent solution will still realistically take some time to be completed, we are proposing to progress next steps as per the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee paper for 22nd January.</p>

<p>Temporary library provision is not suitable for the long term / permanent library facilities required ASAP</p>	<p>KCC agrees that the current temporary library provision is not a long term solution which is why this option has been ruled out. We are proposing to progress the next steps as outlined In the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee paper for 22nd January to get a permanent library location for Folkestone town centre as soon as practical. KCC is also exploring further temporary library provision to mitigate further while this process progresses.</p>
<p>What will happen to the Chris Offili Screen if the building was to be sold</p>	<p>Options would be looked at for the screen and in the first instance we would engage with the artist on this.</p>

Suggested proposals and ideas considered

Alternative idea suggested	Results upon consideration
<p>The Creative Folkestone / Community / Folkestone and Hythe District Council options have not been represented in the consultation document should be further considered.</p>	<p>Options to be further explored.</p> <p>The Creative Folkestone idea is considered further in the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee paper for 22nd January. Some further conversations have taken place post the consultation and engagement is ongoing. KCC is open to considering proposals from other individuals or groups, should any such proposals be made (including through the ACV process).</p> <p>Discussions with Folkestone and Hythe District Council officers on the potential for the library to move to the FOLCA have progressed positively and had taken place before the public consultation. It is correct to say no agreement between both councils has yet been reached and nor would it be right to do so when KCC has been consulting on potential options for</p>

	<p>the service and for 2 Grace Hill. Conversations had progressed to the point it was a viable option to put in the consultation document.</p>
<p>Fundraising approach with local community to fund the repair of the building</p>	<p>Not progressed</p> <p>The amount that needs to be fundraised is significant at £2.9m which realistically could need a lot of time to achieve, it may also not be reached. We appreciate the local enthusiasm but we don't feel this is a viable option at this time.</p>
<p>Reach out to local community businesses to make the cost of repairing the building cheaper / volunteers to do the work</p>	<p>Not progressed</p> <p>This is a listed building and works need to be completed to a required specification and co-ordinated. This is best co-ordinated through a contractor completing the project and with full consideration to the health and safety of those completing the work</p>
<p>Make Folkestone Library a special case to KCC policy to enable it to be repaired or enable the Creative Folkestone option to progress</p>	<p>Not progressed</p> <p>KCC has a clear building disposal policy which it follows consistently across the county for all buildings. As such it cannot make an exception for any one building. KCC will work with partners to enable any proposals to fit within KCC's policies. We have addressed the Creative Folkestone option above, and explained why we cannot justify funding the £2.9m currently estimated to repair the building.</p>

<p>Lobby funding bodies for libraries that should consider a building repair funding pot</p>	<p>Kent County Council has raised this nationally on a number of occasions, ultimately it is not in our gift to achieve.</p>
<p>Develop a scheme to apply to the National Lottery Heritage Fund that would repair the building and transform the service</p>	<p>Not progressed</p> <p>This fund is not just awarded for repairing the building, there needs to be a significant service development alongside if the Lottery Fund is to agree a grant. Given that this is not a solution to repair of the building in the short term, KCC does not see this option as viable to guarantee repair of the building.</p>