

Statement in support of the petition to repair and reopen Grace Hill Library

1. **History/location** for community needs

Grace Hill has a significant place in the history of the Kent Library Service as one of the first purpose-built community libraries.

The location serves the areas of greatest deprivation in the Folkestone and Hythe. Users include families on low income and many vulnerable individuals, as evidenced in our own recent user survey. Reductions in other public services mean that the library is in a location and building of enormous character and great potential. The Grace Hill closure has impacted on some of the most vulnerable people who continue to suffer the consequences, as reported in our survey.

2. **Communication** KCC<> community

Local people reacted to the closure with considerable anger. Many have no access to the internet and would not have seen statements online but would have seen news reports last year that the library "was saved".

Members have promised to involve local Town and District Councillors and community groups going forward, to help avoid fostering a cynical view of politicians and their motivation. **Campaign focus** on seeking a solution

The Save Our Library campaign has commanded remarkable support, including this petition. The Grace Hill issue has touched a national nerve of widespread concern over the future of the Library Service. Grace Hill represents the opportunity to buck the trend of decline and despair with a good outcome and a positive future.

We have consistently called for three positive things to happen:

Repair, Retain and Reopen

The demands are not unrealistic, not impossible, not unaffordable. We have examined the facts in detail and with care: costings, architecture, surveys and strategic planning. The constructive meeting held between senior officers and a representative of the SOL campaign agreed that a way forward might well be found by working with local partners.

3. **Funding issues** recognised; funding opportunities

We understand the challenge of repairs as a significant element in the wider asset management portfolio, due to the constrained budget allocation and reflecting the KCC change of policy in 2011 from proactive maintenance to essential repairs only. As well as working to create opportunities for KCC officers and District Council officers to work together, potential funding solutions for a phased approach to a repair programme have been identified. Phased repairs would involve a far smaller cost than originally publicised.

4. **Community Expectations** - based on realism

Grace Hill can play a key role in the regeneration of this significant Kentish town. The expectations of the campaign are not unrealistic and our experience includes complex local authority project management. We feel no stone should be left unturned, no lack of effort should lead to the avoidable loss of a significant community asset.

Political leaders and Officers at the District Council are ready and willing to work with KCC.
We are asking KCC Councillors and officers to work with us to refresh the original mission of Grace Hill as a centre of opportunity.