

# The Little Book of Public Libraries



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**The Little Book of Public Libraries  
is for people who love libraries  
and want to share their passion  
with others.**



**Love your  
library**

**If you are already a library champion, this book will give you key messages that we'd like you to pass on to friends and colleagues. If not, we hope it will open your eyes to the valuable contribution libraries make to families, communities and society as a whole.**



# **Libraries are changing**

**If you haven't visited a public library for a few years, go and take a look. The library of today is probably not the place you remember.**

## A new approach

These days, library staff not only have the kind of knowledge and information skills you'd expect, but also an approach to customer service that has more in common with a modern retail outlet than a traditional institution. The chance of hearing a librarian say "ssshh" these days is pretty remote.

The majority of libraries have their own calendar of activities, from parent and toddler groups through to theatre and music festivals. You may still lose yourself in shelf upon shelf of books, but you can also find displays of the latest bestsellers that wouldn't look out of place on the high street.

### Image on page 5

**Building** The Campus, Weston Super Mare

**Client** North Somerset Council

**Architect** David Morley Architects

**Photographer** Morley von Sternberg

Computers are the biggest visible sign of change. Every library in England now offers internet access – making a huge difference to the kind of people libraries attract. Young people who shunned libraries before, are now turning out in force and finding that there's much more to discover.

You may be lucky enough to live close by one of the new breed of flagship libraries in places like Norwich, Manchester, Brighton and Peckham, south London. If not, don't let the outside of the building put you off. Some libraries may be short of cash for repairs and decoration but the enthusiasm of the staff inside more than makes up for it.

# Public libraries and communities

**Public libraries are as much hubs of the community as churches, pubs and Post Offices, but with several big advantages.**



- **They are public spaces where everyone is welcome.**
- **You can use them in different ways – to borrow books, music and films, search the internet, find out information, participate in events.**
- **There is expert help on hand if you need it.**
- **Almost all services are free.**

### **Improving people's quality of life**

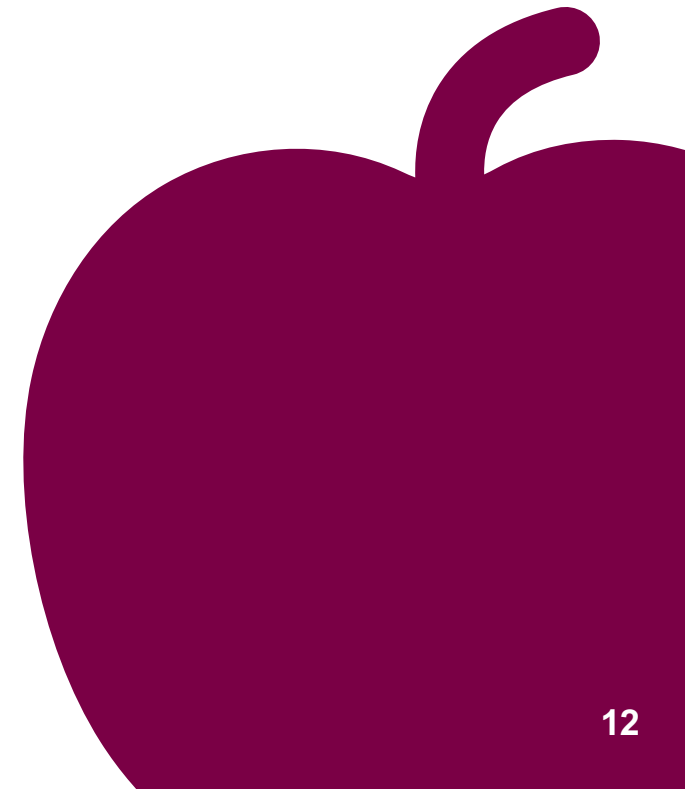
Public libraries are safe places, where everyone is welcome and receives equal respect. You can read for pleasure, study, look for jobs, learn a new skill, and if you can't travel to the library under your own steam, it comes to you through mobile libraries, volunteers or the internet.

## **Safer, stronger, sustainable communities**

They bring people of all ages, genders, beliefs and political convictions together. They provide free access to information and ideas and are an important bastion of democracy. Planners and developers recognise this unifying role and many have put a public library at the centre of new build and regeneration projects.

## **Healthier citizens**

All public libraries have information and advice about health, but there are more specific examples of libraries' contribution; where they hold ante-natal classes, are located alongside health clinics, or work with doctors who prescribe bibliotherapy—self-help books for patients.



# Public libraries and children

**The Government's Every Child Matters programme has five goals and public libraries are well-positioned to support all of them.**



## 1. Stay safe

Public libraries are safe, welcoming places, where children and young people are respected and treated as individuals.

## 2. Make a positive contribution

A library ticket gives you access to books, music, films, information and the internet, but with these rights come responsibilities. Libraries offer children an early taste of what it's like to be a good citizen.

## 3. Enjoy and achieve

In addition to the joys of reading, there are fun things to do for all ages, including parent and toddler sessions, holiday reading and homework clubs, with the added benefit of learning something at the same time.

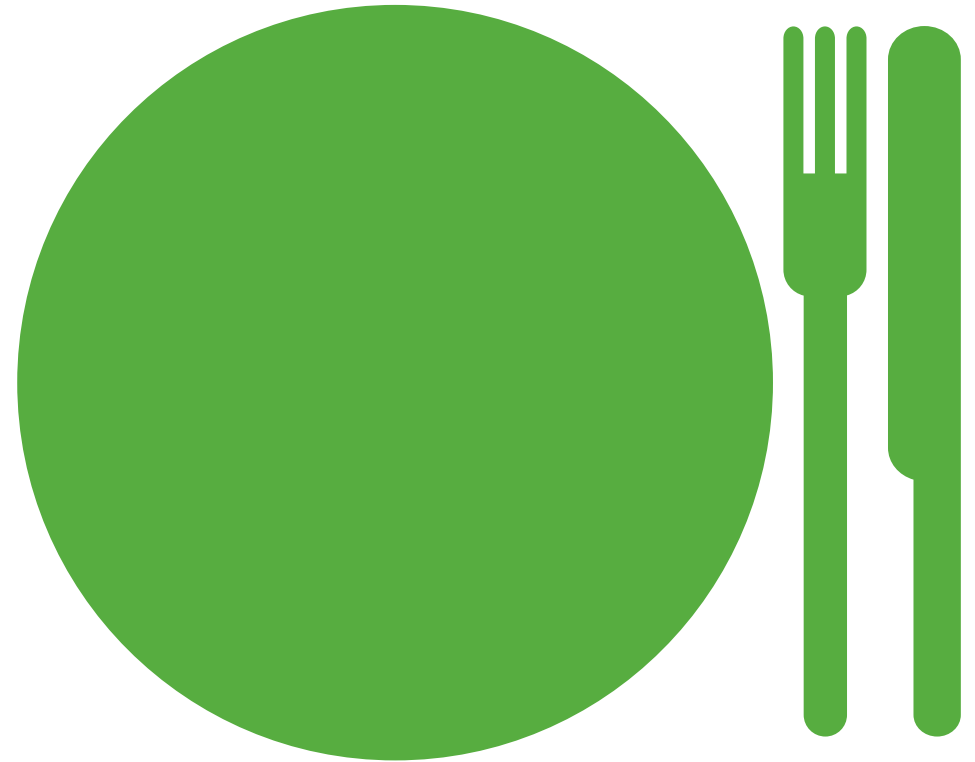


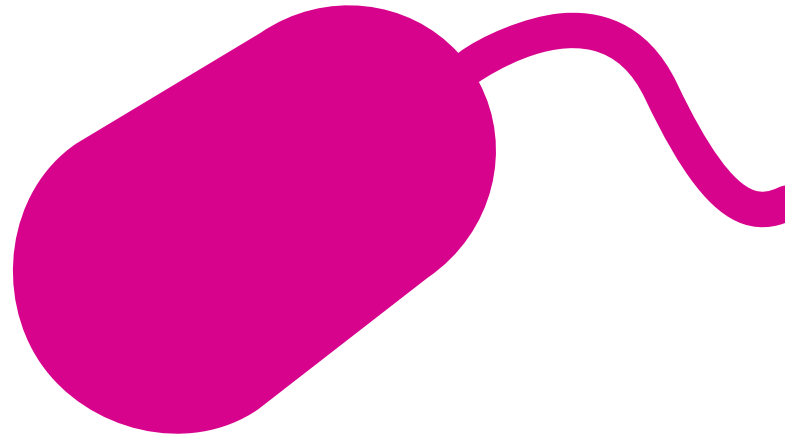
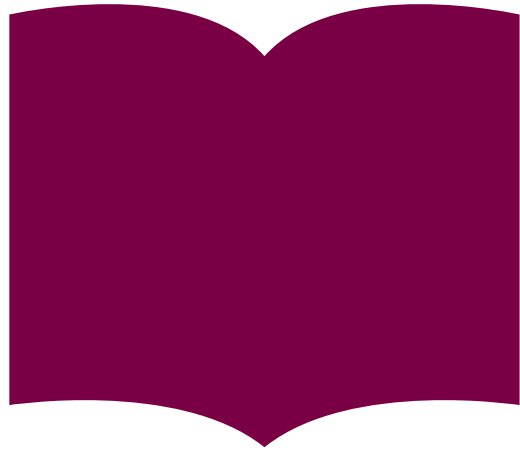
#### **4. Be healthy**

There is information and advice about diet, the effects of smoking, substance abuse, safe sex and other health issues affecting young people.

#### **5. Achieve economic well-being**

Libraries add an extra dimension to learning throughout childhood and teenage years, reaching reluctant learners as well as star pupils. They support both academic and vocational training, helping young people to achieve economic independence.





# Public libraries and learning

**Public libraries support formal and informal learning for people of all ages. They are “street corner universities”, where everyone can study the subject of their choice, in their own time, at their own pace.**

## Literacy

Nearly 80% of public libraries target people who lack basic skills. They provide books, support material and expert guidance for adults who need help with reading.

Libraries are working with the BBC on its learning programmes, including the RaW reading and writing campaign, launched in 2005. They are also linking with publishers to champion reading. For World Book Day they are creating and promoting a new list of titles by best-selling authors for emergent readers.

## IT skills

Staff are qualified to teach library users how to use a PC. Regular IT training courses are held in most libraries and attract all ages. In the first year of the People's Network, almost 24,000 people said they had used it to start a formal education course and more than 62,000 said they had gained a new skill.





## Gateway

Public libraries support the Government's Skills for Life programme, providing a pathway from self-help to more formal or accredited courses. The Government's Link Up scheme for volunteer support for adult basic skills often involves local libraries.

# Public libraries and the economy

**Public libraries help create a vibrant local economy; the contribution that is probably least recognised.**



HERALDRY  
STEPHEN SEATON  
FRIAR & FERGUSON

FAIRBANKS'S  
ORPHEUS  
JOSEPH FOSTER

PLAGGS  
The Penguin

Civilizations  
June McIntosh & Clint Twist  
ALBERT EINSTEIN

THE  
CRYSTAL SUN  
ROBERT TEMPLE

THE SEVENTY WONDERS  
OF THE ANCIENT WORLD  
AND HOW THEY WERE BUILT

ROOTSTEPS  
BRUCE NORMAN

ARCHAEOLOGY  
An Introduction  
PAUL G. BAI

LOST CITIES  
GREAT EXCAVATIONS  
PAUL G. BAI

LOST CITIES  
MYSERIES OF LOST EMPIRES  
DAVID E. FISHER

ARCHAEOLOGY  
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DAVID E. FISHER

## Skilled workforce

Improving adult literacy, teaching people to use computers, putting people in touch with training providers – these are all ways in which public libraries help to ensure that local people have the skills that local companies need.

## Job centre

When you are unemployed, sitting at home can be soul-destroying. Instead, jobseekers use the public library to scan the situations vacant pages in local and national newspapers and to search the internet for opportunities advertised online. 8,000 library users found jobs thanks to the People's Network in the first year of the service.





## **Information**

Innovative companies need reliable market information but it can be prohibitively expensive for some smaller businesses. Public libraries subscribe on their behalf to all kinds of statistical information, news and business intelligence, and online directories.

## **Digital citizenship**

The Government believes businesses will thrive if Britain embraces the electronic age. The fear of a digital divide – a gap between people who are confident IT users and those from homes without PCs or internet access – has diminished now that there is universal access to the Internet and free training on computers available in public libraries. Libraries are already a portal for e-government services.



# Where to go for more information

There is much more we could say, there are many more examples we could give, but the purpose of this book is to be a quick and easy pocket reference. Overleaf, we tell you where you can find out more information.

If you want to find out what is going on behind the scenes, Framework for the Future sets out the Government's 10 year vision for public libraries and you can find it at **[www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)**

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, together with its regional agencies, is responsible for managing the change that is taking place in English public libraries. For more information on MLA and the libraries programme go to **[www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)**

The Society of Chief Librarians represents the heads of service in the 149 library authorities **[www.goscl.com](http://www.goscl.com)**, while the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals is the professional body **[www.cilip.org.uk](http://www.cilip.org.uk)**

The Reading Agency is a key partner for books, reading and learning, at **[www.readingagency.co.uk](http://www.readingagency.co.uk)**. Other interest groups include the National Literacy Trust **[www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)** and Opening the Book **[www.openingthebook.com](http://www.openingthebook.com)**

Try out the People's Network services at [www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk](http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk), where there is a 24/7 live chat enquiry line, and for more facts and figures, go to the Library and Information Statistical Unit at [www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dis/lisu](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dis/lisu)

[www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)

[www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)

[www.goscl.com](http://www.goscl.com)

[www.cilip.org.uk](http://www.cilip.org.uk)

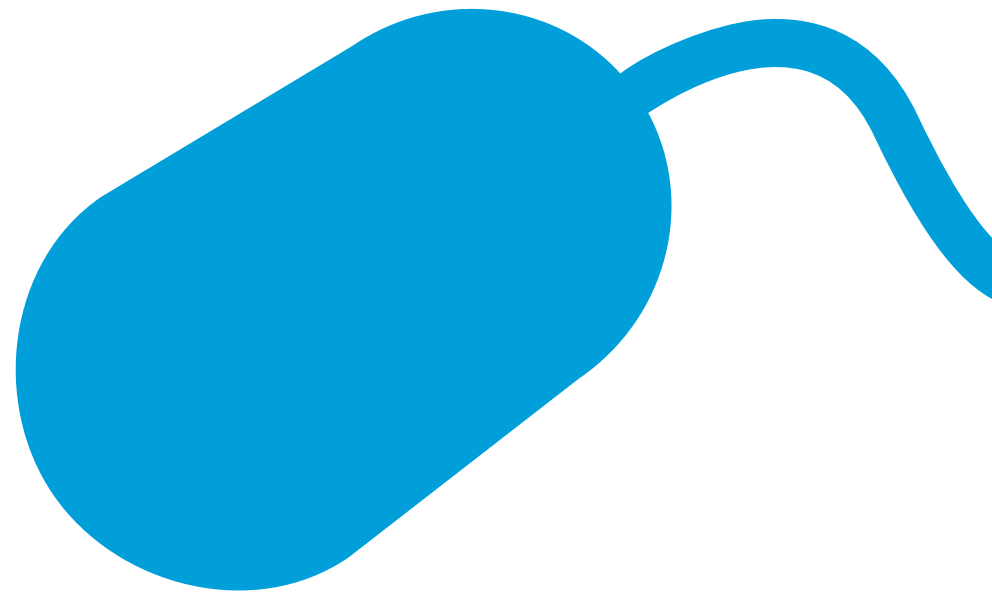
[www.readingagency.co.uk](http://www.readingagency.co.uk)

[www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

[www.openingthebook.com](http://www.openingthebook.com)

[www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk](http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk)

[www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dis/lisu](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dis/lisu)



Other sites you might find interesting:  
[www.designinglibraries.org.uk](http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk)  
[www.whatareyouuptonight.com](http://www.whatareyouuptonight.com)

**Last, but not least, there is  
of course your local library.**



# **Facts and figures**



**There are 3,200 English public libraries...  
12.4 million or 25% of us use them...  
to borrow 289 million books...  
and 35 million audio visual items.**

**We pay 285.4 million annual visits...  
spend up to 68.5 million hours on the  
internet... and make 49 million enquiries.**



5p

**All this is handled by 22,800 staff...  
and it costs us some £881 million—  
less than 5p a day each.**

These figures are mainly taken from the Chartered Institute of Public  
Finance and Accountancy Public Library Statistics 2003-2004

**For more copies of this book, or  
for further information, contact  
the libraries team at the Museums,  
Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)**

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**The Little Book of Public Libraries  
is for people who love libraries  
and want to share their passion  
with others.**



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