

Little Chalfont COMMUNITY LIBRARY

Information ● Recreation ● Education ● Culture



**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

A Case Study About Little Chalfont Community Library

Friends of Little Chalfont Library (FOLCL), an unincorporated charity, was established in 2006 to save the Little Chalfont County Branch Library from closure by converting it to an independent Community-Run Library.

In 2014 FOLCL was closed and replaced by an incorporated charity entitled Little Chalfont Community Library.

The Background

In 2006 Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) announced the proposed closure of a number of branch libraries. FOLCL was formed to fight the closure of the library in Little Chalfont.

FOLCL organised significant opposition to the closure through petitions, lobbying and local and national media. In the face of this fierce opposition BCC agreed that if a business plan could be produced demonstrating that the community could take over the library “at no cost to BCC” it would be considered.

“At no cost to BCC” meant that anything provided or supplied by BCC would need to be paid for. This included rent for the building, charges for IT equipment and software, payment for supplies such as bar codes, a management fee of £1000 per annum and rent for any stock retained. The only discretionary item was stock for which BCC required rent of around £7000 per annum. To avoid this cost most of the stock was returned to BCC and replacement stock was obtained by a public appeal that netted 12000 books.

A business plan was produced covering budgeted costs, funding, the volunteer base and organisation and management. The plan also covered FOLCL’s aspirations to improve and expand services to make the library a real centre for the community. The business plan was accepted and Little Chalfont Community Library commenced operations in February 2007 completely managed and staffed by unpaid volunteers.

Services Provided

Little Chalfont Community Library offers all the services available through a County Library. It is linked to the County Library Management Computer System and customers use a standard County library card to borrow, reserve or renew stock either from the Community Library or from County stock. Stock can be returned to the Community Library or to any County Library.

In addition to normal library facilities such as photocopying, laminating, reference material, information on local events, magazines, newspapers and access to a wide range of books, including large print and audio books, the library offers a range of other services. These include public access Internet enabled computers,

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wireless broadband, a craft based Knit & Knatter group, two book-reading groups, sessions for children including a Chinese language group for toddlers, computer classes for adults and regular Film Shows. All services are provided free of charge.

The library is also made available to community groups as a low cost meeting venue. Facilities for these groups include a computer data projector, large screen and a linked surround sound audio system.

Library Operation

Running Little Chalfont Community Library is very similar to running a business. The main exception being that there is no payroll as all work is done by unpaid volunteers.

The management team, all of whom are Trustees of the charity, take on the various roles and responsibilities of running a library “business”. This includes, Health and Safety, Data Protection, Financial Management, Charity Commission Requirements, Volunteer and Rota Management, Fund Raising, Event Management, Policy and Procedures, Stock Selection and Procurement, Website Management, Building Maintenance, Liaison with Local Authorities and Organisations plus a host of other activities that arise from time to time such as Managing Projects and dealing with specific issues as they arise.

The library is staffed by volunteers working a flexible shift system. Volunteers also help with other work such as library bookings and leaflet delivery to the 2400 households (6000 residents) in Little Chalfont.

Facts

- Over 50 unpaid volunteers manage and staff the library
- The volunteers have received the Best Volunteering Group Award from Chiltern District Council, a Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service, the MBE for volunteering groups, the High Sheriff’s Award for services to the community and its Chairman has been awarded an MBE for services to libraries
- Grants have been obtained from a wide range of organisations
- The library has over 7,000 stock items
- Around £6000 is spent on new stock every year

Benefits

- The library is highly valued by all sections of the community.
 - Footfall has increased
 - Stock issues have increased
 - The local community responds very positively to financial appeals to help cover the running costs.
 - Local businesses, organisations and authorities have provided financial and other support, including BCC who have now (as at November 2010) acknowledged that the library is a success and can be used as a model to reduce BCC costs in other communities
 - Local schools use the library for projects and the display of artwork
- The library gives a large number of local people the opportunity to be involved in voluntary work. Volunteers enjoy the work and value the interaction with other volunteers and members of the public. They feel they are making a real contribution to the community whilst working in a friendly and stimulating environment.
- **The library management team provides information and advice to other communities faced with library closure.**

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Improvements Since 2007

The library is well established as a valued community facility and the Trustees of Little Chalfont Community Library intend to continue to upgrade the services and the facilities.

Since opening in 2007:

- Two new counters have been built
- The carpet tiles have been replaced (twice)
- The Kitchen/Workroom has been completely refurbished
- The toilet has been refurbished
- The CCTV system has been upgraded
- Opening hours have been increased (twice)
- A paved and planted public amenity area on the library frontage has been built
- A bicycle park has been built
- The thermally inefficient windows and entrance door have been replaced.
- The library interior and exterior have been refurbished.
- Library equipment has been upgraded.
- Blinds have been fitted to the windows
- Audio visual equipment has been installed
- Film shows are held regularly showing a range of films including latest releases
- Two book reading groups have been formed
- A craft based Knit & Knatter group has been formed
- Computer classes for adults have been made available
- Children's sessions have been introduced including a Chinese language group for pre-school children
- A digital monitor to promote the Library's services has been installed
- An extension to the Library building has been built to house a computer suite

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Email Jim Brooks at jimbrooksmbe@gmail.com for more information.

Visit our website at www.littlechalfontlibrary.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/LCCommunityLibrary