

Annual report

The last 12 months have seen the Trust consolidate its approach to running community libraries, and has been successful in laying a foundation, but the next phase is going to be difficult because of the financial situation, and limited opportunities to secure core funding for day to day staffing and rent bills.

Liden Library has continued to outperform the strategy, with an improvement in visitor, and user, numbers of more than 40% year on year. The last three months has seen the opening of a Library café, run by a charity called Open Door. In return the charity will provide volunteers to assist library users outside of staffed hours. This arrangement benefits the community, the Trust and Charity and it is hoped that this will be built on in the coming years.

The Friends of Covingham Library have been instrumental in Covingham Library's success. The popular story time sessions have returned and regular fundraising, and promotional, events are well supported.

IT represents a challenge, with a frequency of pc breakages that is suspicious. An additional camera has been purchased, and monitoring is taking place to identify if the cause is a user. Continued issues may lead to the withdraw of PC provision due to the cost and effort overhead in remediating.

In January, Covingham Parish Council withdraw from providing any financial support for Covingham Library. Despite over 80% of library users living in Covingham, a report being supplied on how the support contributed to activities and the disclosure of detailed financial statements, the decision was made that the Parish had other priorities.

This means that while the Trust was looking at achieving a break-even point between grant funding and fundraising, there will now be a near doubling in fundraising needed. We do not currently see how this can be achieved, but there are sufficient funds within the Trust to mitigate for only the next 12 months. If a replacement source of funds cannot be obtained by Q1 2020 then tough decisions will be required. Plans for refurbishment, and introduction of Extended opening hours, have been placed on hold until greater clarity on long term future has been achieved. The Chair of the Trust has covered the short-term impact of this issue, and has directly paid bills of £3,000. This is treated as a donation in kind.

This decision makes Covingham Parish the first, and only, Parish in Swindon to decline to support their Community Library. In comparison, South Swindon and Stratton Councils contribute close to £70,000 a year, Covingham was less than £4,000. This issue shines a line on the Trust's value for money, and impact, because running two libraries represents half the cost of running one Parish library.

Our continued thanks to Nythe, Liden, Eldene Parish Council who have reiterated their support for Liden Library with continued grant funding. Without this support, Liden would close with almost immediate effort. All things being equal, Liden Library has now achieved a sustainable funding model balanced between grants, income and fundraising, one year ahead of schedule.

The Trust needs to improve its capacity and resilience, and there is an ongoing drive to sign up more volunteers and Trustees. While the community is open to supporting the local libraries as volunteers, there is a reticence in the taking the next step to become a Trustee. Therefore the Trust is heavily dependent on two individuals, and the Librarian. This has been fine for the last 12 months, and there is no expectation of change, but to expand activities of the Trust into the community, and

further broaden the scope for fundraising, requires active involvement of more people. The 2018 plan had ideas like a Community Film Club, but these have not been fulfilled due to capacity.

The current year can best be described as keeping the ship steady as the transition to “business as usual” is completed. Due to the decision of Covingham Parish Council, the year ahead will almost certainly focus on the long term sustainability of Covingham library, with no obvious solution at the time of writing. There is anticipated to be minimal new activity in Liden Library, but opportunities continue to be explored for hiring of the space in evenings and weekends.

The last 12 months has seen the Trust run two Community Libraries, fulfilled its objectives, increased visitor and library user numbers significantly, improved relationships with schools and groups to start visits and has achieved a stable level of fundraising.