

## **Statement to Cabinet on the Future of Marksbury Road Library**

When I was a child growing up on a Council Estate not dissimilar to some of the streets in Windmill Hill Ward around the Marksbury Road area, my parents were keen to encourage my education but lacked the money to buy books in the quantities required to satisfy my reading habit.

Weekly trips to the public library were the norm as I progressed from the beauty and simplicity of Rev. Aubrey's Thomas the Tank Engine books, through the Billy Bunter series to Tolkien and beyond. Of course, that may not have been surprising in the town that gave the world Andrew Carnegie and was the first beneficiary of a legacy of over 2,500 public libraries he gifted the world.

It is certainly the reason that I value the importance of public libraries on a deeply personally level, and still relish the joys of browsing the shelves: exploring new avenues and reaching for books I may not choose to purchase.

Of course, things have changed a lot over the years – the Net Book Agreement has been abolished since I was a child and books can be bought more cheaply now, either in supermarkets or online and the internet is now in the vast majority of homes.

These changes notwithstanding, I believe that Libraries can still play an important society function – not just as places to borrow books but as community hubs and social spaces. The experience of Junction 3 shows how a library can be a wider community resource.

The report before Cabinet suggests a variety of ways in which the library service infrastructure could be used to greater effect for the benefit of the local community – and I would urge Cabinet and the Mayor to explore all options to increase the use of the existing portfolio of library facilities – not reduce it.

The data in the report shows that users value the local nature of the service - 59% of library users walk to their library and for 48% of users the journey (however they travel) takes less than 10 minutes. By contrast, only 13% of users journey more than 20-30 minutes – which would be around the time it would take users of Marksbury Road to get to Bedminster or Filwood Libraries.

Whilst some people will be able to make the longer journey, it is by no means certain that all users will – and for them it will not be a restructure of the city's library service but the removal on the only viable service.

The data also suggests that closing the library will disproportionately affect woman and children – as these groups are the primary users of libraries when compared with the general demographic data – and in Marksbury Road's case it will also disadvantage some of the already most disadvantaged people in the city.

The Carnegie Library of my childhood only opened in 1883 – the public library service in Bristol pre-dates it by some 270 years. Let's not sell that legacy to our citizens short by reducing access to what should be community asset – instead, let's revitalise them ready for the next generation, if not the next 400 years.

**Andrew Brown**