

Folkestone Library

Consultation document



Consultation closes 11 September 2024

kent.gov.uk/folkestonelibrary



Paper copies of consultation documents are available from all Folkestone and Hythe district libraries.

If you have a question or need help taking part in the consultation you can also contact us by phone:

03000 41 64 38 (9am to 6pm on weekdays and 9am to 5pm on Saturdays) or email: **AKL@kent.gov.uk**.

This document is also available in Easy Read and large print from the consultation webpage or on request. If

you need this information in another format or language, please: email: **alternativeformats@kent.gov.uk**

or telephone: **03000 421 553** (text relay: **18001 03000 421 553**). This number goes to an answer machine which is monitored during office hours.

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Background	3
Folkestone Library	3
Temporary library and registration provision	5
The 2 Grace Hill building and its maintenance	6
Cost of repairs and work needed to bring the building back into use	7
KCC's financial challenges	8
Funding our buildings	9
3. How have we identified our preferred approach?	11
4. What are we proposing and why?	12
Our proposals	12
Why this is our preferred option	13
What would happen if we leave Grace Hill?	16
5. What are the other options we have considered?	17
6. Equality analysis	23
7. How to give your views	24
Next steps	26
8. Glossary	27

1. Introduction

Welcome to Kent County Council's (KCC) consultation on Folkestone Library.

Folkestone Library at 2 Grace Hill temporarily closed in December 2022 because it became unsafe for customers and staff. Since then, we have been investigating the extent and cost of the works needed to bring the building back into use, exploring ways to fund the works, looking at other locations in Folkestone town centre where the library could be located, and considering the future of the Grace Hill building.

KCC recognises the strength and depth of local feeling regarding this building and the importance of Folkestone's town centre library and registration service.

While options are still at a formative stage they have developed to the point that we now want to share them with you and listen to your views before progressing any further.

KCC is mindful of the feelings and views expressed by people in Folkestone and Hythe since the library's temporary closure and as promised we are now giving residents and other interested parties the opportunity to tell us your views and ideas.

The financial situation for KCC remains very challenging and means that the Council does not have the budget to repair and re-open the building. Given the length of time the library has already been closed and the further deterioration to the building, which will only continue to get worse unless significant financial investment is made, there is a pressing need to set a roadmap and plan for the future of the building as well as for the town centre library and registration service.

KCC is committed to securing a permanent town centre location for the library and registration service. We have explored the options available to us, including repairing and moving back into the Grace Hill building. Having carefully considered the options at this stage we are proposing to:

- Permanently leave the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the Folkestone town centre library and registration service.
- Take forward work with Folkestone & Hythe District Council on moving the library and registration service to FOLCA on the high street. Subject to consultation feedback, we consider that this currently represents the best long-term option for Folkestone's town centre library.

These are the proposals we are now consulting on.

This document provides information on:

- Folkestone's town centre library and registration service and the Grace Hill building.
- KCC's financial context.
- Our proposals and why these are our preferred approach.
- The other options we have explored.

Details of how to give your feedback and contact us can be found from page 24.

We have highlighted in **bold** where there may be words used that you are unfamiliar with or may need explaining. These are explained in the Glossary section on page 27.

Easy Read and large print versions of this document are available from the consultation webpage or on request.

Thank you for taking the time to consider and respond to this consultation.

2. Background

Folkestone Library

Folkestone's library is part of KCC's **statutory** library and registration service and one of our key town centre libraries. At the time of the temporary closure it was the ninth most visited library out of 99 in the county.

Prior to its temporary closure the following services and facilities were provided at Folkestone Library:

- Full public library book stock collection, including adults and children.
- Space for activities, events and studying.
- 17 public computers for customers to use for free as well as free public Wi-fi throughout the building.
- A room for the local studies collection where the public could access this precious non-loanable material.
- A community space that could be booked for local organisations and groups to use.

- A meeting room utilised for team and individual meetings, interviews, training and as a bookable space for outside organisations.
- Notice of marriage appointments and a secure collection point for KCC's Ceremony teams to pick up ceremony packs for all civil ceremonies taking place in the district.
- A location for people to register births and deaths.

The building also contained a Skills Plus classroom run by Kent Adult Education. This classroom has not been used since it temporarily closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Skills Plus service is now delivered from the Adult Education Centre at The Cube in Folkestone and does not form part of this consultation.

The Grace Hill building also contains the Sassoon Gallery where art exhibitions were hosted prior to the temporary closure.

There are also two artworks / installations in the Grace Hill building by notable artists, the Chris Offili Screen and Yoko Ono's Skyladder. These pieces remain in the building and are being protected and checked regularly to ensure that they are not at any risk.

Before its temporary closure, the Grace Hill building also provided space for community events and activities. These are currently taking place at other libraries across Folkestone and Hythe.

From April to November 2022, Folkestone Library held 141 community events and activities, with 1,464 attendees. These activities included:

- Rhyme Time for babies, toddlers and their parents and carers.
- Playground artist-led sessions for babies from 0 to 18 months old and their parents and carers.
- Books Beyond Words book group sessions for adults with learning disabilities.
- Meet and Practice English sessions for adults whose first language is not English.
- Summer Reading Challenge for children.
- A series of sessions for the Flux programme with partners Living Words, who work with 18 to 25 year old **LGBTQIA+** people addressing issues around self-harm, mental ill health and suicide through the creative arts.

The table below shows the number of visitors to Folkestone Library in comparison to the nearest alternative libraries. The data was collected from April (at the start of the financial year) to November 2022 before the temporary closure of the building.

Library	Number of visitors
Folkestone	50,675
Hythe	38,399
Wood Avenue	22,209
Cheriton	21,397
Sandgate	6,982

Temporary library and registration provision

Services have been put in place since the temporary closure of the Grace Hill building to minimise the impact of the closure on our customers. We will keep this in place until a long-term town centre location for Folkestone Library opens.

The temporary services we have put in place include:

- “Folkestone Library - Heritage and Digital Access” opened in November 2023 at 5 Grace Hill (previously the Shepway Youth Centre). This is temporarily the location for the complete local studies collection, public PCs, Wi-fi, microfilm reader, photocopying and study space.
- A free reservation service is also being provided at 5 Grace Hill. The service means that customers can order anything from the Kent library catalogue and have it delivered for free to the building for collection.
- The opening hours at the libraries closest to Folkestone town centre have been increased so that there is library provision available six days a week. Hythe Library has increased by 7.5 hours from 37 hours to 44.5 hours per week and Wood Avenue Library has increased by 15.5 hours from 23 hours to 38.5 hours per week. While Folkestone Library was also open on Sundays the temporary provision offers library opening across six days. Sunday usage was lower compared to the weekdays so to maximise the offer we put the extra hours into the other libraries across Folkestone and Hythe during the week.
- Additional services have been provided at Wood Avenue Library including three additional public computers and increased loanable stock. We have also added this as a location to register a birth or death, in addition to Hythe Library.

As well as those temporary measures, the following existing library services are also available to help mitigate the impact of the temporary closure:

- E-library service - we have a large digital offer with thousands of free ebooks, audiobooks and online newspapers and magazines for all ages and interests¹.
- Library services direct - including the Home Library Service, where we can deliver library items to people if they cannot visit a library, and also our Mobile Library Service².
- Other libraries in the Folkestone and Hythe district - Hythe, Cheriton, Wood Avenue, Lyminge, Sandgate, Lydd, and New Romney.

The 2 Grace Hill building and its maintenance

2 Grace Hill was built between 1886 and 1888 and is **Grade II listed**³. It was purpose-built as part of the Scottish American industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie's drive to build publicly accessible libraries across the country.

KCC is responsible for the maintenance of the building. However, the Council's financial situation and the fact that works to the building are costly and complicated has made effective maintenance challenging to achieve. The building's listed status adds to the complexity and cost of any works.

For example, during significant rainfall events, the parapet gutters, drain hoppers, and down pipes do not have enough capacity to take the water from the roof into the drainage system. In addition, many of the down pipes are cracked and in some areas the pipes are restricted with narrow bends, around Grade II listed stone façade features and there are simply not enough pipes to cope with the quantity of water. This has been made worse by large amounts of earth and other debris in the valleys behind the parapet walls, covering and blocking the parapet gutter outlets with maintenance access not readily available.

Due to these issues, the building has suffered from significant rainwater getting in, which has led to damp and building deterioration. These issues got worse in 2022, with water getting into the electrics, damp spreading and mould growing. This forced the temporary closure of the building due to the overriding health and safety concerns for the public and staff. We are continuing to survey and monitor the building to protect it as a historic, listed building.

¹ www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/libraries/ebooks-eaudiobooks-emagazines-ene newspapers

² www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/libraries/library-services-direct-to-you

³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1061215?section=official-list-entry>

In July 2023, the Grace Hill building was registered as an **Asset of Community Value** (ACV)⁴. This means that if KCC decides to sell the building or enter into a lease longer than 25 years it would need to tell Folkestone & Hythe District Council so they can trigger a **moratorium period** of up to six months. This would give the community time to develop a proposal and put together the funding necessary to bid for the building on the open market.

During this time KCC could not proceed with any sale or long lease of the building. While KCC is not under any obligation to accept a community bid if we do decide to sell the building we would welcome bids to come forward that would enable the Grace Hill building to remain in community use.

Cost of repairs and work needed to bring the building back into use

Minor maintenance works have taken place to protect one area of the building from further water getting in, but this is not a permanent fix and extensive works are needed across the building to reopen it in a good shape, addressing all the current known issues.

Library stock, furniture, and other items have been removed to another KCC building so they can be safely sorted and stored with no risk of damage before returning to Folkestone's town centre library when a long-term solution for the library and registration service is found.

KCC has invested £552,375 since 2016, investigating and taking action to repair and maintain the Grace Hill building.

The repairs needed to reopen the Grace Hill building are now estimated to cost in the region of £2.9 million. This figure was compiled by a KCC surveyor in April 2024. It is an updated figure from the original estimates produced just after the temporary closure.

The listed status contributes to the cost of repair, which must be carried out on a like-for-like basis in places. Some work is highly specialised and purpose built scaffolding would need to be made and erected from the top down because of the shape of the building.

KCC recognises that costs have increased with the building suffering further damage and deterioration since its temporary closure, whilst the longer term future of the building is determined. Despite ongoing work to maintain this listed building repair

⁴ www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/planning-policy/assets-community-value-community-right-bid

costs have increased. This further highlights the urgent need to find a way forward for the building and service.

The estimated £2.9 million would cover the key work needed to re-open and get the building into a good shape for the short to medium term, subject to any unforeseen or new issues with the building. These works include:

- Removal of birds' nests and other materials and installation of new wired bird mesh.
- Installation of new gulleys, cast iron downpipes and guttering and other protective fittings to guard against rain and make the building watertight.
- Detailed survey of roof, creation of safe access to enable ongoing maintenance with less need for specialist scaffolding. Repair / replacement of any broken or dislodged tiles. Reinstallation of spikes to deter birds.
- Installation of a system to allow safe access to the roof.
- Repair and refurbishment of windows inside and out, full replacement where required.
- Repair library parquet floor that has suffered water damage.
- Repointing brickwork.
- Internal works to remove mould, treat all areas to protect against mould. Re-plaster and re-decoration where required.
- Renewal on a like-for-like basis of ornate listed plaster features, which have incurred serious damage due to leaks (required due to the building's listed status).
- All walls and woodwork to be treated, painted and made good.
- Replacement of all carpeted areas due to mould and damp.

KCC's financial challenges

Like many other councils, KCC is facing significant financial challenges. We have been through an extraordinary period in the last few years with the Covid-19 pandemic followed by the significant economic turbulence arising from international and national circumstances.

The cost of and demand for our services continue to increase at a much higher rate than the funding available from Government, Council Tax, income from services users and a small proportion of Business Rates.

Since 2011, we have had to make almost £1 billion in savings and income generation in order to manage within the funding available to us. However, the demand for and cost of providing services was such that for the first time in 22 years we ended the 2022-23 financial year with a significant overspend of £44.4 million, followed by an overspend of £9.6m in 2023-24. We had to fund these overspends by using our **reserves**, but this is not an ongoing sustainable solution.

The biggest overspends were largely for services for the most vulnerable residents in the areas of adult and children's social care, and home to school transport. These services are continuing to face increasing demand and above inflation cost pressures. We estimate the additional demand and costs for these service areas alone will total £83 million in 2025-26.

KCC has an estimated significant budget gap of £81 million in 2025-26. We need to find savings or raise income to fill this gap to balance the Council's budget. This means ensuring that there is enough money to fund what we need to pay for. We are continuing to look across all of our services to identify where savings can be made and income can be raised. Spending controls are in place and difficult decisions across KCC's services are having to be considered. All of this highlights the significant financial pressure KCC remains under.

Funding our buildings

In November 2023, KCC made the difficult decision to close 43 buildings across Kent, following the [Community Services consultation](#)⁵. This change is expected to save the Council £1.28 million over the next two years, against the property **revenue** budget and reduce our building maintenance **backlog** by £5.85 million.

This decision included co-locating some of our services together within single buildings, alongside other partners and providers, to deliver services locally to our communities. Co-locating services is an approach that KCC is committed to. It makes sense for residents to have access to services all in one location, which reduces costs, saving us money, while providing better access to more services for residents.

Currently KCC has over 300 buildings (not including schools) across the county which are used for staff and delivering services to communities. The Council's annual **capital** budget includes £3 million a year to spend on maintaining these buildings. However, as a result of not having enough money to spend on maintaining our buildings over a long period of time there is a backlog of over £159 million in

⁵ <https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/community-services-consultation>

maintenance costs required across all of our buildings. Therefore, it is necessary to prioritise this funding to ensure that buildings for the most vulnerable, such as care homes and respite centres for adult and children social care services, can remain open. This meant that in the last financial year (2023-24) we weren't able to allocate any funding to support maintenance works across KCC's 99 library buildings.

Despite the challenging financial situation, KCC has allocated a further £11.2 million towards essential building maintenance. £5.6 million has been approved for 2024-25 and a further £5.6 million is planned for the following year (subject to approval in February 2025 when KCC Members agree the 2025-26 budget). This still leaves a significant shortfall in funding for the backlog of works needed across all of KCC's buildings, which means this additional funding will need to be prioritised to where it's needed most. Even with this additional funding on top of the annual £3 million budget, we do not currently believe spending £2.9 million on repairing just one building is justifiable or responsible.

£500,000 of the £5.6 million additional funding for 2024-25 has been allocated for essential maintenance works across KCC's 99 libraries, nine country parks and seven picnic sites. Due to the financial pressure KCC is under and the number of sites this money is spread across, this funding is for reactive and essential maintenance rather than delivering a planned maintenance programme. Examples of reactive maintenance include patching a roof rather than replacing it or mending a boiler to last another year rather than replacing it. The £500,000 needs to be spread across a large number of buildings and sites and therefore cannot be spent in its entirety on repairing one building.

3. How have we identified our preferred approach?

When considering the options for returning to a full library and registration service to Folkestone town centre the critical factors were:

- **Service requirements:** Does the option meet the Library, Registration and Archive (LRA) service requirements? These requirements are covered in more detail below:
 - **Location:** It is important to be somewhere really visible and accessible, which is why high-street locations will generally be our preference as this is where most people will go or be able to get to. Libraries can also play an important part in wider high-street regeneration. As a rule, we want to be in a location that lots of people will naturally pass so that we can advertise and be visible for those who are not yet users of the service with the desire that they do become users. Where the best location is in a community may change over time and we should always keep this under review.
 - **Space:** We need adequate space to meet service needs and is affordable for KCC.
 - **Partnership potential:** The LRA service is in general keen to co-locate with other customer and community services. This brings more services to people in one convenient place but also has the potential to increase the take-up of library and other services for those who don't currently use them.
- **Financial:** How much will it cost KCC, both in terms of **capital** and **revenue** both short and long term? Does the option rely on securing grant funding? Will the option generate any income for KCC, given the already-described financial challenge facing the Council?

Other key considerations included:

- **Deliverability:** Can the option be delivered and what is the timeline for delivery?
- **Environmental:** Does the option reduce the carbon footprint therefore supporting KCC's net zero target?

4. What are we proposing and why?

Our proposals

We are proposing to permanently leave the Folkestone Library building at 2 Grace Hill and find an alternative town centre location for the library and registration service. Our current preferred option, and the most viable location at present, is FOLCA on the high street.

Following the purchase of the former Debenhams store, now named FOLCA, Folkestone & Hythe District Council's ambition is to deliver a mixed-use building in the heart of Folkestone. The District Council has appointed an architect to develop a concept design with a combination of public sector, community and commercial space, including potentially space for KCC to deliver the Folkestone town centre library and registration service. Discussions with the District Council have progressed positively to the point where we believe this option for Folkestone library is feasible and viable. Subject to this consultation and decision process, we are proposing to take forward the detailed work with the District Council needed to realise this project.

KCC would provide the following library and registration services at the new location:

- Main adult lending library
- Children's library
- Space for activities and studying
- Public PCs and Wi-Fi
- Local studies collection
- Birth and death registration
- Notice of marriage appointments
- Bookable meeting room
- Activities and events programme for all ages.

We would aim for a public library space that is similar to the public library space at the Grace Hill building but more adaptable to enable community use outside of library opening hours. We would also look to make use of shared spaces like meeting rooms for other activities and community use.

The Sassoon Gallery does not form part of our statutory library service and therefore it is our intention that it would not be provided in the new town centre location.

If a decision is taken to permanently leave the Grace Hill building we would explore options for the Chris Offili Screen. The options would need to reflect the future use of the building but would include:

- Removal of the artwork to storage.
- Leaving the artwork in place and incorporating it in the future use of the building.
- Leaving the artwork in place and selling or gifting it to new owners as appropriate in the event that the building is sold.
- Removal of the artwork and relocation to another KCC building.
- Sale or gifting of the piece to a partner organisation and relocation to a suitable site.

The other piece of artwork currently housed in the Grace Hill building, is Yoko Ono's Skyladder. This artwork is in the form of 'instructions', exhibited above the stairs in Grace Hill. These words are on loan to KCC. If the building were sold we would need to explore whether the words would need to be returned.

This means that while the space we would occupy at FOLCA would be less than the entire Grace Hill building, we could maintain a similar size of public library, using space flexibly for events and activities, and still offer the same library and registration services provided at the Grace Hill building.

Why this is our preferred option

We have evaluated each option using the factors outlined on page 11. Below we have set out the key considerations under each of these factors.

Service requirements

Location: This option would locate the library on the high street where it would be expected to benefit from higher passing footfall than the Grace Hill building.



Figure 1 Map showing locations of Folkestone Library at 2 Grace Hill, the temporary provision at 5 Grace Hill and FOLCA on the high street.

Space: The future space requirements for the library and registration service can be accommodated. While subject to further detailed work this space would enable us to develop a new library layout to reflect the ever-evolving nature of the modern library service. We would want to make the library space as flexible as possible to host community activities and ensure we have the right proportion of space for the children's library, adult library, computers and activity space. We would engage more with customers about the plans for the library, subject to any decisions.

The space proposed for the library and registration service in FOLCA is equivalent to the public library and registration spaces provided at the Grace Hill building. The Grace Hill building is bigger than is needed to provide the statutory library and registration service in Folkestone town centre. We have looked to co-locate with other services in the past, such as Adult Education. However, the layout of the Grace Hill building and its listed status has made this more complicated and costly to achieve than it would be in a more modern building where adaptations can be made more easily.

Partnership potential: Co-locating with other public sector and community services would bring more services together making it easier for people to access services in one place and should enable more use and take-up of all services. A new location on the high street, such as FOLCA, co-located with other community services, represents an opportunity to develop and sustain the library and registration service. It is also in line with our countywide approach to explore co-locations, which has been successful elsewhere in the county.

Financial considerations

In the current financial climate, and subject to considering consultation responses, KCC does not consider that it can justify the cost of all the work needed to the Grace Hill building. The fact that the costs of repair are increasing makes this particularly unviable given the number of buildings KCC has to maintain across the county.

The financial constraints facing KCC are such that we have taken and continue to need to take difficult decisions to reduce the number of buildings we have (alongside other difficult decisions concerning service provision across a wide range of areas). In this context, we do not consider that it would be appropriate, or responsible, to spend £2.9 million on the Grace Hill building alone.

We also need to be mindful of the future costs of maintaining the Grace Hill building which, after making repairs, will continue to be significant given the age, construction and listed status of the building. This is likely to be unsustainable in the longer term given the financial constraints explained above. There is also the risk that if in the future the building needs other significant works that we would not be able to afford to do them and may find ourselves in the same scenario we are currently in.

Moving to FOLCA would reduce future maintenance liabilities and would support reducing KCC revenue costs. The costs to maintain the library in FOLCA would be considerably lower than at Grace Hill as it will be a newly refurbished space, with a more efficient footprint. The building is not listed so does not have the limitations that there are at Grace Hill and KCC would only be responsible for the area it uses and not all of the expensive building maintenance (such as the roof, boiler etc).

The capital investment needed to move the library and registration service to FOLCA and transform the empty space into a functioning library is estimated to cost around £150,000 to £200,000 based on the current assumptions of what KCC would be required to do. The service and building operating costs (including staffing, rent and service charge) of providing the library and registration service in FOLCA would be similar to how much it cost us at 2 Grace Hill.

In coming to this proposal KCC has explored a number of potential sources of external grant funding which might make spending £2.9 million on repairing the Grace Hill building viable, including the Government's Libraries Improvement Fund (LIF), the Heritage Lottery Fund, and Historic England repair grants. Unfortunately to date we have not found a fund that KCC would be eligible to apply for or which is about repairing buildings. The LIF, for example, is about investing in projects to upgrade buildings and technology not a fund for repairing buildings.

We also identified that more options for grant funding are available for buildings not in local government ownership / control. [Creative Folkestone](#)⁶, explored earlier this year the potential of an application to the Community Ownership Fund to enable it to take over the Grace Hill building, carry out refurbishments and then lease back to KCC the space needed for the library and registration service for a nominal rent. Creative Folkestone commissioned a feasibility study to explore design possibilities and broad estimates of costs. However, this option would be subject to the Asset of Community Value process which in turn cannot begin unless KCC determines that it intends to dispose of the building (more information on this process is available on page 7 and in the Glossary). It would also be subject to KCC's obligations around achieving best value from the disposal of any property asset.

Deliverability considerations

The FOLCA option is still subject to more detailed development, working with the District Council. Indicative costs and principles of a potential lease have progressed and on the basis of these discussions we believe that this option is viable. Details of the lease of course still need to be agreed and the timescale for delivery still need to be confirmed, but we now want to take a formal decision to work towards relocating to FOLCA. As with any significant redevelopment project it may take years to come to fruition and the temporary provision will need to remain in place until that point. If this proposed option for any reason cannot progress then KCC is committed to then finding an alternative town centre site.

Environmental considerations

This would be a smaller footprint than the Grace Hill building, which would reduce KCC's carbon footprint, contributing to our 2030 carbon neutral target. Also, the building would be more environmentally efficient.

What would happen if we leave Grace Hill?

If, after this consultation, a decision is taken to progress as proposed, KCC would then need to evaluate if it is best to lease or sell the building. If KCC decides to sell the building, we must comply with both Government legislation and our own [Disposal Policy](#)⁷ (Freehold Property Assets Disposals Policy).

This Policy sets out the way in which we sell our buildings. We must openly market the building for sale in a fair and impartial way and obtain bids / offers for it. KCC has an obligation to the taxpayer to give priority to the best financial offer for the building

⁶ www.creativefolkestone.org.uk

⁷ <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2614>

it is selling, to maximise the benefit to Kent residents. Any proceeds from selling buildings would be reinvested into our priority capital programme.

5. What are the other options we have considered?

Before reaching our preferred way forward, a number of other options were considered, as described in the table below.

Whilst this consultation asks for views on our proposals to permanently leave the Grace Hill building and work towards a new library and registration service in FOLCA, it is also an opportunity to comment on the other options we have considered and for other ideas to be suggested. You can tell us about your ideas in the consultation questionnaire.

Alternative option	Considerations
<p>Continue with temporary provision permanently and exit the 2 Grace Hill building.</p> <p>This would mean making the temporary provision that has been put in place since the closure of Folkestone Library permanent and leasing / selling the 2 Grace Hill building.</p> <p>See page 5 of this document for more information on the temporary provision.</p>	<p>Service requirements: The temporary provision does not allow full library and registration services to be delivered from one town centre location. KCC is committed to providing a permanent town centre library in Folkestone. The temporary provision was never envisaged or considered as a permanent replacement. As a result, we do not support this option.</p> <p>Financial: This option would be the best financially. Provision is currently in place, so there would be minimal additional cost to deliver it. This option would reduce KCC's ongoing building maintenance costs and KCC would realise the value of the existing Grace Hill building.</p> <p>Deliverability: Already in place.</p> <p>Environmental: Smaller footprint so lower carbon emissions.</p>

Alternative option	Considerations
<p>Make repairs to the Grace Hill building, re-open Folkestone Library and co-locate with other services.</p> <p>KCC would need to fund the repair of the building, move the library and registration service back in and look at the potential for other services to move in to maximise the use of the building.</p>	<p>Service requirements: The building is bigger than is needed to provide the library and registration service in Folkestone town centre. In the past options have been looked at to co-locate other partners in the building such as Adult Education but the structure and layout of the building and its listed status has made this prohibitive.</p> <p>Financial: KCC does not have available the estimated £2.9 million needed to repair the Grace Hill building, and this is unlikely to change.</p> <p>There would also be significant ongoing maintenance costs (and risks), as explained above. Repairing the building does not solve the ongoing maintenance issues and there is a risk that if something else went majorly wrong in the next few years that we would not be able to afford to fix it.</p> <p>We do not support this option primarily because in the current financial climate, and subject to considering consultation responses, KCC does not consider that it can justify the cost of all the work needed to the Grace Hill building.</p> <p>Deliverability: Works to the Grace Hill building would take some significant time.</p> <p>Environmental: While some improvements can be made, the Grace Hill building is not as</p>

Alternative option	Considerations
	environmentally friendly as other options proposed.
<p>Relocate full library service to another existing KCC building.</p> <p>We have considered opportunities to relocate the library service within these KCC community buildings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kent Adult Education’s The Cube or Folkestone Early Years Children’s Centre (changing to a Family Hub) buildings around Tontine Street. • Cheriton House office, Cheriton High Street. <p>This could maximise the potential of KCC’s existing buildings if suitable space was available which overall would reduce ongoing building costs to KCC.</p>	<p>Service requirements: This option is not supported as KCC does not have a suitable building with the space available to relocate the Folkestone town centre library and registration service.</p> <p>These locations would not meet the needs of the library service and would not offer an improved location in the town.</p> <p>The KCC offices in Cheriton House are not located close enough to Folkestone’s high street and are nearly three miles away from the Grace Hill building.</p> <p>Financial: Not applicable as no suitable building identified.</p> <p>Deliverability: Not deliverable.</p> <p>Environmental: Not applicable as no suitable building identified.</p>
<p>Sell and then lease back part of the building.</p> <p>KCC would sell or issue a long lease to another party on the basis that KCC could lease back part of the building at a very low or nominal rent for the library to use. The lease would need to be for at least 15 years as explained in the next column.</p>	<p>Service requirements: This would result in the library returning to the Grace Hill building which while positive would not enable us to take the opportunity to be on the high street and might not enable us to be co-located with other public services to maximise the service offer to the public.</p> <p>The building would need to be remodelled to fit other services or uses in and still provide room for the</p>

Alternative option	Considerations
	<p>full range of library and registration services.</p> <p>Creative Folkestone has proactively expressed an interest to KCC in taking forward a proposal of this nature. Given the Asset of Community Value (ACV) registration of the Grace Hill building, KCC is required to ensure any interested community group has an opportunity to pursue purchasing the building.</p> <p>Financial: The lease back arrangement is likely to be required for approximately 15 years to extract sufficient value from the lease for foregoing the money KCC would realise from selling the building.</p> <p>The new owner / leaseholder would need to invest in the building condition (using funding that is not available to KCC so it can be put back into use) and find uses for the space not leased to KCC. This would enable Folkestone Library to reopen in the Grace Hill building alongside other partners enabling the building usage to be maximised.</p> <p>There is the risk that no one will want to take on the responsibility of the building unless they can get external funding which may not be available.</p> <p>This option is likely to be subject to securing necessary grant funding which may be a significant challenge</p>

Alternative option	Considerations
	<p>given the nature of the building and its restoration costs.</p> <p>Deliverability: The time to deliver would depend on how long it takes any third party to secure the necessary funding. If the lease is longer than 25 years it would trigger the ACV process, which would add an extra six months or more, if there are other parties interested in purchasing the building.</p> <p>KCC would also need to be satisfied that this arrangement complied with its obligations around achieving the best value when selling or leasing property assets. KCC would need to carefully consider this based on the specific arrangement proposed. This is a further uncertainty.</p> <p>Environmental: Utilising the existing building would not be as environmentally efficient as other options.</p> <p>Overall, we do not support this option because of a combination of the service-related advantages of moving to FOLCA, the uncertainties and deliverability challenges of this approach, and the importance of taking a decision in the near-term on the future of the Grace Hill building and moving forward with a clear-road map for the future of library services in Folkestone.</p>

Alternative option	Considerations
<p>Move service to an alternative leasehold site.</p> <p>If FOLCA was no longer a viable option we would look for another building in the town centre for the library and registration service.</p>	<p>Service requirements: This would enable a town centre provision for the service.</p> <p>Financial: Would need to be evaluated based on locations available. KCC would need to take on a lease.</p> <p>Deliverability: This option would be subject to the right property being available in the right place and at the right time. If the right property was found it may need adaptations to be suitable for library and registration services. It could take time for the right property to become available.</p> <p>Environmental: Unknown at this time. Any building the library service moves to is likely to be more environmentally friendly than 2 Grace Hill but it would depend on the specific building.</p>

6. Equality analysis

An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed to assess the potential impact our proposals could have on the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation) and those with carer's responsibilities.

The EqIA identifies potential positive impacts for all service users and protected characteristics. Customers would be able to access a full library and registration service and activities, including Rhyme Time, Summer Reading Challenge and Books Beyond Words reading group in the town centre again. Birth and death registration appointments would also resume in the town centre. Specialist disability, LGBTQIA+ and dual language book stock would be available in a town centre location. These services and activities would be more accessible in a high street location, closer to public transport links, and co-located with other public and community services.

Potential negative impacts from our proposals have been identified for age and disability. FOLCA is at the top of the high street, which is uphill from the Grace Hill building. This could be more difficult for someone with mobility issues if they live closer to the current location on Grace Hill. Moving to a new building / location may be difficult or daunting for some customers.

To help reduce potential negative impacts we would make sure that there is clear signage and awareness of the new building / location. We would provide a **social story** for the new location to provide familiarity to the new space for customers who need this before their first visit. We would also arrange a virtual tour to be uploaded to our webpage.

Accessibility of the building and the layout of the library space for all is a key requirement. The existing building at 2 Grace Hill does have accessibility challenges which we expect could be improved upon at FOLCA.

The full EqIA can be found on the consultation webpage: www.kent.gov.uk/folkestonelibrary or upon request. The EqIA will be updated to consider any relevant information we receive during the consultation.

7. How to give your views

The consultation will run for eight weeks from 18 July to 11 September 2024.

Before making any decisions we need to understand and consider people's views.

We want to know:

- What you think about our proposals to permanently leave the Folkestone Library building at 2 Grace Hill and find an alternative town centre location for the library and registration service.
- What you think of our current preferred option to move to FOLCA on the high street.
- How these proposals could impact you.
- And any alternative suggestions that we have not considered that you think we should.

We want to hear from you

Please let us know your thoughts by visiting www.kent.gov.uk/folkestonelibrary to complete the online questionnaire.

Alternatively, you can download a copy of the questionnaire from the website, pick one up from any of the Folkestone and Hythe district libraries (see pages 25 and 26 for a list) or request it using these contact details:

- 03000 41 64 38 (9am to 6pm on weekdays and 9am to 5pm on Saturdays)
- AKL@kent.gov.uk

These contact details can also be used if you have any questions or need any help to take part in the consultation.

Please ensure your response reaches us **by midnight on Wednesday 11 September 2024.**

This document and the consultation questionnaire are available in Easy Read and large print formats from the consultation webpage or on request. If you need this information in another format or language, please:

- email: alternativeformats@kent.gov.uk
- telephone: 03000 421 553
- text relay: 18001 03000 421 553

This number goes to an answer machine which is monitored during office hours.

Drop in events

There will be four drop-in events where you can come and talk to us about the proposals and ask your questions. If you have any accessibility requirements, please get in touch and let us know in advance:

Venue	Date	Time
Wood Avenue Library, Wood Avenue, Folkestone, CT19 6HS	Tuesday 30 July	10:30am to 1pm
	Monday 12 August	2pm to 5pm
Folkestone Library – Heritage and Digital Access, 5 Grace Hill, Folkestone, CT20 1HA	Wednesday 7 August	5pm to 7pm
	Saturday 10 August	10:30am to 1pm

Paper copies of consultation material including the questionnaire are available from all Folkestone and Hythe district libraries:

Libraries	Address	Opening hours
Wood Avenue	Wood Avenue, Folkestone, CT19 6HS	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday: 9:30am - 4:30pm Wednesday: 9:30am - 1pm
Sandgate	Sandgate High Street, Sandgate, Folkestone, CT20 3RR	Monday and Thursday: 9:30am - 5pm Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday: 9:30am - 1pm
Cheriton	64 Cheriton High Street, Folkestone, CT19 4HB	Monday, Thursday: 9am - 5pm (closed 1pm - 2pm) Tuesday: closed Wednesday: 9am - 1pm Friday: 10am - 5pm (closed 1pm - 2pm) Saturday: 10am - 2pm
Hythe	1 Stade Street, Hythe, CT21 6BQ	Monday to Friday: 9:30am - 5pm Saturday: 9:30am - 4:30pm
Lyminge	Station Road, Lyminge, Folkestone, CT18 8HS	Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 10am - 2pm Tuesday: 12pm - 5pm Thursday: 10am - 5pm Saturday: 9am - 1pm

Libraries	Address	Opening hours
New Romney	82 High Street, New Romney, TN28 8AU	Monday and Friday: 9am - 2pm Tuesday: 1pm - 5pm Wednesday and Saturday: 9am - 1pm Thursday: 10am - 4pm
Lydd	Skinner Road, Lydd, Romney Marsh, TN29 9HN	Monday, Tuesday and Thursday: 11am - 4pm Wednesday: closed Friday: 12pm - 4pm Saturday: 9am - 1pm

Next steps

The consultation responses will be evaluated by an independent company and we will publish their report on the consultation webpage.

The feedback from this consultation is expected to be reported to Members at the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee in the late Autumn and will be taken into consideration before a decision is taken.

Temporary provision will stay in place until any decisions are made and then any permanent options are delivered.

We will continue to keep the consultation webpage updated with the latest Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) as well as updating on the [Folkestone Library webpage](#)⁸.

⁸ <https://local.kent.gov.uk/kb5/kent/directory/service.page?id=YRWoQMs70mE&communitychannel=9>

8. Glossary

Assets of Community Value (ACV): A building or other land is an asset of community value if its main use has recently been or is presently used to further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community and could do so in the future. The Localism Act states that 'social interests' include cultural, recreational and sporting interests.

Backlog: A buildup of work that needs to be completed.

Capital spend: Money spent on things like modernising and improved utilisation of buildings, highway improvements, structures and waste enhancement. Funding comes from many sources but over 60% comes from grant funding and around 23% is borrowed. More information on our capital budget is available on Kent.gov.uk⁹.

Grade II listed: A building is listed when it is of special architectural or historic interest and considered to be of national importance and therefore worth protecting. Grade II listings are the most common listing type. In the case of 2 Grace Hill this building is listed for its special architectural or historic interest.

LGBTQIA+: Stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), intersex, asexual. The "plus" represents other sexual identities, such as, non-binary, pansexual and genderfluid who identify as part of the community.

Long lease: Is a lease that is likely to be for a period of 15 years or longer.

Members: KCC's elected politicians / councillors. More information on our Members can be found on Kent.gov¹⁰.

Moratorium period: A period of time when KCC cannot proceed with the sale or long lease of a building. There are two moratorium periods to note, both of which start from the date the listing authority (in this case Folkestone & Hythe District Council) is notified of the intention to sell a registered ACV asset:

- 'Interim moratorium period' – this is a six week period during which a community group wishing to bid for the asset must notify the listing authority that they wish to be considered as a potential bidder. If this does not happen the owner can proceed to a disposal.

⁹ www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/finance-and-budget/our-budget

¹⁰ <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

- 'Full moratorium period' - this is a six month period during which a community group can develop a proposal and raise the capital required to purchase the asset.

Reserves: Councils hold financial reserves so they can plan for the future and react to unforeseen events.

Revenue spend: Day to day spending on services including staffing and rent. Revenue spending comes from Council Tax, Government grants, income from service users and a small proportion of Business Rates. More information on our capital budget is available on Kent.gov.uk.

Social stories: Social stories can help people (often with autism) to cope with changes to routine and unexpected or distressing events. They present information in a literal, 'concrete' way, which may improve a person's understanding of a previously difficult or ambiguous situation or activity. More information is available from the National Autistic Society¹¹.

Statutory: Something that KCC legally has to do or provide because Government regulations say that all councils must do it. For example, the Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964¹², requires local authorities in England and Wales to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons.

¹¹ <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations>

¹² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75/contents

Folkestone Library Public Consultation



kent.gov.uk/folkestonelibrary

Paper copies of consultation documents are available from all Folkestone and Hythe district libraries. If you have a question or need help taking part in the consultation you can also contact us by phone: **03000 41 64 38** (9am to 6pm on weekdays and 9am to 5pm on Saturdays) or email: **AKL@kent.gov.uk**.

