

Shaping the future of Devon's library service – a joint response issued on behalf of The Friends of Buckfastleigh Library and Buckfastleigh Town Council – February 2026

Whilst we understand that all locally delivered services are facing unprecedented financial pressures, lack of investment and significant change, we believe that this consultation has not considered the individual needs and demographic of each community.

Buckfastleigh is a rural community with a higher than national average number of lower income households. It has poor transport links and degrading infrastructure. At the same time, it is not solely dependent on tourism and has few second homes or holiday lets. It is a community where people actually live, need and use essential services to not only exist but thrive. The availability of an accessible library provides a valuable resource for education and entertainment but also contributes to community cohesion, wellbeing, economic growth and a sense of pride.

We therefore question why Buckfastleigh Library as part of the proposed consultation has been placed alongside other communities in the Band D category most of which do not have the same need or demographic. Buckfastleigh library would have its staff hours cut by 60% compared to an overall reduction of 30%. Surely each community should be assessed by the level of use and engagement.

Buckfastleigh Library has an average turnover of 9,000 books per year compared to other communities such as the affluent town of Salcombe who has also been placed in Band D with only 470 books issued per year. In addition to this are all the activities and events that are provided, how these are incorporated into the town calendar and the administration that is required by a dedicated and professional member of staff whose knowledge and value is impossible to quantify. It should also be highlighted that Buckfastleigh Library has outperformed all tier 5 (except Chulmleigh which is a school) and one 3 tier libraries regarding the Summer Book Quest which should be commended.

This is clear discrimination based on the misinformed assumption that more hours can be met from volunteers or funded from other underdetermined sources with the suggestion that the overstretched budget of a small poorly resourced Town Council can step into the breach when we are already facing the impact of taking on other non-revenue generating liabilities with no additional funding. Larger libraries will however continue to be adequately funded and resourced while the smaller libraries will be sacrificed.

There is no other suitable location for the library in Buckfastleigh which has had a mutually beneficial arrangement with the Town Council for the past 74 years. It should be noted that the Town Hall charity has not implemented a rent increase for four years despite facing its own financial difficulties. The suggestion to incorporate a key card system when the library is unstaffed is also untenable due to increased risk and insurance implications. Neither Libraries Unlimited or Devon County Council have consulted directly with the Town Council since this consultation was initiated.

We request therefore that this proposal is re-visited to provide a more balanced and fair system of banding and that Buckfastleigh library is placed in the Band C category with the original 15 hours allocated for a paid member of staff reinstated.