

DCMS Libraries & Archives Team
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

libraryreview@culture.gsi.gov.uk

25 January 2010

Dear Sir/Madam,

Empower, Inform, Enrich – The modernisation review of public libraries: consultation

Thank you for inviting English Heritage to respond to the consultation on the modernisation review of public libraries.

English Heritage is the Government's statutory advisor on the historic environment. As part of this role it advises on listing, and receives an average of 12 applications per year to assess library buildings for listing.

Within the portfolio of public libraries there are a number of buildings that form an important part of the historic environment and the nation's cultural heritage. Some of these are included on the statutory list of buildings of special architectural and historic interest, as compiled by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and others will be locally listed or within designated conservation areas.

Many historic libraries represent not only a key component in local townscapes but also an expression of our cultural heritage and civic aspirations. As a result they are much-loved local landmarks, with a high community value. As generations of local people grow up using and enjoying the facilities provided, the building, as well as the service, becomes embedded into the local psyche.

English Heritage therefore feels it is important that local authorities seek to keep library provision in the buildings that have become synonymous with the service. The form of the building will reflect its historic function and generally the best use will be the original use (PPG 15, Planning and the Historic Environment para 3.10). The use and appropriate management of a place for its original purpose illustrates the relationship between design and function and may make a major contribution to its historical significance. Where authorities feel the current libraries are not fit for purpose, they should consider adapting the building rather than abandoning it and moving the service to another location which does not have the emotional connection with the local community. Any changes should be based on an understanding of their significance as well as the service needs and buildings should be managed to sustain their values.

We feel that these issues should be picked up in any recommendations which fall out of **Question 17** of the consultation document. Library leaders need to consider the importance of the existing building, both in heritage and community terms, when

deciding whether it should remain the focal point of the service. They need to be aware of what they will be losing if they choose to go elsewhere.

By way of background I have attached a short note on the history and designation of library buildings for your information.

Yours faithfully

Owain Lloyd-James
Senior Policy Advisor for Local Government and National Infrastructure