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The future of our library: please tell us what you think.

The Bowring Library building, facing down Lime Street, is a familiar part of the town centre. Given to the town by Sir Thomas Bowring in 1902, the ground floor has been our library ever since.

Devon County Council, who took over the library and the building from the town in 1962 and are now faced by substantial spending cuts, think it would be better to move the library service to Green Hill, and sell the Bowring Library building. This would save money spent on upkeep of the building. There would be nearly 30% less space for the library at Green Hill, however they believe that it will be possible to provide a better service at Green Hill because it would be possible to keep the library open for longer hours between 10 am and 4 pm. Comments by the Friends of Moretonhampstead Library are available on the website and at the Library and the Parish Office.

The proposed move would impact on the Youth Club, which currently occupies the space that would be used by the library. Comments by Moretonhampstead Action for Youth are also available on the website and at the Library and Parish Office. Having the library at Green Hill would help Green Hill's finances (in past years there has been a deficit), but DCC have not yet been able to confirm that funding will be made available to pay for the move (and annual running costs) at Green Hill, and are facing further cuts. DCC have indicated that they would use some of the proceeds of selling the library building to pay for the capital costs of moving the library; the rest would go into DCC general funds. The building would still be a feature of the town centre because it is protected by being a listed building, however it would no longer be in public ownership.

Keeping the library in the present building would not be easy. The Bowring Library building was well-built, and is still basically in sound condition apart from damp areas in the walls mainly caused by poor maintenance of gutters and drainpipes. Internally, the building is a bit run-down; the two upper floors have been used as offices, but only one room is let at the moment. It would probably cost £50-£80K to put the building back into good condition externally and internally, and then cost around £10K a year to keep it in good shape. Devon County Council aren't prepared to pay for this – they are trying to reduce spending on underused buildings. It might be possible to raise the amount needed to put the building back into good condition from donors – we already have offers of £35K; but there's no point in doing this unless the building can then generate enough income to pay for future maintenance, and there isn't a lot of demand at present for offices in Moretonhampstead. Converting the upper floors to flats would seem to make a lot of sense – flats are needed, and would generate a reasonable income. However this would need more money – probably another £50K, and DNPA have indicated that they are reluctant to give planning permission. Unless we can find donors, and people to form a trust to manage the building, and have solid plans for a sustainable future for the building, we are unlikely to be able to persuade DCC to transfer the building back to the town.

In view of the affection of many Moretonians for the library building and its loss as a public building if the library is moved to Green Hill as currently proposed by DCC and MDT, the parish council wishes to consult the community about the change, and to give time and opportunity for anyone who wishes to help to keep the building in public use and ownership to come forward before any decisions are made.

Please fill in the consultation form and return it to us before Sunday January 17th. If you don't find a copy in your News in Moreton, or want another, copies are available at the Library, the Parish Council office (at Green Hill) and other places in the town, or you can print one off from the Parish Council website (www.visitmoretonhampstead.co.uk). Further information is available on the website, at the Library or at the Parish Office. There will be open sessions for discussion in the Library on Saturday 5 December (10.00 – 12:00); and at Green Hill on Saturday 9 January (10:00 – 12:00).