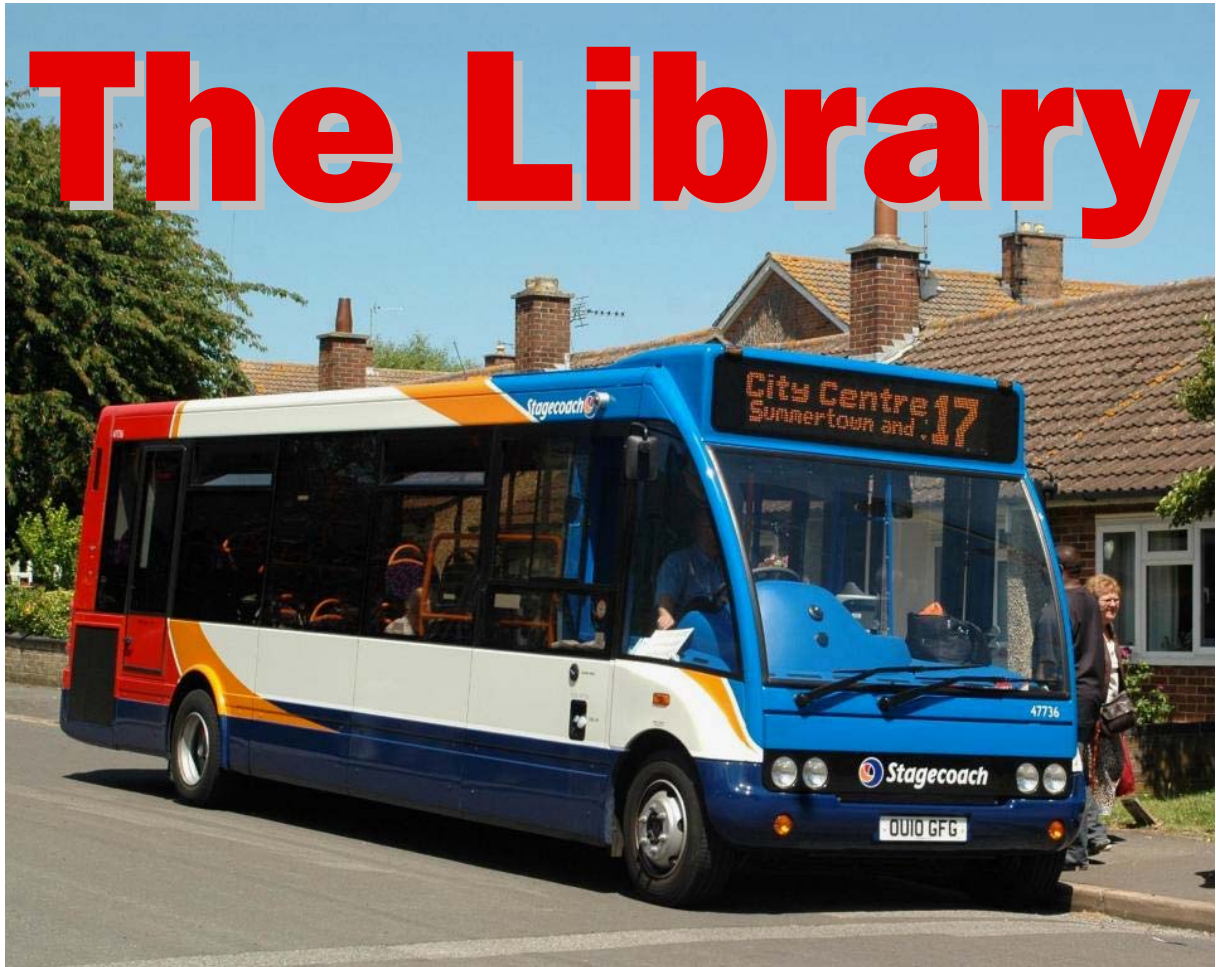


# Getting to The Library



by Hugh Jaeger  
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Bus Users UK

a response to **Oxfordshire County Council's  
Future Libraries** proposals for public libraries

**February 2011**





# Getting to the Library

## comments on Oxfordshire County Council's "Future Libraries" proposals

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### 1.1 Bus Users UK

Bus Users UK is a non-statutory body, formerly the National Federation of Bus Users, founded in 1985 to represent bus passengers in the deregulation and privatisation of bus services outside London. It aims:

- To represent bus users in the discussion of public transport issues
- To increase passengers' influence on local and national decisions about bus services
- To develop good communication between bus companies and their passengers

Bus Users UK's work has been recognised by the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK such that it also has relations with most major bus companies (outside London, which has its own representation body) and with local authorities. Bus Users UK is not aligned with national or local government or any political party.

Bus Users UK is a partner in the Bus Appeals Body, founded to help passengers whose complaints about bus services have not been resolved satisfactorily. Bus Users UK organises Bus Users' Surgeries in town centres throughout Britain to enable passengers to address their concerns directly to bus company managers.

### 1.2 The author

Hugh Jaeger worked for London Transport from 1985 until 1997. He has nearly 40 years' experience as a pedal cyclist, 25 years as a motorcyclist, has been the British Motorcyclists' Federation's Oxfordshire representative since 2005 and Bus Users UK Oxford Group's chairman since 2009. He moved to Oxfordshire in 2000 and has lived in the city of Oxford since 2002.

## 1.3 “Future Libraries” within Oxfordshire’s budget

“Future Libraries” is Oxfordshire County Council’s set of proposals to reduce the cost of providing public library services to Oxfordshire. Future Libraries is part of Oxfordshire County Council’s response to the Department for Communities and Local Government’s decision to reduce funding allocations to Oxfordshire in response to HM Treasury’s Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in October 2010.

On the same day as announcing its Future Libraries proposals, Oxfordshire County Council announced proposals to close 20 youth centres. Two weeks alter it announced plans to reorganise social care for disabled and/or elderly people in order to operate on much lower funding. The social care reorganisation could significantly increase hardship for thousands of vulnerable people in Oxfordshire and the reduction in youth services could reduce social integration and personal development for thousands of young people in less well-off communities. Public concern has so far paid less attention to the youth service and social care proposals. This has been particularly true of interventions by local celebrities.

In 2010 Oxfordshire terminated aspects of its road safety spending in order to save revenue. Public debate highlighted the withdrawal of speed cameras in August 2010. Public debate paid much less attention to the withdrawal of Oxfordshire Road Safety’s mobile information unit and the redundancy of its one staff post, which happened to be held by the only member of road safety staff who had a full motorcycle licence. Any further reduction in Oxfordshire’s road safety spending in 2010–11 could seriously compromise the county’s casualty reduction work.

## 2.1 Oxfordshire’s proposals to withdraw library funding

Oxfordshire County Council provides 43 public libraries sited in towns and villages throughout the county, plus five mobile libraries and two children’s mobile libraries. It proposes to withdraw funding from 20 of its 43 libraries and to develop the remaining 23 as library “hubs” with improved facilities.

Oxfordshire County Council’s website, statements to news media and the County Librarian’s letter to library users all stress that 82% of library visits take place in the 23 libraries listed to become hubs. This would lead a reader to suppose that Oxfordshire has selected the busiest libraries to become hubs and proposes to withdraw funding from the 20 least used libraries.



**Adderbury Library was built in 1818 as the parish Sunday School. It is closed all day Monday and Wednesday and open for a total of only 18.5 hours per week. If it were closed the nearest library “hub” would be Banbury, to which the adult return bus fare is £5.50.**

Such an impression would be misleading. In fact the County Council’s closure proposals include libraries that ranked 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> for visitor numbers in 2009–10 (Headington, Summertown and Botley). Further, its proposals to create library “hubs” include the libraries that ranked 29<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> for visitor numbers in 2009–10 (Burford, Watlington and Hook Norton).

Watlington may have been selected to be a “hub” because it is unusually remote from other library “hubs”. Wallingford is 7.4 miles away and bus route 125 runs only once or twice a day. Buses link Watlington with Cowley every 60 minutes but the journey is 12.2 miles.

**Burford**'s nearest "hub" would be Wychwood. The distance is only 4.1 miles but bus route 233's timetable has long and irregular intervals of 70 – 105 minutes between trips. Route 233 is also Burford's main link with Witney. Burford is about as close to Carton as to Wychwood, but bus route 113 runs only on Thursdays and only one journey in each direction serves the whole route.

**Hook Norton**'s nearest "hub" would be Chipping Norton. The distance is 5.1 miles and bus route 488 runs every 60 minutes. Berinsfield, Charlbury, Deddington and Woodcote, all of whom face withdrawal of funding from their libraries, face longer distances and the same 60 minute bus frequency to their nearest "hubs".

The level of use of Hook Norton library and the degree of inconvenience that its closure would cause do not explain why it is to be retained as a "hub" when 15 libraries busier than Hook Norton are listed for funding withdrawal or closure. I do not at all suggest that Hook Norton library should close; only that the County Council should explain its selection criteria more clearly.

## 2.2 Usage data for individual libraries



**Deddington Library was built in 1874 as part of the Magistrates' Court. It is closed all day Tuesday and Friday and open for only 16.5 hours per week. If it were closed the nearest library "hub" would be Banbury, 6.1 miles away, to which the adult return bus fare is £5.50.**

Oxfordshire County Council has compiled 2009–10 figures the number of visits to each library, the number of items that each library issued and each library's net operating costs. Oxfordshire County Libraries service states on its Future Libraries webpage that it will answer enquiries within ten days. When I asked for the numbers of visitors and items issued at each library in the last year, Oxfordshire Libraries failed to reply as promised. However, it has provided these data to councillors. One of the councillors provided me with the data instead.

The visit numbers are rounded to the nearest 50 which suggests that they are estimates. Unfortunately the County Council spreadsheet carries no explanatory note to indicate (a) whether this is the case or (b) if the figures are estimates, what is their margin of error?

Some libraries rank differently for the number of visits and the number of issues. This reflects differences in the pattern of use of individual libraries. Some visitors may borrow more items than others, and users of computer facilities or the reference section may borrow no items at all. Some reference sections, such as Oxford Central, may be very intensively used whereas others may receive very little use.

The number of visits to each library does not necessarily give a precise measure of use. Many borrowers may stay only minutes, whereas users of



**Charlbury library is closed all day Tuesday and Thursday and open for only 18 hours per week. If it is closed the nearest library "hub" will be Chipping Norton, 6.4 miles away.**

library reference sections or information technology may stay for some hours. Actual total use may therefore be difficult to estimate.

It would be wrong to try to over-interpret such simple raw data. However, it should be borne in mind that there is more than one measure of each library's level of use and none of the available measures gives a complete picture. Hence no decision should be based on one measure alone.

Library	Visits '09-10	Proposal	Library	Issues '09-10	Proposal
Oxford Central	582,900	Hub library	Oxford Central	676,417	Hub library
Banbury	376,800	Hub library	Abingdon	306,991	Hub library
Abingdon	354,750	Hub library	Witney	268,577	Hub library
Witney	212,450	Hub library	Didcot	243,735	Hub library
Cowley	196,000	Hub library	Banbury	231,724	Hub library
Wantage	161,350	Hub library	Cowley	217,458	Hub library
Henley	157,050	Hub library	Bicester	217,283	Hub library
Headington	153,350	To be closed	Henley	163,920	Hub library
Didcot	151,000	Hub library	Wantage	163,403	Hub library
Bicester	141,700	Hub library	Kidlington	157,172	Hub library
Summertown	122,400	To be closed	Summertown	139,957	To be closed
Kidlington	107,300	Hub library	Headington	136,804	To be closed
Wallingford	97,050	Hub library	Wallingford	96,606	Hub library
Botley	89,750	To be closed	Carterton	93,029	Hub library
Carterton	82,650	Hub library	Botley	78,825	To be closed
Chipping Norton	70,350	Hub library	Chipping Norton	68,587	Hub library
Goring	47,550	Hub library	Thame	60,575	Hub library
Woodcote	45,100	To be closed	Goring	54,575	Hub library
Faringdon	42,500	Hub library	Wheatley	54,344	Hub library
Woodstock	33,950	Hub library	Woodstock	51,320	Hub library
Sonning Common	29,150	To be closed	Faringdon	50,925	Hub library
Thame	26,450	Hub library	Benson	49,188	To be closed
Eynsham	24,650	Hub library	Chinnor	48,795	To be closed
Wheatley	23,850	Hub library	Sonning Common	45,563	To be closed
Grove	23,400	To be closed	Wychwood	44,575	Hub library
Blackbird Leys	21,950	To be closed	Woodcote	43,159	To be closed
Wychwood	20,000	Hub library	Eynsham	43,013	Hub library
Benson	18,950	To be closed	Adderbury	35,637	To be closed
Neithrop	16,900	To be closed	Deddington	33,690	To be closed
Burford	16,900	Hub library	Neithrop	32,272	To be closed
Littlemore	16,050	To be closed	Blackbird Leys	29,206	To be closed
Chinnor	15,550	To be closed	Kennington	28,794	To be closed
Watlington	15,250	Hub library	Grove	28,099	To be closed
Berinsfield	14,900	To be closed	Watlington	25,555	Hub library
Charlbury	13,150	To be closed	Berinsfield	24,860	To be closed
Deddington	12,750	To be closed	Charlbury	23,856	To be closed
Kennington	12,450	To be closed	Hook Norton	22,135	Hub library
Adderbury	11,900	To be closed	Old Marston	20,541	To be closed
Hook Norton	9,750	Hub library	Burford	17,341	Hub library
Bampton	9,350	To be closed	North Leigh	17,090	To be closed
Old Marston	7,000	To be closed	Stonesfield	14,577	To be closed
North Leigh	6,500	To be closed	Littlemore	14,376	To be closed
Stonesfield	4,550	To be closed	Bampton	13,091	To be closed

## 2.3 Net costs

As simple usage data for individual libraries can be interpreted only to a limited extent (see above) it is not possible to apply them to measure precisely the value for money of each library. However, each branch's net cost (see table below) can be related to each library's number of visitors (see section 2.2, above) to estimate the operating cost per visit.

Library	Net cost 2009-10	Proposal	Library	Net cost 2009-10	Proposal
Oxford Central	£888,703	Hub library	Littlemore	£42,138	To be closed
Banbury	£210,500	Hub library	Wheatley	£42,121	Hub library
Abingdon	£205,856	Hub library	Goring	£41,139	Hub library
Witney	£198,213	Hub library	Faringdon	£37,310	Hub library
Didcot	£151,967	Hub library	Grove	£36,641	To be closed
Wantage	£147,366	Hub library	Sonning Common	£33,723	To be closed
Bicester	£146,391	Hub library	Eynsham	£32,661	Hub library
Henley	£143,614	Hub library	Benson	£32,609	To be closed
Cowley	£125,781	Hub library	Neithrop	£31,177	To be closed
Headington	£119,198	To be closed	Woodcote	£30,560	To be closed
Kidlington	£110,994	Hub library	Wychwood	£27,274	Hub library
Summertown	£102,112	To be closed	Deddington	£26,085	To be closed
Carterton	£70,483	Hub library	Burford	£25,574	Hub library
Wallingford	£62,332	Hub library	Kennington	£22,622	To be closed
Thame	£58,208	Hub library	Hook Norton	£21,848	Hub library
Blackbird Leys	£52,439	To be closed	Adderbury	£21,509	To be closed
Botley	£47,372	To be closed	Charlbury	£21,478	To be closed
Chinnor	£44,755	To be closed	Bampton	£20,472	To be closed
Woodstock	£44,376	Hub library	Old Marston	£19,403	To be closed
Chipping Norton	£44,286	Hub library	North Leigh	£17,249	To be closed
Watlington	£43,871	Hub library	Stonesfield	£13,088	To be closed
Berinsfield	£42,577	To be closed			

## 3.1 Distance to the nearest library "hub"

Oxfordshire County Council states that communities whose libraries are closed could order library items online and collect and return the items at automated facilities. This option is dealt with in section 4.2 of this report. Users who still wish to visit an actual library face three options:

- private transport to the nearest library "hub",
- public transport to whatever library "hub" is served by public transport,
- wait for a mobile library that visits their community once a fortnight,
- stop visiting public libraries.



**Woodcote Library building was originally the village school. If it closes, residents who want to visit a library would need to travel either four miles by private transport to Goring or 6.3 miles by bus to Wallingford.**

Each private transport user’s decision on whether to walk, cycle or drive to a library “hub” will depend on each occasion on a number of factors. However, the greater the distance, the greater the likelihood that the user may decide to drive. Even if they choose a low-emission vehicle, this choice will contribute to congestion and be against Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan’s policies on smarter travel choices.

Below are the distances from each of the 20 threatened libraries to the nearest “hub”.

Library	Nearest hub	Miles	Library	Nearest hub	Miles
Charlbury	Chipping Norton	6.4	North Leigh	Witney	3.4
Deddington	Banbury	6.1	Headington	Oxford Central	3.4
Berinsfield	Wallingford	5.4	Old Marston	Oxford Central	3.4
Bampton	Carterton	5.1	Kennington	Oxford Central	3.1
Stonesfield	Woodstock	4.7	Summertown	Oxford Central	2.5
Chinnor	Thame	4.4	Botley	Oxford Central	1.8
Woodcote	Goring	4.0	Grove	Wantage	1.7
Sonning Common	Caversham	3.8	Blackbird Leys	Cowley	1.7
Adderbury	Banbury	3.7	Littlemore	Cowley	1.3
Benson	Wallingford	3.6	Neithrop	Banbury	0.9

### 3.2 Bus travel to nearest accessible “hub”



**Berinsfield’s nearest “hub” is Wallingford by buses X39 and X40, but their stop on the A4074 main road is up to half a mile from many villagers’ homes. For those that cannot walk that far, Heyfordian route 116 links all of Berinsfield with Abingdon and Cowley once an hour.**

If Oxfordshire closes libraries from which funding withdrawal is proposed, in most cases the nearest “hub” will also be the one that is most accessible by public transport. There are two exceptions.

If **Berinsfield** library closes, the nearest “hub” will be Wallingford 5.4 miles away. Buses X39 and X40 link Berinsfield and Wallingford every 30 minutes but at Berinsfield they stop only on the A4074 main road. This stop is up to 900 metres’ walk from parts of Berinsfield. The DfT’s *Inclusive Mobility* guidelines indicate that many disabled people find it difficult to walk

more than 50 metres without resting, and that if a bus stop is more than 200 metres’ walk from their home they are unlikely to use it at all. This limitation may also apply to able-bodied people if they are carrying heavy shopping or managing a number of small children. For Berinsfield residents in any of these circumstances the more convenient alternative is to catch bus 116 to Abingdon which is 6.0 miles away. Route 116 serves Fane Drive which takes it around the whole of Berinsfield.



**Summertown has many buses per hour to central Oxford but only one per hour, subsidised route 17, that stops within disabled walking distance of Oxford Central Library.**

If **Woodcote** library closes, the nearest

“hub” will be Goring 4.0 miles away. However, bus 132 between Woodcote and Goring runs only once every two hours. This could add very lengthy waiting times to a round trip, particularly on the return half of a journey. A more convenient bus link is between Woodcote and Wallingford by route X40. This runs every 60 minutes and the distance is 6.3 miles.

Library	Hub	Bus routes	Subsidy	Frequency	Journey	Adult rtn	Child rtn	Adult + 2
Adderbury	Banbury	59/59A/59B (note 1)	no	60 mins	19 mins	£5.50	£3.60	£12.00
Deddington	Banbury	59/59A/59B (note 1)	no	60 mins	28 mins	£5.50	£3.60	£12.00
Bampton	Carterton	19	yes	60 mins	15 mins	£4.90	£3.20	£11.30
Chinnor	Thame	40	yes	60 mins	24 mins	£4.50	£3.15	£10.80
Woodcote	Wallingford	X40 (see above)	no	60 mins	25 mins	£4.10	£2.70	£9.40
Berinsfield (A)	Abingdon	114, 116 (note 2)	yes	60 mins	29 mins	£4.20	£2.10	£8.40
Charlbury	Chipping Norton	X9	yes	60 mins	24 mins	£3.50	£2.30	£8.10
Berinsfield (W)	Wallingford	X39, X40 (note 2)	yes	30 mins	13 mins	£3.30	£2.20	£7.70
Stonesfield	Woodstock	S3	no	60 mins	25 mins	£3.40	£1.60	£6.60
Kennington	Oxford Central	35	no	15 mins	22 mins	£3.20	£1.60	£6.40
Sonning Cmn	Caversham	2/2A	no	30 mins	30 mins	£3.80	£1.30	£6.40
Headington	Oxford Central	7C, 8, 9, U1	no	frequent	22 mins	£2.90	£1.40	£5.70
Old Marston	Oxford Central	14A, 17C	yes	30 mins	20 mins	£2.90	£1.40	£5.70
North Leigh	Witney	11	yes	60 mins	12 mins	£2.90	£1.40	£5.70
Botley	Oxford Central	4/4A/4B/4C, S1, U1, X30	no	10-20 mins	12 mins	£2.90	£1.40	£5.70
Summertown	Oxford Central	17	yes	60 mins	20 mins	£2.90	£1.40	£5.70
Littlemore	Cowley	16/16A	no	30 mins	08 mins	£2.40	£1.40	£5.20
Grove	Wantage	38	yes	60 mins	13 mins	£1.90	£1.60	£5.10
Benson	Wallingford	X39, X40	no	30 mins	21 mins	£2.10	£1.40	£4.90
Blackbird Leys	Cowley	1, 5, 12/12C	no	frequent	23 mins	£2.40	£1.20	£4.80
Neithrop	Banbury	B5	no	12 mins	15 mins	£2.30	£1.20	£4.70

Many parents use public libraries to support their children’s interest in reading and develop their ability to read. Therefore the above table lists return fares not only for individuals but also for one adult and two children travelling together. Please note:

- From either Adderbury or Deddington to Banbury, one adult return plus two child returns would add up to £12.70. However, all three can travel together on one Stagecoach GoldRider ticket for £12.00.
- There are many buses each hour between Summertown and central Oxford but nearly all of them terminate at Magdalen Street East. This is at least 550 metres from Oxford Central Library, which the DfT’s *Inclusive Mobility* guidelines make clear is nearly three times the distance that many disabled people can walk. Only route 17, which runs once per hour between Summertown and Castle Street, stops within most disabled people’s walking distance of Oxford Central Library.



**Stagecoach routes 59 and 59A serve villages between Oxford and Banbury once an hour. If Deddington or Adderbury public libraries are closed, who will pay a £5.50 return fare to Banbury just to borrow a few books or DVD’s?**

Therefore the table above cites route 17 for service frequency and journey time between Summertown and Westgate.

### 3.3 Inconvenience or hardship?

The tables in sections 3.1 and 3.2 above clearly show a wide variation in inconvenience to people who wish to continue visiting a library. The threshold at which inconvenience can be defined as real hardship will vary between the circumstances of different individuals. A degree of subjective opinion is hard to avoid and may in fact be necessary.



**Sonning Common Library occupies part of the parish school building. If it closes, Oxfordshire's nearest library "hub" will be Henley, 5.6 miles away.**

**Reading Libraries allows any in England or Wales to use its libraries free of charge. The nearest Reading Library is at Caversham 3.8 miles away. There are buses every 30 but the journey takes 30 minutes as well.**

Whatever one's perspective, it is hard to argue the inconvenience caused by closing Neithrop library could be called "hardship". Neithrop is less than one mile from Banbury Library. An able-bodied person can walk that distance in 15 minutes. For people who cannot walk that far, the B5 bus runs every 12 minutes and makes the journey in the same amount of time. The fares between Neithrop and Banbury are the least expensive from any of the 20 threatened libraries to their nearest convenient library "hub". In both the number of visitors and the number of items issued, Neithrop ranks 30<sup>th</sup> out of Oxfordshire's 43 libraries. The case for closing Neithrop Library is well made.

The libraries at Stonesfield and North Leigh have the lowest running costs but also the lowest visitor numbers. Each is open for only 11 hours per week, but they have the two lowest parish populations of any of the 43 Oxfordshire communities that have a library. There is therefore the least potential to stimulate and increase their amount of use much above current levels. The bus fares from Stonesfield and North Leigh to their nearest library "hubs" are significant but not exceptional. Therefore the case for closing Stonesfield and North Leigh Libraries may also be well made.

Section 2.1 points out that three very well-used libraries are listed for withdrawal of funding and two of these would definitely be closed. Summertown and Headington rank 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> for visitor numbers and 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> for the numbers of items issued. Botley ranks somewhat below them, at 14<sup>th</sup> in visitor numbers and 15<sup>th</sup> in the number of items issued. In 2009-10 Botley, Headington and Summertown combined had more visitors than the other 17 libraries added together (365,500 versus 306,400), although they issued significantly fewer items than the other 17 (355,586 versus 564,101).



**Bampton's main bus services are hourly subsidised routes 18 (right) and 19 (left). Route 19 is Bampton's only link with its nearest library "hub" at Carterton. The adult return fare is £4.90.**

However, the inconvenience caused to relatively large numbers of

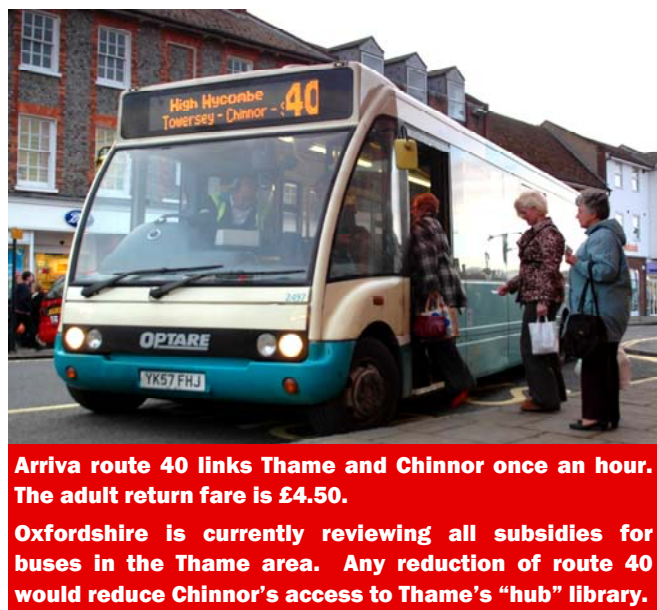
people by closing Headington, Summertown and Botley would be much less acute than the inconvenience caused – albeit to smaller numbers of people – by the closure of libraries in some villages for whom the bus to the nearest library “hub” runs only once an hour and the return fares for an adult and two children total between £8 and £12. It therefore seems necessary to make a synthesis of objective data and somewhat subjective evaluation.

In the bus fare rankings a relatively wide threshold appears below Berinsfield and Charlbury and above Stonesfield. This suggests that if funding withdrawal were to lead to closure of the 20 libraries under consideration, **closure of seven in particular of those 20 would cause significantly more acute inconvenience** than the other 13. These seven are **Deddington, Adderbury, Bampton, Chinnor, Woodcote, Berinsfield and Charlbury**. Whether this degree of inconvenience amounts to “hardship” may be even more subjective. However, it may be reasonable to expect that closure of these seven libraries might cause the most acute reduction of public library use in the communities that they currently serve.

### 3.4 Subsidised buses

The table in section 3.2 shows that of the 20 communities whose libraries may lose their funding, eight would depend on subsidised buses for access to library “hubs” if their libraries are closed. They are Bampton, Chinnor, Berinsfield (Route 116, see section 3.2), Charlbury, Old Marston, North Leigh, Summertown (Route 17, see section 3.2) and Grove. Only about 15% of Oxfordshire bus services are subsidised, and currently the County Council does not intend to withdraw significant numbers of subsidised services.

However, from this April the Government will cease ring-fencing money for county councils to subsidise bus services. Bus subsidies will have to compete with all other council services for funding at the same time as total council budgets will be reduced every year. Library closures would reduce people’s access to one set of local services, but bus subsidy reductions would reduce people’s access to all local services, employment and social inclusion.



### 3.5 National Concessionary Travel Scheme

Also in April, administration and funding of National Concessionary Travel Scheme (NCTS) passes will be transferred from district to county councils. Counties are not being funded enough for this. It costs Oxfordshire £8.7 million per year to reimburse bus operators for concessionary bus travel, of which the Government contributes only £4.3 million.

### 3.6 Bus Service Operators Grant

The Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) is a rebate that refunds 80% of the Excise duty paid on fuel used by buses. As a result of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review this rebate will be reduced by 20%. The reduction will be applied phases from 2012 to reach its full effect in 2015.

The phasing will mitigate the effect of the BSOG reduction, and the reduction will only slightly reduce the profit margins of the most profitable bus routes. However, its cumulative effect may particularly reduce the viability of subsidised bus services. It may also change some routes from being only just profitable to making a slight loss.

Sections 3.2 and 3.4 state that eight of the 20 communities whose libraries are to lose their funding, eight would depend on subsidised buses for access to library “hubs” if their libraries are closed. In addition, four more (Benson, Littlemore, Stonesfield and Woodcote) depend on services that were subsidised until recently and have become profitable only in the last few years.



**Routes X39 and X40 link Benson and Berinsfield with their library “hub” at Wallingford, and route X40 also serves Woodcote. The County Council provided revenue support to help to establish both routes. They are now commercially self-supporting, but the cumulative effect of the 20% reduction of BSOG fuel duty rebate to be phased in from 2012 remains to be seen.**

When considering withdrawal of services such as libraries it should be borne in mind both that the BSOG reduction could affect the future of any bus service, whether subsidised or not, whose viability is currently marginal.

## 4.1 Reduced library opening hours

Oxfordshire library opening hours range widely. 10 of the library “hubs” are open six days *per* week, and Oxford Central Library is open the most at a total of 57 hours a week. 11 of the less used libraries are open only four days *per* week. Of these, as noted in section 3.3 above, North Leigh and Stonesfield are each open for only 11 hours *per* week.

Oxfordshire County Council is now considering the option of outsourcing operation of its public libraries. The contractor that it is currently considering is US company Library Systems and Services (LSSI). The *Oxford Mail* has reported that options could include keeping all libraries open for fewer hours *per* day or closing fewer than the 20 libraries that have been at risk.



**Bampton Library was completed in 1653 as a grammar school. It is closed all day Tuesday and Friday and open for a total of only 12.5 hours *per* week. Could it survive any further reduction of its opening hours? If it closes, the nearest library “hub” will be Carterton, 5.1 miles away.**

However County Council leader Cllr. Keith Mitchell has warned against reducing opening hours, pointing out that this would make all libraries less accessible for everyone. His warning is undoubtedly correct. It must be doubtful whether any reduction in opening hours significant enough to reduce costs could avoid causing a correspondingly significant reduction in the numbers of visitors received and numbers of items issued.

Each library is a public asset. Any reduction its use would seem to be a reduction in council efficiency.

Library	Days/week	Hours/week	Library	Days/week	Hours/week
Oxford Central	6	57.00	Benson	5	25.00
Banbury	6	52.50	Chinnor	5	25.00
Bicester	6	51.50	Sonning Common	5	25.00
Abingdon	6	51.50	Watlington	5	25.00
Witney	6	51.50	Faringdon	5	25.00
Didcot	6	50.50	Eynsham	5	24.00
Henley	6	50.50	Grove	5	22.00
Wantage	6	50.50	Neithrop	5	21.50
Kidlington	6	45.00	Wychwood	4	20.00
Cowley	5	43.50	Old Marston	4	19.50
Headington	6	42.25	Littlemore	5	19.00
Summertown	5	42.00	Adderbury	4	18.50
Thame	5	41.00	Charlbury	4	18.00
Carterton	5	37.00	Burford	4	18.00
Wallingford	5	37.00	Woodcote	5	17.50
Botley	5	37.00	Deddington	4	16.50
Chipping Norton	5	37.00	Kennington	4	14.00
Woodstock	5	27.50	Hook Norton	4	14.00
Goring	5	26.50	Bampton	4	12.50
Berinsfield	5	26.50	North Leigh	4	11.00
Blackbird Leys	5	25.50	Stonesfield	4	11.00
Wheatley	5	25.50			

## 4.2 Online ordering, automated issue and return facilities

Oxfordshire County Council proposes that if funding withdrawal leads to library closures, it could provide some communities with automatic facilities at which to collect or return library items. Only users with Internet access to Oxfordshire Libraries' online catalogue could use this facility. Many smaller rural communities in Oxfordshire have only dial-up Internet links and it is not clear how long it will be before the county will have 100% broadband coverage.

The value of automated facilities would depend on the frequency with which Oxfordshire Libraries delivers items to them for users to collect. Were it only once a week, automated facilities would not be much more useful than a mobile library visiting once a fortnight. If it were every day or two, an automated facility might be a relatively attractive service.

If automatic facilities were attractive, they should be considered not only as a way to mitigate local library closures but also as a way to extend library services to communities of significant population that are currently relatively remote from public libraries. The table below gives bus journeys and fares to proposed library "hubs" from five of the most populous Oxfordshire parishes that currently have no library.



**Shrivenham has no library and the nearest "hub" is Faringdon, 5.5 miles away. In the 2001 Census the population of Shrivenham and Watchfield parishes totalled 4,574. There seem substantial grounds to consider at least an automatic library issue and return facility for Shrivenham.**

Parishes	Population	Hub	Buses	Frequency	Journey	Adult rtn	Child rtn	Adult + 2
Shrivenham & Watchfield	4,574	Faringdon	65, 66	30 mins	15 mins	£3.70	£2.30	£8.30
Bloxham	3,132	Banbury	488	60 mins	13 mins	£3.80	£1.80	£7.40
Chalgrove	2,909	Watlington	101, 102	60 mins	10 mins	£2.70	£1.80	£6.30
Harwell	2,354	Didcot	32	60 mins	9 mins	£2.90	£1.90	£6.70
K Bagpuize & Southmoor	1,955	Abingdon	X15	5-7 journeys	23 mins	£5.20	£3.40	£12.00

### 4.3 Possible future libraries

Grove currently has a parish population of nearly 8,000 and up to 1,500 new homes are projected for the parish. Closure of Grove Library would not cause the greatest hardship, but it would be ironic to close the library and then in only a few years' time seek a new library for a greatly enlarged community, perhaps from Section 106 funding from a developer.

A better use of Section 106 developer funding might be made at Heyford Park, where up to 1,000 new homes are projected. Upper Heyford's nearest library "hub" is Bicester, 7.7 miles away, accessible by bus 25A once an hour. If Heyford Park is redeveloped, a new library there could serve the parish's existing 1,150 population plus significant neighbouring parishes such as Steeple Aston (population 920) and perhaps about 2,500 incomers to the new development.

### 5.1 Conclusions and recommendations

1. Oxfordshire needs a 2011-12 budget in which library funding is balanced against other priorities including youth services, care for disabled and/or elderly people, road casualty reduction and the need to continue supporting and improving public transport.
2. Oxfordshire should seek to mitigate as far as possible any adverse effect on bus services that could result from the loss of subsidy ring-fencing in 2011, the transfer of the NCTS from district to county councils in 2011, and reductions in the BSOG from 2012 to 2015.
3. If Oxfordshire decides to modify its plans for reducing library funding, it seek to mitigate the significant and disproportionate travel hardship that would result from closure of Deddington, Adderbury, Bampton, Chinnor, Woodcote, Berinsfield and Charlbury libraries.
4. Oxfordshire should seek not only to reduce library costs but also to increase access for significant populations such as Shrivenham that are relatively distant from current libraries.

### 6.1 Bibliography

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