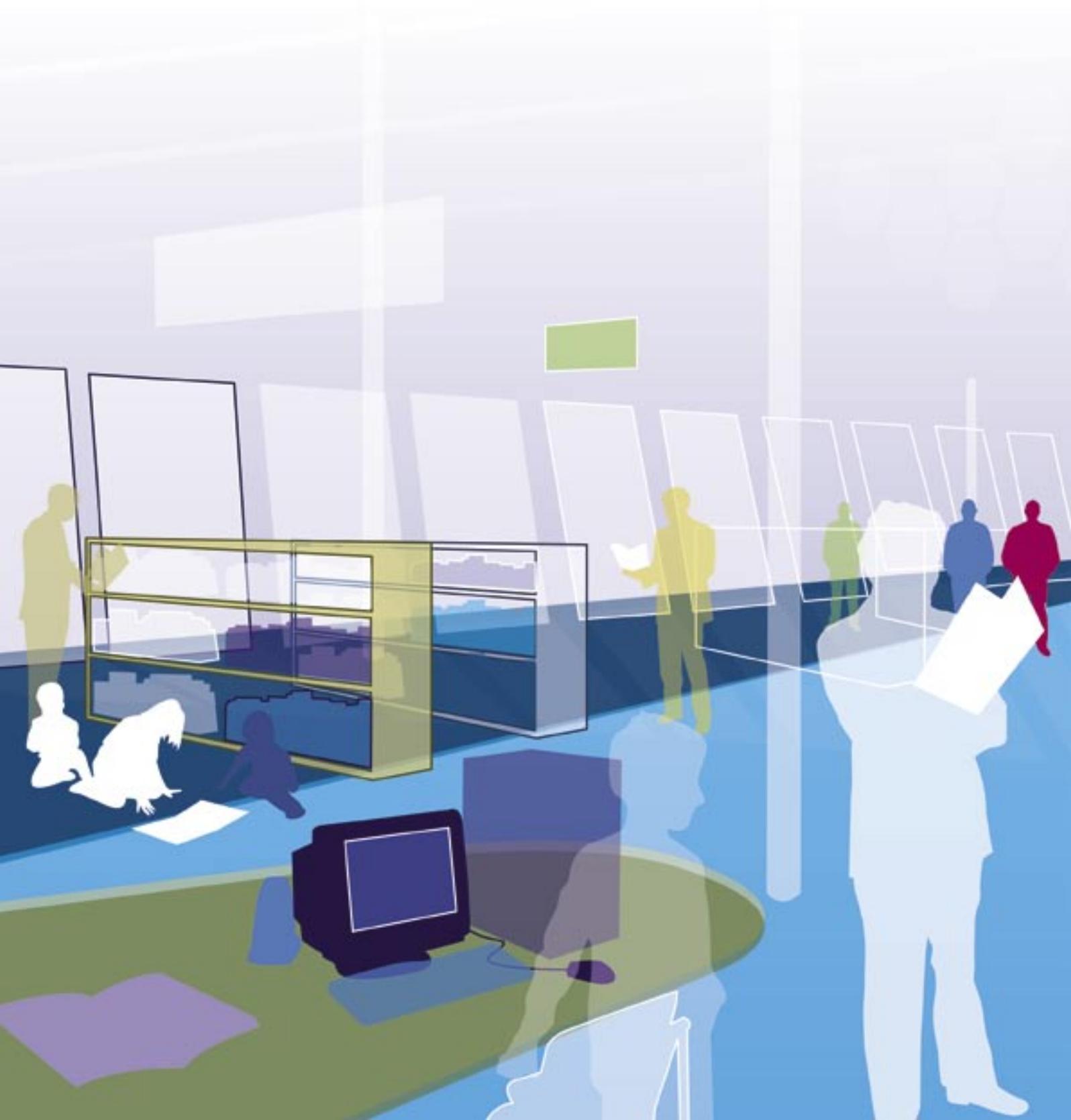
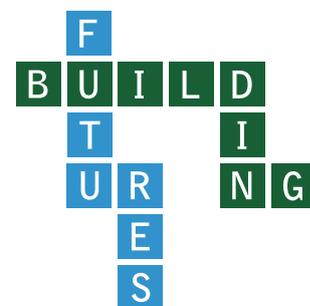


# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LIBRARIES

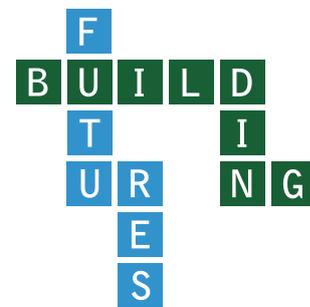
CHANGING FORMS, CHANGING FUTURES



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# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LIBRARIES

CHANGING FORMS, CHANGING FUTURES



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# PREFACE



The developing role of the library has created a set of new and complex challenges for those delivering library buildings and services. The libraries of the 21st century are no longer simply familiar repositories for books. They have changed and expanded, been rethought and redesigned. Libraries now provide an increasing range of different services, using a multitude of media, and reach a more diverse audience than ever before.

'IN ORDER TO DESIGN LIBRARIES FOR THE NEEDS OF FUTURE USERS, WE NEED TO EXAMINE THE VARIED ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN THE COMPLEX RANGE OF LIBRARIES WE HAVE TODAY'

In 2003, CABE and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council published *Better Public Libraries*, which highlighted the importance of innovation and creativity in the design of public libraries. A complementary study, *21st Century Libraries* looks at libraries 20 years from now, taking as its starting point the question 'what is a library?' In order to design libraries for the needs of future users, we need to examine the varied elements involved in the complex range of libraries we have today. The report has been written for library professionals, local authorities, architects, planners, and everyone involved in the process of commissioning, designing and running library services. The report explores the many elements that make up a library, and identifies the trends that are reshaping our ideas of what a library can be. It also projects a series of future scenarios, examining the issues, drivers and trends that could have a crucial impact on the future of the library.

These scenarios do not attempt to predict the future, but they do generate a number of key questions. They not only provide a framework for debate on what we want our libraries to be, but also identify the key choices for everyone involved in delivering library services. If libraries that are on the drawing board now, can integrate the needs of the future into those of the present, they will be fit for purpose up to and beyond 2024.

This paper has been developed by Building Futures, from work originally commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Building Futures was established in April 2002 to create space for discussion about the needs of society from our built environment and, consequently, the built environment professions in twenty years and beyond. For more information on the Building Futures programme, including events, reports and online debates, visit [www.buildingfutures.org.uk](http://www.buildingfutures.org.uk).

# INTRODUCTION

Reports of the death of the library have been greatly exaggerated.

The technological revolution of the 1980s and 1990s was widely seen as sounding the death knell for the public library as we knew it. Why would people bother to borrow books when they could get all the information they needed from their home computers? These predictions have proved unfounded. Indeed, ironically the internet has proved to be one of the saviours of today's public library.

This report, commissioned by Building Futures, looks at the way in which public libraries have reinvented themselves in the last decade, reviving their role as beacons for civic pride, social and economic regeneration. Dealing principally with the 4,500 plus public libraries in the UK, the publication acknowledges that school, academic and commercial libraries have also been the subject of considerable design innovation in recent years. However, it is public libraries where the change has been greatest. They have successfully rejuvenated themselves into places where you are as likely to meet a friend for coffee, do your homework, find out more about the history of the local community or take part in an activity, as borrow a book.

The report identifies four crucial elements to today's public library: people, programmes, partners and places. A larger number and a wider mix of people are using the library thanks to the new and innovative programmes they are running. Having commercial partners, such as cafes or internet providers, has made the library into a different kind of place, open for longer hours and more accessible to many users.

## 'REPORTS OF THE DEATH OF THE LIBRARY HAVE BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED'

The study describes a number of successful new designs for library buildings and shows how these draw on traditional library architectural typologies, as well as embodying new ideas which respond to the widespread use of information and communications technology (ICT) and the culture of lifelong learning.

Building Futures concludes that imaginatively designed and responsive public library services can play a pivotal role in promoting greater social cohesion and a stronger sense of civic pride and local identity.

We see libraries everywhere. Following the intuition of thinkers ranging from Spinoza to Alan Turing, we can conceive of the universe as the shape information takes as it flows and clots, cascades and recombines.

Matthew Battles,  
*Library: an unquiet history*, Heinemann,  
London, 2003

# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LIBRARIES: CHANGING FORMS CHANGING FUTURES

## 1 WHAT IS A LIBRARY?

Not very long ago pundits were drafting the obituary of the public library. That act now seems premature. Today new libraries are springing up everywhere, in city centres, in ex-mining communities, in shopping malls and on large new residential estates. Early in 2003, architectural writer Dominic Bradbury declared in *The Daily Telegraph* that 'the library is becoming a must-have element in prominent town-planning schemes.' A familiar if ageing institution in both the rural and urban townscape appears to have bounced back with a vengeance.

Ironically it has been the rise of information and communications technology (ICT) - thought by some to be about to pull the plug on the public library service - which has arrived just in time to save it. All of the new library buildings of the past decade in the UK are packed with computer terminals, technology suites, seminar rooms, and hot-desking email stations.

Nevertheless, a library is much more than a building. As the quotation from Matthew Battles suggests, it is a way of arranging and re-arranging access to knowledge and other cultural resources. Sometimes a new building will be the most appropriate way of delivering a new range of library services, but not always. New configurations of books, information, electronic access to learning, and related services can be delivered in many ways and through a range of media. Even so, buildings will always play an important role, whether as adaptations or refurbishments of existing building stock, joint ventures with other public or commercial services in shared (or 'co-located') premises, or in dedicated new library buildings which speak to the changing needs of the 21st century.

The reason for the belief that library services do indeed have a future is simple. Now, and in the foreseeable future, people will need to upgrade their skills or learn new ones many times in the course of their working - and even domestic and recreational - lives. Education will no longer be a once and for all operation at the outset of life, but a continuous process of adaptation, self-development and vocational re-skilling that will go on until people are well into their eighties, and even beyond. Although such developments appear to further consolidate the increased individualisation of society, it is a form of individualism tempered by having historical roots in self-improvement and the ideals of an educated democracy.

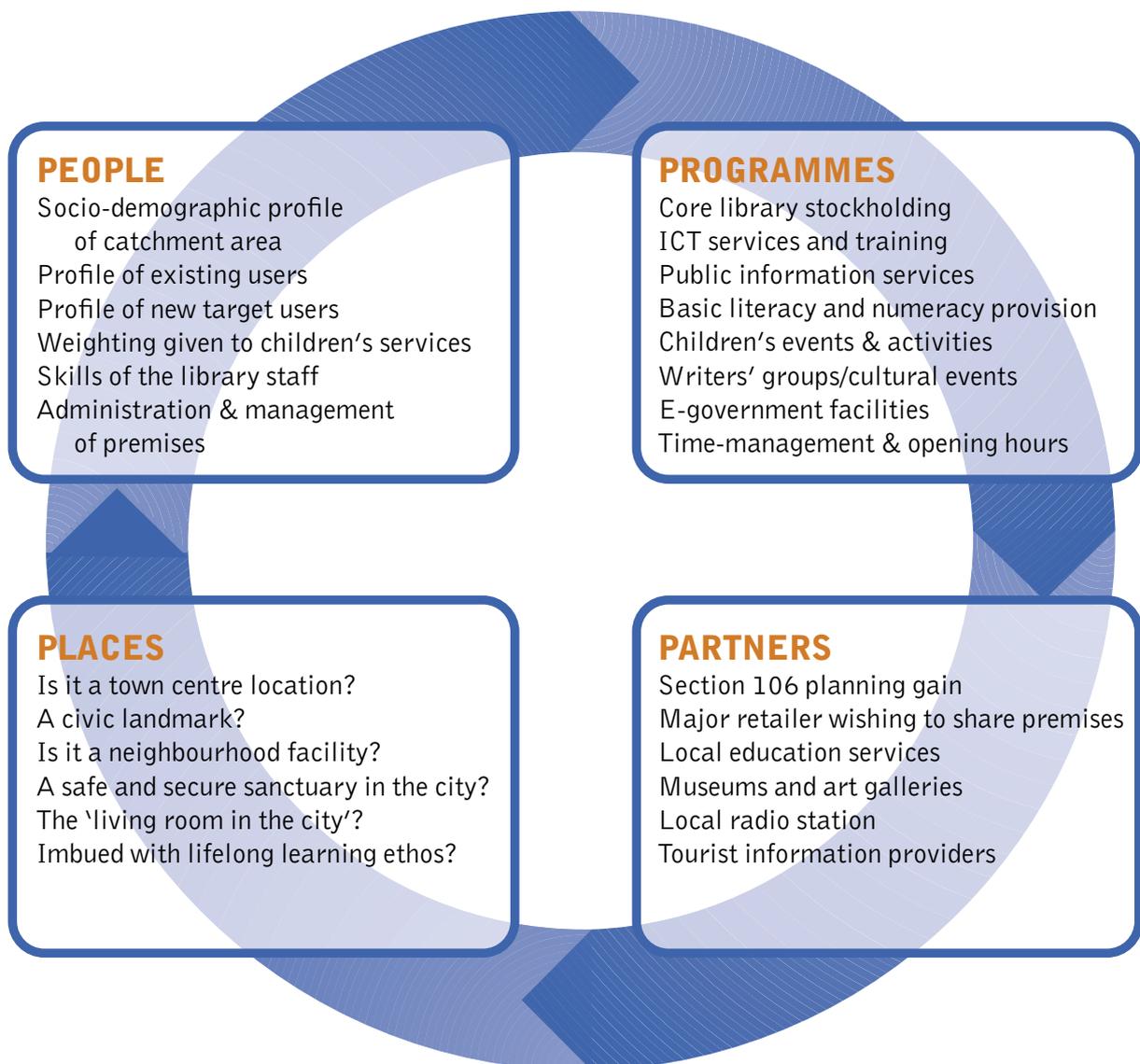
We should stop seeing libraries as places of function - storing this, lending that, checking the other, and more as places of free and shared exploration and learning via all media, a democratic space wherein to free your mind.

John Dolan,  
Head of Birmingham  
Library Services

## The virtuous circle

It is the argument of this report that the future design of libraries and library services has to find the right equilibrium between four key factors: the **people** for whom the library service is intended (along with the staff providing the service), the **programme** of services, events and activities required to fulfil that obligation, the **partners** with whom the library authority might wish to undertake a joint development or venture, and the **place** of the library itself (along with the spaces it offers to meet its designated programme most efficiently and effectively). This inter-connected set of strategic themes closely relates to the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's four-pronged approach to the framework for its programme Inspiring Learning for All, based around People, Places, Partnerships and Plans.

This virtuous circle can be represented as:



It is clear from this analysis that buildings pose both opportunities and problems. In the 20th century the iconic role of the central library (often a classical building of great symbolic importance) has been complemented by the growth of branch libraries, now often known as neighbourhood or community libraries. These likewise have come to be a distinctive feature of suburban life, usually offering fewer facilities, but providing a much-needed social role as well as an intellectual one. The architecture or design of the branch library was likely to be more low-key, functionalist or vernacular. Yet as towns and cities have changed and expanded, many buildings have found themselves in the wrong places and unable to be adapted to meet changing needs. It is for this reason that future services have to regard the building component in relation to the other key elements, and not as the one and only solution to the challenge of 'making it new'.

**Many Chief Librarians are struggling to operate services from old buildings in dire need of modernisation. The problems of historic buildings and old building stock are paramount, and help with remodelling buildings such as these is urgently required.**

Society of Chief Librarians

The facilities and services which public libraries provide are changing to meet new cultural needs and interests, at an ever-increasing pace of cultural and technological transformation, particularly in response to the development of new media: CDs, videos and DVDs, talking books, computer software, internet access. This process of adaptation is not new: library buildings in Britain in the 1930s often incorporated a small art gallery, theatre, or even a film theatre. They also loaned out framed prints and jigsaw puzzles. Today, libraries may well incorporate computer training suites, advice centres, careers services, cafes, toy libraries and homework centres.

Furthermore, today's library services may be offered in buildings alongside other public services, sometimes in unusual and intriguing combinations. A number of libraries in former mining communities in Durham and Sunderland also operate as 'electronic village halls'. In Bishop Auckland, the library shares a rehabilitated town hall with a beautiful art gallery and theatre. In Houghton Le Spring close to Sunderland, the design of the new library centre also incorporates a children's nursery, a youth centre and local police facilities. The new library in March, Cambridgeshire, designed by Bernard Stillwell Associates, and winner of a 2003 Civic Trust Award, houses the local Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths, as well as a marriage suite. Changes in services and functions obviously mean changes in design and plan. Traditional library design has to be adapted or superseded.

## 2 DRIVERS OF CHANGE

This sea change in ways of thinking about library buildings and services is not simply a last-ditch attempt to appear 'relevant'. Social and demographic trends today underwrite the renewed importance of such civic spaces, where new forms of multi-cultural citizenship are evoked through high-quality and well-designed collective provision, coupled with an ethos of mutual respect, which the library has traditionally engendered, and is now doing so again. Ten drivers of change are especially worth noting:

### The rise of further and higher education

The continuing rise of young people entering further and higher education is a long-term trend, and includes those 'returning' to education or training later in life. The biggest demand in public libraries over the past decade has been for quiet, secure study space. The Government has expressed the wish that 50% of students up to 30 years of age will enter some form of higher education by 2010. The new Norwich Library offers 85 computers with internet access, 220 study spaces, as well as more than 120,000 books. The new library in the small market town of March registered 900 users for its learning programmes in the first six months of opening.

### The continuing rise of the one-person household

There is also a pronounced trend towards living alone - the 'home alone' syndrome. In 1971, only 18% of households in England were one-person households; by 2016 it is estimated that this figure will double to 36%. Together with the rise in student numbers, both groups are likely to increase the use of the public library not only as a study centre, but also as a meeting place in the town or city. The Scandinavians have long since been given to describing the modern library as the 'living room in the city', or the 'town salon', a civil and educational alternative to the frenetic commercial world of the modern shopping mall or themed bar. Libraries are adjusting to these demands through improved interior design, as well as the 'added-value' facilities they provide: not only armchairs, sofas and even fresh coffee for those who want to browse, but also reading groups, celebrity lectures, and a full-blooded programme of events and activities. The new Idea Store in Bow displays a large plasma screen at the entrance, detailing each day's programme of events and courses.

### Increasing mobility

Another key demographic trend is that of increasing population and professional mobility (or demographic 'churn' as it is sometimes called). A growing proportion of the contemporary urban population is made up of peripatetic business professionals, contract workers from other countries, asylum seekers, and other transient groups. All such groups need or want to stay in touch with colleagues, friends and family around the world, and so the city library is becoming a kind of electronic poste restante, where people call in on a daily basis (as with an internet café) to send and pick up their emails. Birmingham Library has a suite of email terminals near the entrance for easy access off the street - a form of public hot-desking.

Libraries struggle with image, in particular with young people, and the fact that they are 'free' is often unknown among those who most need their services.

Jane Hall, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, Sunderland

## Advancing technology

Changes and advances in technology are likely to be faster, and perhaps less predictable, than ever. Broadband, wi-fi, mobile telephony, all contribute to the increasing speed and availability of direct internet communication, and to date libraries have been reasonably able to keep pace. It is evident that an increasing number of people are worried that they cannot afford to keep up with advances in new technology, in a consumer market where the latest models may be declared redundant within a matter of months. For example, for many young people in Japan the personal computer is already a matter of history, as it is rapidly replaced by the mobile phone. In such a world, more and more people (particularly the growing proportion of over-60s) may choose to rely on the collective provision of ICT, rather than risk wasting money on domestic equipment which may be technically superseded very quickly. Even so, book lending still remains the 'core business' of many public library services, and the popularity of the book as a cultural form is not likely to be challenged in the foreseeable future.

## Social interaction

More and more people today appreciate the added value which skilled support can bring to any task or activity, whether it is in the form of a personal fitness trainer, a specialist holiday or pensions adviser, or someone in the computer shop who talks you through the technology you want to buy. One business leader interviewed about the new hi-tech Norwich Library, said that he used it for private purposes, but didn't know how to use it in his work because he felt that business people 'need to be spoon fed and told you can use it for this, this and this.' In the complex world of modern information, the new generation of librarians are becoming 'knowledge navigators', rather than just cataloguers and shelf-fillers who avoid public contact.

## Environmental sustainability

Environmental concerns may increasingly favour forms of re-cycling and the shared use of common resources, thus benefiting libraries - which have historically provided a textbook example of an institution which supports the re-use and collective provision of consumer goods (principally books, recorded music, videos and DVDs) rather than their individual ownership. The library plays an invaluable role in bridging the gap between the technological haves and have-nots in contemporary society, a gap that is not likely to diminish. Increased fears of environmental risk surrounding food products, toxic substances, health concerns, and climatological risk such as that of flooding, put an increasing premium on high quality, reliable public information.

## Economic trends

In the economic field, the threat which the private sector posed to the traditional library service, through the growth of more user-friendly bookshop chains, online information services to the office and home, allied to the perception of the library service as part of a failing municipal sector, has temporarily been arrested, and in some places reversed. Nevertheless, there is evidence that certain key groups of opinion-formers and age groups - particularly young trend-setters and middle class professionals - have deserted the library service, and unless their support and interest is re-captured, the service will struggle to advance its cause and sustain a positive public and media profile in the corridors of power.

## New forms of democracy

The probable introduction of electronic voting in the near future means that libraries could take a more centre stage role in political engagement, providing the computer facilities required for the next generation of polling stations. There is also growing interest in creating new forms of democratic debate, participation and involvement in decision-making, whether through focus groups, citizens' forums, scrutiny panels, the creation of electronic newsgroups, or other forms of opinion sharing. The public library provides a natural home for many of these activities, which fit well with its historic role as a provider of free access to the world of knowledge and culture. There are potential pitfalls for libraries in being seen as too closely aligned with the political system, rather than providing an independent, unbiased access to information. During the worst years of the sectarian disputes and violence in Northern Ireland, almost every other institution - the church, the school, and the pub - was associated with one religious or political sect or another. The public library alone offered a neutral territory where sectarian interests had to be left at the door. Nevertheless, there are also significant benefits for libraries in engaging a new selection of users through promoting constructive debate on important issues.

## Governance

There is also a concern about the long-term shape and future of local government itself, currently the provider of public library services in Britain. Apart from the development of regional government, the possible disappearance of county councils, and the slow growth of autonomous trusts and even private sector groups taking charge of certain local government services there is some dissatisfaction already - and has been for some time - with the sheer disparities of quality in library services from one local authority to another. From time to time calls for a 'national library service' emerge from the fringes, and though this is unlikely, it is certain that national government will continue to seek to raise standards across the board, whether by stick or carrot; most likely, both. This should not lead to national 'off-the-shelf' designs for libraries rather than local site-based design and stakeholder involvement.

## Long term political support

The library is often seen as a valuable and safe institution, unbiased in the goods and services it offers, politically neutral, a service that takes care to meet the needs of particular sections of the community who are otherwise not powerful: children, those without high levels of formal education and the elderly. Yet it is also perceived, sometimes by the very same people who otherwise support it, to be out of touch, too municipal, and lacking flair. According to the Government policy analyst, Geoff Mulgan, no public service can afford to lose the support of certain key 'swing groups', whose views determine so much of what becomes public policy. It could therefore be argued that bold design and a high level of technological capacity are just as crucial to the future success of the service as its continuing social role.

### 3 DESIGN AND THE ETHOS OF THE LIBRARY

People feel a kind of ownership for their library. This is often reflected in the way people refer to 'my' or 'our' library. They rarely speak of my / our Boots or Marks & Spencer's. There is a sense of pride attached to this idea of 'ownership'.

Professor Bob Usherwood,  
Department of Information  
Studies, University  
of Sheffield

How will people recognise the library of the future? It is not likely that Britain's high streets will see many more neo-classical buildings with imposing entrances, drawn from a pattern book of library architecture that dates back to Alexandria. Yet even with a building as distinctive as Alsop & Störmer's iconic Peckham Library, the designers felt obliged to cap the roofline with the generic title 'LIBRARY', visible for miles. According to Fred Manson, former Director of Regeneration and Environment at Southwark Council and involved in commissioning Peckham Library, the very word itself continues to exert a very strong behavioural power (or 'brand') that is almost universally recognised by everybody. The library, like the school or church, is not just a generic building type, but is seen to embody particular values, ones which have proven to be remarkably enduring.

However, because a significant element of current library design takes many of its elements from retail culture - including location - then not only is the traditional distinction between the central library and the branch library no longer workable, but also some new libraries may only expect to have a lifetime of ten years or even less before following other retailers to newer territory. There is likely to be a much greater overlap between traditional architectural and interior design codes and practices. It is nevertheless likely that some new central library buildings will remain flagship design projects, retaining generic library building features.

#### SOME KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

Amongst the design issues which will be paramount in these developments, the following are highlighted:

##### Establishing the appropriate ethos

Libraries in particular locations may present themselves to the public in specific ways and with specific programmes: whether as life-long learning centres, as cultural market-places, as settings for new kinds of aspirational lifestyles, as agencies of public information and welfare rights, or as community facilities and meeting places. Each library design will need to reflect the priority services and ethos being offered in that library for its particular set of users.

**LEFT**  
Library at Essen,  
© Ken & Lorraine Worpole

**RIGHT**  
Brixworth Library,  
by Bob Fielding,  
© Northamptonshire  
County Council



**Libraries need to provide better signage, better displays and better presentation of stock. The institutional feel of the library needs to be removed.**

Graham Fisher,  
Director, London Libraries  
Development Agency

### The library as a second home

The relationship between the library and the home is changing, as more library catalogues go online, enabling people to order, reserve or renew library stock, and even belong to electronic newsgroups established by libraries for particular educational or cultural interest groups. (In November 2003 it was recorded that, for the first time, more than 50% of the UK population had access to the internet). As a result the library is being de-institutionalised, and becoming more like a club or leisure centre. As has already been noted, in Sweden they talk of the public library as being 'the living room in the city' or even 'the town salon'. Interior design and furnishing can help create a more domestic, club-like sense of membership and belonging: a home from home.



**LEFT**  
Man reading on bench,  
© Ken & Lorraine Worpole



**RIGHT**  
Central Library, Rotterdam  
© Ken & Lorraine Worpole

### A window on the world

Historically libraries have offered people a chance to escape, to explore other worlds through books, journals, and forms of self-education, and their design and architecture often reflected this. The design of libraries in future should also reflect this sense of uplift, of pleasure, and possibilities of life-enhancement. Too many today still seem weighed down in dull municipalism, particularly in poorer areas. Greater visual transparency between interior and exterior worlds now seems to be a mark of a more open and democratic culture.

**LEFT**  
People reading in Waterlow Park,  
© Ken & Lorraine Worpole



**RIGHT**  
Bow Idea Store,  
© Joe D Miles



### Time-tabling access and circulation

Another important consideration with regard to library design, is the need to be able to section off or close some areas at different times of the day or night to meet other needs, particularly when library services are shared with other services; or the provision of community meeting rooms, where access to toilets and catering facilities is required without having to open up a whole building. Design needs to take into account matters of 'time-management' and the allocation of space and patterns of circulation which reflect both short-term and long-term uses of the public library.



LEFT  
March Library,  
© Ken & Lorraine Worpole

RIGHT  
Birmingham Central Library,  
© Ken & Lorraine Worpole

## The library is a public space (and place)

Historically, library design has emphasised its public nature, with imposing entrances, high ceilings and domed roofs, but also with a pronounced relationship to the street outside. Some libraries have tiers of steps in front of them, where people sit in fine weather, to chat, or take a break from their studies inside. The steps in front of New York Public Library, for example, are famous as a meeting place; so too were the steps outside the old British Library, as they are still today outside Birmingham's Central Library. Many libraries have been designed with gardens in front of them, as can be seen in Bromley and Middlesbrough, again emphasising the relationship with both the interior and exterior aspects of the public realm. Though in future, some of the more grandiose or monumental aspects of library architecture may be abandoned, the requirement to emphasise the civic (even ennobling) quality of the library space and its relationship to the street outside, remains a design priority.

## Finding a way through the labyrinth

By their very nature, libraries are full of signs and references to arcane classificatory systems, often confusing to lay readers. The importance of clear patterns of circulation, of architectural and spatial legibility, and of coherent and attractive signage cannot be over-estimated. In this regard, the new library and learning centre at March is exemplary: as you enter the doors, the whole library and its sections are laid out before you, clearly sign-posted and labelled, all of which allows the first-time visitor to grasp and understand what is on offer in an instant.

## Designing in (and out) technology

All library facilities, of whatever size, will need to incorporate ICT and online services. All ICT equipment comes with specific design and construction requirements of its own: cabling, networking, lighting, heat-displacement, security, and so on. Design also needs to take on board matters of monitoring and surveillance of ICT use; the difficult question of appropriate and inappropriate uses (e.g. accessing pornography), or the suitability of ICT for both individual and group use. The technology will continue to evolve: large-scale, cabled screens and monitors may shortly be replaced by wireless laptops and portables. Hot-desking has already arrived in some libraries.

The idea of public places has become tarnished (too old, too Victorian, too shabby and under-funded) and with this the idea of civic pride and a shared sense of civic identity has often been lost. New libraries and library concepts which attract a wide audience also have the effect of reinvesting civic spaces and shared experience for the community with value. Libraries have historically been the most inclusive public service, with the broadest audience.

Sarah Godowski, Bisset  
Adams Architects

## Handling conflicting needs and interests

Because of the wide range of people using libraries, conflicts of expectations and use may occur. Some of these can be resolved by matters of timetabling and circulation, as already indicated above. Children's areas in libraries may at times be noisy with songs and games, and need to be designed to minimise their impact on other users (as, in turn, young children need to be protected from the predatory interest of some adults). Teenagers may want to sit in groups and talk, as they read magazines or listen to music on listening posts. The historic library atmosphere of hushed silence is no longer appropriate to many new library uses and users. The siting of a library café is a classic problem which confronts any library designer. Because libraries are so public, and offer so many different uses, the handling of potential conflicts of use is a vital issue, which thoughtful design can help minimise if not resolve entirely.



**LEFT**  
Business planning group,  
© DEGW

**RIGHT**  
Classroom,  
© Ken & Lorraine Worpole

## Family-friendly design

Amongst the most loyal groups of library users are parents with young children and the elderly. The library remains a socially inclusive institution and this needs to be reflected in issues of physical access and family-friendly design. Encouraging people to stay longer, and use more than one facility, means providing toilets, refreshments, and a sense of security. The library is becoming as much a learning centre, a homework club and a leisure venue for young people as it is a place where books are borrowed and returned in as little time as possible.

## Security Issues

Library stock-holdings are public goods, and have to be protected from theft. Today this is largely done electronically, with security gates at the entrance which can detect books, videos or CDs, which have not been processed and ticketed. More and more libraries are investing in self-service terminals which can 'check out' stock automatically. However, some designers find security gates send out the wrong message to users and potential users - referring to the 'turnstile mentality' - and prefer to find other ways of preventing theft, notably through the use of CCTV and security staff, as well as individual security cases for videos, CDs and DVDs. In busy libraries used by all sections of the population, security is an important issue, to be handled sensitively if it is not to create the wrong effect.

## 4 FUTURE LIBRARY SCENARIOS

One can see a number of different types of library buildings and services emerging from this analysis, of which a number of possible generic types are sketched in outline below. From these, and other library types and services, more and more library users and other stake-holders will be invited to join with architects, designers and library managers in future to create a bespoke library building (or network of dispersed but co-ordinated library services), which will meet the specific needs of each particular place and community. In Lambeth, for example, the Council's Libraries, Archives and Arts Service is currently working with the Learning Place Consortium to develop a number of new specialist libraries in the borough. These include an employment and enterprise library at Waterloo Station, a family-oriented health library in Clapham, an arts library and centre for the study of Black history and literature in Brixton, and a number of other bespoke libraries to meet the interests and needs of communities and project partners. In Hampshire, the development of a number of 'Discovery Centres' is in process, initially in Gosport and Winchester, which will be centres providing traditional library services along with extensive and free internet access, cafés, exhibition and performance spaces.

In future we might expect to see many of the following, and others besides:

### THE NEW CIVIC LANDMARK

PECKHAM LIBRARY,  
©School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, University of Newcastle

**PROGRAMME:** likely to house extensive archives and reference materials, local history materials, a wide range of books and audio-visual materials, meeting rooms for exhibitions, events and ceremonial functions, coffee bar and 'home-from-home' reading room, large-scale computer access.

**PLACE:** a town or city centre building, a great people-attractor, facing on to a main square or public space.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** possibly designed by a signature architect, needs to create an important public presence in the townscape.



### PECKHAM LONDON

Peckham Library (in the London Borough of Southwark) is perhaps the most image-conscious of the recent civic landmark libraries. Designed by architects Alsop & Störmer, and opened in 1999, it won the Stirling Prize for Architecture in 2000, and has become an icon of Peckham and of library renewal everywhere. It receives over half a million visits a year, compared to 120,000 annual visits for the previous library, but, perhaps more importantly, its breezy, stylish image has won the affection and loyalty of many of the area's young people, as well as traditional library users.

The library is located on the fourth floor, and is accessed by what are said to be 'the busiest lifts in London'. On arrival at the fourth floor, the bold effect is re-established, with a feeling of entering a space ship just taking off or about to land, and a sense of purposeful activity and enjoyment of a variety of library services by users. The children's section is particularly successful, as are the meeting room pods. As the Stirling Prize jury reported, 'This is a building to make you smile: more architecture should do that.' In addition to the library, there are meeting rooms on the floor above, and the lift can be programmed only to stop at certain floors at different times of the day, so that other services can be offered when the library itself is closed, and circulation of the building needs to be restricted.

In a small market town in North Wiltshire, a less well-known landmark library has been built. Aaron Evans Architects has designed the new Calne Library in the form of a glass drum with retail and affordable housing integrated into the overall development. The library fronts on to the River Marden and is a new landmark building for the town with a public space in front. The Millennium Library Quarter, as the development is called, provides a high-ceilinged public library of architectural standing, as well as 22 houses, 20 flats, and 9 retail units, all helping to regenerate the town centre.

## CALNE NORTH WILTSHIRE

### THE RETAIL MODEL

CHRISP STREET IDEA STORE by Miller Hare. Building designed by Adjaye Associates. Concept for the Idea Stores – Tower Hamlets Borough Council

**PEOPLE:** more likely to be aimed at people with high levels of interest in borrowing books, CDs, DVDs – shoppers and city centre workers - as well as wanting internet access, who see this as a public contribution to consumer lifestyles.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** this might well be developed in partnership with a major retail developer, keen to add staying power and cultural weight to the town centre retail experience.

**PROGRAMME:** mainly borrowing or browsing information, educational and entertainment materials.

**PLACE:** wherever high footfall and retail developments occur.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** could be a fitted out shell, or former retail unit. It has to have a big storefront presence with high visibility and transparency. Interior decor would borrow much from multi-media retailing, as well as having reading lounges and listening posts.



### THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIBRARY

MARK ELLIS AND ASHLEY BINGHAM,  
© ICD LTD



**PEOPLE:** targeted at children and young people, with issues of child safety and security to the fore.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** could be developed in conjunction with government programmes such as Sure Start, education and / or youth services.

**PROGRAMME:** emphasis on early learning materials, story-telling, toy library, group visits, along with listening booths, homework centres and individual study spaces, and coffee-lounge facilities for teenagers. There would be a different ambience during school hours to after-school and early evening use.

**PLACE:** could be a modern attachment to an existing library building, but needs to be located close to other town centre facilities.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** bright and inviting on the outside, carefully planned inside so that very different activities – story-telling, studying, watching video monitors, coffee bar ambience - can co-exist without conflict. It could be attached to a school, or community centre.

## THE NEIGHBOURHOOD LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRE

MANCHESTER PICCADILLY STATION  
© Joe D Miles



**PEOPLE:** serving people who may be spending most of their time at home, but who need drop-in facilities locally: those involved in child-care, those working at home, retired people.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** likely to be developed in partnership with neighbourhood renewal initiatives, adult education and employment training schemes.

**PROGRAMME:** a drop-in crèche, community meeting rooms, photo-copier, a smaller range of books and other materials, but direct access to the complete library book and audio-visual catalogue online.

**PLACE:** welcoming, business-like atmosphere, clear opening times, explicit facilities and events programme.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** development of existing branch library, redundant shop or church building, integrated into local transport and institutional networks.

## NORWICH

The Millennium Library in Norwich shows how drop-in internet facilities can be provided within the context of a large library. The library has 85 computers offering free internet access, 220 study spaces, and has a self-contained area in the lobby open until 10.30pm on weekday evenings, offering an 'express service' of classic and best-selling paperbacks, computers for email and a self-service checkout station for books and other loans. The 'express service' lobby evokes older library design principles, which often arranged space in the library according to estimated length of stay: with fiction loans towards the front of the building, and reference books and archives towards the rear (or on another floor).

## BISHOP AUCKLAND

In Bishop Auckland, the new library represents a good example of building adapted from its former use to provide a neighbourhood learning facility. A former vacated Town Hall premises was adapted by Durham County Cultural Services as a new library, tourist office, art gallery and theatre. The work was carried out by Ainsworth Spark Associates, Architects. The café-restaurant which services all users of the building, including theatre audiences at night, really does act as the town salon. The quality of the shelving, signage and finish in the main library is very high.

## THE THEMED LIBRARY OR JOINT VENTURE

BOW IDEA STORE  
© Joe D Miles



**PEOPLE:** targeted at a particular social and demographic group whose needs are not currently being met or are the concern or target group of other public agencies.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** health services, social services, children's services, schools, (in the case of March Library, wedding registry services), arts and museum services, religious organisations.

**PROGRAMME:** the programme will clearly reflect the interests of other partners, whether this is a museum or gallery service (thus creating an 'arts library' or 'museum library'), or health and welfare services.

**PLACE:** this might be a library service extension to an existing health centre, gallery or museum or a joint new-build.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** the design would reflect the ethos of the major partners and the facilities they wish to provide.

The March Library and Learning Centre provides an example of a library financed through a joint venture. It was opened in August 2000, in a market town with a population of just under 20,000, and achieves an astonishing 500 visits a day. 900 people registered for learning courses offered in the library in the first 6 months. Cambridgeshire County Council organised a competition to design the new library, funded by a partnership with the district council, local education services, careers services and others. On a small budget of around £1.25 million, including fixtures and fittings, Bernard Stillwell Associates has designed a library which is already regarded with pride locally. Whereas the former library was primarily used by older people and some parents of young children for fiction books only, the new library is used by a much larger cross-section of the local Fenland population.

As one of its principal advocates said, 'a modern building like this speaks to young people, who otherwise wouldn't come near our older library buildings'.

## MARCH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

### THE MOBILE LIBRARY OR POD

GIRL IN PARK  
© Mark Ellis

**PEOPLE:** home-bound library users, those with access to public transport, those living in remote residential settlements. Also could service big outdoor events, or be taken to key events or locations – business fairs, railway stations, airports – to promote library services to new users.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** education and training services, support services for the elderly and housebound, business and civic events organisers.

**PROGRAMME:** an ideal opportunity to train people in developing basic computer skills, so accessing a wide range of online services. Basic delivery and return of selected book or AV stock.

**PLACE:** the service goes where it is needed and wanted.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** ideal opportunity for designers to fit out a range of standardised vehicles to maximum public use and effect, or create mobile pods or kiosks easily moved from one venue to another. Could also take the form of fixed terminals in the street, providing access to services, or could have a longer design life while still being capable of being dismantled.



### THE ONLINE LIBRARY

MAN WORKING AT FOUNTAIN, JUBILEE PARK  
© Joe D Miles

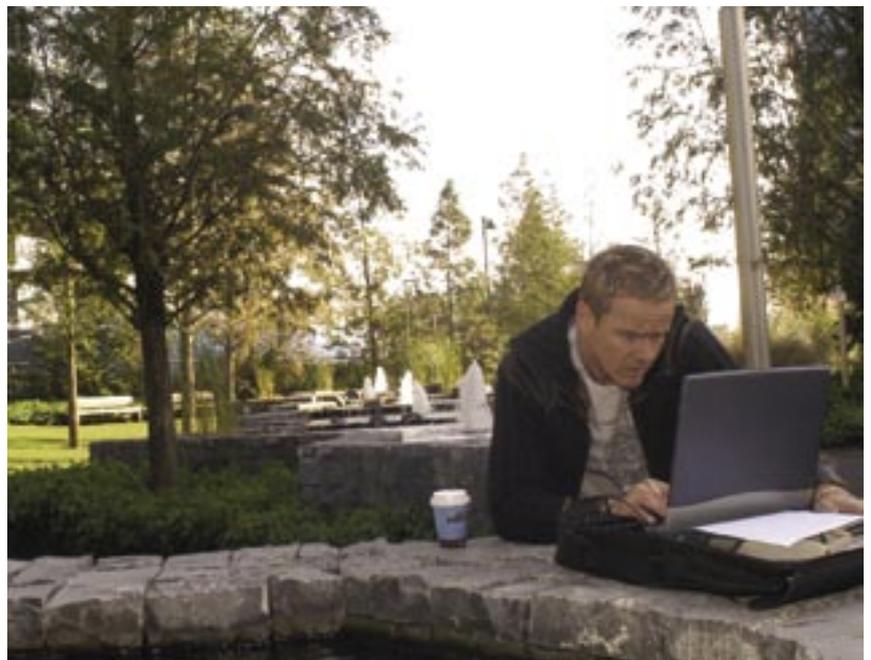
**PEOPLE:** the widest range of people with online access at home.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** intranet services are now attractive to other services engaged in shared transport schemes, re-cycling schemes, skills exchange, and other public information schemes.

**PROGRAMME:** access to the complete area library catalogue and local archives with facilities for ordering and renewing books, allied to a call centre where related public information enquiries can be handled.

**PLACE:** the online library makes possible an entirely new relationship between the library services (and its collection of buildings) and the private home, on terms and conditions chosen by the user.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** the attractiveness and user-friendliness of the online service should reflect the best of current web design.



I think libraries should be user-friendly places for discovery, investigating and learning. That inevitably encompasses a change of image for most of the public libraries I have visited, as the majority are austere and unwelcoming. Also the range and extent of services needs to be increased, using innovations such as 24-hour online service. Only when their level of service is improved will libraries provide a viable alternative to commercial retailers.

Angela Hector, Law Society

## FROM FORM TO FUNCTION

The above scenarios suggest that library provision is moving away from the traditional hierarchy of forms, consisting of an imposing municipal central library in the town centre and a series of smaller branch libraries in the suburbs. There is evidence to suggest that is gradually being replaced by a hierarchy of functions, as more individualised and bespoke libraries become more common, offering services tailored to specific target groups of users. With this shift comes the need for sensitive management of key potential conflicts of design, function and ethos:

- Getting the right balance between the safety and security of users and stock-holdings, while at the same time providing a welcoming and more open plan layout
- Getting the priorities of time-use (from popping in to return a book to spending a whole day studying) reflected in the allocation of space close to or furthest from the entrance
- Ensuring that the social programme – the coffee bar, the reading lounge, the video or DVD preview suite, the seminar room – does not conflict in terms of noise and activity, with space allocated for studying and browsing.
- Providing dedicated space for children's services which is secure, whilst also easy for library staff to supervise
- Ensuring that the needs of different groups of users – the elderly, school parties, students – are respected, possibly by forms of time management. For example, the demand for seats and reading space often means that increasing numbers of students displace older library users who may want to read newspapers and journals, making the latter feel resentful and excluded. However, the library may also represent the only place where such different social and age groups come into contact, and this contact may well have more positive than negative consequences. Total segregation is unlikely to represent the best solution
- Extended opening hours, along with Sunday opening, offers opportunities to shape patterns of use: early evening use could be more youth-friendly; Sunday could be a quiet day, only available for browsing, borrowing and studying
- Maintaining the distinctive ethos of the library. There is a danger that the increasing range and individuality of library buildings and services will erode the identity of 'the library', and reduce library users' inherent trust in libraries as independent, neutral places with a distinct role in collective culture

In short, it is likely that libraries will need to be bold about the facilities and services they provide, and should be prepared to shape public expectations of use and convenience, rather than offering a standardised set of facilities and services uniformly throughout the week.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

It has been argued that the public library service in the UK is entering a new era, not only in terms of the range of services it finds itself providing, but in terms of the partnerships and programmes it is developing with other public agencies or commercial operators. There have been a number of new buildings in recent years which have captured a new excitement, and public appreciation has been revived - as has political interest in the role which libraries can play in social and civic renewal.

A number of significant trends are evident:

- In future, it is likely that more libraries will be developed in partnership with other organisations or services, whether commercial supermarkets or adult education providers
- Greater adaptability may be required in areas such as internal design, circulation, access and hours of services in library buildings, even though the buildings themselves are only a part of wider library services delivered through many physical and electronic media
- Libraries could become key communications centres for mobile populations, and their design will need to reflect different 'levels and layers of entry' or different temporal zones: hot-desking, browsing, long-term study
- As the need for lifelong learning continues to increase, long stay use of libraries for study purposes will require more friendly and efficient support services - toilets, catering, recreational quiet zones – meaning that libraries are likely to become more like members' clubs
- Electronic links between homes and libraries are likely to increase, so that the library service and the 'customer' are in constant contact with each other as and when required
- Children's services may grow in importance as the library becomes a secure, supervised, electronic safe haven in the city, and as government investment in early years provision continues to grow
- Virtual library services could be provided 24 hours a day, while other services will be offered out of hours

### Key questions

Taken together, these trends point to the development of an increasingly bespoke library service, with libraries offering their own individual programmes based on the services most appropriate to their own particular mix of users. This view of the future presents many opportunities for libraries to play an increasingly significant role in social, intellectual, cultural and civic life. It also creates a number of potential problems and dilemmas for those directly involved in the management and development of library services in the UK, as well as politicians, policy-makers, and many others who share an interest in their future, including of course their many users. The following key questions form a basis for planning the future of the library service.

It is assumed that the core funding for the provision and maintenance of libraries will come from the public purse. Yet in so many other sectors, public funding is slowly being reduced as charged-for services play a greater role. To what extent can libraries operate in the market place without compromising their historic neutrality and intellectual integrity? Where will the money come from to fund expansion?

How can libraries secure financial and service partners to achieve economies of scale in design, building costs and maintenance, and to jointly fund services? Can this be achieved without compromising the integrity and independence of the library service?

How can libraries identify both potential and existing stakeholders, whose needs, interests and views could help make the final service and facilities more robust and embedded in local needs? How can these stakeholders be consulted and engaged in decisions over the future of their library?

What is the best way to ensure the brief for a new library building or refurbishment is as effective as possible, taking into account contrasting, sometimes conflicting, programmes and user groups and encompassing the future needs of the building? How can realistic long-term management and maintenance costs be built in at an early stage?

Given that the long-standing architectural forms associated with library design have impressed themselves upon the public imagination, are there dangers that in adopting radically new and different designs, the essential identity of the library will be lost?

The above issue is compounded by the view that in the future, library services may need to follow retail developments as population densities move from one area of town to another. This may mean using temporary buildings or standard shells which can be fitted out and eventually vacated. Should library services attempt to build for the long term, or is the future likely to be a ;moveable feast?

Is it necessary for all library stock-holdings to be held in prime site locations, or could they be housed in cheaper warehouse space outside the city centre? Is it desirable to separate the 'front office' functions, occupying prime sites, from stock-holdings accessible at short notice from elsewhere? This particularly relates to the issue of how the library continues to manage its conservationist, archival, and reference responsibilities (requiring ever more warehousing space), with its function as a contemporary showcase for literary, entertainment, educational and media culture? Are these differing expectations contradictory?

If the provision for safe, accessible public space for children and young people – which libraries seem to be uniquely placed to provide – is a new priority, what forms of monitoring and security need to be developed which do not at the same time appear overly prescriptive or heavy-handed?

How is the historic universalism of the public library to be squared with managerial requirements to separate out different user groups and their needs, particularly in a more culturally segmented and multi-media society?

### A new era of change and flexibility

Libraries are changing rapidly, and it is likely that the development of new library service buildings, either in dedicated buildings of their own, or in conjunction with other kinds of services, is likely to continue at a faster pace than for many years. Many local authorities now have programmes for adapting or replacing all of their library buildings in the foreseeable future. While there are many examples of impressive new library buildings, the majority of the UK's libraries are housed in older buildings in need of significant modernisation. The problems involved in adapting buildings to accommodate uses for which they were not originally designed are likely to act as a major brake on ambitions. Specific guidance is needed on how to address these problems.

Simple prognostications about the future are often wrong, particularly if they simply extrapolate on statistical trends. For example, in 1966 when S.G.Berriman and K.C.Harrison produced their study, *British Public Library Buildings*, they noted that already some American libraries had introduced drive-in facilities for those unwilling to get out of their car. They went on to add that 'it may be that future British libraries can and ought to be planned with this facility in mind.' Such a view would not gain much popularity today.

There will continue to be buildings called libraries, largely because the library 'programme' has been subject to such massive developments and changes. In the end it is the idea of the library which remains the key organising principle of the public library service; the spaces and places which local authorities and others choose to construct and inhabit all flow from that historic intellectual ideal.

## IN MEMORY OF

Katherine Vaughan Williams (Shonfield) 1954 - 2003

'It is a tribute to the magical properties of architecture (when it works) that it conjures up unimagined vistas into the world around - lyricism on the doorstep, which, without its revelation through the lens of a new building, would have remained forever hidden. It is especially pleasing when that new revelation is not just for a lucky few but is a gift of a public world to the public itself.'

Katherine Shonfield on the new Bournemouth Public Library, *Architects' Journal*, 20 March 2003

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