

The Development of Coldean Library

Community Empowerment Case Study

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What was the issue?

Coldean library was under used. The building was full of asbestos and was dark with limited space. There were a few issues with anti social behaviour from a couple of young people which caused friction between generations, parents and others.

Plans to develop the library in partnership with Hanover Housing began. These included building flats for sale and rental above the new library building, which would generate an income. The flats included extra care properties for vulnerable elderly people supported by New Larchwood Extra Care Centre on the opposite side of the road.

The plans for a larger library and flats meant a taller building which the community objected to. Residents complained that there would be a loss of light, disruption during works which would follow 18 months of traffic and noise due to development of the New Larchwood centre.

Who was engaged with?

Brighton and Hove City Council Libraries Team were keen to develop the library using a model of 'local ownership' to ensure that residents were at the heart of the redevelopment. The library staff took advice from colleagues in the Communities Team (the Voluntary Sector Unit as it was then) who helped them map some of the key stakeholders and plan the beginnings of an engagement process. This included as a starting point contacting the local community development worker as well as some of the local community groups.

A partnership between BHCC Libraries and Hanover Housing was formed which was later joined by the Trust for Developing Communities (TDC), who employed the local community development worker.

The community development worker from the Trust for Developing Communities provided advice and guidance to the Library staff ensuring that existing groups were involved and that activities built on planned events. Existing groups included the Residents Association, the Local Action Team, the Festival Group and the Youth Group.

Crucially, the Libraries staff set up a steering group which included residents who were strongly opposed to the development to ensure that their concerns were addressed as sensitively as possible. The community development worker provided support to the local groups to assist their engagement in the process.

How did engagement take place?

The Steering Group included community members who requested TDC community development support and local councillor input.

The Steering Group oversaw the process to carry out:

- Consultation re possible uses for the building
- Consultation re hours and services available there

The Library and Hanover Housing were absolutely clear from the start about what could and couldn't be influenced through the consultation. The steering group met to discuss progress and make sure that residents concerns were heard and information exchanged at regular meetings.

While the new building was being developed, the Library service was housed in the community space at New Larchwood. This meant that the community and library staff worked together in the shared space and library staff got to know New Larchwood residents and key community members. This enabled good relationships to be developed, including between Hanover Housing and the library. It also meant that the community didn't lose their library during the rebuild.

The activities supported by the community development worker, Library staff and the steering group included:

- Consultation at the Coldean Festival regarding the development over 300 people
- Door-knocking over 300 households with survey
- Targeted consultation and focus group work with afterschool and play groups- play bus visiting area to do consultation and link with library and youth project.
- Opening event attended by over 400 people
- Development of short term projects that use the library facility

What was the impact?

The community now has a well used library which is seen by all as a community resource. The issues with anti social behaviour have stopped and a number of community activities now take place. Activities and developments include:

- Wii Club- Saturday in partnership with youth project
- One off and continuing courses making use of computer suite.
- Links have been built with training and education providers so they provide some one off activities and events- ie the Bridge and Brighton Friends centre
- Exhibition space for local art work, intergenerational and reminiscence projects
- Regular hiring by community groups-(Residents Association, festival group planning and evaluation meetings , the community website project)
- A sliding scale for the hire fee to reflect community, public and private sector use
- Resident key holders for easy access and also to help with security
- Community bookings bring revenue for the Library and encourage joining and participation
 - ❖ Baby Boogie
 - ❖ Story telling
 - ❖ Book club
 - ❖ Very successful Homework club and because of earlier opening times increased parent and pre school use of the facility.
- Library staff are known to key residents
- Relationships have developed that aid community cohesion and limit isolation.
- Increased library membership
- A Library that the community is proud of and that others can make positive use of.
- Local surgery space for Housing officer, PCSO and Local councillor

One local resident, Sue, provided her view of the library development project

"I got involved with community stuff originally due to anti social behaviour and also because everyone moaning about Coldean going downhill got to me. I am now the chair of the local residents association – It's taken a long time to get our association to this point.

As to library, we didn't have much choice really. As a neighbour, I hate it, as I have now have flats overlooking us, and we have lost all our privacy. As a community facility the library is great, the library without the flats would be perfect!!!!

I got involved because I felt that although we had no choice we could at least have some sort of voice. With support from The Trust for Developing Communities community development worker, we could make things happen in the new space.

The downside of this involvement is that it seems to stop once the building is up. This happened with New Larchwood and with the library. There have been no steering group meetings since the opening.”

www.Coldean.org.uk