

Dear Anita,

Thank you for your letter of the 19th May. My apologies for the delay in responding.

I must start by saying that my aim has always been to see Hay Library stay open and delivering at least its current range of services for at least the amount of time that is currently the case. It is on that basis that I and Hay's County Councillor, Gareth Ratcliffe, have been working within the County Council to try to achieve that outcome. I am pleased that Powys County Council is committed to maintaining the current arrangements until December this year, with the very welcome financial support from Hay Festival. This gives us a small but significant breathing space.

But this issue has been one in which the situation has changed repeatedly over the past 12 months, as the Council's Cabinet and the Portfolio holder responsible for Library Services have changed their position, made contradictory statements, negotiated inconsistently and generally made matters more difficult to resolve than should have been the case. We have a new Council now with a new Leader and Cabinet, so hopefully we can get a satisfactory resolution to the library's future soon.

I know there is a debate about whether the public library should be moved in to the new school complex, or remain where it is and that Powys County Council has indicated it will fund more hours if it moves to the new school. However, there are good arguments for keeping it in the current building, albeit that may mean less funding from the County Council, as this will enable, for example, funding to be sought from elsewhere, including local community councils on both sides of the border although this option does also place an increased onus on local volunteers to help staff the library and raise funds for it.

These really are decisions that need to be driven by the local communities served by the library, not imposed by the County Council, but whatever happens it is vital that 'The Town of Books' retains its library in a sustainable way for the long term. Whether as Brecon & Radnorshire's MP or in my current role as Leader of the Opposition on Powys County Council I commit myself to doing all I can to achieve that aim.

I hope the above is helpful.

Best wishes,

James Gibson-Watt
Welsh Liberal Democrat Candidate in Brecon & Radnorshire
General Election 2017