

Submission from The Booksellers Association to The Culture, Media and Sport Committee inquiry into library closures

1. Executive Summary

- The Booksellers Association believes that libraries play an essential part in society by playing a key role in the promotion of books and reading. All the fantastic work that goes on in libraries significantly helps to develop a more literate and economically productive society.
- Libraries exist to ensure that everyone has free access to the knowledge, scholarship and information contained in books that they need to help them enjoy and make a success of their lives.
- Children's borrowing from libraries continues to rise and this demand alone demonstrates the value inherent in having an easily accessible library service.
- Literacy is the key driver for social mobility. Libraries can help people to re-engage with learning and improve their literacy skills. Libraries are vital in helping people become fluent and engaged readers.
- More can be done to promote efficiency within the diverse number of library authorities. Indeed attempts have been made to produce a 'manifesto' for improvement in the library supply chain.
- Governance is key and effective central leadership is essential; there needs to be an effective national body in charge.
- Libraries and bookshops are naturally mutually supportive; therefore bookshops should not be undermined by the indiscriminate lending of e-books or the sale of books.
- The closure of local libraries can damage the community and in particular the lives of children, the elderly and the disadvantaged.
- The Secretary of State has the power to intervene in certain situations and should use this power to ensure that the UK continues to have an efficient, comprehensive library service.

2. What constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service for the 21st century

2.1 The core purpose of a library should be to lend books, as well as to provide a service that people want and will use. The Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 makes clear in Section 7 that one of the duties of library authorities is “to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials”.

2.2 We understand that over £1,000m of public money goes to fund the library service annually, yet only just over £90m goes towards the book fund. The BA has stressed to successive Ministers of Culture that this is pitiful and that the percentage spent on books by libraries (as a percentage of the total funding) has to be increased.

2.3 The key is to ensure the right opening hours for libraries and that libraries are situated in places that people find convenient – ie not an over reliance on ‘super’ libraries. Once communities have easy access to books and to professional staff, it is critical that borrowers have the right book stock to browse in an attractive building that encourages them to enter. The undisputed reduction in libraries’ book stocks over the years is particularly worrying, because not to have the books in libraries that the public want is to reduce further access – particularly to young adults who can discover for themselves the value and pleasure of books and reading.

2.4 There is an economic dimension. Books are central to the acquisition of literacy, education and knowledge of all kinds: special and general, informal and formal, whether for adults or children, providing the basis of reading skills, inquiry, comprehension and individual enterprise. In order to enable UK PLC to compete in an ever increasingly competitive global marketplace, we need in particular a literate work force and a literate society. Books, libraries (and indeed bookshops) are fundamental in underpinning this objective.

2.5 Library campaigners have suggested that the service is not as efficient as it should be and that the potential exists to increase efficiencies in order to produce the lower costs to save some libraries from closing. We hope that the Minister’s powers could be used to see what could be done to look at these matters - suggestions include merging library services across some of the 151 authorities, implementing fully national standards, simplifying processes, eradicating layers of management and seeing how back office functions could be usefully shared.

2.6 The BA partly owns [Book Industry Communication](#) [BIC], together with the PA, CILIP and The British Library. BIC produced a ‘manifesto’ covering ten areas for potential improvement of the library supply chain, which were submitted to the MLA as the basis for a joint initiative to standardise library stock supply arrangements. The imminent abolition of the MLA seems to have effectively brought to an end this initiative and we very much hope it could be revived. BIC also has an e4libraries accreditation scheme which we would like to see more libraries achieve.

2.7 The BA has always taken the view that what needs addressing in particular is Governance. The extent to which the DCMS and local authorities pass the parcel on this doesn't make it easy for an effective national service to be run and for there to be leadership. In a commercial business, it would be considered irresponsible not to have one body in charge of Strategy, Finance and Operations. The Minister himself and the All Party Parliamentary Library Group have talked about the need for some form of Library Development body. Those with strong retail and service skills can provide valuable help to such a body. Without effective leadership, the public library will continue to decline and several millions of people will be disadvantaged.

2.8 The BA very much believes in the importance of public libraries, but we do have some concerns about e-book lending, as without controls, it would pose an extremely potent threat to the retail market, to publishers and authors. If bookshops are substantially undermined by e-book lending without fair controls, then they may well go out of business, which will not be in the interests of the libraries and communities they serve.

2.9 In our view, e-books should be treated simply as a different book format and be subject to restrictions in the same way as printed books. Libraries should only be able to lend e-books for a pre-determined period to a borrower, who is a registered member of the library, on a one book/one user basis, as happens now with physical books - the technology already exists.

2.10 Also, selling books in libraries would be – in our view – anti-competitive. Libraries are supported by taxpayers' money. Libraries, in the public sector, already have an advantage over the private sector. They obtain financial support from the public purse, and fiscal benefits in areas such as property and occupancy costs, tax, VAT concessions etc. So if libraries start to sell new books in a substantial manner (as opposed to occasionally selling off old/tired stock) they would have a competitive advantage over booksellers (who pay taxes to support, inter alia, libraries).

3. The extent to which planned library closures are compatible with the requirements of the Libraries & Museums Act 1964 and the Charteris Report

3.1 The closure of many libraries to date has caused great concern among their communities. The threat of further library closures remains and some campaigners have had to take action in the courts to protect their local libraries. Some Councils have offered to transfer responsibility for community libraries away from professional staff to volunteers. There are no comprehensive guidelines for voluntary run libraries and we cannot believe they will be sustainable in the long term.

3.2 Are the decisions to close libraries or transfer responsibility in many authorities really compatible with the requirements of the 1964 Act? Having to use public transport is bound to reduce the number of users and the closure of mobile services, cuts in opening hours and much reduced

resources is surely not compatible with the duty to ensure that the library service is comprehensive.

4. The impact library closures have on local communities

4.1 The local library, along with the local bookshop, should be at the centre of communities. With the advent of the internet and e-books we have seen a gradual reduction in the number of bookshops on the High Street. It is vital that the local library remains open.

4.2 The closure of the local library can seriously damage the local community and have the greatest impact on the young, the elderly and the disadvantaged. The very fact that volunteer groups have sprung up demonstrates the value put on the library service for many in the community.

5. The effectiveness of the Secretary of State's powers of intervention under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964

5.1 Libraries are being forced to close throughout the UK. The Minister has overall responsibility for the library service and has the power to intervene under the Act in certain situations.

5.2 It seems to us that the Minister has two choices – to intervene or not to intervene. We find it quite surprising that the Minister has decided on the latter, when in opposition, we believe he described the planned 2009 closure in The Wirral as “offensive and outrageous” and called for the then Minister, Andy Burnham, to intervene..... and by not intervening currently, the implication is there that the Minister is quite happy to see the library closures. If we agree that we need to have a literate workforce to compete globally, discouraging reading by closing libraries is not going to help this objective.

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About The BA

The Booksellers Association of the United Kingdom & Ireland [BA] is a trade association, based at 6 Bell Yard, London WC2A 2JR. The BA currently has over 3,500 bookselling outlets in membership, covering over 1,000 businesses.

Our members cover a diverse range of different bookselling businesses - large high street chains with mixed businesses (eg [WH Smith](#)); large specialist bookselling chains (eg [Waterstone's](#)); independents (eg [Daunt Books](#)); library suppliers (eg [Askews](#)); school suppliers (eg [Heath Educational Books](#)) and supermarkets (eg [Tesco](#)). The two national wholesalers ([Bertrams](#) and [Gardners](#)) are also members.

The BA Group includes the [Booksellers Association](#), [National Book Tokens](#) and [batch.co.uk](#). The BA also co-owns [World Book Day](#), [Book Industry Communication](#) and [green4books](#) and is proud sponsor of the [London Book Fair](#).

The [Independent Booksellers Forum](#) is the BA's independent booksellers group. It exists to bring independent booksellers together across the UK, to facilitate the exchange of best practice and the sharing of ideas and experience.

In March 2011 the BA put together a campaigning toolkit to help booksellers and their customers, librarians and their borrowers, and others campaign against library closures in their local communities.

Working with the Save Our Libraries campaign, the BA toolkit included a poster to download for shop/library window or giveaway, advice on who to lobby locally to keep libraries open and advice on how to lobby local MPs effectively.

See attached.

The BA encourages members to support Save Our Libraries campaign

MEDIA BRIEFING NOTE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01 A.M. WEDNESDAY, 2ND MARCH 2011

London, 2 March, 2011 - The Booksellers Association has put together a campaigning toolkit to help booksellers and their customers, librarians and their borrowers, and others campaign against library closures in their local communities.

Working with the *Save Our Libraries* campaign, BA has put together a microsite (www.boooksellers.org.uk/saveourlibraries) which includes:

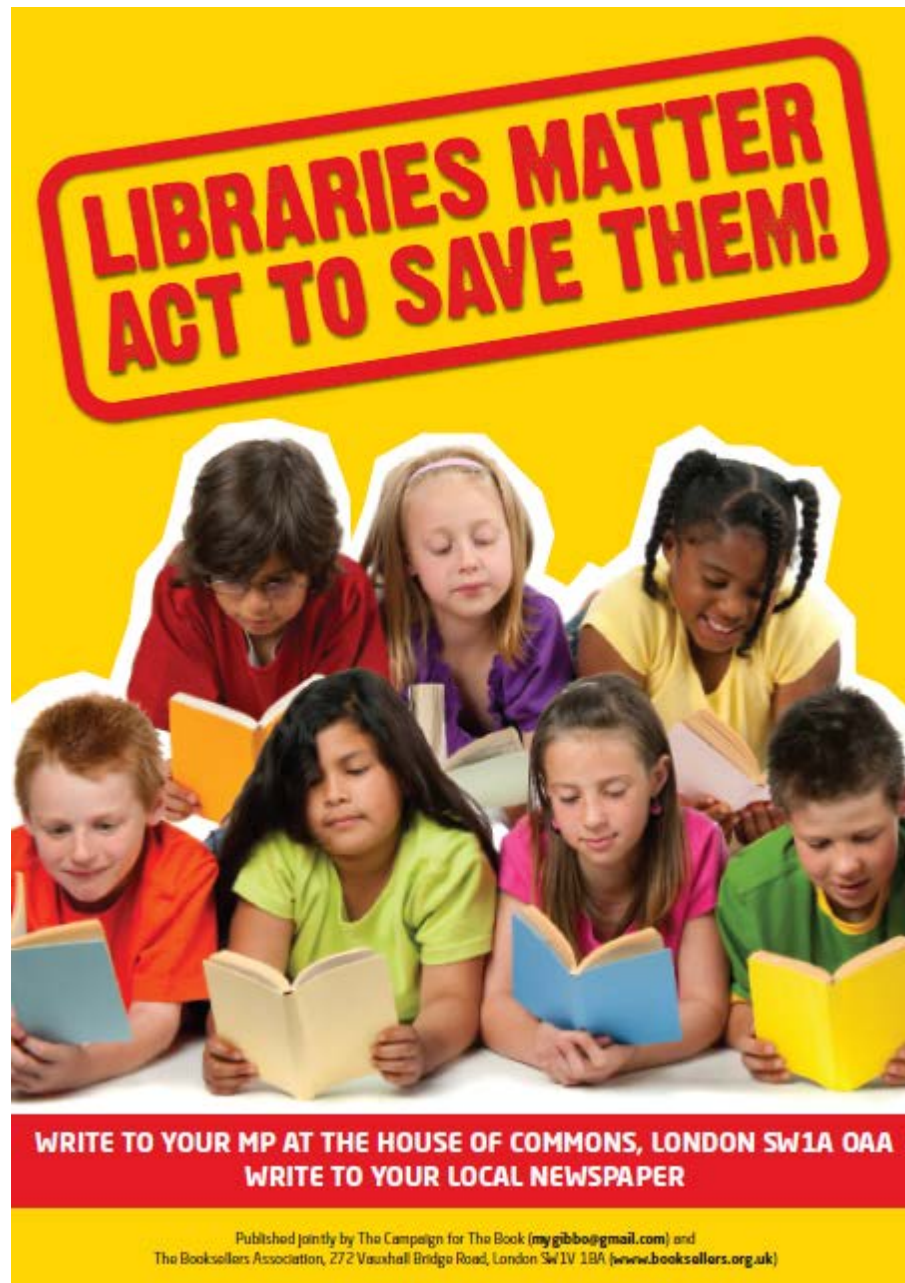
- A poster to download for shop/library window or giveaway
- Advice on who to lobby locally to keep your library open
- Advice on how to lobby local MPs effectively.

The BA is urging booksellers, librarians and others to download the poster and communicate the best campaigning techniques to local people.

Tim Godfray, Chief Executive of The Booksellers Association, said: “The BA has supported the *Save Our Libraries* campaign since it began. We know that booksellers are the hub of the community and, as such, many of our members have already been instrumental in campaigning against local library closures. We want to support as many members as possible to get involved, so we have put together a poster and advice to help them campaign. The materials will help booksellers and their customers’ campaign in the most effective way to fight the closure of their local library.”

Desmond Clarke, supporting the *Save Our Libraries* campaign, said: “The BA's initiative is both timely and imaginative. Libraries play a crucial role in promoting literacy, reading, education and the acquisition of knowledge. We all need to send a very clear message to government and local politicians that disproportionate cuts to library services and the planned closure of 500 libraries is unacceptable.”

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Front of poster/bag stuffer

LIBRARIES MATTER ACT TO SAVE THEM!

**522 libraries (462 buildings and 60 mobiles)
are currently under threat of losing funding
out of 4517 in the UK**

**Cuts of this magnitude could do lasting damage
to the public library service**

We need our libraries because:

- they are a community resource and meeting place and promote social cohesion
- libraries provide books and other resources free to people on low incomes and the elderly
- children who visit the library are twice as likely to read well as those who don't
- children who are read to every day at age three have a vocabulary at five two months more advanced than those who do not
- 30% of UK citizens do not have access to the Internet. Public libraries provide it free of charge
- three million people lack adequate reading skills. Libraries can help them access education and work
- librarians provide expert support to the public
- the OECD says that finding ways to engage pupils in reading is one of the most effective ways to leverage social change.

**LIBRARIES MATTER
KEEP THEM SAFE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION**

Published jointly by The Campaign for The Book (mygibbo@gmail.com) and
The Booksellers Association, 272 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1BA (www.booksellers.org.uk)

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