

With a property portfolio of around £500m a new library and associated Council activities might cost some of 2-3% of this. And of course it would remain an asset on our Council's balance sheet, year on year! The question then is: do we deserve a new library? The answer from BANES Council is a resounding no. Our World Heritage City, home to world class festivals does not deserve better!

Lewis House or Podium, a choice that is no choice. But the Podium library ain't broke and to date has delivered a modern service. The Council's current de-skilling of our library will have negative service and fiscal impacts beyond the current Tory administration. Every CEO knows an organisations most valued asset is its qualified personnel. Believe it or perish.

A Lewis House conversion and change of use is the worst option, carrying high risk of fiscal and delivery failure. I've looked over the building and I've seen this situation too often in my career. It's already an office. Let this sleeping dog lie. The Podium is already a library. Only tin-eared, hubris would swap these two buildings over. To go with Lewis House would mean throwing our money into a black-hole and spending Council time and effort on an uncertain outcome. Public outrage at the loss of an old friend followed by disaffection would ensue with further election losses for those responsible. [BANES council please march-in-step with a library solution led by a council-citizen-librarian coalition.](#)

Refurbishing the Podium library - pointers

An hour spent in briefing and design can cut days from construction time and save thousands in costs; research the user brief; embrace library professionals; plan for service continuation during construction; protect our book-stock; design right-first-time; appoint an experienced design team; brief the architects/designers directly; needs will change, so design-in future flexibility; 'scenery-and-sets' that avoid locking in a One-Stop-Shop, which at some point will morph into a different animal; mechanical, electrical and data services are often the most expensive 'fixes' taking up to two-thirds of contract costs; get a good QS on-board and drop your management consultants; a formal 'post-commissioning' contract is essential to saving Council time and money chasing problems after handover; a BSRIA 'Soft Landings' approach provides a best-practice model for ensuring a refurbished Podium space will work well.

Next steps

Appoint a champion for libraries. A team leader. Someone passionate about our library, actively finding money and support when needed. Former cabinet members have been tardy, indifferent and listless. Bath has already missed the statutory funding boat. But we still have two world class universities to speak to. In the meantime please visit inspiring UK exemplars - the Hive, the Storyhouse, the Word for example. These libraries work to reduce the costs of local social services. Tap into Bath's creative energy - citizens, professional librarians, the best designers, the best constructors. Build the team on Bath's creative expertise. Lastly, avoid the perils of 'design-and-build', in my experience it's too risky and rarely delivers what's required.

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