

I'm Caroline Ambrose, resident and founder of Bath's international Novel Awards. I'm here to talk about public libraries.

It's been a year since cabinet's sudden decision to close all but three public libraries. By early 2019 Bath & NE Somerset residents will have one of the worst residents to library ratios in Europe, with just one public library per 60,000 residents compared to the average of one per 16,000.

This leaves Bath Central Library left to play an even bigger part of the council's lawful obligation to provide a comprehensive public library service for everyone in Bath & NE Somerset. It's never been more vital the £3m proposed changes for Bath Central Library strengthens, not weakens, it so I'm rather puzzled that we're a year down the line no meaningful facts or evidence to support and explain the project have come to light.

Here's my top 8 of basic facts the public have asked and not had answered:

1. The up to date costs of the Bath Central Library project with a detailed breakdown for the £3+ million expenditure?
2. A detailed breakdown of savings cited as the key driver for the £3m spend?
3. The updated advice from Bevans Chartered Surveyors addressing their serious misgivings about the viability of the space as an inclusive multi-function space back in March 2017?
4. A schedule of works detailing the planning permission schedule, the works and where the city's library services will be sited during the lengthy closure of the Podium site?
5. Business plans setting out how the council's progress in bringing on the £1m+ funding and income opportunities highlighted by myself and others?
6. Detailed layouts with explanations of how each of the One Stop shop services will be provided within the middle of the public library
7. Benchmark evidence citing a comparable small footprint / high footfall city library anywhere in the world where this has proved a success.
8. Details about the additional opening hours to be implemented to enable residents no longer near a public library to travel and make use of services?

At a time when budgets and services are going downhill fast, the public expects every pound to be wisely spent. The libraries project has already wasted a great deal of time and public money. Will the cabinet member address these questions?