

Appendix C



CROYDON

**Library service review
Review of closure proposals**

Croydon Council

Activist Group

v1.0 17 September 2024

Library services review – review of closure proposals

This report was produced for Croydon Council by Activist Group.

Report details

Report authors	Eric Bohl, Mike Wynn (Activist Group)
Contributors	Andrew Holden (Activist Group)
Version number	v1.0
Date	17 September 2024
Revisions	V1.0 - final version – 17 September 2024



Contents

Contents.....	2
1. Introduction.....	6
About this appendix.....	6
Background to the closure proposals.....	6
Why have closures been considered again?.....	7
Opposition to the option of closing libraries.....	8
Table C1.1: principal issues raised opposing closures.....	8
2. Understanding the current library network in Croydon.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Libraries, geography and demographics.....	9
Figure C2.1: the location of libraries and population density.....	11
Figure C2.2: the libraries mapped against deprivation.....	12
Figure C2.3: the libraries mapped against deprivation impacted by crime.....	13
Figure C2.4: areas in blue whose residents live more than 1 mile from their current nearest library in the existing library network.....	14
Table C2.1: libraries in other boroughs with 1-mile catchment areas that include Croydon residents.....	15
How the libraries have been performing.....	17
Table C2.2: summary of performance of each library for 2023-24.....	17
Table C2.3: library opening hours (including Open+ hours in italics).....	18
Table C2.4: visits and opening hours and percentage change for 2023/24 compared with 2019/20.....	19
Table C2.5: showing differences in opening hours, visits per hour and rank.....	20
Table C2.6: summary of the unit costs of each library for 2023-24.....	21
How Croydon libraries’ performance compares.....	22
Figure C2.5: trends in visitor numbers to libraries in London boroughs 2018-23.....	22
Figure C2.6: total expenditure (£s) per 1000 population.....	23
3. Evaluating the thirteen libraries.....	24
Assessing the performance, viability and impact of each library.....	24
Table C3.1: draft strategic outcomes for the review of library services.....	24
Table C3.2: summary of assessment criteria for retaining a library.....	25
Notes on the data used on performance.....	25
Notes on the commentary on location and building.....	27
Notes on the commentary on population and need.....	27
Figure C3.1: map of overall IMD deprivation for recent IMD releases.....	29
<i>Darker colours show lower levels of deprivation</i>	29
Figure C3.2: maps of overall relative deprivation, IMD 2019 and Census 2021.....	30
Demographic data on libraries.....	33
Table C3.3: age profile of population and proportions in library catchment areas.....	34

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C3.4: ethnic profile of population in library catchment areas.....	35
Figure C3.3: map showing comparative levels of overall deprivation	36
Table C3.5: health of population in library catchment areas	37
Table C3.6: disability levels of population in library catchment areas	38
General observations on the evaluation process	38
4. Reviewing the thirteen libraries	40
About this section	40
Review of Ashburton Library	41
Table C4.1: performance, location and building data	41
Table C4.2: summary of population, need and community	42
Figure C4.1: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	43
Figure C4.2: population data for catchment area (LSOA)	44
Review of Bradmore Green Library	46
Table C4.3: performance, location and building data	46
Table C4.4: summary of population, need and community	47
Figure C4.3: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	48
Figure C4.4: population data for catchment area (LSOA)	49
Figure C4.5: health deprivation and disability within 1 mile catchment area	50
Figure C4.6: respondents who cannot use another library and frequency of use	55
Figure C4.7: comparison of crime in Coulsdon Town and Old Coulsdon 2021-2024	57
Review of Broad Green Library	59
Table C4.5: performance, location and building data	59
Table C4.6: summary of population, need and community	61
Figure C4.8: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	62
Figure C4.9: Income Deprivation Affecting Older People by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	63
Figure C4.10: population data for catchment area (LSOA)	64
Figure C4.11: addresses of active users of Broad Green and Thornton Heath libraries... Broad Green Library	67
Thornton Heath Library	67
Figure C4.12: respondents who cannot use another library and frequency of use	70
Figure C4.13: comparison of crime in Coulsdon Town and Old Coulsdon 2021-2024	72
Figure C4.14: Health Deprivation and Disability by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	73
Review of Central Library	76
Table C4.7: performance, location and building data	76
Table C4.8: summary of population, need and community	78
Figure C4.15: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	78
Figure C4.16: population data for catchment area (LSOA)	79
Review of Coulsdon Library	81

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C4.9: performance, location and building data.....	81
Table C4.10: summary of population, need and community.....	82
Figure C4.17: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area.....	83
Figure C4.18: population data for catchment area (LSOA).....	84
Review of New Addington Library.....	86
Table C4.11: performance, location and building data.....	86
Table C4.12: summary of population, need and community.....	88
Figure C4.19: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area.....	89
Figure C4.20: population data for catchment area (LSOA).....	90
Review of Norbury Library.....	92
Table C4.13: performance, location and building data.....	92
Table C4.14: summary of population, need and community.....	94
Figure C4.21: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area.....	94
Figure C4.22: population data for catchment area (LSOA).....	95
Review of Purley Library.....	97
Table C4.15: performance, location and building data.....	97
Table C4.16: summary of population, need and community.....	99
Figure C4.23: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area.....	99
Figure C4.24: population data for catchment area (LSOA).....	100
Review of Sanderstead Library.....	102
Table C4.17: performance, location and building data.....	102
Table C4.18: summary of population, need and community.....	104
Figure C4.25: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area.....	104
Figure C4.26: population data for library catchment area (LSOA).....	105
Figure C4.27: respondents who cannot use another library and frequency of use.....	107
Figure C4.28: addresses of active users of Sanderstead and Selsdon libraries.....	110
Sanderstead Library.....	110
Selsdon Library.....	110
Figure C4.29: Health Deprivation and Disability by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area.....	111
Review of Selsdon Library.....	115
Table C4.19: performance, location and building data.....	115
Table C4.20: summary of population, need and community.....	117
Figure C4.30: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area.....	117
Figure C4.31: population data for catchment area (LSOA).....	118
Review of Shirley Library.....	120
Table C4.21: performance, location and building data.....	120
Table C4.22: summary of population, need and community.....	121
Figure C4.32: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area.....	122
Figure C4.33: population data for catchment area (LSOA).....	123

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.34: respondents who cannot use another library and frequency of use	125
Figure C4.35: Health Deprivation and Disability by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	129
Review of South Norwood Library	133
Table C4.23: performance, location and building data	133
Table C4.24: summary of population, need and community	135
Figure C4.36: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	135
Figure C4.37: indices of income deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	136
Table C4.38: population data for catchment area (LSOA)	137
Figure C4.39: reported crime per quarter in South Norwood 2021-2024	138
Review of Thornton Heath Library	141
Table C4.25: performance, location and building data	141
Table C4.26: summary of population, need and community	142
Figure C4.40: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area	143
Figure C4.41: population data for catchment area (LSOA)	144
5. Summary of recommendations for change	146
Introduction	146
Table C5.1: summary of assessment criteria for retaining a library	146
Recommendations for the libraries to be retained	147
Table C5.2: recommendations for libraries to be retained	147
Recommendations for library closures	149
The new Croydon library network of provision	154
Figure C5.1: areas in blue whose residents live more than 1 mile from their current nearest library in the existing network of library provision and in future	155
Figure C5.2: areas in blue whose residents live more than 1.25 miles from their current nearest library in the existing network of library provision and in future	155

1. Introduction

About this appendix

- 1.1 In section 3 of the main review report (Appendix A), we have summarised feedback from the public and other stakeholders received during the consultation carried out earlier this year. In section 4, we then go on to analyse the key themes that have emerged from consultation over the proposed changes. The three main themes were identified as opposition to closing libraries; the need for improvements to the service; and the preference for alternatives to closure.
- 1.2 In this appendix, we have explored in more detail the feedback opposing library closures and then use this feedback to review again each of the libraries. We have paid particular attention to feedback on the libraries recommended for closure as well as on other libraries that might be considered as alternatives for closure.
- 1.3 The results of the analysis in this appendix have been summarised in section 4 of the main review report (Appendix A).
- 1.4 This report has been prepared by Activist Group using data provided by Croydon Council.

Background to the closure proposals

- 1.5 In section 4 of the main report (Appendix A), we have reviewed the options for change that were recommended in Appendix B of the report to Cabinet on 31 January 2024. Those options for change were designed to achieve the strategic outcomes for the Library Service Review. A longlist of options was evaluated, resulting in a recommended shortlist of improvements to the service.
- 1.6 One option on the shortlist was closing some libraries which would release resources to fund improvements to the libraries that would remain. Library managers were very reluctant to propose closures but believed that this was the only way to improve the overall performance of the service given that it was very unlikely that the state of the Council's finances would allow it to increase funding to the service. Although some of the other options were designed to deliver some savings from efficiencies, these would not save enough to fund more than a handful of improvements.
- 1.7 In Appendix C of the report to Cabinet in January 2024, we reviewed all of the borough's libraries (informed by more detailed site profiles), exploring their performance and viability and the impact of closure before recommending:
 - That four libraries should be considered for closure, subject to formal consultation.
 - That mitigation should be put in place for communities affected by the proposed closures.
 - That the savings made should be used to fund improvements to the nine libraries that would remain.

Why have closures been considered again?

- 1.8 This was not the first time that closures have been considered. The Council decided in 2021 to seek £500k in savings from the library service and to consult on a proposal to close five libraries:
- Bradmore Green
 - Broad Green
 - Sanderstead
 - Shirley
 - South Norwood
- 1.9 In the first round of consultation, participants showed strong opposition to the proposed closures. In response to the feedback, the Council decided not to progress with the closure option and instead consulted on a range of alternative options for savings. The option preferred by a majority of respondents was to reduce the opening hours by 21%, with 56% of survey respondents preferring that option.
- 1.10 The Council decided to proceed with the reduction in staffed opening hours which would be accompanied by measures including introducing Open+ (ie self-service access) and encouraging more volunteering. These measures had failed.
- 1.11 First, the introduction of Open+ proved technically complex, slow and expensive and so Open+ had been implemented in only two libraries of the planned five, and take-up at Selsdon Library (introduced from May 2023) and Norbury Library (from October 2023) was lower than expected.
- 1.12 Second, it proved very difficult to recruit and retain volunteers and numbers were far lower than hoped. This reflected a downwards trend in formal volunteering in recent years, which worsened further as a result of the pandemic.
- 1.13 As a result of these problems, the actual reduction in opening hours since April 2022 has been 39% (if Open+ opening hours are included) or 48% (if they are excluded).
- 1.14 Croydon's library service take-up fell during the pandemic when libraries were closed due to lockdowns, and service take-up has been recovering slowly. However, user numbers have fallen considerably, with the exception of the rise in the number of issues of books and other materials thanks to a big increase in issues of digital books and materials which now have a 31% share of all issues in 2023/24. This increase in issues of books and materials, while welcome, is from a very low base compared with issues per head of population in other councils.
- 1.15 We concluded that, **despite the best endeavours of committed library staff and the enthusiastic support of loyal library users, Croydon's library service was now a failing service. The option of library closures was identified as a way to release resources that could be re-invested in repairing the damage caused by the changes made in 2022. In recommending the option of closures, there were no cuts proposed to the overall library service budget.**

Opposition to the option of closing libraries

1.16 Between January and April of this year, a third round of consultation was undertaken on a set of options that included the closure of four libraries:

- Bradmore Green.
- Broad Green.
- Sanderstead.
- Shirley.

1.17 As summarised in section 3 of the main Phase 3 Report, (see Appendix A) and in the Consultation Findings Report (Appendix B), the results of the consultation show that there is strong opposition to the option of closing four libraries in order to improve the remaining nine.

1.18 The key points raised in opposition to closure are summarised in the table below.

Table C1.1: principal issues raised opposing closures

- **The majority of participants remain opposed to closures:** they do not accept closing libraries as a way of improving services. Even users of libraries which would open longer were opposed to closure.
- **Closures would have a severe effect on users in the communities concerned:** particularly people with protected characteristics, deprived people and global majority communities, among whom the most affected would struggle to use other libraries.
- **Closures would worsen the digital divide:** it would hit residents who do not have access to the internet and for whom e-lending is not a possibility.
- **A considerable proportion of current users prefer to keep libraries open on a part-time basis:** this was seen as preferable to closures amid fears the buildings would be sold off.
- **The rationale for the closures proposed was questioned:** the choice of library and area affected was challenged on the basis of the usage figures since the pandemic and benchmarking with other authorities.
- **Poor transport options:** apart from losing valued local assets, the greatest concern was about lack of transport options to visit other libraries.

1.19 In later sections of this appendix, we have also reviewed more detailed points raised during consultation in opposition to the closure of specific libraries. We have also examined in greater detail other libraries that could be considered as alternatives for closure.

1.20 It should be noted that section 4 of the review of proposals report (Appendix A) evaluates the other two main headings of consultation feedback in some detail:

- The service needs improvement.
- Alternatives to closure should be found.

1.21 This report does not repeat that detail but touches on some of the issues raised.

2. Understanding the current library network in Croydon

Introduction

- 2.1 In this section, we provide background information that provides some context for our review in section 4 of the proposed closure of four of the borough’s libraries. First, we set out how the libraries are distributed across the borough and an overview of how data on geography and levels of need can aid an understanding of the catchment areas of libraries and the people they serve. Second, we summarise how the libraries have performed in 2023-24 and in recent years, and how the impact of the COVID pandemic and the reduction in opening hours have affected service take-up and the unit costs of the libraries. Finally, we provide some information analysing how Croydon’s library service is performing in comparison with other services across London.

Libraries, geography and demographics

- 2.2 Croydon is the London Borough with the largest population and the third largest geographical area. In this section we highlight some key data that help to provide an overview of the library service and the population it serves.
- 2.3 We begin by showing a series of maps. These maps are designed to aid understanding of the borough and its population but need some explaining. These maps present data updated from the 2011 Census and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 allows relative deprivation levels across England to be compared. The next IMD is expected to be published in late 2025¹ and, as a result, we are reliant on deprivation data that is increasingly out-of-date.
- 2.4 The index is based on population data at Lower-layer Super Output Area (LSOA) level:
- “LSOAs were created based on 2011 Census data by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). There are 32,844 LSOAs in the country and of these 220 LSOAs are in Croydon. Each one has between 400 and 1,200 households with between 1,000 and 3,000 people”².*
- 2.5 The IMD allows deprivation in Croydon to be compared for each local area (or LSOA) within the borough with deprivation levels across England.
- 2.6 As the maps used in this report showing IMD deprivation come from different sources, there are different ‘colour schemes’ used in the legends. Where there are differences from the main colour scheme used, we have explained these before each map.

¹ Source: the Croydon Observatory, https://www.croydonobservatory.org/deprivation/#/view-report/8b97d75c317745b3a6016fc0788469d1/_iaFirstFeature/G3

² Source: the Croydon Borough Profile June 2023.

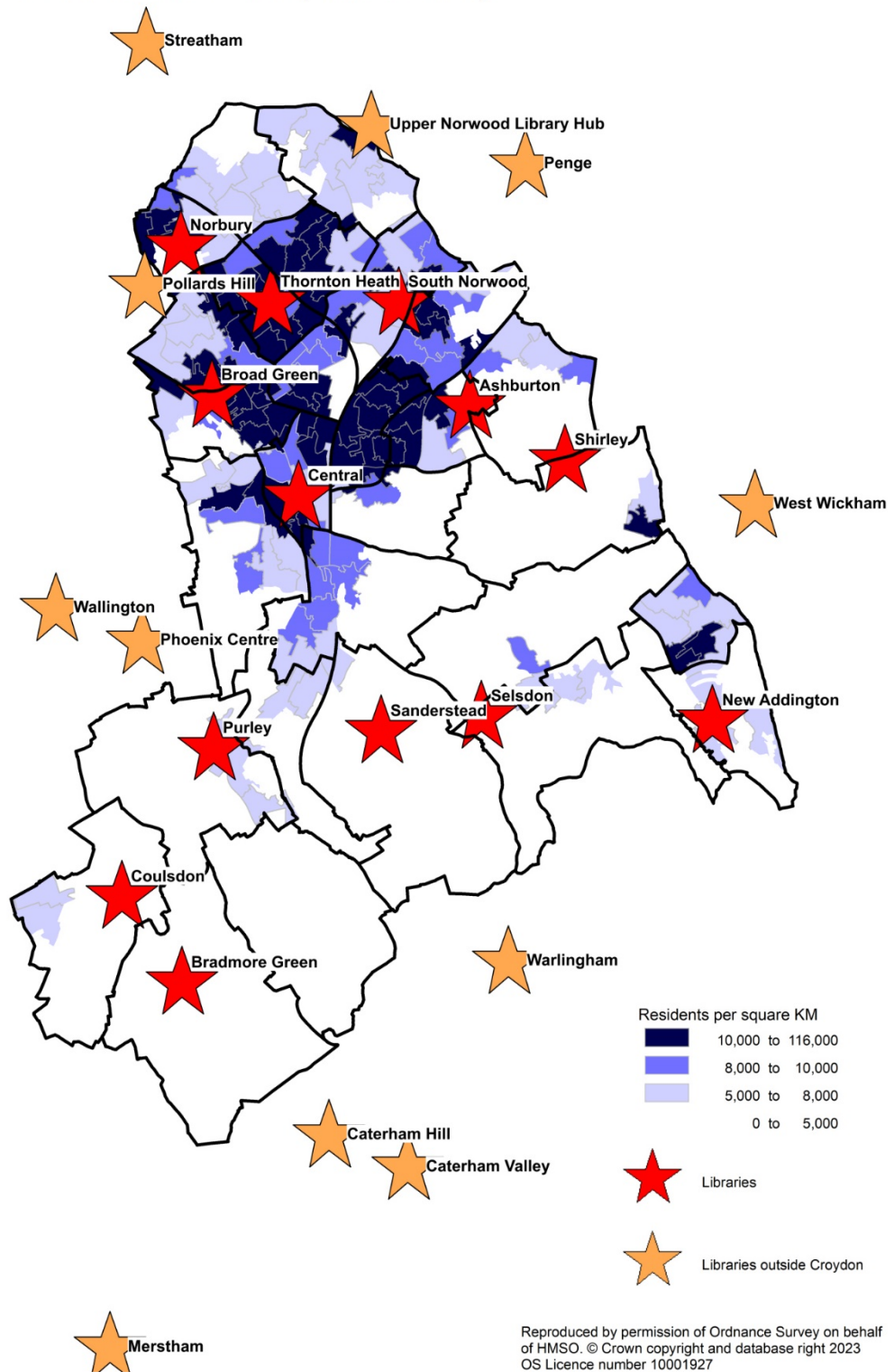
Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 2.7 Below we illustrate the relative density of the population (ie how many people live in an area) in comparison with the location of libraries. The libraries in the north of the borough are closer together, but they are serving much denser concentrations of population compared with the south which has large areas of green space. In this map, the darker areas have a denser population.
- 2.8 To reach the people that need them, libraries need to be located where people go. This means that, in some areas, libraries may be some distance from each other and in others they could be little more than a mile distant, particularly if there are two distinct shopping districts in which the libraries are located.
- 2.9 One argument raised during consultation was that the south of the borough was being particularly (and unfairly) targeted for closures. We will examine this issue further in this appendix and will explore the size of the population in the catchment area of each library and their distance from other libraries.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C2.1: the location of libraries and population density

Croydon Libraries and 2021 Population Density

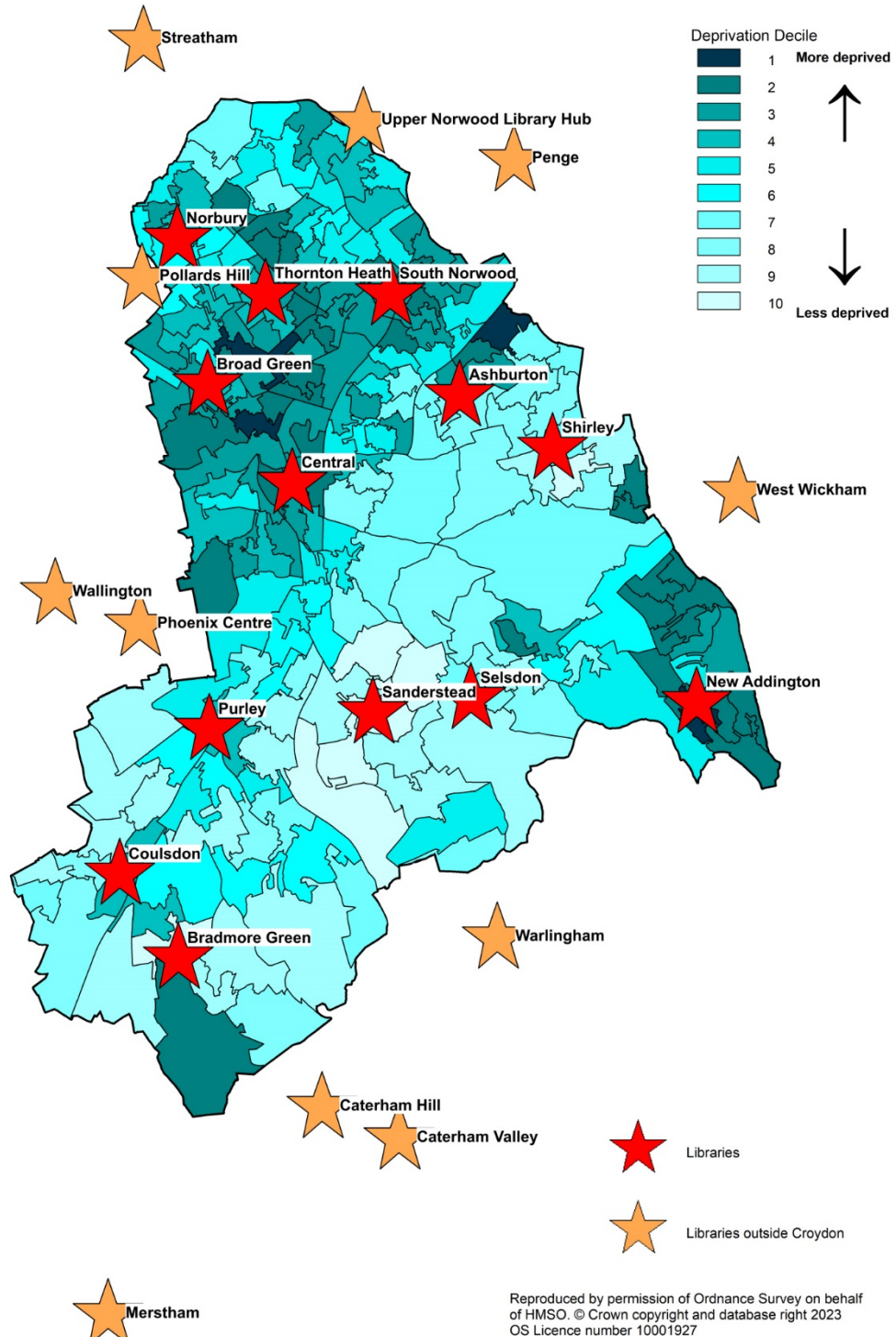


Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 2.10 Much of the south of the borough is more prosperous than much of the north. However, there are pockets of deprivation in parts of the south (eg Old Coulsdon) and the east (eg New Addington) and pockets of greater prosperity in the north (eg in parts of Norbury). The darker areas of the map in the north of the borough are more deprived and are also where most libraries are located.

Figure C2.2: the libraries mapped against deprivation

Croydon Libraries with 2019 IMD

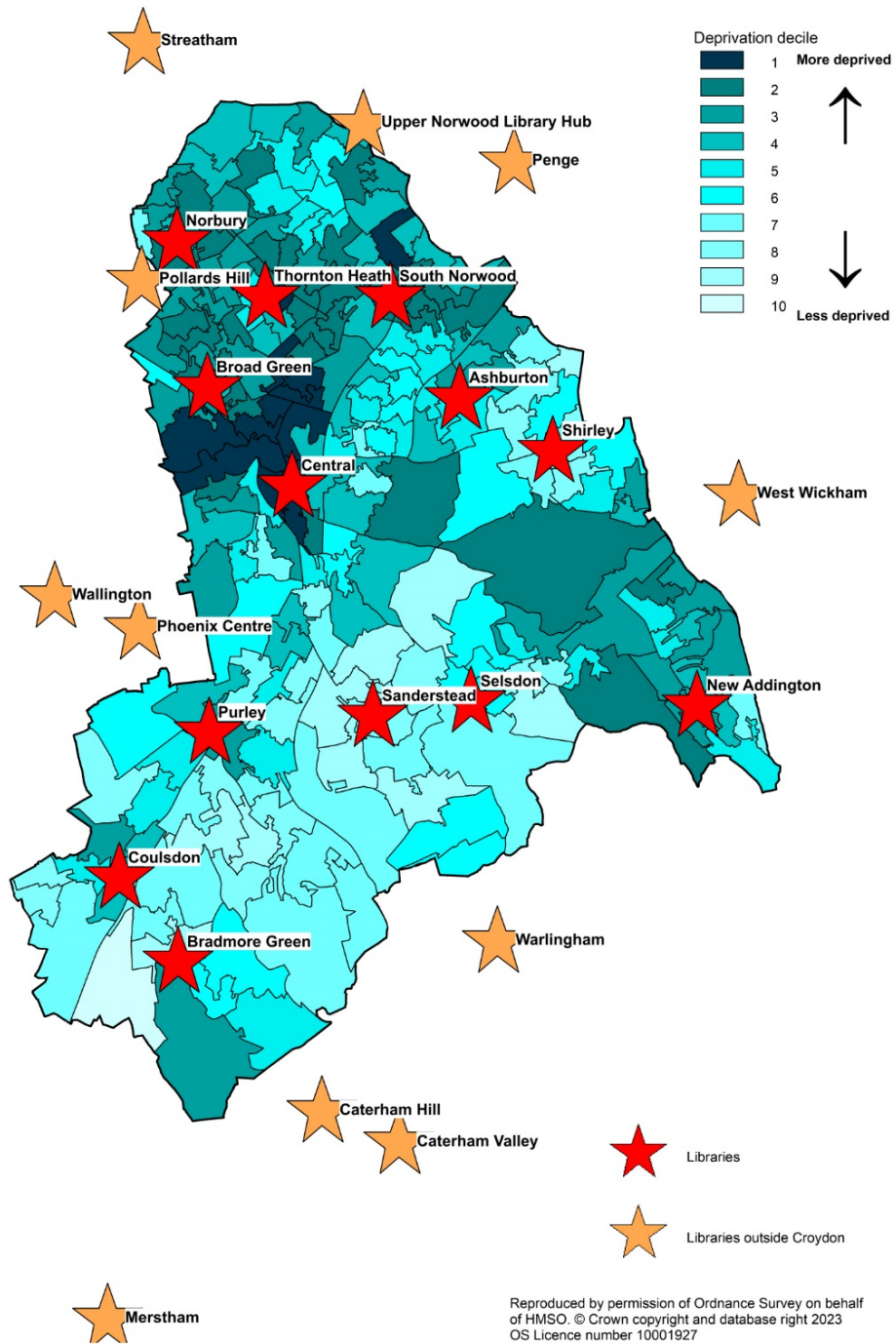


Library services review – review of closure proposals

2.11 The location of libraries is not merely a matter of geography. In areas of high deprivation, people can be more reluctant to travel far as they might not be able to afford public transport if not entitled to free or discounted travel. Also, crime and fear of crime can limit people’s (especially younger and older people’s) willingness to travel. Crime is a serious problem for some parts of the borough and this was an issue raised during the latest consultation: for example, crime was identified as an issue that might deter some from using other libraries, eg Coulsdon Library and Central Library.

Figure C2.3: the libraries mapped against deprivation impacted by crime

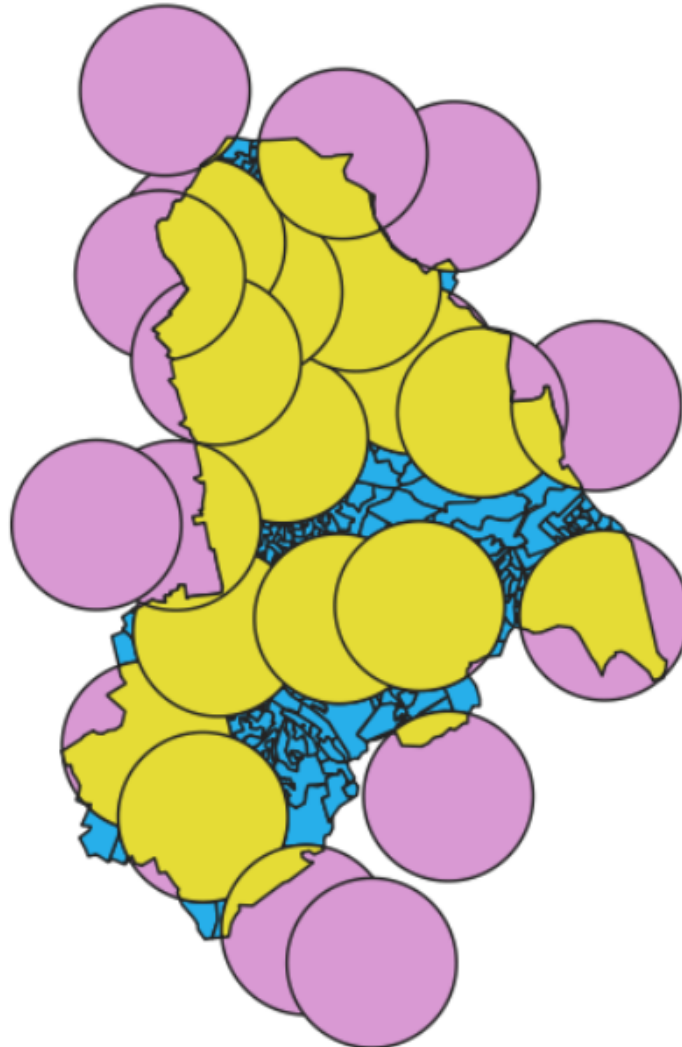
Croydon Libraries with 2019 IMD - Crime



Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 2.12 The current network of libraries is not evenly distributed across the borough. There are an estimated 28,282 residents (7% of the population) who live **outside** a current library 'catchment area' which is the area inside a one-mile radius from their nearest library³. These areas are shown in blue below. The catchment area of Croydon's library service is shown in yellow, of libraries provided by other Councils in pink. There are an estimated 6,400 (2% of the population) who live outside a wider, 1.25-mile radius.
- 2.13 There are a number of residents in the catchment areas of libraries outside of the borough which they can use, eg Croydon residents also have access to libraries in Merton, Sutton and Surrey through membership of The Libraries Consortium⁴ (see more below). We examine the population in each catchment area (and outside catchment areas) in further detail later in this appendix.

Figure C2.4: areas in blue whose residents live more than 1 mile from their current nearest library in the existing library network



³ The estimated population of a 'catchment area' is the estimated population which lives within one mile of a Croydon library or one operated by a neighbouring council (eg Upper Norwood Library in Crystal Palace which is jointly owned by Croydon and Lambeth).

⁴: [Home - TLC \(thelibrariesconsortium.org.uk\)](http://thelibrariesconsortium.org.uk)

Library services review – review of closure proposals

2.14 The catchment areas shown in the map above are of libraries that are available to the public and include libraries that are part-time, including most of those in Croydon. So many residents will live in the catchment area of a library that is closed more often than it is open.

The Libraries Consortium

2.15 Local authorities have the power to enter into shared service arrangements and consortia for the discharge of their duties. In exercising its public library duty to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service, the Council has formed a partnership with 20+ other councils, The Library Consortium (TLC). TLC is one of the most advanced library shared services in England through which its members:

- Share a single Library Management System which provides the IT operating system for library management and a shared Library Management Platform which provides users with a digital portal to access information about the library service, reserve books and download eBooks.
- Share their library catalogue with all other TLC members, giving library users a much larger book stock to draw on. They can reserve a book which is held by Essex County Council’s library service, for example, and collect it from a library in Croydon.
- Have a single library card which allows residents to use any library in the TLC network using their library card.

2.16 The TLC includes the following neighbouring councils: Merton and Sutton London boroughs and Surrey County Council. There are eight libraries located in neighbouring boroughs which have 1-mile catchment areas that include residents in Croydon. In total there are 66,975 Croydon residents who live in the 1-mile catchment area of a library managed by another Council:

Table C2.1: libraries in other boroughs with 1-mile catchment areas⁵ that include Croydon residents

Library	Authority	Croydon residents
Caterham Hill Library	Surrey County Council	379
Penge Library	Bromley Council	40
Phoenix Centre	Sutton Council	8,335
Pollards Hill Library	Merton Council	32,164
Streatham Library	Lambeth Council	211
Upper Norwood Library Hub	Lambeth Council	17,868
Warlingham	Surrey County Council	1,753

⁵ Using 2021 Census population data by Output Area.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Library	Authority	Croydon residents
West Wickham Library ⁶	Bromley Council	6,225
Total		66,975

- 2.17 Upper Norwood Library Hub is owned jointly by Lambeth and Croydon Councils. Lambeth Council runs the library service and the Upper Norwood Libraries Trust operate the building and activities in the building which are largely grant funded. Croydon makes a contribution to the staffing and stock budgets, and also works with the Lambeth and Upper Norwood Libraries team on joint events and activities.
- 2.18 Croydon’s residents are not restricted to using Croydon libraries and it is common for people in London to use services across borough borders. In addition to the libraries which are part of The Libraries Consortium, Croydon’s residents can apply for membership of Bromley libraries to give them access to the nearby West Wickham Library. West Wickham Library is currently closed for refurbishment and due to reopen in 2025, in the meantime there is a temporary library at 77 Addington Road (some distance further east than the permanent site).

⁶ Using the location of the permanent West Wickham Library which is currently closed for refurbishment and due to reopen in 2025.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

How the libraries have been performing

- 2.19 Each library is very different. They range in age, design, size, scope of offer, and opening hours. In this section, we provide an overview of each library including data, such as performance, activities, condition and proximity to other public facilities and libraries. In Appendix F of the January 2024 report to Cabinet, the Council also provided ‘site profiles’ of each library.
- 2.20 The January 2024 Cabinet report presented a summary of performance for the first six months of the financial year 2023-24. This is now updated for the full 12 months below.

Table C2.2: summary of performance of each library for 2023-24

Library	Visits	Issues	PC hrs	Event visits ⁷	Hours	Active users
Ashburton	46,757	50,301	4,389	2,666	32	1,709
Bradmore Green	25,878	17,324	202	788	16	584
Broad Green	17,023	9,635	1,259	1,963	16	935
Central	335,028	170,539	31,404	12,074	40	19,940
Coulsdon	34,499	34,361	1,461	1,524	24	1,460
New Addington	15,798	8,564	2,424	2,258	24	769
Norbury	29,993	29,242	4,379	3,082	24	2,251
Purley	18,486	29,041	1,392	1,906	16	1,493
Sanderstead	22,554	34,948	770	1,317	24	1,139
Selsdon	72,792	72,012	3,471	4,076	24	2,694
Shirley	12,918	14,003	979	1,106	16	855
South Norwood	13,976	22,330	1,971	2,200	16	1,755
Thornton Heath	36,700	31,776	4,491	3,086	24	2,986
All libraries	682,402	524,076	58,589	38,046	296	38,570

- 2.21 All except Central Library are part-time (Central Library is now open five days a week), with most closed on Saturdays (often the busiest time for libraries). Two libraries (Selsdon and Norbury) have 3 days a week of Open+ (self-service access) with a security guard on-site but no library staff. The total opening hours below are 39% lower than before 2022/23 and 48% lower if Open+ hours are excluded.
- 2.22 Since visits during Open+ hours at Selsdon Library have been so low, it worth noting that opening hours *excluding* Open+ are now only 296 hours a week compared with 566.5 hours in 2019/20.

⁷ The figure for event visits is the estimated number of attendees at events and activities organised by the library service in each library.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C2.3: library opening hours (including Open+ hours in italics)

2022-23	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thur	Fri	Sat	Total
Ashburton	10m-6pm	10am-6pm	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	9am-5pm	32
Bradmore Green	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	16
Broad Green	10am-6pm	Closed	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	Closed	16
Central	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	Closed	10am-6pm	9am-5pm	40
Coulsdon	10am-6pm	Closed	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	9am-5pm	24
New Addington	10am-6pm	Closed	Closed	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	Closed	24
Norbury	<i>10am-6pm</i>	10am-6pm	<i>10am-6pm</i>	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	<i>9am-5pm</i>	48
Purley	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	Closed	16
Sanderstead	10am-6pm	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	24
Selsdon	10am-6pm	<i>8am-6pm</i>	10am-6pm	<i>8am-6pm</i>	<i>8am-6pm</i>	9am-5pm	54
Shirley	Closed	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	16
South Norwood	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	16
Thornton Heath	10am-6pm	Closed	10am-6pm	Closed	Closed	9am-5pm	24
						Total	344

- 2.23 There have been marked differences in the rate of recovery of visits to libraries since the pandemic, largely determined by their reductions in opening hours. We have compared the number of visits to libraries for the last financial year (ie April 2023 to March 2024) with 2019/20 (ie the year before the COVID pandemic and before the reduction in opening hours in April 2022).
- 2.24 Overall visits in 2023-24 are 53% fewer than in 2019/20, but this hides significant variations. For example, New Addington's are 80% lower than in 19/20 whereas Ashburton's are only 35% lower. Interestingly, Central Library's visits are 59% lower, despite having the lowest reduction in opening hours (25%).
- 2.25 The 53% reduction in the number of visits compared with 2019/20 is also understated as that year was affected by the closure of Norbury Library for refurbishment in September 2019, as well as the closure of all libraries on 20 March 2020 due to the first national COVID lockdown.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C2.4: visits and opening hours and percentage change for 2023/24 compared with 2019/20

April-September	2019/20		2022/23		2023/24		% change	
	Visits	Hrs	Visits	Hrs	Visits	Hrs	Visits	Hrs
Ashburton	71,954	44.5	38,593	32	46,757	32	-35%	-28%
Bradmore Green	41,547	44.5	17,370	16	25,878	16	-38%	-64%
Broad Green	38,929	35.5	11,315	16	17,023	16	-56%	-55%
Central	816,435	53.5	316,046	40	335,028	40	-59%	-25%
Coulsdon	58,483	44.5	27,315	24	34,499	24	-41%	-46%
New Addington	80,738	52.5	12,268	24	15,798	24	-80%	-54%
Norbury ⁸	31,335	44.5	17,030	24	29,993	24	-4% ⁹	-46%
Purley	47,817	44.5	14,485	16	18,486	16	-61%	-64%
Sanderstead	35,222	34.5	18,784	24	22,554	24	-36%	-30%
Selsdon	93,216	44.5	48,695	24	72,792	24	-22%	-46%
Shirley	31,250	44.5	11,006	16	12,918	16	-59%	-64%
South Norwood	39,295	34.5	12,582	16	13,976	16	-64%	-54%
Thornton Heath	79,622	44.5	28,651	24	36,700	24	-54%	-46%
Total	1,465,843	566.5	574,140	296	682,402	296	-53%	-48%

- 2.26 The complexity of the opening hours and performance in the table above makes it harder to judge the trends in the relative performance levels of each library. Therefore, in order to understand how popular each library is *for the hours that it is open*, we have calculated the average number of visits for each opening hour for each library. We have then identified the rank of each library for visits per opening hour.
- 2.27 While it shows that Selsdon Library has increased its average number of visits per hour and ranks second behind Central Library at 58 visits per opening hour, the third busiest library in terms of total visits overall (Ashburton) is only in fifth place when measuring visits *per opening hour*. Most libraries have largely similar number of visits per hour (within a range of plus or minus 15 percentage points). There are four libraries with markedly different visits per hour in 2023-24 compared with 2019-20. Central Library's and New Addington Library's visits per hour have *reduced* by 45% and 57% respectively since 2019-20.

⁸ Norbury Library was closed first for refurbishment and then due to COVID lockdowns for 87 weeks in total from September 2019.

⁹ The small reduction in visits is the result of the closure of Norbury Library for refurbishment for over six months in 2019-20.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 2.28 Selsdon and Bradmore Green have both *increased* their visits per hour by 45% and 73% respectively. Bradmore Green now ranks third in visits per hour (although there are question marks about the visitor numbers to Bradmore Green, as discussed in section 3 below). How far smaller libraries, such as Bradmore Green and Shirley libraries, can continue to increase further is open to question given the limitations of their buildings, location, catchment areas and opening hours as we shall explore in section 4.
- 2.29 The figures suggest that users of some libraries have adjusted more easily to the change in opening hours, making more intensive use of their library for the fewer hours that it is open each week. There are various reasons that might explain these differences. For example, they may be due to the days on which the library is closed (eg if closed on Saturdays) or what else is going on in the vicinity (eg the temporary closure of the nursery in the building shared by New Addington Library).

Table C2.5: showing differences in opening hours, visits per hour and rank

Financial year	2019-20		2022-23		2023-24		Change in visits/hr
Library	Visits/hr	Rank	Visits/hr	Rank	Visits/hr ¹⁰	Rank	Since 19-20
Ashburton	31.10	5	23.19	3	28.10	5	-10%
Bradmore Green	17.95	12	20.88	6	31.10	3	73%
Broad Green	21.09	9	13.60	11	20.46	9	-3%
Central	293.47	1	151.95	1	161.07	1	-45%
Coulsdon	25.27	7	21.89	5	27.64	6	9%
New Addington	29.57	6	9.83	13	12.66	13	-57%
Norbury ¹¹	32.01	4	13.65	10	24.03	7	-25%
Purley	20.66	10	17.41	7	22.22	8	8%
Sanderstead	19.63	11	15.05	9	18.07	10	-8%
Selsdon	40.28	2	39.02	2	58.33	2	45%
Shirley	13.50	13	13.23	12	15.53	12	15%
South Norwood	21.90	8	15.12	8	16.80	11	-23%
Thornton Heath	34.41	3	22.96	4	29.41	4	-15%
Total	49.76		37.30		44.33		-11%

¹⁰ For consistency, the opening hours quoted are for staffed opening hours in 2023-24. However, the visitor numbers include the small percentage of visits that take place during *unstaffed* hours using the Open+ system. As a result, the visits per hour are slightly overstated for Norbury and Seldon libraries, but do not affect the ranking.

¹¹ Norbury Library was closed for refurbishment from September 2019 for 66 weeks and so the visits per hour are for the 22 weeks the library was open in 2019-20.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

2.30 To help judge the cost efficiency of each library, a simple unit cost has been calculated for the cost per visit of each library. The sharp fall in library usage has increased the overall cost per visit for the library service. The three libraries with the lowest number of visits have the highest unit costs. However, although Ashburton has the third highest number of visits, the cost of operating in a PFI building means its unit cost is the fourth highest. Even though the costs of the Central Library are three times higher than the next costliest, the high number of visitors means that its unit cost is lowest of the thirteen.

Table C2.6: summary of the unit costs of each library for 2023-24

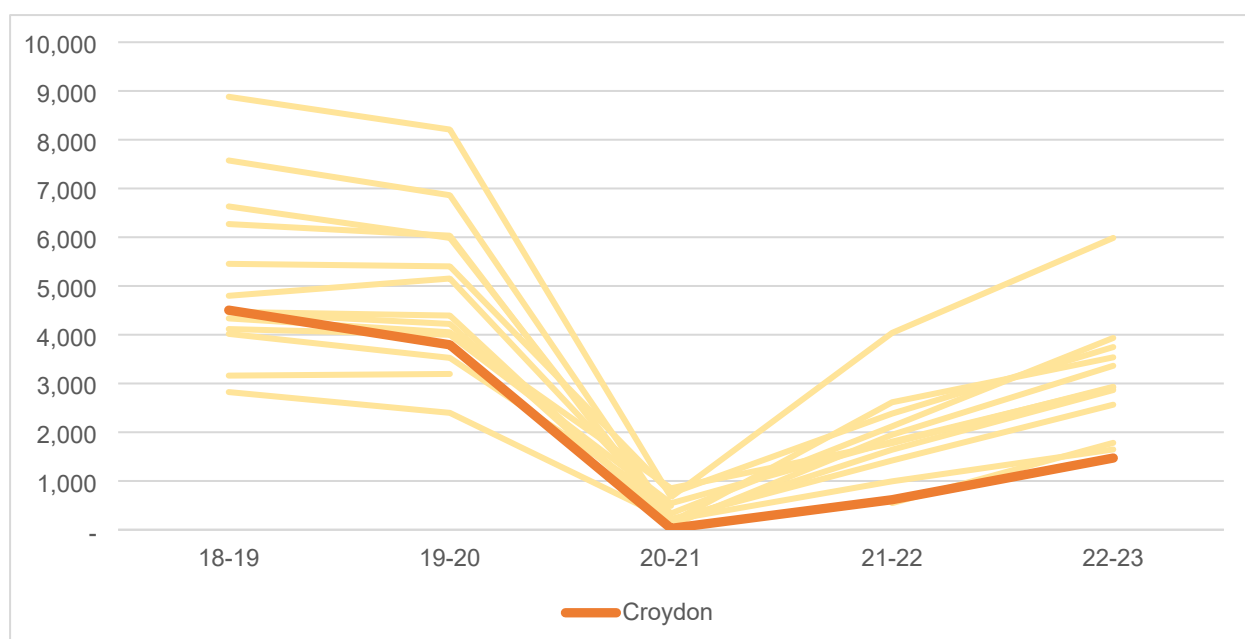
Library	Visits	Hours	Cost (£) ¹²	Cost (£) per visit	Rank
Ashburton	46,757	32	340,095	7.27	4
Bradmore Green	25,878	16	96,185	3.72	11
Broad Green	17,023	16	101,727	5.98	8
Central	335,028	40	1,150,998	3.44	13
Coulsdon	34,499	24	178,940	5.19	10
New Addington	15,798	24	150,634	9.53	2
Norbury	29,993	24	185,098	6.17	7
Purley	18,486	16	125,598	6.79	6
Sanderstead	22,554	24	131,112	5.81	9
Selsdon	72,792	24	266,630	3.66	12
Shirley	12,918	16	110,470	8.55	3
South Norwood	13,976	16	139,340	9.97	1
Thornton Heath	36,700	24	261,425	7.12	5
All libraries	682,402	296	3,238,250	4.75	

¹² The cost of operating each library represents an estimate after allocating library management costs to each library. It included both planned and reactive maintenance into account and so will not represent the long-term planned maintenance and refurbishment costs required for each library.

How Croydon libraries' performance compares

- 2.31 In section 2 of the main review report (Appendix A), we reported on the most recent CIPFA libraries benchmarking exercise for 2022-23¹³ which showed that for a range of factors, including spend on libraries per head of population, visits and physical loans, Croydon was at or near the bottom of the 'league table' of those participating.
- 2.32 The participating authorities suffered a severe reduction in usage during the COVID pandemic on all indicators except digital book issues. With the pandemic restrictions removed, they had by 2022-23 recovered much of the ground lost during the pandemic – and at a faster rate than Croydon – as shown in the graph of trends in visitor numbers below.

Figure C2.5: trends in visitor numbers to libraries in London boroughs¹⁴ 2018-23



- 2.33 Of the 14 authorities participating in the survey during this period, the mean 'recovery rate' was 64%, ie the visits per 1000 population in 2023-24 were on average 64% of the number of visits per 1000 in 2019/20. The median recovery rate was 72%. Croydon's recovery rate was only 39%.
- 2.34 As a result, Croydon is now bottom of the 14 participants in 2022-23, with just 1,471 per 1000 population compared with a mean of 3,091 (the median was very close to the mean).

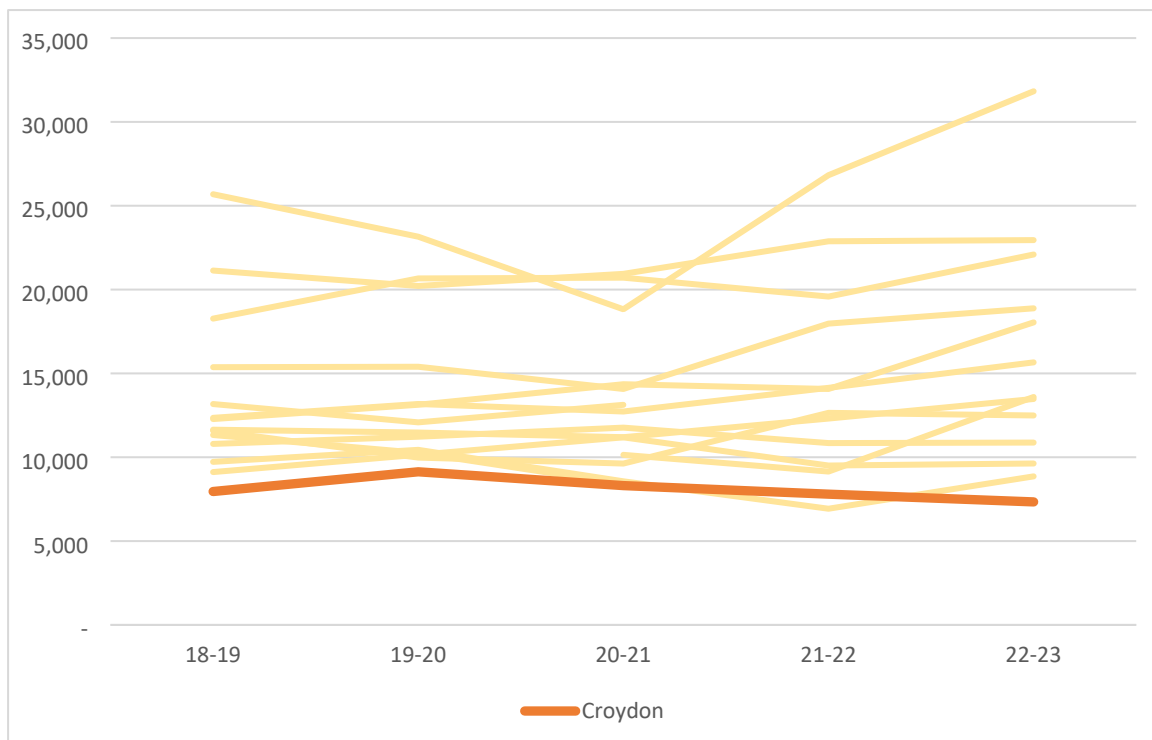
¹³ CIPFA conducts an [Annual Library Survey](#) and shares data with participating authorities.

¹⁴ The graph shows the trends for the 14 authorities that participated and submitted the relevant data in the CIPFA annual library survey in at least four of the five years between 2018-19 and 2022-23. All 14 participated in 2018-19 and 2022-23.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

2.35 Croydon's expenditure per 1000 population was and remains bottom of the 15 participants in this indicator as illustrated below. Its expenditure fell further in 2022-23 and Croydon's expenditure per 1000 population was £7,337 in 2022-23; the mean was £15,304 and the median £13,475.

Figure C2.6: total expenditure (£s) per 1000 population¹⁵



¹⁵ The graph shows the trends for the 15 authorities that participated and submitted the relevant data in the CIPFA annual library survey in at least four of the five years between 2018-19 and 2022-23. All 15 participated in 2018-19 and 2022-23.

3. Evaluating the thirteen libraries

Assessing the performance, viability and impact of each library

- 3.1 The reduction in library opening hours has led to a reduction in library visits, PC usage and other library-based activities and the impact of this is likely to have been hardest on the most vulnerable people in the community, whether they are existing users or potential users that the service has struggled to engage. A gap analysis in the report for Cabinet in January 2024 suggested that much needs to be done to achieve the strategic outcomes for the project *and* to ensure the service is serving as many as possible of those most in need.
- 3.2 It was proposed that the success of the review should be judged against a draft set of strategic outcomes shown below.

Table C3.1: draft strategic outcomes for the review of library services

<i>By three years' time, we will be able to say that the library review has achieved the following:</i>	
Primary outcome	Supporting outcomes
1. We are reaching more people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people are using our library service. • We reach the people who need us most in Croydon. • People know what we're offering.
2. We have improved our service to the whole community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a wide range of popular services and activities. • People across our communities enjoy what's available. • Our facilities are welcoming and attractive.
3. Our service is more efficient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are delivering better value within the resources we have. • We generate more income from events and venue hire. • More people are willing to help.

- 3.3 The options for achieving those outcomes and improving the service that were explored in the January 2024 Cabinet report (eg extending opening hours at some libraries, introducing more activities and events and conducting outreach) will only be possible if resources are diverted from elsewhere in the library service.
- 3.4 The main way of releasing those resources would be to close a number of libraries. In this section we set out our approach to assessing each library and recommending whether it should be considered for closure.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

3.5 We have based our analysis on a set of assessment criteria designed to address the gaps that need to be bridged in order to achieve the outcomes for the review:

Table C3.2: summary of assessment criteria for retaining a library

Criterion	Factors to consider
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usage including visits, issues and numbers of users. • Event attendances and attendances for other activities. • PC hours in use. • Unit costs, ie cost per visitor.
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The visibility and prominence of the building. • The level of natural footfall in the vicinity. • Public transport access for users.
Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suitability of the building to accommodate the full range of library uses (ie Universal Offers). • The adaptability of the building to allow for various uses. • The overall condition of the building and the extent of remedial work required.
Population and need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The population in a library's geographic catchment area. • The extent of deprivation in the catchment area. • Other libraries in the vicinity. • The extent of existing community group use. • The number of volunteers.

3.6 The data on service performance, expenditure, population, demographics, deprivation, catchment areas and mapping have been prepared for the review by Croydon Council. Activist has then analysed the data provided and made recommendations in its review of each library.

3.7 In the rest of this section we explain the data we have used, its sources and its reliability.

Notes on the data used on performance

3.8 The data used in our performance assessments includes both data that is directly reported from the Library Management System (LMS) and data that is collated with a degree of manual intervention or judgement:

- **Visits** are recorded by counters at the entrance to the library and collected periodically by library staff. When the counters fail, staff have to resort to counting users. As a result, data on visits are not wholly reliable. We have noted in section 4 where there are any particular problems or question marks about the reliability of the visitor numbers in our assessment of each library.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- **Active usage:** ‘active users’ are defined as library members who have used their library card to access services at least once in the preceding 12 months and refers to the library where the user is registered. This usage comprises borrowing and reserving physical items; any interaction with their account, eg payments; use of library computers; and borrowing or reserving digital items (books, audio, newspapers and magazines). Active usage is recorded against the library at which the user is registered, wherever that usage takes place. It depends for its accuracy on users informing the library service when they change address and so will not always be up-to-date. The measure of active usage does not capture visits to libraries that do not require the use of a library card, eg to sit and read or to participate in an event and so should be considered alongside information on the number of visits.
- **Issues** of physical books and materials and PC hours are reported directly from the LMS and are credited against the figures of the library at which the transaction took place.
- **Library budget and cost per visit:** we have calculated a budget for each library. Some of the figures included are based on actual costs for each library (eg reactive repairs), others are estimates, eg disaggregating and reallocating the cost of library management to each library or the disaggregating of business rates for the Central Library (which is part of a larger complex). As one-off reactive maintenance expenditure can distort comparisons, the figures used for reactive repairs and maintenance are the *average* costs spent on each library over a five-year period from January 2018. Whereas most libraries are fully owned by the Council, Selsdon¹⁶ and Ashburton¹⁷ are, in effect, rented and their rent *includes* the cost of routine repairs to the fabric of the building. The cost of one-off major capital works such as refurbishments are not included in the budget used for each library. The overall budget for the library service included in these estimates has increased in comparison with that used in the January 2024 Cabinet report for two reasons:
 - Cleaning costs have now been included in this report, totalling £180k.
 - Staffing costs have increased by £187k following backdated pay awards.

These changes have not generally resulted in an increase in the cost per visit for each library as the number of visits has also increased in 2023-24 compared with 2022-23. Since the January 2024 Cabinet report, there have been changes in the ranking of some libraries’ cost per visit as some have improved visitor numbers faster than others. Because of the mix of actual and estimated expenditure from a range of different sources, we have rounded the cost per visit to the nearest pound.

¹⁶ Selsdon Library is part of the Sainsbury’s site at Selsdon and is leased by the Council.

¹⁷ Ashburton Library is owned by a PFI special purpose vehicle under a 30-year agreement after which the building asset will transfer back to the public sector in 2034. The Council pays a rental charge for its share of the building.

Notes on the commentary on location and building

3.9 Our commentary on location and building relies on a mixture of objective, subjective and factual observations:

- **Location:** comments on visibility and footfall are based on visual inspections at different times of day and a map-based review of distances between sites, eg between a library and its local shops. Our approach rejects the ‘build it and they will come’ philosophy, partly because most people clearly don’t, and partly from experience of the positive impact on performance of moving a location from a quieter spot to a busy area such as a shopping centre.
- **Public transport access:** this is based on a simple assessment of the availability of bus, tram or train routes to the library.
- **Suitability:** this is a judgement on the size of the library, its layout and zoning and its potential for delivering the full range of Universal Offers (see the summary in section 2 of the main review report, Appendix A). This will tend to favour a larger building, since this allows for features such as a zoned children’s library area, quieter study space, space for events and exhibitions, PC desks or workstations, training rooms and event spaces. This does not rule out a high rating for smaller library, but it would need also to be adaptable (see below).
- **Adaptability:** this is a judgement on the ability to use the building for a range of uses and considers the extent to which spaces can be reconfigured readily (eg by moving wheeled bookshelves to create a temporary event space) to maximise the building’s usage.
- **Condition:** as the most recent library condition surveys are now out of date, this judgement is based on a visual inspection of the exterior and interiors and interior design.

3.10 Rather trying to generate a numerical rating for these often subjective judgements, we have simply provided a Red, Amber or Green rating and provided a written commentary on key points of interest.

Notes on the commentary on population and need

3.11 For each library, we have summarised the catchment area and levels of need within the area. We also indicate the nearest libraries and the schools that might use them as well as the level of community use and involvement in the library and the number of volunteers.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 3.12 **To identify the levels of need in library catchment areas, we have relied on the Index of Multiple Deprivation¹⁸ (IMD) which is published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (and its predecessor bodies). It uses the same standardised geographical building blocks ('Output Area'¹⁹ and 'Lower layer Super Output Area'²⁰) as the ten-yearly national census, although the data used is updated from a wider variety of sources.**
- 3.13 IMD provides a set of relative measures of deprivation based on around 40 performance indicators split across 7 main deprivation domains. Each domain is given a "weight". The IMD collects measures by neighbourhood or Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOA) in England. The scores for each LSOA are ranked in terms of deprivation under each of the 7 main deprivation 'domains' (which we have called 'subsets of the IMD' in this report'.
- 3.14 For IMD 2019, measures were collected for 32,844 LSOAs across England. There is no other data source which can provide deprivation data at the same granular level and covering the range of deprivation subsets within the IMD. Also, as there is so much data collection that takes place across England, data collection is consistent across a wider geographical area. The downside to this is the time it takes to develop, implement and complete the data collection.
- 3.15 Indeed there are other deprivation measures available which might be more current but these tend not to offer overall deprivation indicators and will mostly only be at the Borough level. With IMD, LSOA data can be aggregated up to ward and borough level. The IMD and Census represent the most methodologically consistent and recognised estimates of population and need, but they may not fully reflect the *current* situation in a locality. The IMD used in this report dates back to 2019, with the source data dating back even further. The next IMD is scheduled for late 2025 so at the moment, IMD 2019 is the latest, broad-based deprivation measure we have available to us.
- 3.16 Although the underlying data is not current, the IMD provides a guide to levels of deprivation that tends to be consistent over the years and the variations are generally limited between IMD releases. This is because the IMD reports on *relative* deprivation and Lower layer Super Output Areas' (LSOA) levels of deprivation *compared with other* LSOAs tend to have a fair degree of consistency over short time horizons.

¹⁸ 2019, "The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019), Statistical Release", MHCLG. [IoD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

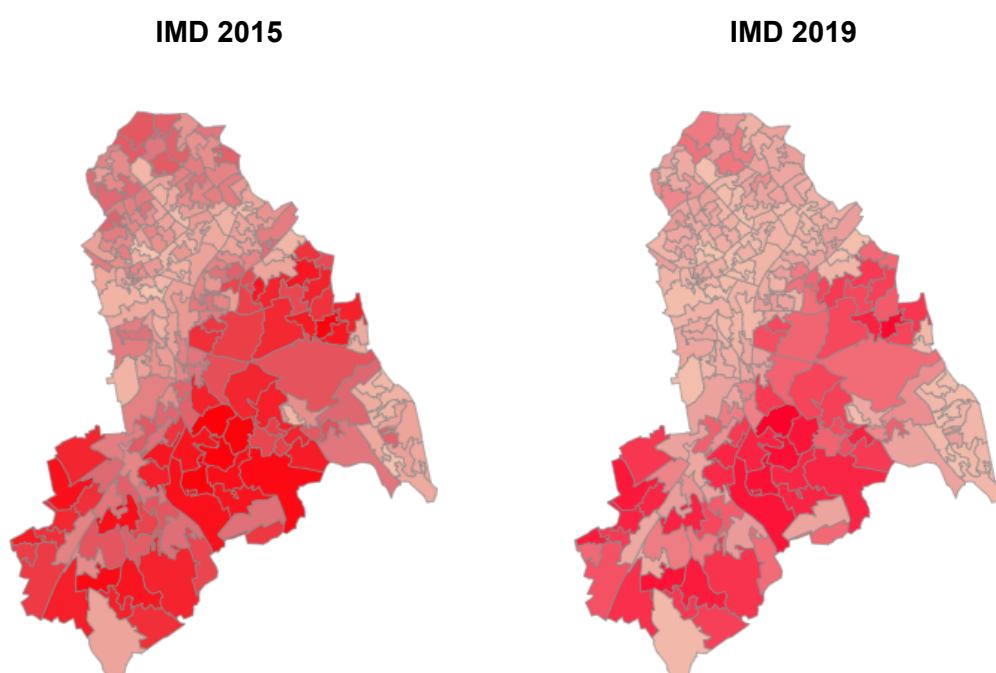
¹⁹ An Output Area has a minimum of 40 households and 100 residents to a maximum of 250 households and 625 residents. [Census 2021 geographies - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁰ A Lower layer Super Output Area comprises between 400 and 1,200 households and has a usually resident population between 1,000 and 3,000 persons. [Census 2021 geographies - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 3.17 Although shocks to the economy, such as major factory closures in small towns, can have a significant effect on a single area, wider changes (whether the effects of COVID or longer hospital waiting lists) tend to affect all areas in some way. Deprivation has various determinants, such as housing which change slowly over time (unless there is a major housing redevelopment) and deprivation tends to be inter-generational. A comparison of the IMD'S overall levels of deprivation for 2019 compared with the previous IMD 2015 is shown below, a generally consistent pattern of relative deprivation between IMD releases. LSOAs in England do move deciles between IMD releases, but the degree of movement of LSOAs between deciles of deprivation is more limited at the deciles of most and least deprivation²¹.

Figure C3.1: map of overall IMD deprivation for recent IMD releases
Darker colours show lower levels of deprivation



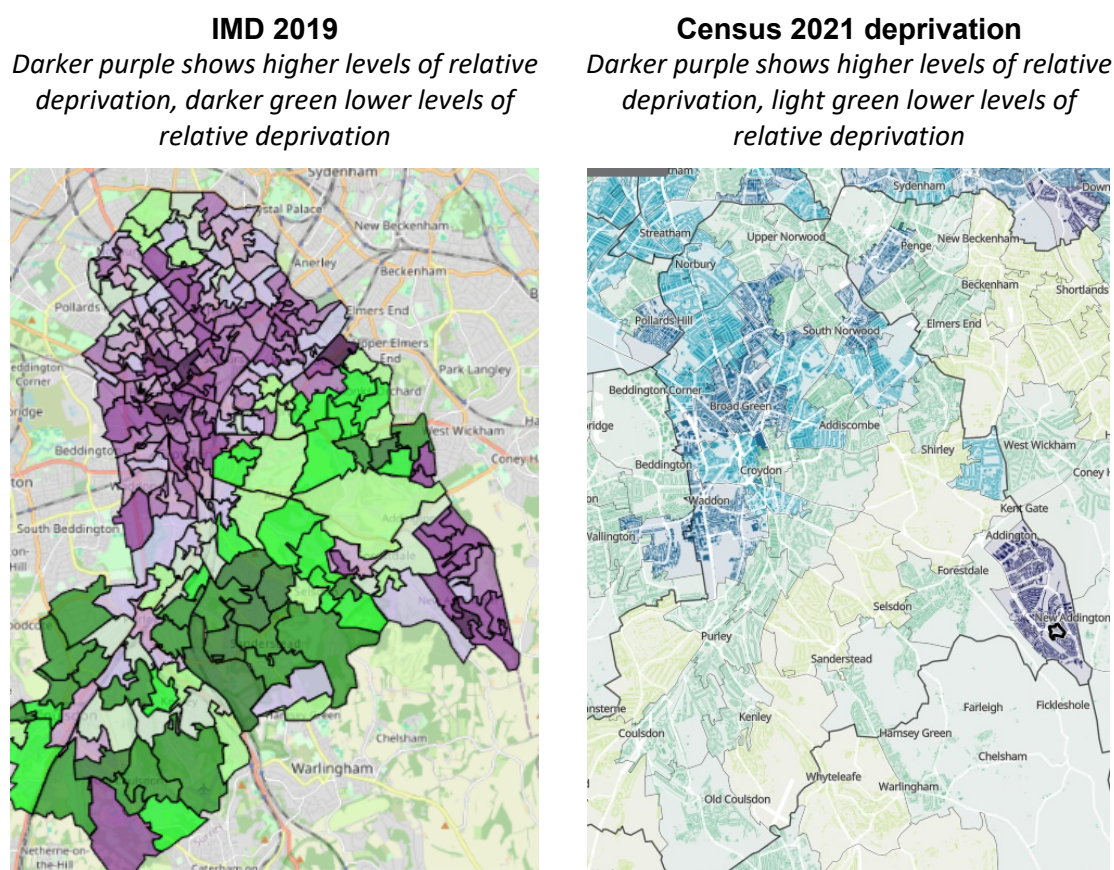
- 3.18 There may well be more major shifts in patterns of relative deprivation between 2019 and the next release of the IMD in 2025 as it will cover the period impacted by COVID and the 'cost-of-living crisis', but it is too early to predict the degree of change. In the meantime, we show below an alternative source of information on deprivation provided by the 2021 Census. The Census uses a very different methodology as it relies on self-reported indicators of deprivation on 4 household characteristics: education, employment, health and housing.
- 3.19 Below we show the IMD 2019 map of overall deprivation in Croydon alongside the Census 2021 map of deprivation for households deprived in two of the four household characteristics. The colour scheme is different, and this is summarised above each map.

²¹ Source: MHCLG (2019) *Statistical Release, The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019)*. London.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 3.20 For example, the New Addington area, which is the further east, is darker purple on both maps, showing higher levels of relative deprivation. Much of the south of the borough is darker green on the IMD 2019 map, which shows lower levels of relative deprivation, and light green on the Census 2021 map, which also shows lower levels of relative deprivation. The overall pattern of deprivation has a degree of consistency despite the differences in the age of the underlying data and the methodologies.

Figure C3.2: maps of overall relative deprivation, IMD 2019 and Census 2021



- 3.21 We have used the IMD 2019 for our analysis of need in each catchment area as this is a methodologically reliable and reasonably consistent indicator of relative deprivation and is also mirrored in other sources of data on deprivation, such as the Census, on less complex data sources. However, the underlying data in IMD 2019 will be refreshed by the next IMD which is due to be published in 2025.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

3.22 Our use of the data is summarised below:

- **Estimating the population in a library catchment area:** to estimate the approximate population in each library's 'catchment area', we have drawn a radius of 1 mile around each library and then estimated the population in each 2021 Census Output Area (OA) which is inside that radius²². Where the circumference of the catchment area bisects an Output Area, we have identified the number of households inside the radius and then estimated the population in those households. This approach provides a 'best-fit' picture of the people who live within 1 mile or a 20-minute walk²³. This provides an estimate with a fair degree of accuracy but is not based on a count of the number of occupants of each household.
- **Estimating need in a library catchment area:** we have used the 2019 IMD to identify comparative deprivation within library catchment areas. This uses the larger census building block, the LSOA. There is an overall Index of Multiple Deprivation underpinned by seven 'domains' (which we have called 'subsets') which measure different aspects of deprivation. We have quoted data on the *two* most deprived deciles for the overall IMD for every library catchment area as there may be greater movement in any single decile between the 2019 IMD and the 2025 IMD.

The IMD maps of deprivation used in section 4 use the larger census building block, the LSOA. We have included in our analysis and map the whole LSOA if it is either wholly or in part within the circumference of the 1-mile catchment area. This results in a larger population and a larger geographic area being reported on than the population estimate we use for the catchment area of each library using the OA data (see above).

- **Alternative provision:** for each library, we have listed other libraries within 2 miles on foot (as calculated using Google Maps), including libraries in other boroughs. In the case of New Addington Library, we have included the two nearest, both of which are more than two miles away. We have indicated how many schools are within 1km of the library. We have included libraries outside of the borough whose catchment areas include parts of Croydon in our assessment of the alternative libraries available to the population. As outlined in section 2, there are arrangements for residents of Croydon to use the libraries located in neighbouring boroughs.
- **Community use:** we have included the number of regular community group uses of the library and the number of active volunteers. This is used to provide some indication of the level of community engagement with its local library.

²² We have revised the method of identifying the centre of each catchment area using the geographic co-ordinates for each facility rather than its postcode. This provides a higher degree of accuracy and has resulted in some changes to the figures for the catchment areas' population shown in an earlier published draft of this report.

²³ Transport planners assume 1 mile is a 20-minute walk. Of course, this represents an average so many people may walk faster and some slower, eg older people and people with heavy shopping or children's buggies. Road layouts will also affect the speed at which people can travel.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 3.23 In our written text accompanying our summary of each library, we have highlighted where the population in the catchment area differs significantly from the average for Croydon. In this section **we only highlight differences in the proportions by age, ethnicity, health or disability where these vary significantly from the Croydon average.** Issues of accessibility **to** the building are not mentioned **as all have level access** but we do highlight where there are particular issues such lack of accessible toilets or problems with accessibility *within* the building.

Demographic data on libraries

- 3.24 Feedback raised during consultation highlighted the difficulty that closures would have on particular demographic groups, including:
- Children and parents with young children.
 - Older people.
 - People with disabilities.
 - People of global majority heritage.
 - People on low incomes.
- 3.25 In this section we include the demographics of the population living in library catchment areas drawing on the results of the Census 2021 undertaken by the Office for National Statistics. We have highlighted in bold in the tables below the libraries that were proposed for closure and summarised where their demographics diverge significantly²⁴ from the Croydon average.
- 3.26 Starting with young people, the issue was raised during consultation that closures would make it more difficult for children to access libraries for reading, learning and digital access (if this is not fully available at home). It was also highlighted that parents with young children may find it difficult to travel to another library, particularly if using buggies, eg on public transport.
- 3.27 In the catchment areas of the libraries considered for closure, Bradmore Green, Sanderstead and Shirley have a higher proportion of people over 65, compared with the borough average of 14%, whereas Broad Green has a lower proportion of over-65s. Of the other libraries, New Addington's catchment area has a population with a significantly higher proportion of 0-19s than the Croydon average. Of over 65s, Central, South Norwood and Thornton Heath's library catchment areas have a lower proportion, but the proportion in Purley's and Selsdon's is significantly higher.
- 3.28 We comment on the implications for each of the libraries considered for closure when we review the closure proposals in section 4. **The data used in section 4 on age, ethnicity, health and disability are drawn from Census 2021 undertaken by the Office for National Statistics which is available at LSOA level.** *As a result, we have included data for the whole LSOA if it is either wholly or in part within the circumference of the 1-mile catchment area. This results in a larger population being reported on than the population estimate we use for the catchment area of each library using the OA data (see paragraph 3.22).*

²⁴ A divergence is identified as significant if the percentage figure for a cohort is 10% larger or smaller than the borough average.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C3.3: age profile of population and proportions in library catchment areas²⁵

Library ²⁶	0-19	20-64	65+	Total	0-19	20-64	65+ yrs
Ashburton	16,803	44,539	9,986	71,328	24%	62%	14%
Bradmore Green	6,008	13,607	4,672	24,287	25%	56%	19%
Broad Green	24,210	57,775	8,101	90,086	27%	64%	9%
Central	23,830	62,718	9,373	95,921	25%	65%	10%
Coulsdon	8,540	19,613	6,250	34,403	25%	57%	18%
New Addington	7,094	13,359	3,035	23,488	30%	57%	13%
Norbury	15,962	39,055	8,210	63,227	25%	62%	13%
Purley	9,741	24,314	6,697	40,752	24%	60%	16%
Sanderstead	9,298	23,465	7,779	40,542	23%	58%	19%
Selsdon	8,361	20,407	7,981	36,749	23%	56%	22%
Shirley	7,841	19,240	6,606	33,687	23%	57%	20%
South Norwood	22,723	56,791	9,309	88,823	26%	64%	10%
Thornton Heath	27,365	64,532	10,996	102,893	27%	63%	11%
				Borough	25%	61%	14%

3.29 The ethnic profile of catchment areas is much more variable, with significant differences from the borough average for most ethnic categories. Of the catchment areas of libraries considered for closure:

- Broad Green’s proportions of Asian (at 28%) and Black (at 30%) categories are notably higher; the White category (at 29%) is much lower than the Croydon average (48%).
- Bradmore Green’s and Sanderstead’s proportion of Black people is notably lower and notably higher for White people.
- Shirley Library’s proportions are more consistent with the borough average.

3.30 Of the libraries proposed for retention, the catchment areas of Norbury and Thornton Heath libraries have much larger proportions of people of Asian and Black ethnic origin than the borough average. Those in the south, eg Coulsdon, New Addington and Purley have a significantly larger proportion of people in the White category than the borough average.

²⁵ The population figures for library catchment areas are calculated using LSOAs. As these catchment areas overlap, a number of residents will often be counted in more than one catchment area.

²⁶ Libraries considered for closure are highlighted in bold.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C3.4: ethnic profile of population in library catchment areas²⁷

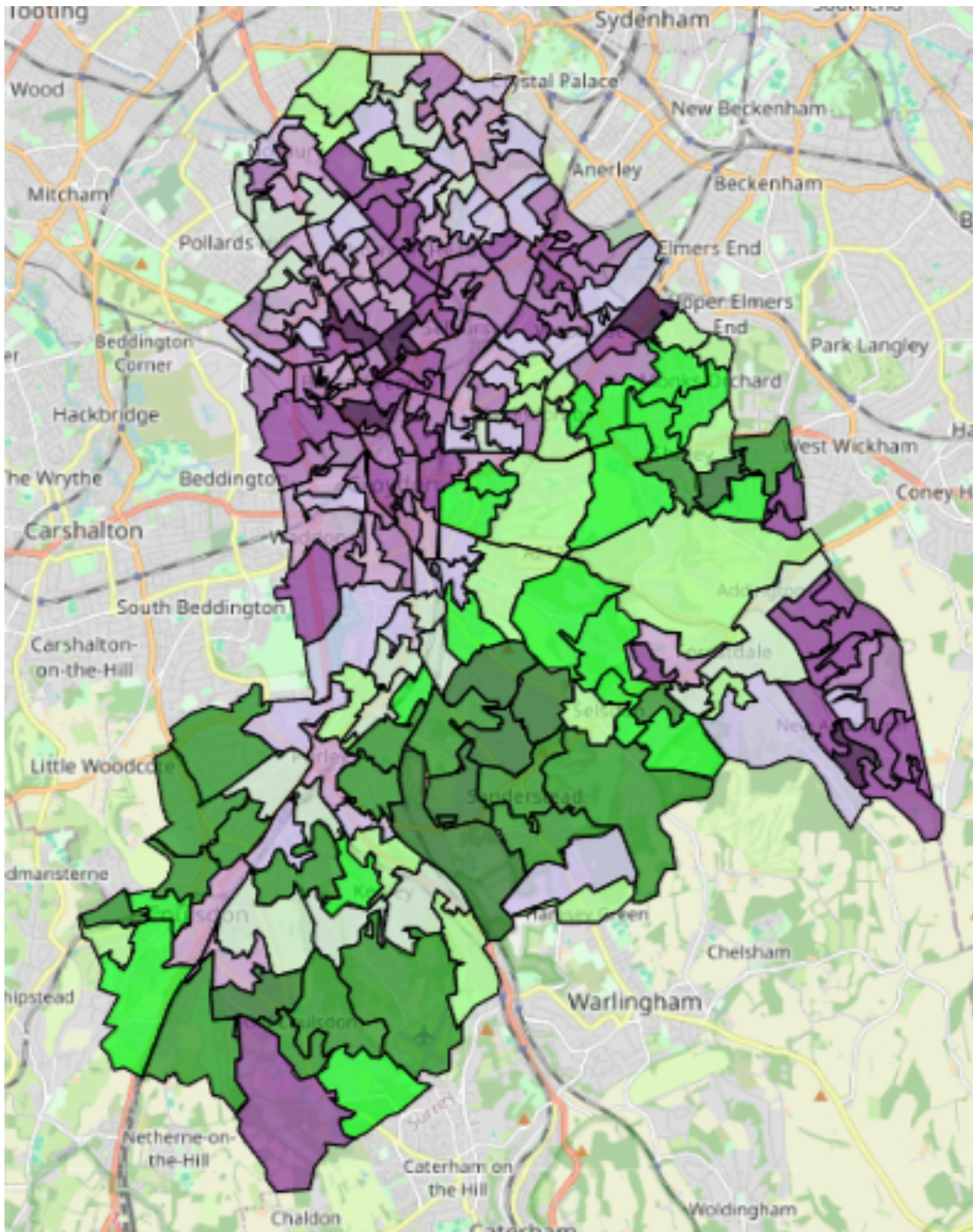
Library	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	White	Population
Ashburton	15%	23%	9%	4%	49%	71,352
Bradmore Green	13%	9%	7%	2%	69%	24,290
Broad Green	28%	30%	8%	5%	29%	90,114
Central	22%	24%	8%	5%	42%	95,975
Coulsdon	15%	10%	7%	3%	65%	34,409
New Addington	7%	24%	6%	2%	61%	23,485
Norbury	27%	30%	7%	5%	30%	63,231
Purley	19%	13%	7%	3%	57%	40,752
Sanderstead	16%	10%	7%	2%	64%	40,530
Selsdon	15%	9%	6%	2%	68%	36,733
Shirley	16%	18%	7%	3%	56%	33,698
South Norwood	12%	33%	9%	4%	41%	88,856
Thornton Heath	24%	33%	8%	5%	30%	102,901
Borough	18%	23%	8%	4%	48%	

- 3.31 We will examine the particular impacts of potential closures when reviewing the individual libraries in section 4 and how these interlink with other data. For example, the potential closure of Broad Green was criticised during consultation as it was argued that it would impact particularly on Asian and Black communities who also suffered from significant disadvantage. This disadvantage is reflected in the patterns of deprivation in the Broad Green Library catchment area.
- 3.32 As the map highlights below, there are generally higher levels of disadvantage in the north of the borough and greater degrees of affluence in the South. So Broad Green Library is situated in one of the most deprived areas in England and Sanderstead in one of the least. We will examine the particular patterns of deprivation in greater detail in each catchment area of the libraries considered for closure in section 4.
- 3.33 In the map below, the purple LSOAs are more deprived and the green LSOAs less deprived. Each colour represents a different ‘decile’, ie the most deprived LSOAs (dark purple) are in the top 10% most deprived LSOAs in England, the dark green in the bottom 10% (ie the least deprived in England). Looking at an example in between, the light green LSOAs are in the seventh decile of LSOAs, ie in the range between the 60th and 70th per cent of most deprived LSOAs and so are in the less deprived half of LSOAs in England.

²⁷ The population figures for library catchment areas are calculated using LSOAs. As these catchment areas overlap, a number of residents will often be counted in more than one catchment area.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C3.3: map showing comparative levels of overall deprivation²⁸



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)

● 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5 ● 6 ● 7 ● 8 ● 9 ● 10

²⁸ Overall deprivation as reported in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 3.34 There was feedback during consultation that the closure of libraries would impact particularly those who suffered ill-health or mobility issues. We will explore these issues as they relate to particular libraries further in section 4 and the levels of health deprivation in their catchment areas. At a borough level, using self-reported census data, there are few significant variations in the average levels of poor health between catchment areas, with the exception of New Addington Library's catchment area which has a significantly higher proportion of those with 'bad' levels of health.

Table C3.5: health of population in library catchment areas

Library	Very bad	Bad	Fair	Good	Very good	Pop'n
Ashburton	1%	3%	11%	34%	50%	71,338
Bradmore Green	1%	3%	10%	33%	53%	24,296
Broad Green	1%	3%	11%	33%	51%	90,087
Central	1%	3%	11%	33%	52%	95,942
Coulsdon	1%	3%	10%	33%	53%	34,405
New Addington	1%	5%	13%	33%	48%	23,492
Norbury	1%	3%	12%	34%	50%	63,233
Purley	1%	3%	10%	33%	53%	40,748
Sanderstead	1%	3%	10%	34%	53%	40,532
Selsdon	1%	3%	11%	35%	51%	36,736
Shirley	1%	3%	12%	35%	49%	33,702
South Norwood	1%	3%	11%	33%	51%	88,838
Thornton Heath	1%	3%	12%	33%	51%	102,892
Borough	1%	3%	11%	33%	51%	390,712

- 3.35 The problems that library closures would cause for people affected by disabilities was also highlighted during consultation (eg for users of Sanderstead library). The census data again suggests very consistent levels of disability in all catchment areas except for New Addington which has a significantly higher level of people with a disability than for the borough as a whole.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C3.6: disability levels of population in library catchment areas

Library	Disabled	Not Disabled	Population
Ashburton	14%	86%	71,339
Bradmore Green	14%	86%	25,636
Broad Green	13%	87%	90,096
Central	14%	86%	95,963
Coulsdon	13%	87%	34,415
New Addington	18%	82%	26,562
Norbury	14%	86%	59,951
Purley	14%	86%	40,742
Sanderstead	13%	87%	36,189
Selsdon	14%	86%	35,169
Shirley	15%	85%	33,698
South Norwood	14%	86%	85,580
Thornton Heath	14%	86%	106,380
Borough	14%	86%	390,731

- 3.36 The two tables above provide a high-level view of issues of health and disability in each catchment area. In section 4 we will use more detailed breakdowns of levels of health deprivation using data from the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

General observations on the evaluation process

- 3.37 The original recommendations in the report to Cabinet in January 2024 to consider four libraries for closure were based on an initial assessment of the 13 libraries which took into account the level of deprivation in a catchment area using the overall IMD measure of deprivation in a library catchment area as one of the evaluation criteria.
- 3.38 In section 4, we will be considering the impacts of the potential closures in greater depth, drawing on subsets of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The process of formal consultation allow for closer examination of the data and of the insights that have been provided before final recommendations and decisions are made on whether to close any libraries.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

3.39 In evaluating the libraries, there are a number of considerations:

- **What is a reasonable distance to travel to uses a library?** As outlined earlier, we have used the benchmark of 1 mile as an acceptable travel distance. Whether it is acceptable to individual residents will depend on many factors, eg ease of travel by walking or by public transport; ease of parking; road crossing points; and a sense of safety. We know from our survey results that many users will travel further than a mile to use the library they prefer. Arguably, a 1-mile benchmark is less relevant to parts of the borough that are in the Green Belt and have much lower housing density. As in more rural areas of the country, libraries will inevitably be more spaced out. We will examine how proposals will affect particular parts of the borough, what a reasonable travel distance might be and how to address any gaps in provision that closures could create. In addition, we have also used a 1.25-mile radius for a library catchment area as this reflects many users' willingness to travel much further to a library they enjoy and better reflects the established distribution of libraries in a borough which includes large swathes of green space.
- **What is a 'comprehensive and efficient' service?** This assessment sets out to maximise the reach of the library service within the budget available. The borough is already a low spender on library services and this review seeks no further budget reductions. Instead the review seeks to find ways to maximise the number of people using a library; offering as many people as possible access to a full library service; and setting out to reach people currently not taking advantage of the library service. The intended outcomes are to ensure that more people are using the library service, delivering the full range of the library 'universal offers' to those who need the service most in Croydon.
- **How reliable are the data being used?** Earlier in this section, we have highlighted issues with the reliability of the data being used. The performance data relies on a range of indicators that can be fallible. Footfall data depends on the automatic counters or manual counting functioning well; and active user data depends on users' home addresses being up-to-date. IMD data on deprivation is at least five years old. On the other hand, population numbers in Output Areas, their ethnic origin and declared health and disability status are from the 2021 Census. **Our objective in conducting our assessment of each library is to use a range of measures, both factual and indicative, in order to provide a rounded evaluation of each library.**

3.40 All of these issues are addressed further and in greater depth as each library is evaluated in section 4 below.

4. Reviewing the thirteen libraries

About this section

- 4.1 In this section we assess each of the libraries using the criteria outlined in the previous sections, before setting out our recommendations and rationale.
- 4.2 The assessment uses our four evaluation criteria as detailed in section 3:
- Performance.
 - Location.
 - Building.
 - Population and need.
- 4.3 The review of each library is longer than in the initial assessment included in the report to Cabinet in January 2024, providing more detail on each building and location as well as more detail on the demographics of each catchment area and its levels of deprivation.
- 4.4 We have also reviewed the consultation feedback on libraries that we had recommended be considered for closure and assessed them using more detailed data, including information from subsets of IMD deprivation.
- 4.5 Our conclusions from the review of the thirteen libraries and a summary of recommendations are shown in section 5.

Review of Ashburton Library

Summary

- 4.6 Ashburton library is one of the larger libraries and occupies part of the Oasis Academy building. This is a modern building covered by a PFI contract which provides for maintenance within the annual budget.

Table C4.1: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	32	2	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	46,757	3	Footfall	
Library issues	50,301	3	Public transport access	
Event attendances	2,666	5	Building	
PC hours in use	4,389	3	Suitability	
Budget (£)	340,095	2	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	7	4	Condition	
Active users	1,709	6	Internal area (m ²)	650

Performance

- 4.7 It is one of the best-performing libraries for visits and issues. Although it has the second longest opening hours, it also has the second highest budget, and so its unit costs (ie cost per visitor) are fourth highest at £7 but are nevertheless close to the median (£6). The relatively high annual running costs help avoid the need for the Council to fund major reactive or planned maintenance work over the life of the PFI contract.
- 4.8 Despite high visitor numbers, event attendances rank only fifth in the network, possibly reflecting the active user base which only ranks sixth. Although it compares well for aspects of its performance, the active user base is low given the size of the library and the size of the population in its catchment area. There are currently three community groups formally making use of the library. Given its location, size and high levels of usage, the library could be expected to play an even more active role in the community and the low level of volunteers (3) suggests the potential for improvement.

Location

- 4.9 Although its location is not ideal, being a little distance from the local shopping parades in Addiscombe, it is a prominent building with good bus links. There is large signage at either end of the building, but no 'shopfront' signage, and the entrance, shared with the Academy, is visually off-putting and does not present a welcoming entrance suited to a library.
- 4.10 In the future, there may be opportunities to relocate the library to a busier location, eg in an Addiscombe shopping parade, but relocation would not be one of the highest priority improvements needed to the library network.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Building

- 4.11 Although well-maintained, bright and spacious internally with a large expanse of glass frontage, its interior and furnishings are functional but dull and uninspiring, not suited to a cultural institution. PFI buildings often have rules restricting changes to interiors and decor, but these can be negotiated over.
- 4.12 The size of the library and its layout allow for a range of uses, although much of the shelving is static. This would limit the adaptability of the internal space and replacements should be considered. The children’s library is zoned off and can be used for public events.

Population and need

- 4.13 Ashburton Library serves a comparatively large population within a mile catchment area (as measured using Census Output Areas either wholly or in part with a 1-mile radius of the library). It also serves communities within the 20% most deprived communities in England. It serves several less deprived areas, although these account for fewer people.

Table C4.2: summary of population, need and community

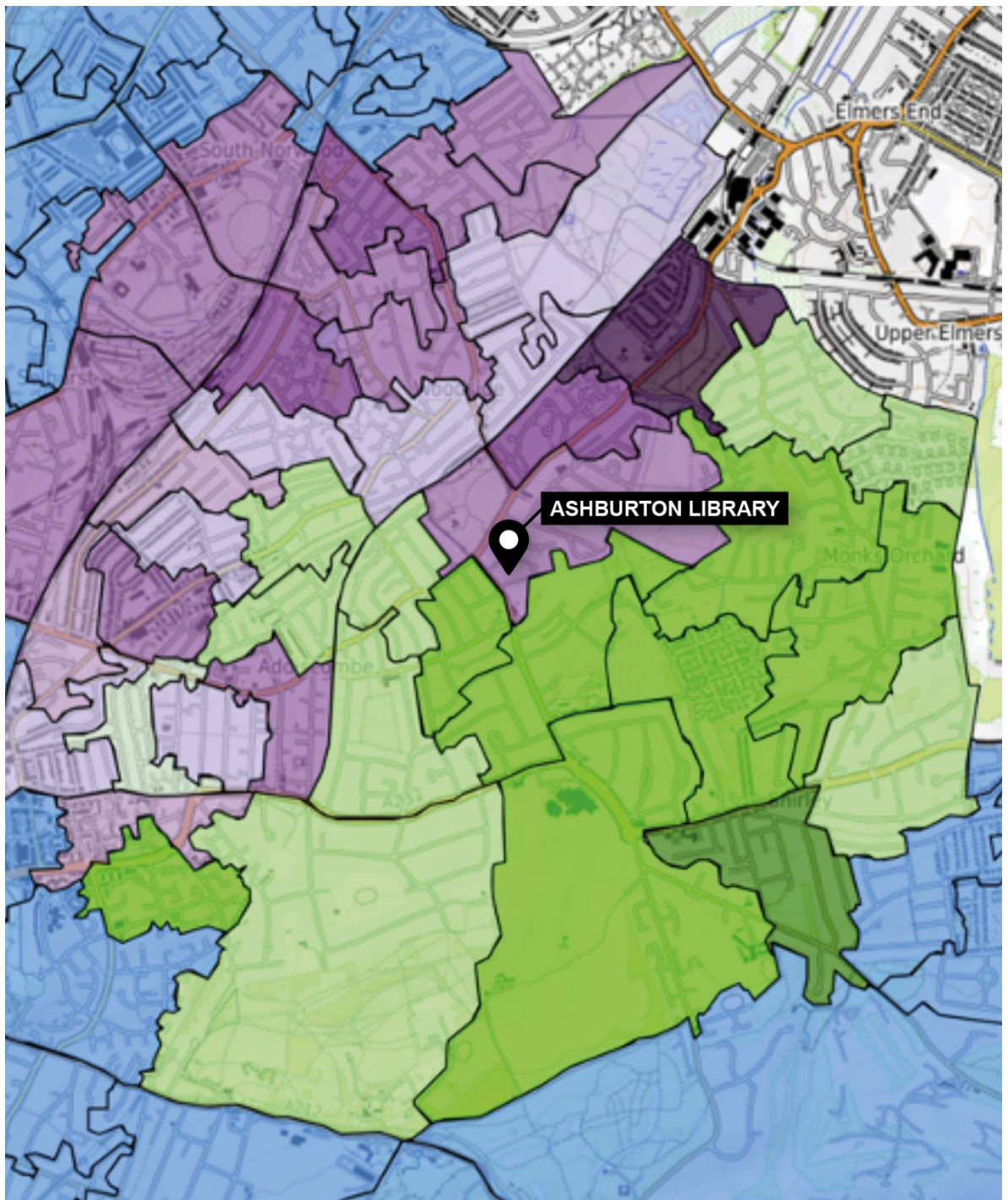
Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	49,667
	OA population within 1.25 miles	70,623
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	4
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Shirley (1.2) South Norwood (1.5) Central (2.0)
	Schools within 1km	4
Community use	Existing community group uses	3
	Number of volunteers	3

- 4.14 The LSOAs either wholly or in part within a 1-mile radius of the library represent two aspects of the borough. To the north west, there are numerous LSOAs within the two most deprived deciles in England, including two LSOAs in the most deprived decile. To the south of the catchment area, there are some of the least deprived LSOAs in England, although it should be noted that these LSOAs are some of the largest geographically in the borough²⁹ and so have much lower densities of population.

²⁹ It should also be noted that the larger LSOAs geographically will often be ‘caught’ within the catchment area of other libraries (indeed, one particularly large LSOA in the catchment area of Ashburton library is also in the catchment area of three other libraries).

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.1: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



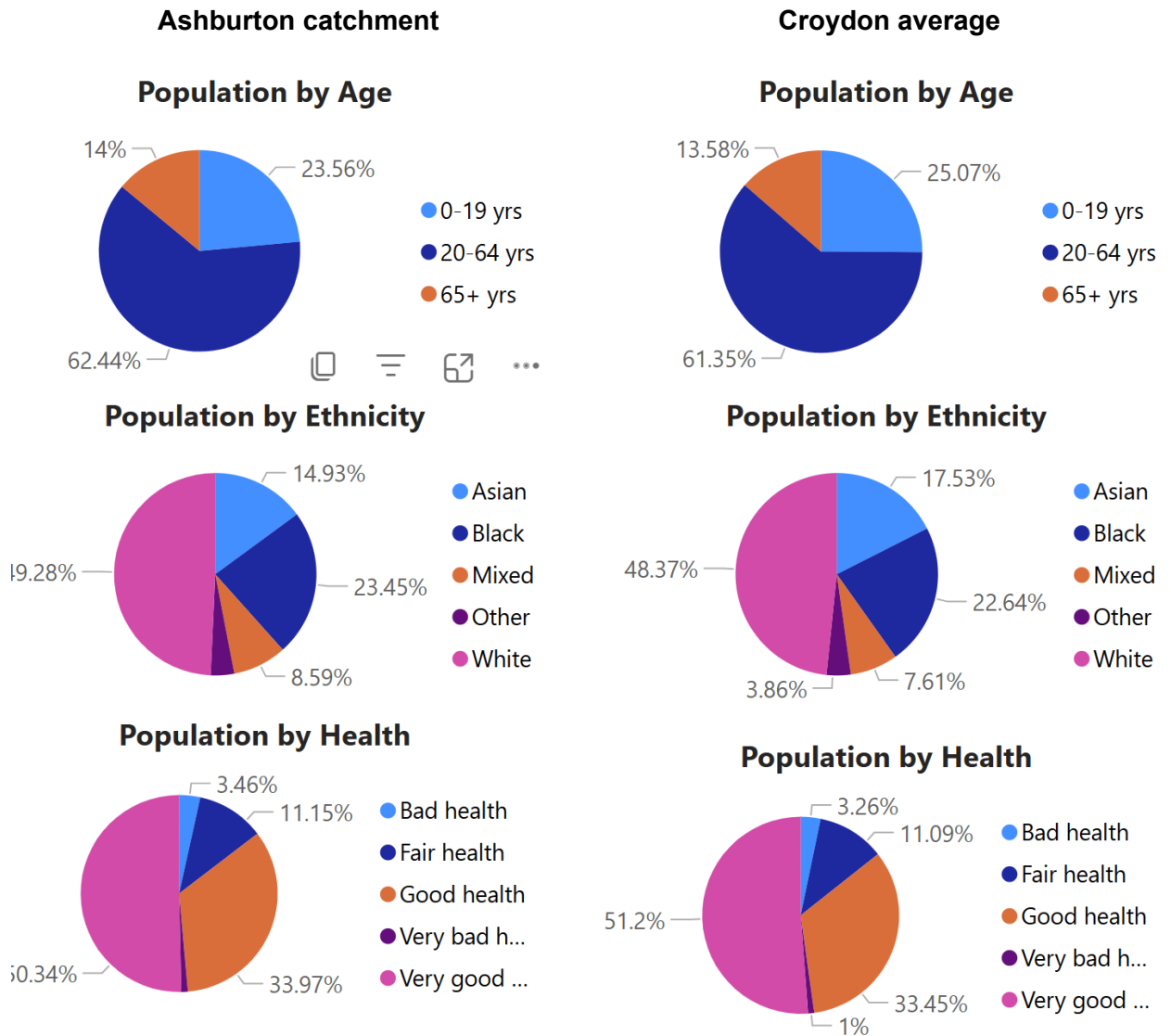
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)

● 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5 ● 6 ● 7 ● 8 ● 9 ● 10

- 4.15 The population has a broadly representative proportion of people who are over 65, and is also broadly representative of the proportion of people of White ethnicity, compared with the average for Croydon.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.2: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

Considering the potential for closure

- 4.16 There is no alternative library within reasonable travel distance that could replicate the size, practicality and overall standard of this library as the Central Library is two miles away. The two nearest library buildings, at Shirley and South Norwood, suffer from a range of problems and are poorly used in comparison.
- 4.17 There is a substantial level of need within its catchment area that cannot realistically be met through other libraries in the network given their distance and capacity.
- 4.18 It is recommended that this library is retained.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.19 The library generally performs well and is serving a large population within its catchment area which includes LSOAs within the most deprived in England:
- The building is large enough for a wide range of uses. Open for four days a week, the library has considerable potential for improvement and additional opening hours would encourage more intensive use of the building.
 - The focus should be on improving the signage, entrance and interior design of the library. If the library is to be an active 'cultural hub', it needs to look and feel like one and attract a wider active user base with more event programming and active marketing and outreach.

Recommendations

- 1. That Ashburton Library is retained and improved.**
- 2. That signage, interior design and furniture of the library are upgraded.**
- 3. That event programming is expanded, supported by more active marketing and outreach.**
- 4. That more community use and volunteering are encouraged.**

Review of Bradmore Green Library

Summary

- 4.20 Bradmore Green Library is the borough’s smallest branch library which serves the smallest population in its catchment area of the thirteen libraries. This is a stand-alone building on a residential road behind a primary school.
- 4.21 This library is one of the four that was recommended for closure at the Cabinet meeting on 31 January 2024. This proposal was then consulted on as part of a wider set of proposals and the feedback informs this evaluation.

Table C4.3: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	16	9	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	25,878	7	Footfall	
Library issues	17,324	10	Public transport access	
Event attendances	788	13	Building	
PC hours in use	202	13	Suitability	
Budget (£)	96,185	13	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	4	11	Condition	
Active users	584	13	Internal area (m ²)	180

Performance

- 4.22 The library is only open two days a week limiting its overall performance which is the lowest in the network for three of the five main indicators. However, its visits are at the median and visits per hour the third highest and so, given its lower running costs, its cost per visit is third lowest.
- 4.23 However, there may be reasons to doubt the accuracy of the visitor numbers, due to the location of the visitor counter. If users leave via the ‘entrance’ rather than what used to be the ‘exit’, they will trigger the counter a second time. The extent of double-counting (if any) is not known but may explain the relatively high number of visits given that three of the other usage indicators are very low.
- 4.24 Due to its small size and inflexibility it does not lend itself to events and so it has the fewest attendances. PC usage is much lower than any other library. There are some volunteers and although it is not used regularly by community groups, there are good relations with the next-door school and regular school visits.

Location

- 4.25 The library has limited visibility as it is located on Bradmore Way which is a residential road and is behind Coulsdon Church of England Primary School. It is not visible from the busier main roads, Marlpit Lane and Coulsdon Road. Signage is very limited with one small sign directly outside the building.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.26 The library is a short walk from the nearest shopping parade and so does not benefit from significant footfall apart from the adjacent primary school, whose children, their parents and carers reportedly use it well.
- 4.27 The library is close to nearby bus routes and allows for safe walking and cycling. There is free off-street and on-street parking on Bradmore Way.

Building

- 4.28 The library is a small single-storey building and is an unusual, roundish shape (reportedly a polygon). The main library space is cramped which makes it difficult to navigate when busy. There is no community or meeting room.
- 4.29 There is no separate children's library space and insufficient space for the range of activities that a modern and well-designed library would provide. The library occupies just a small part of the plot on which it sits.
- 4.30 The exterior of the building is in mixed condition and the entrance to the building is not inviting. The interior is unattractive. As a result of the high level windows the interior is dark and cold in winter. The building is difficult to adapt given its unusual shape. It was argued during consultation that there has not been investment in the library in years and the condition and appearance of the building seems to bear that out.

Population and need

- 4.31 This is Croydon's smallest neighbourhood library serving a comparatively small population in an area of low population density. The catchment area includes one LSOA which is in the second decile (ie the 10 to 20%) most deprived in England. This LSOA includes the Tollers Estate which has high levels of need.

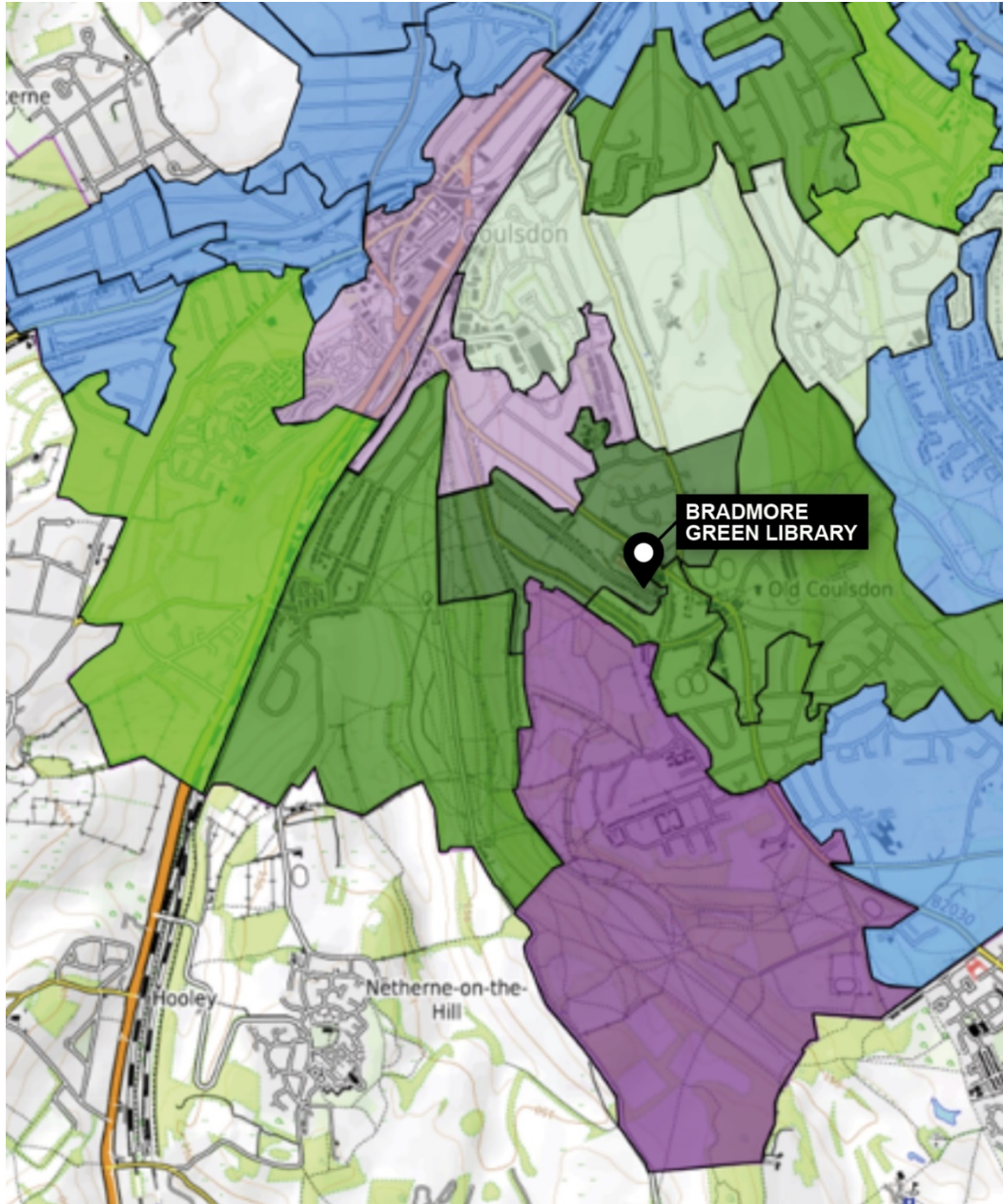
Table C4.4: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	14,432
	OA population within 1.25 miles	22,148
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	1
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Coulsdon (1.2)
	Schools within 1km	3
Community use	Existing community group uses	1
	Number of volunteers	2

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.32 The catchment area also has 6 LSOAs which are in the 20% least deprived in England. Although the library itself is located just inside the one LSOA which is in the 10% least deprived in England, it also borders the LSOA which is home to the Tollers Estate.

Figure C4.3: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)

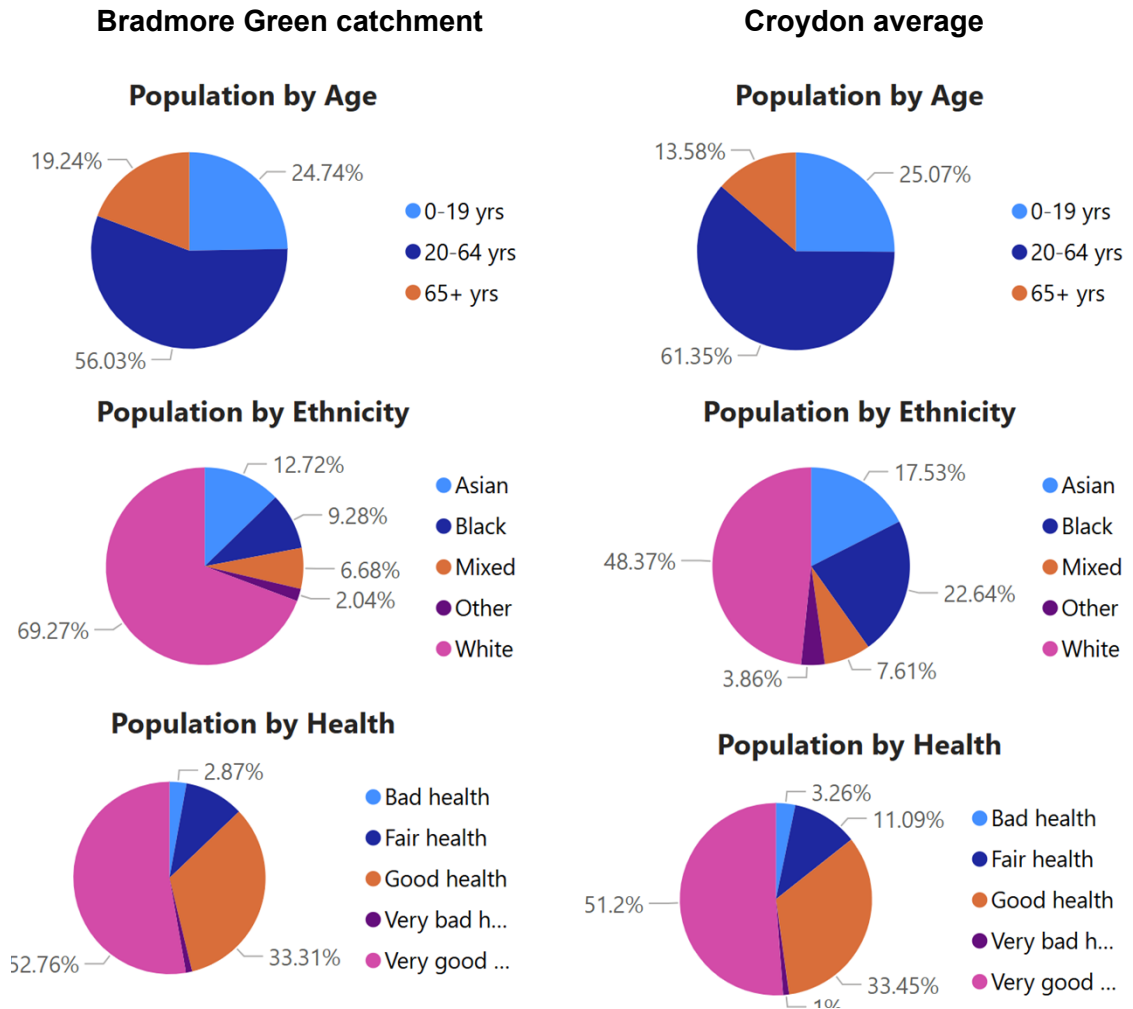


- 4.33 The catchment area has a significantly higher proportion of residents over 65 (at 19%) than the Croydon average of 14%. At 69%, its population of White origin is significantly higher than the Croydon average of 48%.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.35 A number of points were raised during consultation that people suffering from ill health or with mobility problems depend on this library in this location. The Census data on the overall catchment area suggests that health is largely in line with the Croydon average, if marginally better. The proportion of people reporting they are disabled is also in line with the Croydon average (see Table C3.6).

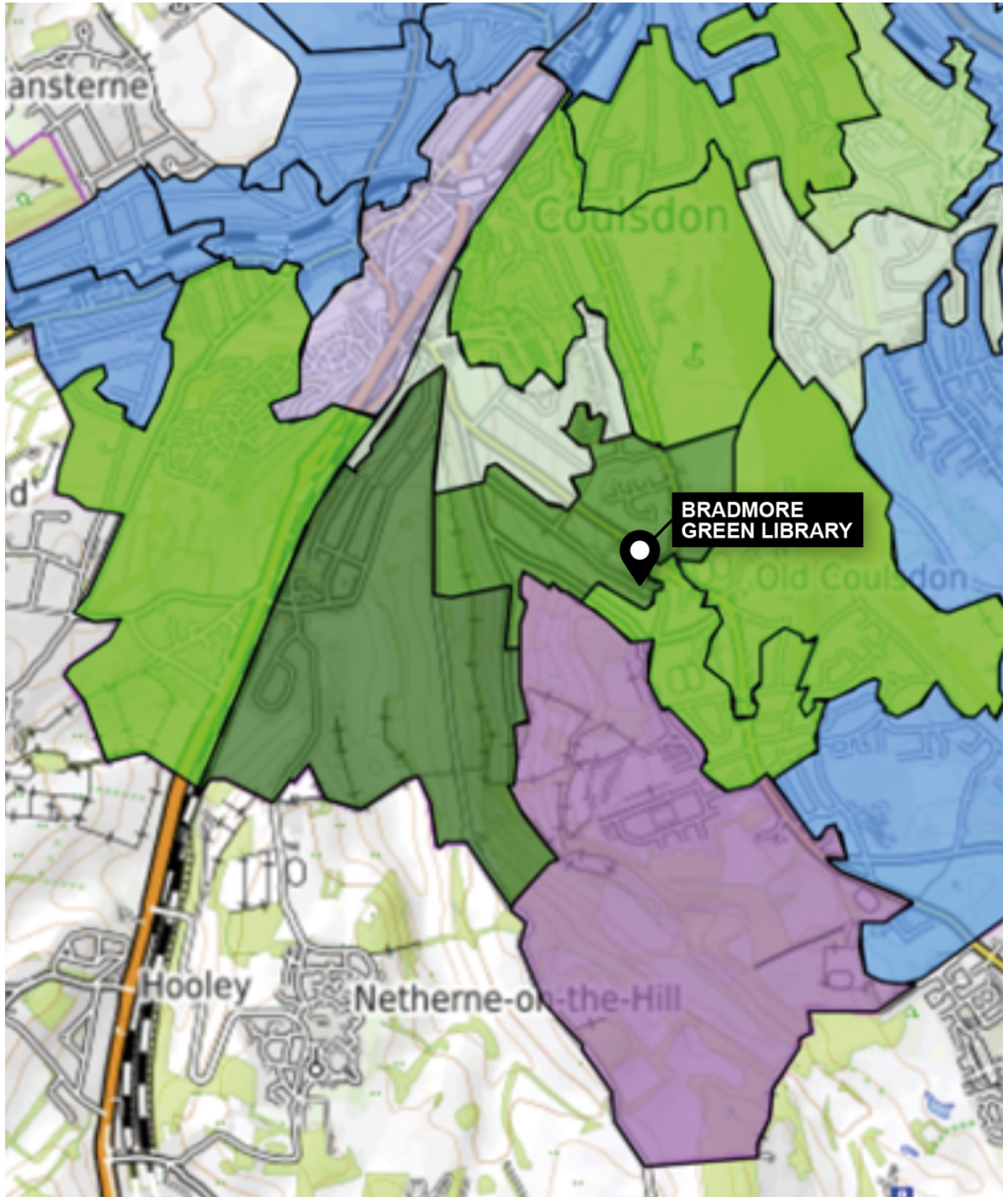
Figure C4.4: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.36 However, there are significant variations within the catchment area. As illustrated below, there are areas within the catchment area that suffer least in England from ‘health deprivation and disability’ (as measured by that domain within the IMD). The LSOA that is home to the Tollers Estate is again home to some of the worst deprivation, being in the second decile for health deprivation and disability.

Figure C4.5: health deprivation and disability within 1 mile catchment area



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.37 That same LSOA is also in the second highest decile of deprivation for the subset of the IMD focused on education, skills and training. This domain is particularly important for the library service as libraries can play such an important role in improving literacy and providing learning support.
- 4.38 Overall, the catchment area for Bradmore Green is characterised by low levels of deprivation. However, there is a significant pocket of deprivation concentrated in one LSOA which is home to the Tollers Estate. This LSOA which is home to approximately 1,355 people and is more geographically remote will need to be addressed.

Considering the potential for closure

- 4.39 Bradmore Green Library was recommended to be considered for closure in the January 2024 report to Cabinet because:
- Its overall performance is comparatively poor despite the apparently low unit costs.
 - The building is small and unsuitable for the full range of the library service offer.
 - There is a comparatively small population in the catchment area which overlaps with that of Coulsdon Library.
- 4.40 Coulsdon Library was recommended to be retained given its performance levels, location and size and so this would become the main library serving the Old Coulsdon area.
- 4.41 The feedback during consultation arguing against closure was very strong and demonstrated the deep commitment of its users and community to the library. There was extensive feedback, much of it making similar points in response to other closure proposals. These included more general points, eg problems with opening hours and the Council's management of its finances, which are addressed in the main report at Appendix A.
- 4.42 There were a number of comments specific to Bradmore Green Library and the Old Coulsdon and Coulsdon areas which are summarised as follows:
- **Travel to Coulsdon Library is difficult** for those with young children and with pushchairs (particularly if travelling by bus) and those with mobility difficulties.
 - **It is unfair to select this library for closure** (as opposed to, say, New Addington) as it is one of the cheapest to run.
 - **It will impact those on low income** who need access to PCs and printing and copying and who cannot afford to travel.
 - **It will have an adverse social and health impact** on its users and increase isolation.
 - **It will particularly impact on children and young people** particularly those in local schools.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- **The Coulsdon Town area is not safe.**
- 4.43 We will deal with each of these issues in turn. The comments below are supplemented by the detailed EQIA for Bradmore Green Library, Coulsdon and Old Coulsdon.
- 4.44 **Bradmore Green Library is easier for most people living in Old Coulsdon to reach.** It was argued to benefit from level ground and to have free parking available. Parking was reported to be difficult at Coulsdon Library and was problematic for people needing a disabled bay.
- 4.45 In comparison with Bradmore Green Library, parking is more difficult at Coulsdon Library. Free parking is not available in the immediate vicinity of Coulsdon Library and the car parks are not immediately adjacent to the library. On-street paid-for parking near the library is limited to 1-hour stays. Users of Coulsdon supermarkets are able to use the car parks free for a limited period of time which make it possible to include a short visit to the library, but not an extended visit for an event, for example.
- 4.46 There are two buses (numbers 60 and 404) available from Coulsdon Road adjacent to the location of Bradmore Green Library to Coulsdon Library. The 404, although slower, also serves the Tollers Estate. The 404 is a route specifically designed to reach the more distant parts of Old Coulsdon.
- 4.47 There is only 1 disabled bay outside Coulsdon library, and this is a significant constraint.
- 4.48 At the border with Surrey on Ditches Lane, Coulsdon library is 2.5 miles away. While it can be argued that a reasonable travel distance to a library for residents in the Green Belt might be more than 1 mile, **the distances and the particular challenges for people with disabilities mean that some additional support would be needed if Bradmore Green Library were to close.** This includes:
- Dedicated outreach provision for the Tollers Estate.
 - Additional transport support for those suffering mobility challenges to reach Coulsdon Library.
 - Seeking additional disabled bays outside Coulsdon Library.
- 4.49 There are a small number (just under 400 people) living in areas at the southern end of the catchment area for Bradmore Green Library who are also in the catchment area for Caterham Hill Library. **For those using Caterham's shops or who would find it more convenient than Coulsdon, this may be a useful alternative and has free parking bays.**

Library services review – review of closure proposals

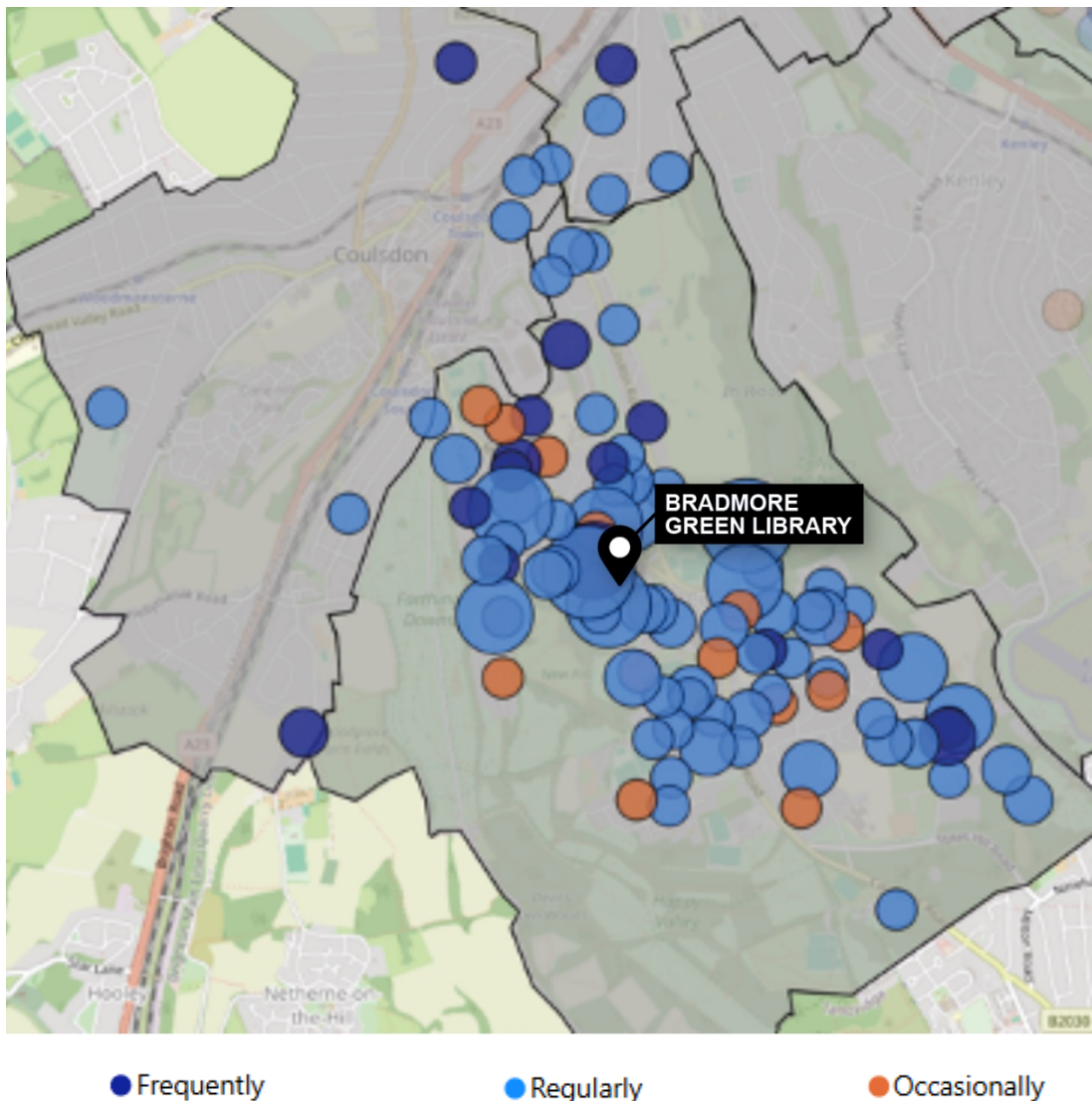
- 4.50 **The selection of Bradmore Green Library for potential closure was based on a range of factors, including performance, location, the building and relative need.** Although the number of physical issues ranks 10th of the 13 libraries, it is bottom for active users, PC hours in use and event attendance. Its active users represent just 1.5% of the borough's active users and PC hours used are just 0.3% of the total for the network. The number of visitors to the library ranks 10th of 13 and the cost per visit at £4 is 3rd lowest. Although there is some doubt about the accuracy of visitor numbers (for the reasons set out above), even if correct, the usage made of the library during those visits is in the bottom four for every indicator.
- 4.51 The population in the catchment area of Bradmore Green Library is the lowest of the thirteen libraries. As the two libraries are only 1.2 miles apart, there is also a fair degree of overlap with the catchment area for Coulsdon Library whose user base appears to extend well into Bradmore Green Library's catchment area (see the maps in the EQIA). If Bradmore Green Library is closed, Coulsdon Library will be serving an overall catchment area with a smaller population than many other libraries in the borough and one that has much lower levels of deprivation, with the exception of the area that is home to the Tollers Estate.
- 4.52 The library is also the smallest and cannot easily host the full range of library services or the service improvements requested by people during the latest round of consultation. By closing this library, it will be possible to free up resources to open Coulsdon Library for longer. Coulsdon Library does have the capacity to provide a broad range of services, but it will require investment (see the analysis of Coulsdon Library).
- 4.53 **There will be an impact on those on low incomes who find it difficult to afford to travel to Coulsdon Library and who need PC access and access to printing/copying.**
- 4.54 It is notable that the total hours that a PC was used by a visitor was only 202 for the whole of 2023-24, ie for less than four hours a week. This suggests a very low level of overall demand but there will have an impact on the few individuals using the IT equipment who would be forced to find alternatives if they do not want to use Coulsdon Library.
- 4.55 The cost of travel can be a deterrent for those on low incomes. Children and young people and over 60s are able to use the bus routes for free. For adults on low incomes the cost can be prohibitive, even with the discount for those on Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit for whom bus travel is half-price using the Jobcentre Plus Travel Discount. The IMD deprivation levels for 'income' are again in the second most deprived level for the LSOA which is home to the Tollers Estate.
- 4.56 While it is not realistic to lay on free travel to Coulsdon Library for everyone in Old Coulsdon, the proposal to provide special additional transport for those with mobility challenges will benefit those who would face the greatest challenges. This is addressed further in the EQIA.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.57 **The loss of a well-used and well-loved library will be a blow** to people who rely on it for the joy of using a library and/or for company. Even though it is open for just two days a week, the library could play an important role in improving their quality of life.
- 4.58 There are, though, no LSOAs in the most deprived two deciles of the IMD sub-category 'Health Deprivation and Disability', although the LSOA housing the Tollers Estate is in the third most deprived decile for this aspect of deprivation. This reinforces the importance of providing an outreach service on the Tollers Estate. For those most in need on the Tollers Estate, a facility in immediate reach may be more convenient
- 4.59 In the EQIA, there are also proposals for engagement and outreach work with care homes, sheltered accommodation and community groups, taking the service to people rather than expecting them to come to the library, which many may currently find difficult.
- 4.60 The proposed increase in opening hours at Coulsdon Library and improvements to the library could make it an even more useful opportunity for engaging in cultural activities, group activities and events as it will provide a more extensive offer and in a more pleasant environment than available at Bradmore Green Library. As Coulsdon Library's garden is also home to a volunteer-run garden, the opportunity for engagement and a richer set of activities could be a boost to health and well-being, albeit at the expense of a slightly longer journey.
- 4.61 It is nevertheless the case that the closure of a library can have an impact on the sense of community in an area and this impact cannot be underestimated.
- 4.62 **There will be an impact on children and young people from the closure of a local library, particularly if they attend the primary school next door.**
- 4.63 However, given the part-time opening hours and the lack of Saturday opening, the use of the library by young people for study is limited to just a few hours each week.
- 4.64 The move to five day staffed opening hours and the proposed improvement to the facilities at Coulsdon Library does offer more opportunities in the week for parents of young children to introduce them to the library and make use of its facilities. A new focus on Coulsdon Library and an enhanced programme of events and activities targeting children and young people could provide an overall improvement to the service. For older children who can readily use bus routes to Coulsdon Library from Old Coulsdon this will be a practical opportunity.
- 4.65 In the EQIA, plans for outreach have been described that would engage all the schools in Old Coulsdon, rather than just the primary school next door. This outreach will enable the service to target better those most in need rather than service those who are already making active use of the library. It will also help to address the needs of the those who, in response to the survey reported that they would not be able to use another library (see figure below).

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.6: respondents who cannot use another library and frequency of use³⁰



- 4.66 **Concerns were expressed during consultation about the levels of crime in Coulsdon Old Town**, something that would deter users of Bradmore Green Library from using Coulsdon Library. Feedback included descriptions of violence and drug use.
- 4.67 The Coulsdon Library catchment area does include an area around the town centre that is in the fourth most deprived areas in England for crime in the IMD sub-category for crime. However, that area is less deprived than the most deprived LSOA in the Bradmore Green catchment area. This deprivation index is based on older data and so it is helpful to examine the Metropolitan Police's latest reports on crime in the two areas.

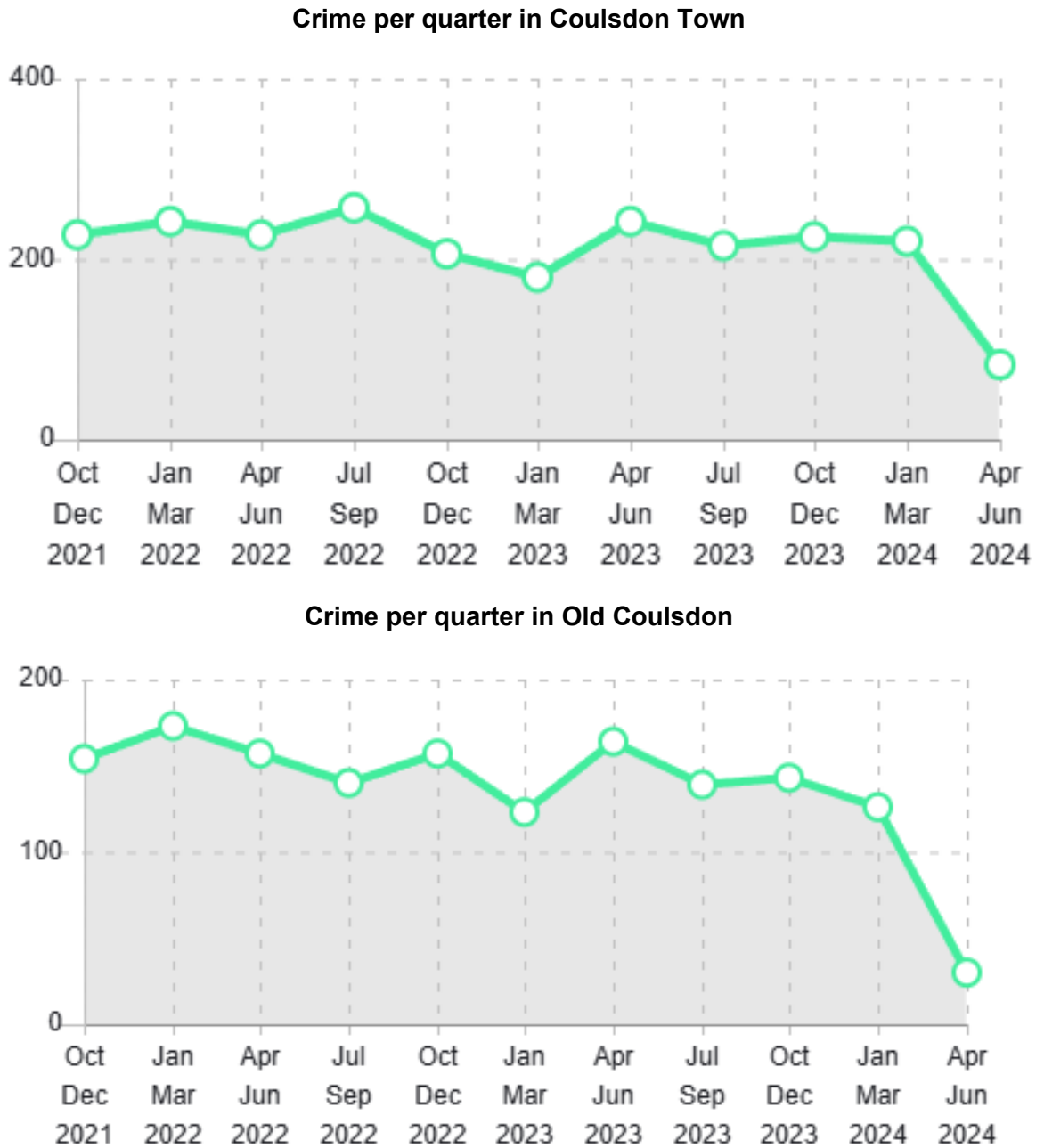
³⁰ This map shows the postcodes of those who responded to the consultation survey and reported that this library is their principal library; that they could not use another library; and how often they used it. 'Frequently' means more than once a week; 'Regularly' means every once a week to once a month; 'Occasionally' means every few months or once a year.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.68 This shows that, although the level of crime in Coulsdon Town is higher than in Old Coulsdon, the differences are small in comparison with, say, Croydon Town Centre (at around 1500 per quarter).
- 4.69 The differences between the types of crime would benefit from closer examination as there are likely to be more crimes of shoplifting from supermarkets and other town centre shops and violence in the night economy.
- 4.70 There is crime evident, and the fear of crime is justified for both areas. However, a closer examination of the nature and extent of it and how its daytime patterns may impact on users of Coulsdon Library could help to provide either guidance or reassurance to people put off by the reported crime levels in the area.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.7: comparison of crime in Coulsdon Town and Old Coulsdon 2021-2024³¹



Findings and recommendations

- 4.71 After reviewing the feedback from consultation and examining background data in greater depth, it remains the recommendation to consider the closure of Bradmore Green Library:

³¹ The most recent quarter's figures have been reported to have been affected by problems uploading data.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- The overall performance of the library is poor with the lowest number of active users, although its unit costs appear to be comparatively low.
- The population in the catchment area is relatively small and overlaps with Coulsdon Library's catchment area (and to a small extent with Caterham Hill Library).
- The building is small, poorly located and is unsuitable for the full range of the library service offer.
- Coulsdon Library already serves residents in Bradmore Green Library's catchment area and would require a short bus journey for those not using a car.
- The closure of Bradmore Green Library would be a serious disappointment to its loyal and passionate users.
- The ability to reinvest its resources in longer opening hours at an improved Coulsdon Library would bring significant benefits for library users.
- There are transport challenges, particularly with longer term parking and for people with mobility challenges.
- There is a significant pocket of deprivation in the catchment area associated mainly with the Tollers Estate.

4.72 There are impacts on library users with mobility challenges and for young people, particularly those using the adjacent primary school. Mitigation would be required focusing on outreach:

- To the wider school community in Old Coulsdon.
- To people who are deprived and/or currently not taking advantage of the service, particularly on the Tollers Estate.
- To people with mobility challenges by offering accessible transport from Old Coulsdon to Coulsdon Library on a programmed basis.

4.73 The impacts and mitigations are described further in the EQIA at Appendix D.

Recommendations

- 1. That Bradmore Green Library is closed to allow for the reinvestment of resources in Coulsdon Library and in library outreach in Old Coulsdon, focusing particularly on the Tollers Estate.**
- 2. That the mitigations summarised above and in the EQIA be implemented.**
- 3. That further engagement and research is undertaken into travel issues, including the design of an accessible transport provision to Coulsdon Library, more disabled parking bays and levels and perceptions of crime in the area.**

Review of Broad Green Library

Summary

- 4.74 Broad Green Library is the second smallest library in the library network and serves a catchment area with a high population but which is also largely in the catchment area of other, larger libraries. This is a standalone building on a busy residential road.
- 4.75 This library is one of the four that were recommended for closure at the Cabinet meeting on 31 January 2024. This proposal was then consulted on as part of a wider set of proposals and the feedback informs this evaluation.

Table C4.5: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	16	9	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	17,023	10	Footfall	
Library issues	9,635	12	Public transport access	
Event attendances	1,963	8	Building	
PC hours in use	1,259	10	Suitability	
Budget (£)	101,727	12	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	6	8	Condition	
Active users	935	10	Internal area (m ²)	236

Performance

- 4.76 The library is only open two days a week for 16 hours in total, a sharp reduction from the previous opening hours of 44.5 before the introduction of part-time opening in 2022. Unlike in some libraries (eg Selsdon) where the number of visits per hour have intensified during the shorter window in which the library is open, the visitors per hour at Broad Green Library have remained largely static at 20.5 in 2023-24 compared with 21 in 2019-20 and on this measure, the library ranks 9th out of the thirteen libraries in the network.
- 4.77 The reduction in opening hours has been associated with a sharp fall in the library's overall performance, which is generally poor. The library's number of active users at 935 is fourth lowest of the thirteen libraries. Annual visits in 2019-20 were nearly 39,000 but reached just 44% of that level at 17,000 in 2023-24. This is, though, an improvement of 15 percentage points compared with 2022-23. The budget is the second lowest and thanks to the increase in visitor numbers, the unit cost has improved from £8 per visit in 2022-23 to £6 in 2023-24, just above the median of the thirteen libraries. However, it still has the fourth lowest number of visits and the second lowest number of issues.
- 4.78 Attendances at events have risen from 688 in 2022-23 to 1,963 in 2023-24 reflecting the increase in events held and is at a level that is 8th highest of 13 libraries. The library is reportedly well-used by the local Tamil community.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Location

- 4.79 Broad Green library is in a prominent location on a busy side street (Canterbury Road). The vertical white library sign is very large and visible. While the building will be familiar to those living in its immediate surroundings, it is not as visible to non-users who do not regularly use this road.
- 4.80 This area is mainly residential with few shops in the immediate area and numerous industrial units in the wider area. It is next to the Tender Care Day Nursery and is close to one of West Thornton Primary School's two sites and a health centre on the roundabout a few hundred metres away. There are some small rows of shops on Mitcham Road but no shopping parades in the immediate vicinity of the library that would generate footfall. Canterbury Road is not served by a bus route although the A23 and A236 roads are well-served by bus routes. The nearest bus stop is a few hundred metres from the library.

Building

- 4.81 The building is the second smallest of the thirteen libraries. The interiors are cluttered but the building's open plan design is practical to use for a range of the library activities of a small branch library, albeit with limited ability to zone activities and the static shelving makes it difficult to adapt it for events and activities.
- 4.82 The glazed entrance doors and large windows at the front of the building allow visitors to see into the interior, but the design of shelving, tables and chairs are basic and unattractive. The children's library area is more colourful. The overall impression of the interior is unattractive, messy and neglected but could be remedied with investment. The exterior brickwork and aluminium windows and frames appear in reasonable condition, although there has been some interior water damage due to blocked gutters.

Population and need

- 4.83 As the library is located in an area of high population density, its physical catchment area suggests it serves a large population, although its catchment area overlaps with several other Croydon libraries (Thornton Heath, Central and Norbury) which are larger and better used. At the margins, it also shares a catchment area with Pollards Hill Library operated by Merton Council.
- 4.84 The library is situated close to areas of high deprivation with a number of LSOAs in the most deprived deciles although these are also largely in the geographic catchment areas of Thornton Heath and Central libraries. Although its overall performance is comparatively low, the addresses of current active users registered at Broad Green suggest a regular following who live close by. There is currently only one volunteer.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

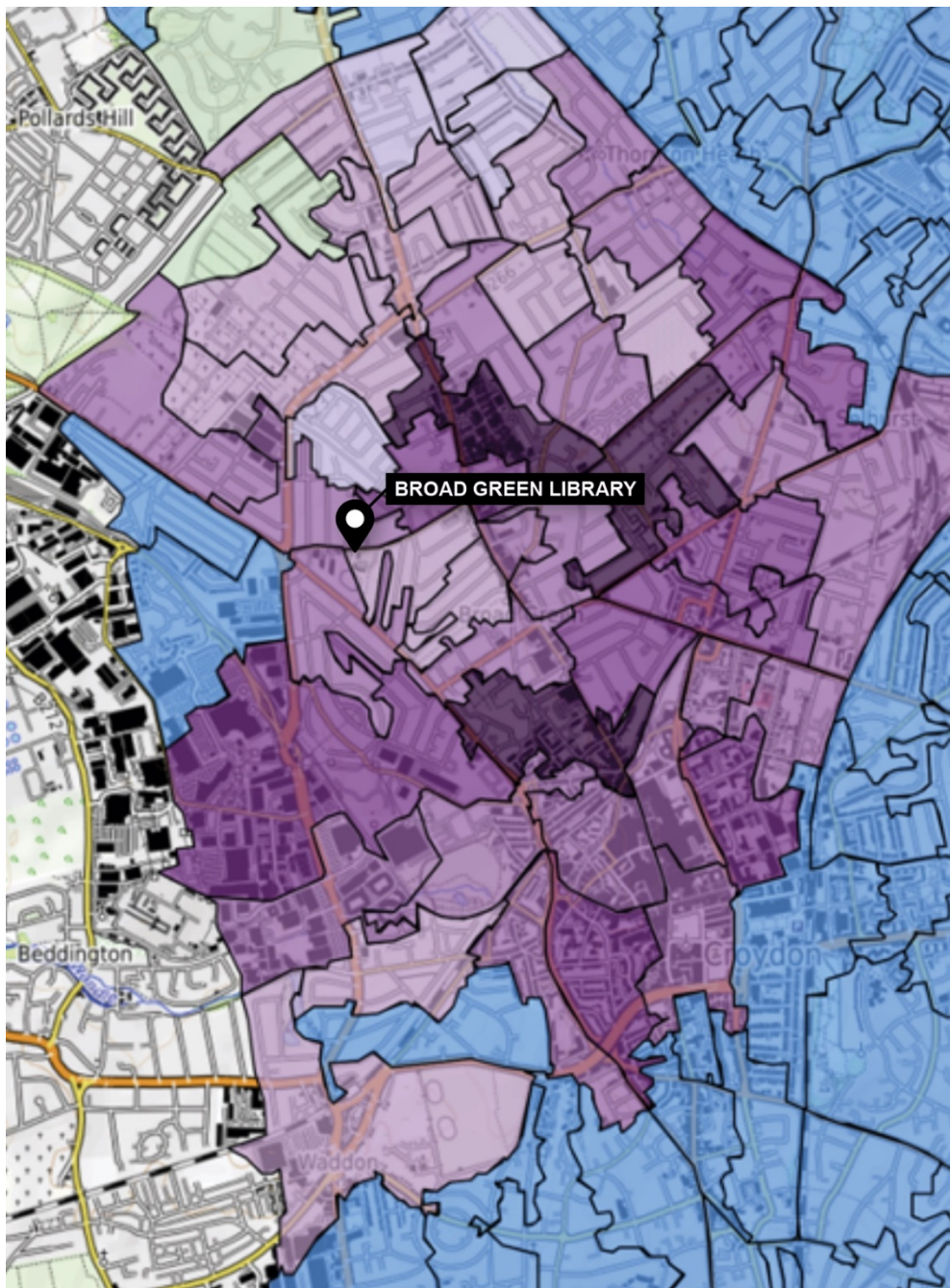
Table C4.6: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	63,916
	OA population within 1.25 miles	90,257
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	13
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Thornton Heath (1.2) Central (1.4) Pollards Hill (1.5) Norbury (1.7)
	Schools within 1km	2
Community use	Existing community group uses	3
	Number of volunteers	1

- 4.85 The overall level of deprivation is shown below. It includes 3 LSOAs in the most deprived decile in England and the catchment area is generally in the 50% more deprived, with only two LSOAs below the median. There are sub-categories of the IMD that show even greater levels of comparative deprivation in this catchment area, with 29 LSOAs in the most deprived two deciles for crime, although there is only one LSOA in the most deprived two deciles for education, skills and training.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.8: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



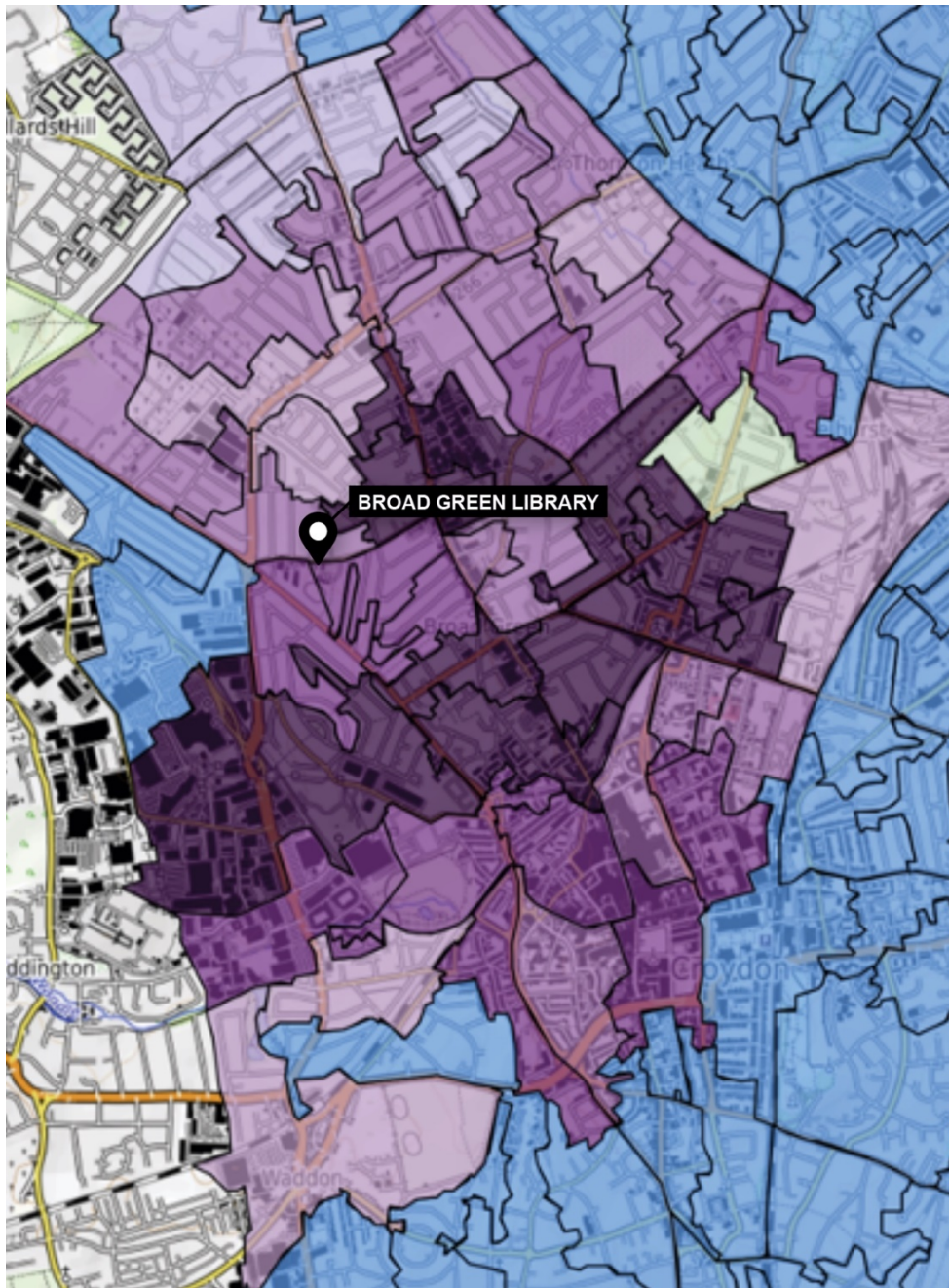
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



- 4.86 It is notable that, although the proportion of people aged 65 and over in the catchment area is significantly lower at 9% than the borough average of 14%, the IMD index for income deprivation among older people is notable with 22 LSOAs in the most deprived two deciles (with nine of those LSOAs in the most deprived decile). These LSOAs are concentrated in the vicinity of the library.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.9: Income Deprivation Affecting Older People by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)

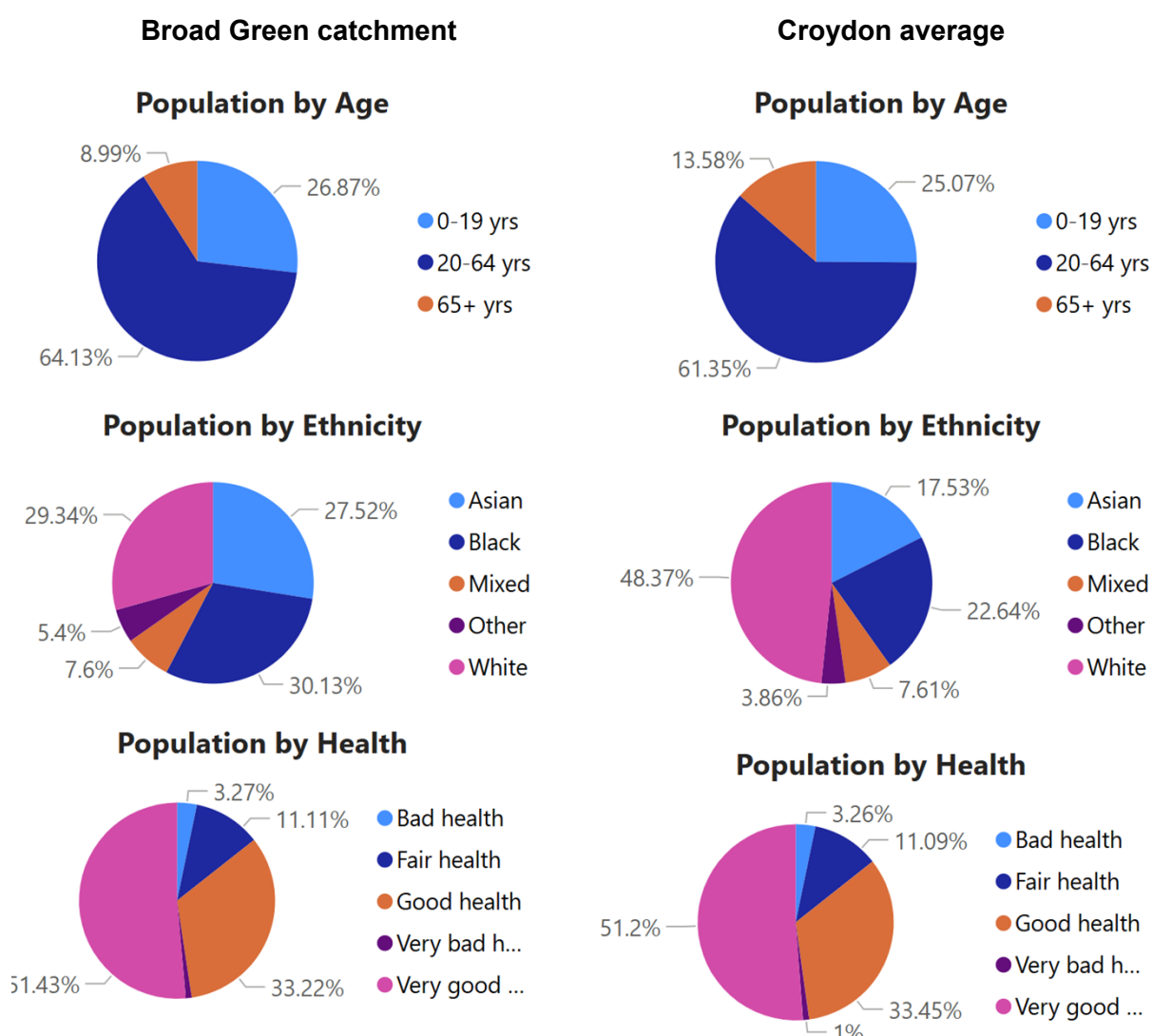


4.87

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.88 The catchment areas are predominantly Asian, Black, Mixed and Other, with Asian ethnic origin at 28% significantly higher than the borough average of 18%; Black ethnic origin at 30% significantly higher than the borough average of 23%; and White ethnic origin at 29% significantly lower than the borough average of 48%. This library is close to a Tamil community who make regular use of the library and it is used by a Tamil community group. The ethnicity of active users suggest³² that over 80% are of Asian and Black ethnic origin.
- 4.89 Older people are under-represented among active users of Broad Green Library who have provided information on their age (at 3%, compared with the average in the catchment area of 9%).

Figure C4.10: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



³² Only 23.7% of active users have provided ethnicity data.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Considering the potential for closure

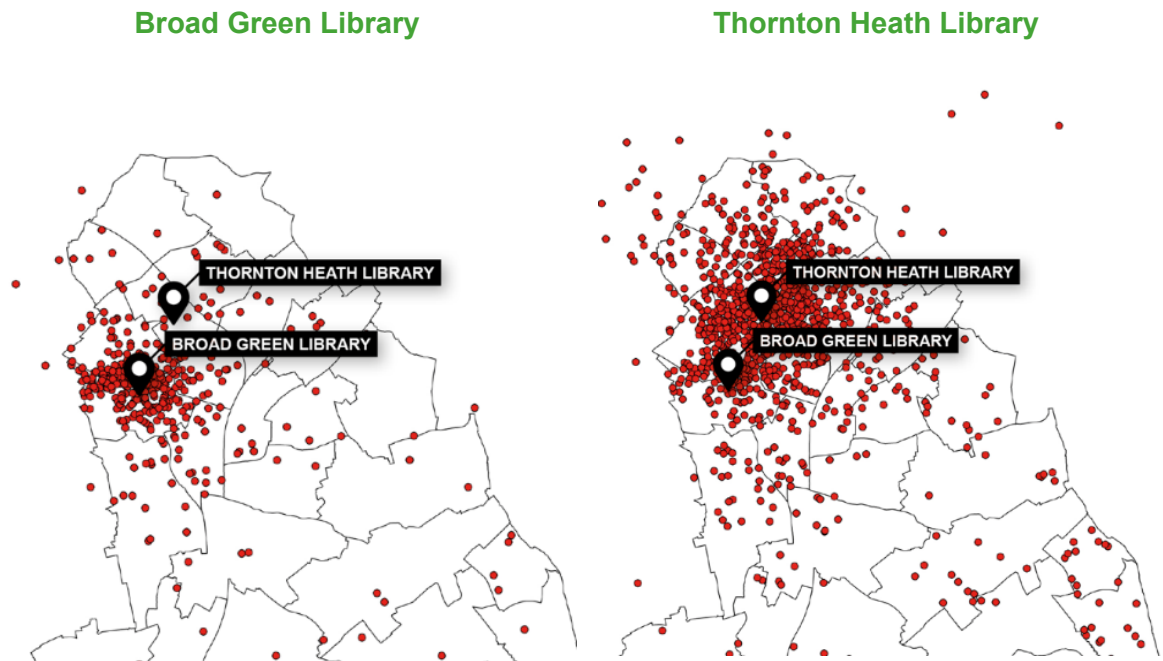
- 4.90 Broad Green Library was recommended to be considered for closure in the January 2024 report to Cabinet because:
- Its overall performance is comparatively poor.
 - The building is poorly located and is not on a road served by public transport but there is good public transport in the catchment area providing access to alternative libraries.
 - Its catchment area is largely within the catchment areas of Central and Thornton Heath libraries.
- 4.91 Thornton Heath, Central and Norbury libraries were recommended to be retained given their performance levels, location and size and so they would become the new libraries for people in Broad Green's catchment area. Outreach activities would be provided to support former Broad Green users and to those who do not make use of Broad Green Library.
- 4.92 **There was considerable feedback during consultation arguing that the library should be maintained, stressing its importance to the local, deprived communities.** Although participation in the survey was lower for Broad Green compared with other libraries proposed for closure, there was a lot of detailed feedback making a number of points that were similar to those in response to other closure proposals. These included more general points, such as the need for improvements to the service, which are addressed in the main review report at Appendix A.
- 4.93 Feedback specific to the potential closure of Broad Green Library and its catchment area is summarised as follows:
- **The library serves an area of very high need** that loses out to areas such as Thornton Heath.
 - **There would be a negative effect for children and their learning**, particularly for those in the adjacent school.
 - **The library and its activities play an important community role**, particularly as a focus for the local Tamil community and for socialising.
 - **It would impact on those learning English** and as a source of reading in community languages.
 - **The local community will not travel to another library** and so will miss out on what it can offer.
 - **Travel and its cost are difficult** for those who prefer to walk or are financially stretched, for those with children and those with mobility difficulties.
 - **Crime levels in areas like Central Croydon** would put people off using other libraries and the library also helps to keep local young people engaged.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- **It will have an adverse impact on mental health** for users who see this as a safe space.
- 4.94 We will deal with each of these issues in turn. The comments below are supplemented by the detailed EQIA for Broad Green and the library service for residents in the North Croydon area.
- 4.95 **The catchment area for Broad Green Library does indeed have some of the highest levels of relative deprivation in England across most IMD indices.** It is particularly high for sub-categories such as ‘Living Environment’, ‘Crime’ and the ‘Income Deprivation Affecting Older People’. It is less deprived for the categories of ‘Education, Skills and Training’ and ‘Health Deprivation and Disability’.
- 4.96 It is not alone in suffering high levels of relative deprivation. For example, the catchment area of Thornton Heath Library has 14 LSOAs in the 20% most deprived in England in terms of overall IMD deprivation (Broad Green’s has 13, albeit with a smaller population in its catchment area). The reduction in opening hours has had a detrimental impact on users of both libraries who live in more deprived areas.
- 4.97 As we show when we review Thornton Heath Library later in this report, it is a larger building in a better location and can accommodate a wider range of uses, including training and meeting rooms and a community garden. Thornton Heath Library is, as a result, better able to meet the needs of people in deprived communities *who are able to reach it*.
- 4.98 As that library is relatively close to Broad Green Library and shares much of the same catchment area, the closure of Broad Green Library and the increase in opening hours at Thornton Heath Library offers many of Broad Green Library’s users an improved range of services less than a mile from their home.
- 4.99 A comparison of the addresses of the two libraries’ active users shows that Broad Green Library’s active users are clustered quite tightly around the location of the library, whereas Thornton Heath’s active users are more widely spread. Those users are also well-represented in Broad Green’s catchment area and so there are residents in Broad Green Library’s catchment area who are already making use of Thornton Heath Library and benefiting from its superior offer.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.11: addresses of active users of Broad Green and Thornton Heath libraries



- 4.101 However, for those living towards the south of Broad Green Library's catchment area, Thornton Heath Library is some distance away and this could act as a barrier for those who find it difficult to travel there. We will examine whether there are alternatives below.
- 4.102 Broad Green Library should be serving its local community, one with high levels of need. However, it is failing to do so, largely because of its location. **In 2023-24 it had, on average, fewer than 1,000 active users in a catchment area population of just under 64,000, ie just 1.5% of its intended users in an area of high need borrowed a book (or other material) or used a PC once or more in the preceding 12 months.** Even before the reduction in opening hours, the library only had an average of 1,978 active users in 2018-19, still just 3% of the population in the local catchment area despite being open for 44.5 hours per week.
- 4.103 It was suggested in consultation that the library should be moved to Mitcham Road. It is questionable that the cost of such a move would outweigh the benefits of freeing the resources saved by closing the library in order to improve the service at other nearby libraries.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.104 **The closure of Broad Green Library would impact on the children that use it,** especially users of the adjacent nursery and primary school. Children and young people form the majority of the library's active users: 57% are under 20 of whom 49% are under 16. Feedback from the consultation process highlighted concerns about the impact on children and young people, on their literacy and learning.
- 4.105 The importance of the library to children at the adjacent primary school site was also highlighted in feedback. There are two schools (one of which has two sites) within half a mile of the library. It is not known what proportion of the children using the library are from the Canterbury Road school branch of West Thornton Primary School or its site on Rosecourt Road or from the Harris Primary Academy Croydon on Thomson Crescent. There is a risk that the library is predominantly serving the school next door, as it is so convenient, and acting as an additional 'school library' for that site, rather than meeting the needs of all schoolchildren in the catchment area.
- 4.106 West Thornton Primary School³³ stresses its commitment to reading and providing books and eBooks to its student as a core part of its curriculum. The school's reading enrichment programme includes visits to the local library. Such visits to libraries act as a supplement to primary schools' reading curriculum activities. However, few organised nursery or school class visits to the library took place in 2023-24: only 7 with 82 attendances in total. It did, however, have 46 events (including Rhymetimes) with 660 attendances in total – one of the better attendances among the smaller libraries.
- 4.107 The EQIA attached at Appendix D has set out plans for mitigation, including the use of resources freed by closing Broad Green Library to develop a programme of engagement with local schools. This will allow librarians to develop a schedule of supporting reading in schools; organising more library visits; or encouraging schools to participate in and promote out of school activities, such as the summer reading challenge.
- 4.108 The introduction of longer staffed opening hours at Thornton Heath, Central and Norbury libraries will also allow more access for children and young people who want to use those libraries for reading or study space, a need highlighted in consultation feedback.
- 4.109 **Library buildings are important focal points for their communities, as places where people of different ages and backgrounds share the same space, where people can find local information and connect with others and where everyone is welcome.** Local residents report that library activities such as Rhymetimes bring young children and their parents into a social community setting, sometimes for the first time.

³³ Source: West Thornton Primary School's website at 5 September 2024: [West Thornton Primary School - Reading](#)

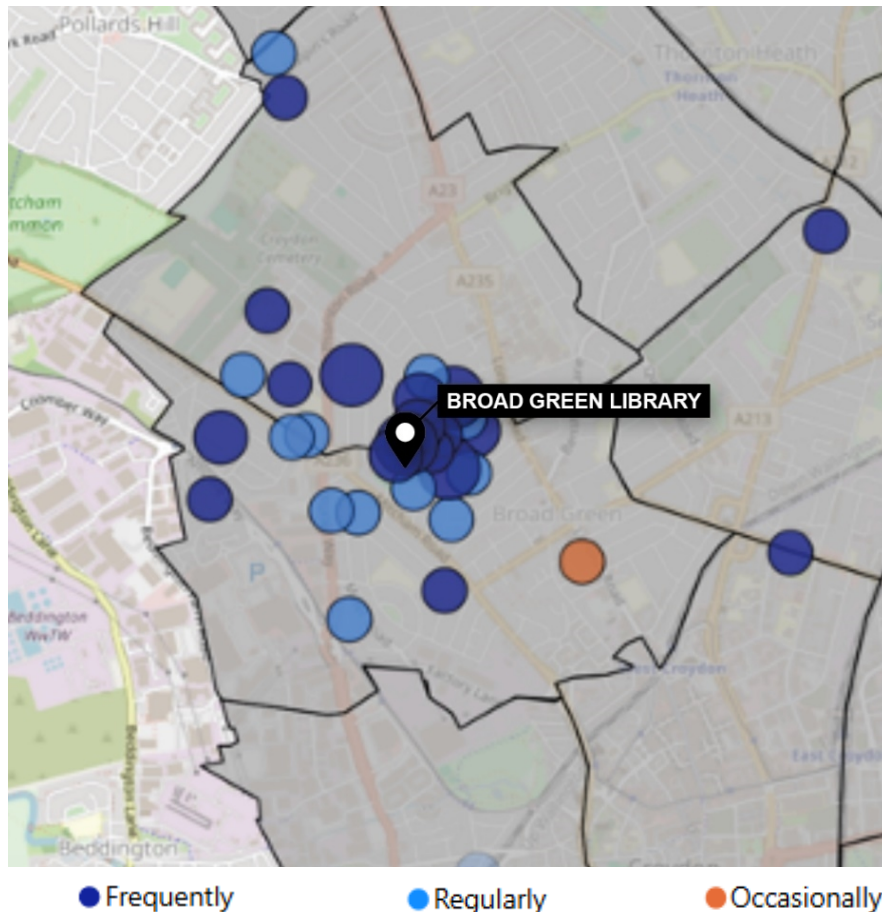
Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.110 **However, given the very small proportion (1.5%) of the local population in the catchment area who are active users, it is questionable how important the library has been to the wider community.** It is undoubtedly the case **that it is important to the community in its immediate vicinity and has been an important resource to members of the Tamil community** as emphasized in consultation feedback. The library is currently used by three community groups.
- 4.111 A local Tamil group has used the Broad Green Library as a base for a range of activities such as English classes, parenting classes, yoga, digital support and other courses to support the local Tamil community. The consultation feedback highlighted the high negative impact on the local Tamil community of its potential closure for those who would lose activities which are greatly valued by a large number of the local Tamil community.
- 4.112 In order to reduce the impact on the Tamil community, the library service proposes to engage with the Tamil community and organise transport by bus to an alternative library for people with access needs or who would otherwise be unable to travel to a library. The library service would arrange a bus to collect residents from Broad Green Library to travel to Thornton Heath Library which would host existing regular activities provided by Tamil community, and also library activities such as Rhymetimes, to ensure residents can continue these activities if they cannot be accessed at a nearby venue.
- 4.113 The transport support provided to help people use Thornton Heath would also allow the continuation of language classes. The importance of books in community languages was highlighted in consultation feedback and the intention would be to review and improve the range of books in the community languages in demand, particularly in Thornton Heath.
- 4.114 It is also intended that the library service outreach activities would aim to locate suitable local venues for a new outreach programme provided by dedicated staff. This outreach programme would allow the library service more flexibility to engage nonusers, especially those from underserved and marginalised communities.
- 4.115 **The transport and outreach in local venues proposed by the library service would also help to address the needs of users who, in response to the consultation, said they would not be able to use another library.**
- 4.116 Of the 91 survey respondents whose main library is Broad Green, 53 said they would not be able to use another library. Using their postcodes, these are plotted on the map below. While a handful live further afield, most are concentrated in the area around the library which also reflects the pattern of addresses of active users shown in the map above. It is hoped that this means that the transport support on offer will benefit those active users who may struggle to travel to Thornton Heath Library, eg for those who are financially stretched, for those with children and those with mobility difficulties.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.117 Of those 91 survey respondents, a minority (38) said that they would visit another library if Broad Green Library closed. 30% of the 92 respondents said that they would use Central Library, 10% would use Thornton Heath Library and 8% would use Norbury Library. 2% said they would use Croydon's library online. These responses represent a small sample size and so a better understanding would be needed of the reasons for people's selection.

Figure C4.12: respondents who cannot use another library and frequency of use³⁴



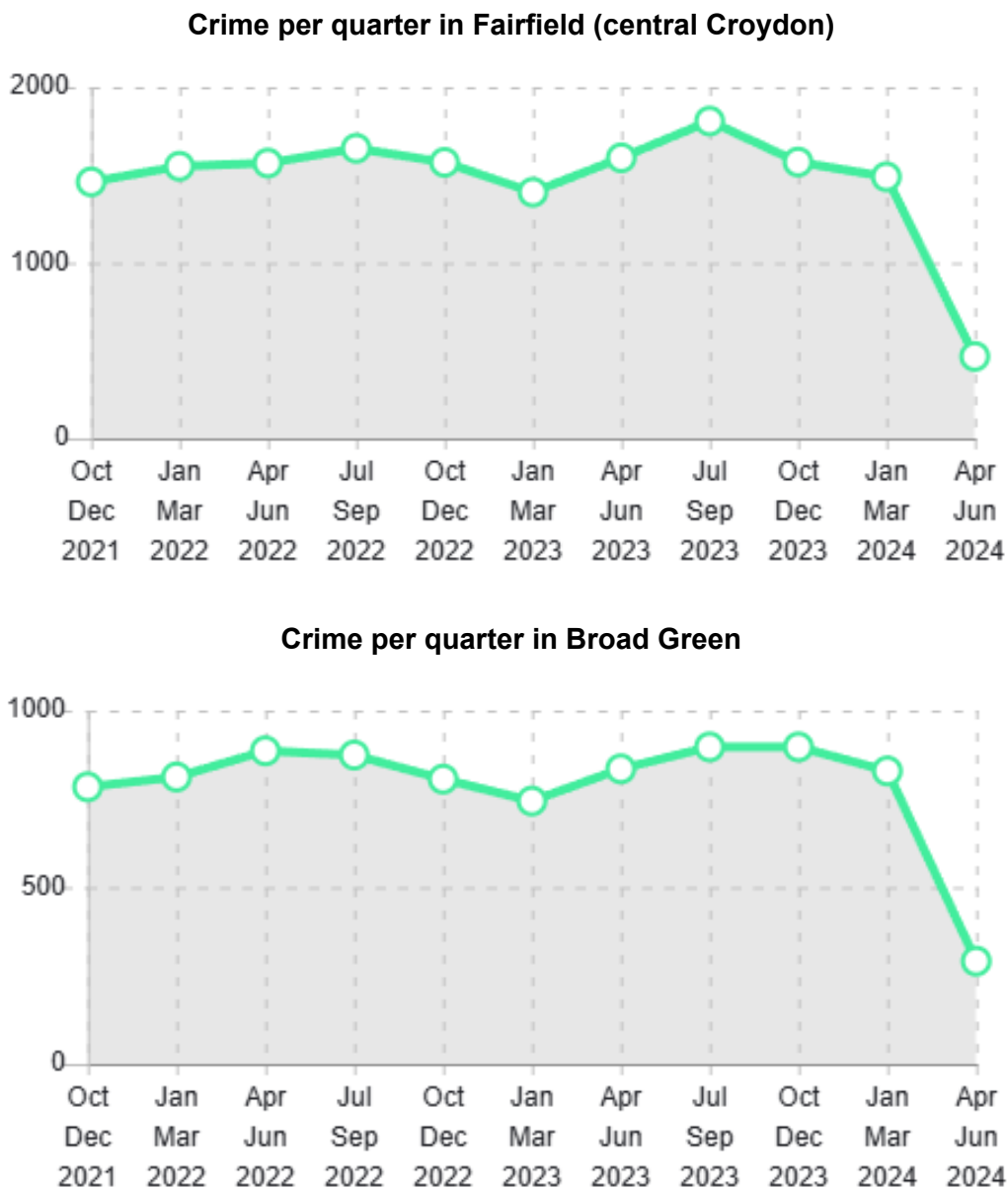
³⁴ This map shows the postcodes of those who responded to the consultation survey and reported that this library is their principal library; that they could not use another library; and how often they used it. 'Frequently' means more than once a week; 'Regularly' means every once a week to once a month; 'Occasionally' means every few months or once a year.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.118 The catchment area of Broad Green also overlaps with that of the Central Library. The consultation feedback included comments such as: “Croydon is a no-go zone – majority of people, me included, would never consider going into central Croydon, (especially) in the dark”.
- 4.119 Many types of incident in central Croydon might not directly affect library goers, such as shoplifting in the shopping centre or incidents associated with the late-night economy. Also, during the daytime, residents continue to use Croydon’s shopping centre which remains busy although it has suffered a decline, like most shopping centres in the country.
- 4.120 Nevertheless, crime in central Croydon will deter some people from visiting the Central Library. The most recent three years of crime incidents are shown in the charts below. Fairfield is the area of central Croydon which includes the shopping centre and is directly below the Broad Green reporting area which forms the southern part of the Broad Green Library catchment area. Although Fairfield’s crime statistics are higher than Broad Green’s they are both significantly higher than areas like Sanderstead.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.13: comparison of crime in Coulsdon Town and Old Coulsdon 2021-2024³⁵



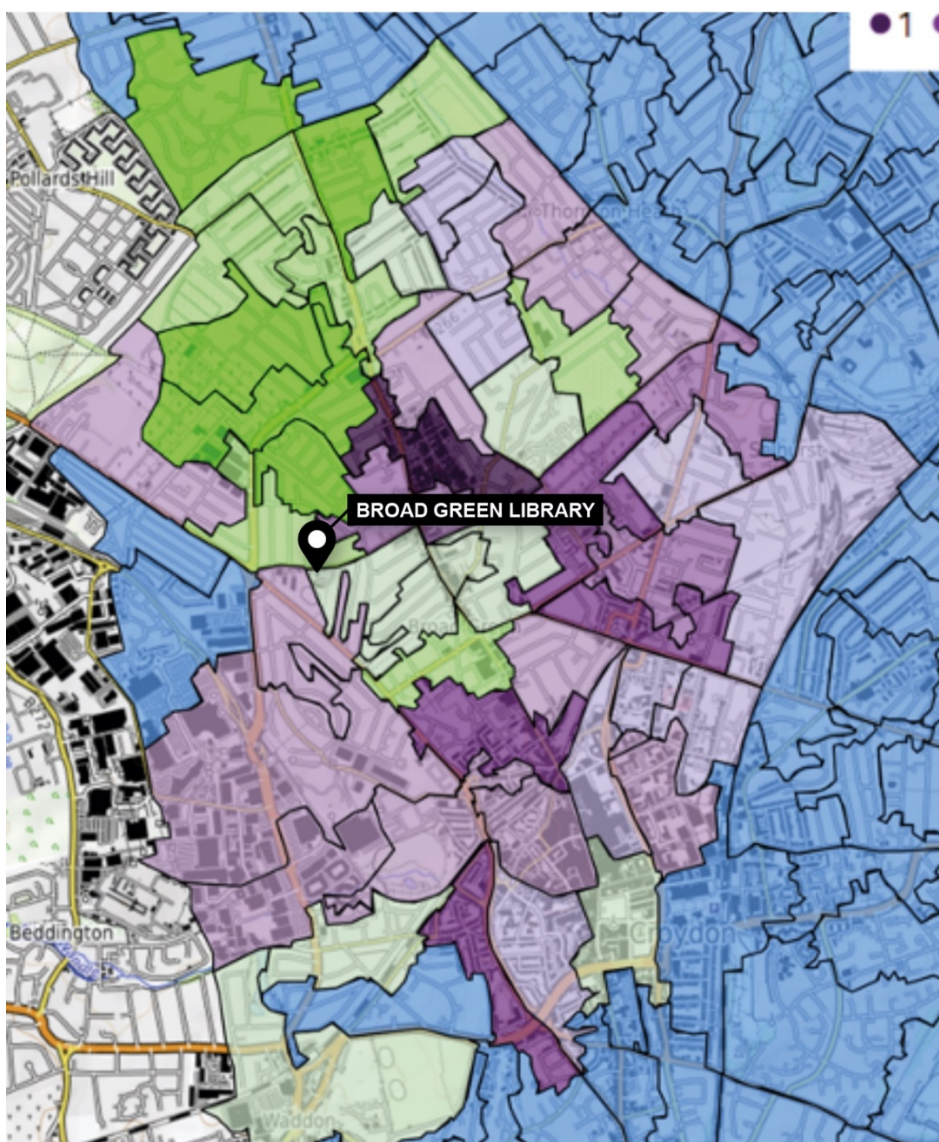
- 4.121 As a result, the proposed outreach and transport support for current users of Broad Green Library is currently focused on Thornton Heath Library which is located in a Metropolitan Police crime reporting area ('Bensham Manor') whose crime figures are considerably lower.
- 4.122 The loss of a small library serving a local community will be a blow to the individuals who rely on it for the joy of using a library and/or for company, even if it is open for just two days a week. The closure of a library can also have a wider impact on the sense of community in an area and this impact cannot be underestimated.

³⁵ Source: The Metropolitan Police who report that May, June and July 2024 data is currently not showing due to an issue with their 'data feed'.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.123 In contrast with the overall IMD deprivation ranking and most of its sub-categories, the Broad Green Library catchment areas has fewer LSOAs (five) in the two most deprived areas for 'Health Deprivation and Disability' as illustrated in the map below. Nearly half of the LSOAs for this sub-category are below the median in England.
- 4.124 This population level information identifies overall levels of concentrations in local areas, but within each area, there will be individual active users who may suffer from physical and mental health challenges. Work would be needed to communicate with all active users and other regular individual and community group users to ensure that the right communication and support is provided for those affected by the potential closure.

Figure C4.14: Health Deprivation and Disability by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)

● 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5 ● 6 ● 7 ● 8 ● 9 ● 10

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.125 However, the longer opening hours at other libraries made possible by the closure of Broad Green Library would allow for a wider service offer to be available to its users, fostering new and enriched community activity at the libraries. The intention is that this expanded offer at neighbouring libraries will contribute to improved health and wellbeing for a wider constituency – and welcoming those who currently use Broad Green Library.
- 4.126 However, it is the intention of the service, as set out in the EQIA at Appendix D to move existing activities at Broad Green Library to nearby local venues which have been suggested through the consultation. These have been researched to confirm the library offer would align with the existing programmes and ethos at these venues. Once there is a continuity of regular activities established, library staff would begin setting up a community collection of books and other materials based on local requirements.
- 4.127 This collection will be maintained by the outreach team once it is in place (expected April 2025), and the library service will have an increased presence at events, health settings, school and education settings to promote the library offer and support with digital access. There will be further engagement with local schools and nurseries, sheltered accommodation, care homes and community groups as the service develops.
- 4.128 The Home Library Service will continue to be available for housebound residents, those in care homes and sheltered accommodation and those who cannot visit a library, and this service has already been offered to Broad Green residents as part of the consultation.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.129 After reviewing the feedback from consultation and examining background data in greater depth, it remains the recommendation to consider the closure of Broad Green Library:
- The overall performance of the library is comparatively low, reflecting its opening hours and its poor location. The active users of the library represent just 1.5% of the catchment area population.
 - Although its catchment area has a large population and LSOAs with high relative deprivation, its catchment area is largely also within the catchment areas of Central, Thornton Heath and Norbury libraries.
 - Although the library itself is on a road with poor public transport access, the catchment area is served by bus routes.
- 4.130 There are impacts on library users with mobility challenges and for young people, particularly those using the adjacent primary school. There are also minority communities, particularly the Tamil community, whose activities would be impacted. Mitigation would be required focusing on outreach including:
- To the wider school community in the area and other community facilities.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- Support for the local Tamil community and community group to make use of Thornton Heath Library as a new community base.
- A programme of transport to enable attendees at Tamil community group activities to make use of Thornton Heath Library.

4.131 The impacts and mitigations are described further in the EQIA at Appendix D.

Recommendations

1. That Broad Green Library is closed to allow for the reinvestment of resources in neighbouring libraries and in library outreach in the Broad Green area.
2. That the mitigations summarised above and in the EQIA be implemented.
3. That further engagement and research is undertaken into travel issues, including the design of a transport provision to Thornton Heath Library and levels and perceptions of crime in the area.
4. That engagement takes place with Tamil community groups to help ensure their activities can be continued in new locations.

Review of Central Library

Summary

- 4.132 Central Library is the largest library and its performance is the highest in the network. Its budget is also the highest. It is located within the Croydon Clocktower complex which is in the town centre, but a short distance from shopping streets and the shopping centres.

Table C4.7: performance, location and building data

Performance			Location		Rating
	Total	Rank			
Opening hours (pw)	40	1		Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	335,028	1		Footfall	
Library issues	170,539	1		Public transport access	
Event attendances	12,074	1		Building	
PC hours in use	31,404	1		Suitability	
Budget (£)	1,150,998	1		Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	3	13		Condition	
Active users	19,940	1		Internal area (m²)	6633

Performance

- 4.133 The library's performance is the highest in the network on every indicator. Its budget is also the highest, but its high usage means that its unit cost per visit is the lowest.
- 4.134 However, compared with pre-pandemic years, its current performance is poor and has not recovered well since the pandemic. Although its opening days were reduced in 2022 by just one day from 6 to 5 days a week, overall hours were reduced by a quarter.
- 4.135 In 2023-24, visitor numbers at 335,028 were still just 44% of the figure of 814,435 achieved in 2019-20. Less than ten years ago, visitor numbers were nearly 1 million. The intensity of use for the hours that it is open has also fallen as visits per hour are down by 45% from 293 per hour in 2019-20 to 161 per hour in 2023-24.
- 4.136 A wide range of activities and events are laid on, albeit their frequency is low for a busy central library.

Location

- 4.137 The central library is Croydon's busiest, but its entrance is not visible from outside. There is little external signage directing people to the central library within the Clocktower building.
- 4.138 The library is a short distance from the main shopping area in Croydon's town centre and so does not benefit from direct passing trade. The closure of stores and delays in progressing the redevelopment of parts of Croydon's shopping district are likely to have impacted on footfall, in common with many shopping centres across the country.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.139 Croydon's town centre is very well served by railway stations, trams and buses. Thanks to the pedestrianised High Street and dedicated cycles lanes, there is easy access by walking and cycling.
- 4.140 However, a new location for the central library at the heart of the shopping centre would improve the library's performance.

Building

- 4.141 Built at the same time as the Town Hall, the Croydon Clocktower complex has a grand and striking Victorian frontage, with the tall clocktower and a piazza area outside the entrance of the Clocktower.
- 4.142 Behind the Victorian façade, the central library was newly built in the 1990s and is spread over four storeys (the top, third floor is no longer used by the library as it is rented to an outside organisation). The library features down and up escalators between floors. The constant noise from the escalators is very intrusive as they are not enclosed. It is likely that the energy usage and maintenance costs of the escalators are high.
- 4.143 While the Clocktower entrance is grand, the interior entrance to the library appears dated. There are units to the side of library entrance that appear closed. The overall experience of arriving at the library is not a welcoming one. The interior design is from the library's construction thirty years ago, with simple shelving and functional furniture. The lighting and suspended ceiling gives the library the feeling of an office. The overall visual impact of the library is very dull and dated, although the children's library is colourful.
- 4.144 There is sufficient space for the main functions of a central library and considerable study space which is reportedly well used. There is a small 'event space' on the first floor but the space is limited, is open plan with the rest of the library and there is no permanent AV equipment. There is funding from Library Improvement Fund (Arts Council England) to create an event space in this area with meeting/activity/exhibition space with AV equipment, toilets & tea point, expected in April/May 2025. The library has limited flexibility due to the book stacks being static, so the floor space cannot be readily reconfigured on an ad hoc basis.

Population and need

- 4.145 With the exception of Thornton Heath library, the Central Library's catchment area has the highest population of the thirteen libraries.

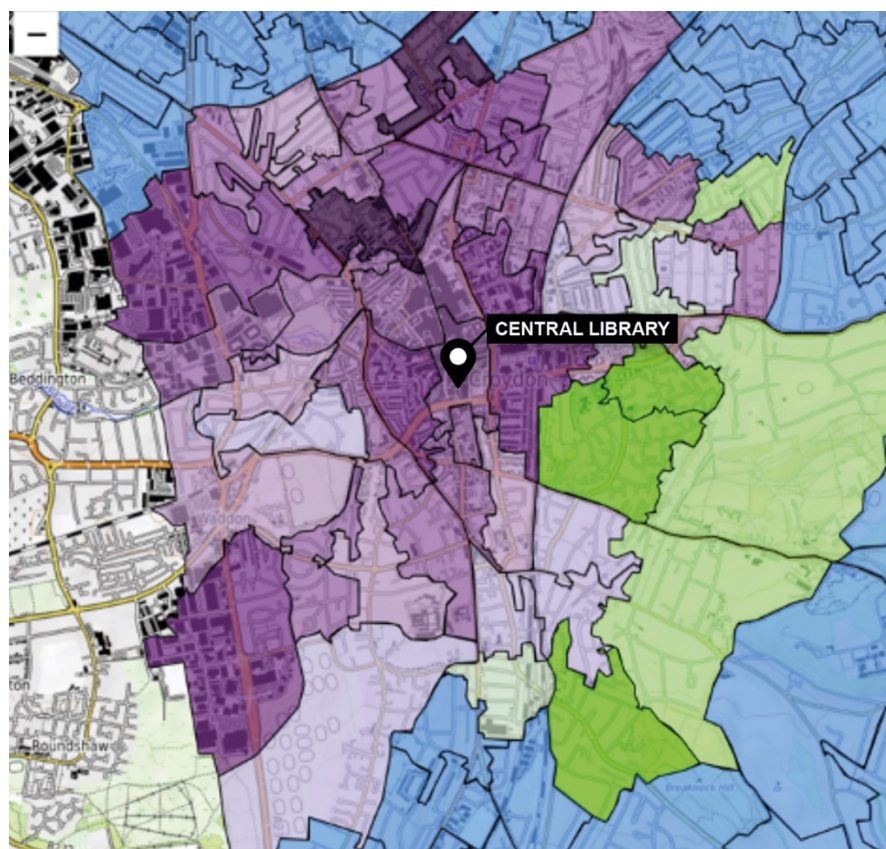
Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C4.8: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	72,659
	OA population within 1.25 miles	98,615
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	11
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Broad Green (1.4) Thornton Heath (1.9) Ashburton (2.0)
	Schools within 1km	4
Community use	Existing community group uses	11
	Number of volunteers	14

4.146 The catchment area includes a sizeable number of LSOAs among the most deprived in England. It also includes a fair number of LSOAs with very high levels of deprivation (in the top decile) for sub-factors of the IMD such as ‘income deprivation affecting old people’ and, particularly, ‘barriers to housing and services’.

Figure C4.15: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



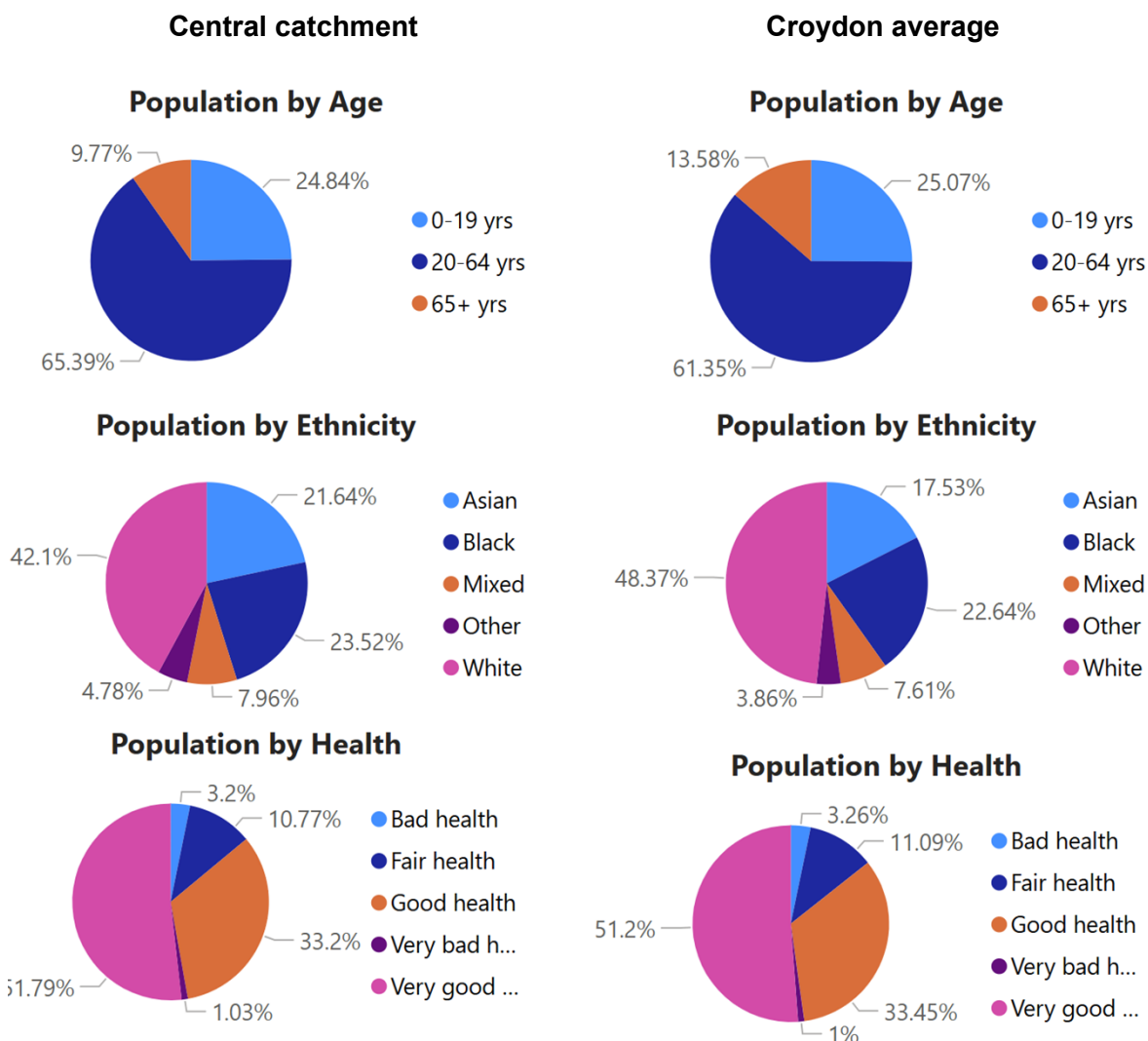
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.147 The population has a lower proportion of people who are over 65, and also a lower proportion of people of White ethnicity, compared with the average for Croydon.

Figure C4.16: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

- 4.148 Central Library accounts for nearly half of active users, half of all visits and nearly a third of all physical issues and its location in the centre of Croydon makes it fairly easy to reach on public transport from most parts of the borough for those determined to use it. Its size allows it to offer the full range of library services, although its current interior design limits its use for events.
- 4.149 Given its importance to the library service for the public, closure cannot be considered and its catchment area includes areas of high deprivation. However, its problems need to be addressed.
- 4.150 The principal problems are the building and its location. The continuing work to regenerate Croydon's town centre and shopping centres may throw up the opportunity to relocate the library to the busy heart of Croydon's shopping centre. Its performance will be improved if resources can be found to return it to 6 day a week opening and longer opening hours.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.151 Although excessive expenditure should be limited given the need to find a new location, expenditure on improved and flexible furniture to a new standard of design would be worthwhile as it could be transferred to a new location in future.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.152 The Central Library is an essential part of the library network and should be retained:
- The library is the highest performing library in the network with the largest budget and lowest unit costs.
 - It accounts for half of all visits and hosts a popular programme of activities that could be expanded.
 - The number of visits remains well under half of pre-pandemic levels and is only slowly recovering.
 - If resources can be found to reintroduce six day opening and longer hours, this would make better use of this large asset.
 - Its catchment area includes a large population and LSOAs with high levels of deprivation.
 - The library is invisible from the street and the building is poorly designed and its interior design limits the range of library activities possible.
 - Opportunities should be sought for moving the library to a better location and more suitable building as part of the regeneration of Croydon's shopping district.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Central Library should be retained but improved.**
- 2. That an alternative location should be sought in a more suitable building at the heart of the changing shopping district.**
- 3. That, in the interim, investment is made in the interior design that could be easily transferred to a new location.**

Review of Coulsdon Library

Summary

- 4.153 Coulsdon Library is a small well-located library in the busy Coulsdon Town Centre with performance generally around the median but with a relatively low cost per visitor.

Table C4.9: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	24	3	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	34,499	5	Footfall	
Library issues	34,361	5	Public transport access	
Event attendances	1,524	10	Building	
PC hours in use	1,461	8	Suitability	
Budget (£)	178,940	6	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	5	10	Condition	
Active users	1,460	8	Internal area (m ²)	337

Performance

- 4.154 Although a relatively small library open three days a week, its comparative performance is fairly good and its unit costs comparatively low. Coulsdon is open three days a week and has the fourth lowest costs per visitor (£5), which is below the median (£6). The number of active users is a little below the median (1,493).
- 4.155 Issues and visits are fifth highest out of 13. The event attendance figures rank only tenth in the network, offering potential for improvement. In addition, the number of PC hours are also a little low at 8th out of 13.

Location

- 4.156 Coulsdon Library is a prominent building located directly on Brighton Road within Coulsdon's extended shopping district, albeit towards the somewhat quieter end of the parade, away from the Coulsdon Town station and two main supermarkets (Aldi and Waitrose). Despite this, the library will benefit from the shopping district's natural footfall.
- 4.157 The library is on several bus routes and Coulsdon Town and Coulsdon South train stations are a third of a mile away. Its location allows for relatively safe walking and cycling, although the main roads into Coulsdon are very busy. There is on-street parking and car parks nearby.

Building

- 4.158 The brick building is of 1930s design and is in fair condition, with some attractive detailing and large windows creating a bright interior. The age and height of the building and size of the windows present problems in managing temperatures.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.159 A community garden project (the Hive) has successfully maintained the garden at the rear to a high standard. The entrance to the library is rather unattractive and dingy, with discoloured brick and paintwork and messy signage. The interior, and internal paintwork, is in fair condition albeit drab, but the messy entrance, discoloured blinds and plethora of signage and leaflets create an overall impression of neglect.
- 4.160 There is enough space for the core activities of a small branch library with some space available for partner use. Bookshelves are fixed to the walls, although there are some mobile bookshelves. The small size of the ground floor and current layout limits the scope for alternative uses, but this could be improved considerably with the benefit of improved interiors and better furniture. Ideas have been suggested for opening up the rear of the library entrance lobby, which could transform users' experience of the library.

Population and need

- 4.161 The library's catchment area has a smaller level of population, reflecting the lower density of its housing and includes some areas with higher level of deprivation (serving one LSOA identified within the 20% most deprived communities in England). The catchment area also overlaps with Bradmore Green's catchment area.

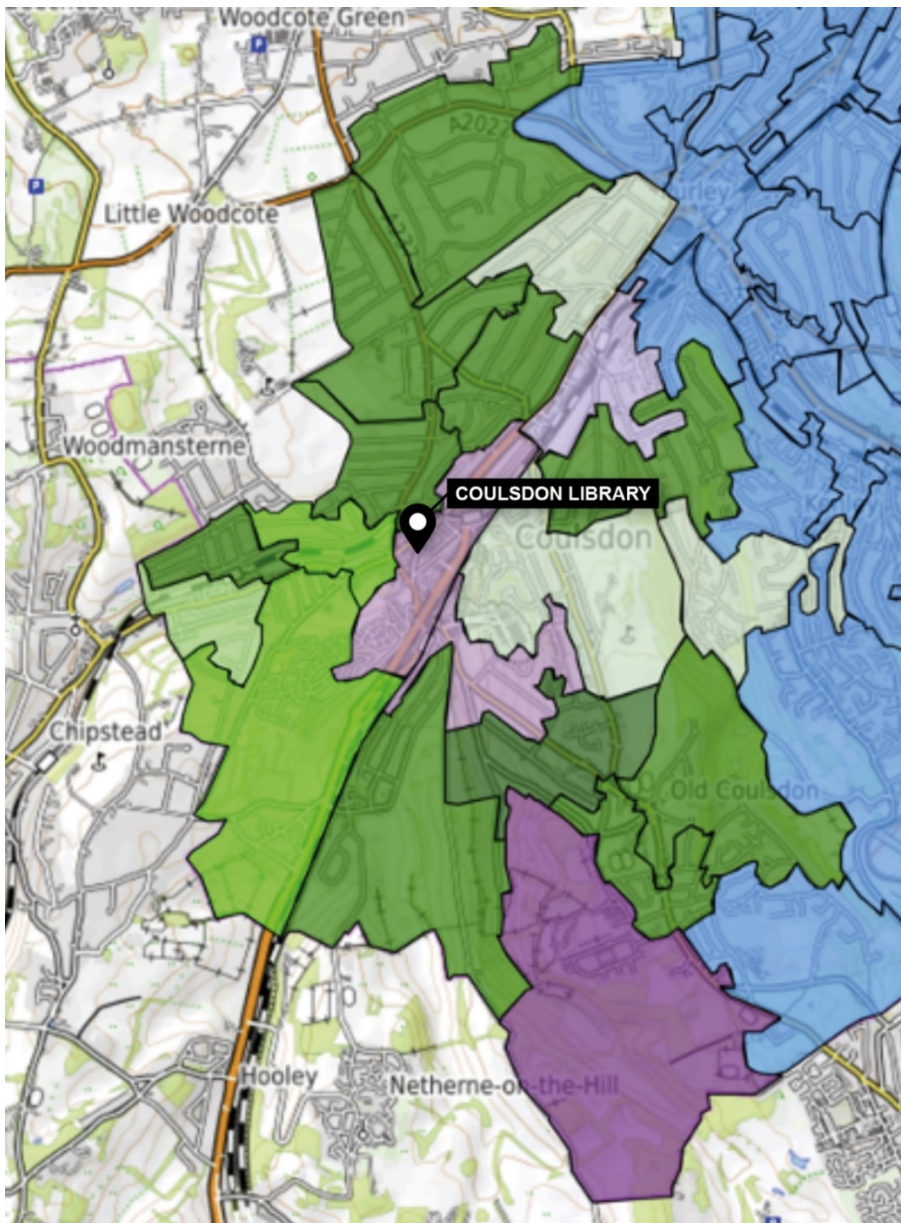
Table C4.10: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	21,978
	OA population within 1.25 miles	28,234
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	1
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Bradmore Green (1.2) Purley (1.7)
	Schools within 1km	2
Community use	Existing community group uses	3
	Number of volunteers	5

- 4.162 There are a small number of volunteers within the library at present, however the Hive has an active team of volunteers working on the community garden and grounds maintenance. There may be a possibility of working with the Hive on extending their involvement in the library and harnessing that community support.
- 4.163 To the north and south of the library building there are also numerous LSOAs that are amongst some of the least deprived in England. It should be noted that due to the large geographical size of the LSOAs, they are included in the map below, but only a smaller proportion of the population of, say, the LSOA furthest south which houses the Tollers Estate, will be counted towards the population of the library's catchment area.
- 4.164 There is one LSOA close to the town centre which is in the second most deprived decile for Income Deprivation Affecting Children which underlines the importance of Coulsdon Library increasing its opening hours and remodelling its interior to make it a more attractive to children and their families.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.17: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



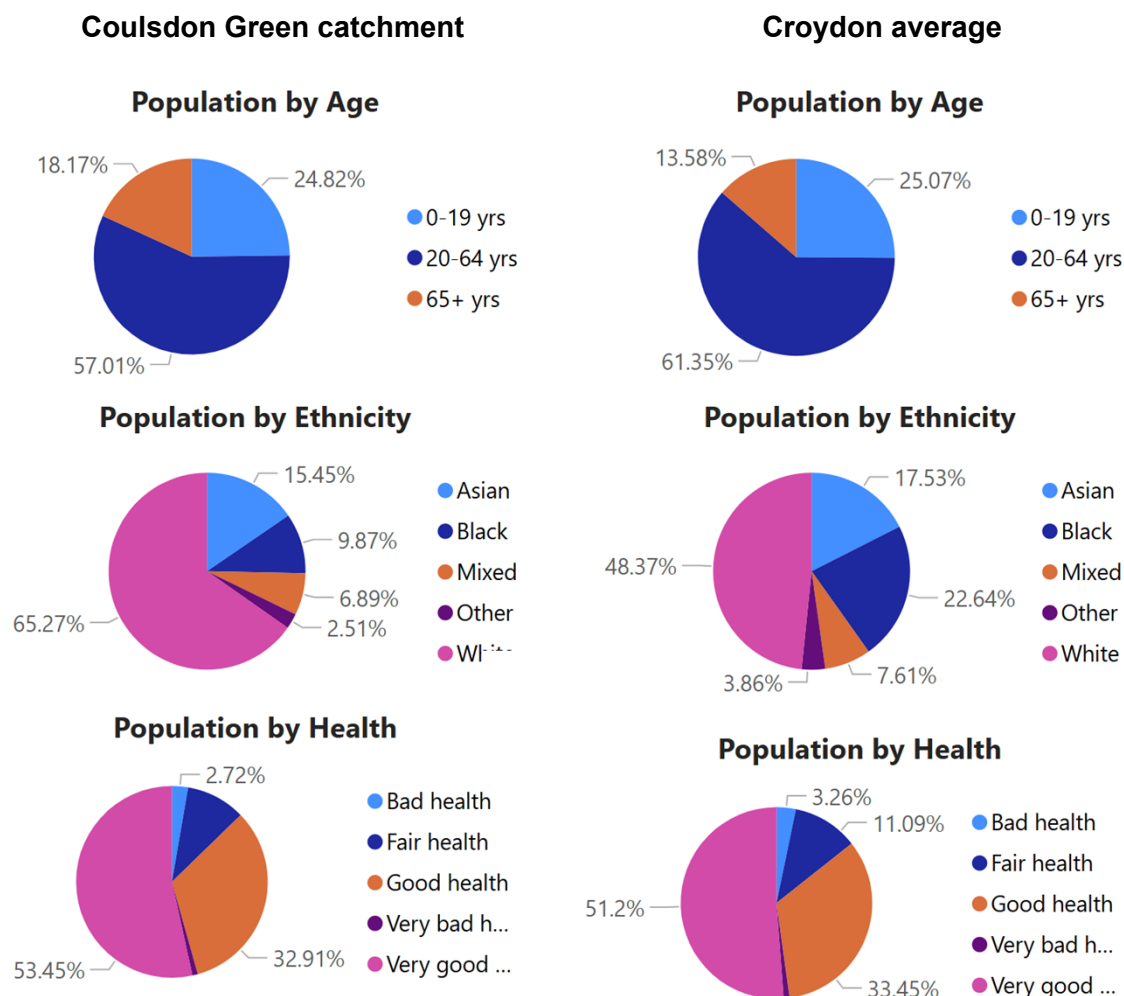
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.165 The population has a slightly higher proportion of people who are over 65; higher of people of White ethnicity; and lower of Black ethnicity than the average for Croydon.

Figure C4.18: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

- 4.166 As one of the more popular libraries (despite its small size) and one of only two libraries in good locations in the borough, closure would have a serious impact on residents in the south of the borough who are some distance from alternatives.
- 4.167 The option of closing Coulsdon Library and retaining Bradmore Green Library would have a significant adverse impact on service take-up as Bradmore Green Library is so small and poorly located. It would leave a large distance (2.4 miles) between that and Purley Library.
- 4.168 If the recommendation to consider Bradmore Green Library for closure is accepted, Coulsdon would be the main library serving the Coulsdon Town and Old Coulsdon area, supplemented by outreach including to the children's centre and the Tollers Estate. The proposed additional transport for people with mobility issues who currently use Bradmore Green Library would give them access to Coulsdon Library's wider offer.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.169 With an increase in opening hours, Coulsdon Library would be well-placed to become a more active community resource for the population in the far south of the borough and has the size and layout (with investment in the interior) to offer a far more comprehensive service offer than is possible in the small Bradmore Green Library and to absorb that library's users.
- 4.170 It is recommended that this library is retained and improved.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.171 Coulsdon Library is a small, well-located library in the busy Coulsdon Town Centre with performance generally around the median but with a relatively low cost per visitor.
- 4.172 An increase in opening hours would enable the library to extend its offer and welcome new users who currently use Bradmore Green Library.
- 4.173 The building's interior needs refurbishment in order to make it more adaptable and better able to provide a full service.
- 4.174 Remodelling of the library layout could offer benefits, including a new access route to the garden.

Recommendations

- 1. That Coulsdon Library is retained as the main library for residents living in Coulsdon Town and Old Coulsdon.**
- 2. That investment is made in refurbishing the library's interior to improve its design and make it more adaptable.**
- 3. That remodelling of the library is explored with the aim to provide direct access to the community garden.**
- 4. That further partnership work on the library service offer is explored with the Hive.**

Review of New Addington Library

Summary

- 4.175 New Addington Library is located near to the New Addington shopping parade in a building shared with CALAT and a nursery. It has a comparatively large internal area compared to others in the current network but has suffered from a sharp decrease in service take-up.

Table C4.11: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	24	3	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	15,798	11	Footfall	
Library issues	8,564	13	Public transport access	
Event attendances	2,258	6	Building	
PC hours in use	2,424	6	Suitability	
Budget (£)	150,634	7	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	10	2	Condition	
Active users	769	12	Internal area (m ²)	766

Performance

- 4.176 The performance of New Addington Library has fallen drastically compared with pre-pandemic levels and its recovery is much slower than elsewhere in the network. Where once the library was one of the best performing in the network it is now one of the worst with visits lower than pre-pandemic levels and PC use significantly down.
- 4.177 The causes of this extreme decline are not yet fully understood but are thought to include closing on one of the market days, and a perception that the shared building is no longer in full use since CALAT reduced its activities and while there was no active nursery present for a period. Due to the decline in visitors, the cost per visitor is now the second highest in the network. The decline in performance needs to be understood but does call the current library into question. While visits and issues are low, the usage of PCs and attendance at events is above the median compared with other libraries.
- 4.178 There are question marks over the visitor count for New Addington Library as it is possible to bypass the counter. Equally, past visitor performance (which was much higher) may have been overstated as users of other services may have been caught by the counter when the Centre was busier.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Location

- 4.179 New Addington Library is located in the New Addington Centre on Central Parade at one end of the main shopping parade. The building dominates the sightline to one end of the parade. There is poor signage for the library, with only very small signs at the front of the building and a banner sign alerting passers-by to the library's presence. Although the Centre and Library are visible, they are at a quieter section of the parade on the other side of the road that will limit passing trade from shoppers.
- 4.180 The area of New Addington is surrounded by green space and farmland, limiting the geographic size of the resident catchment area. Central Parade is well-served by public transport and has generous car parking. The library is easily accessible by walking and cycling. There are several primary schools and a secondary school within a mile of the library.

Building

- 4.181 The New Addington Centre is a functional building with a large area of glass forming the central entrance with a large cream-coloured façade on either side. The side and rear elevations are unattractive with low barred windows to the ground floor. The design allows for an airy feel to the front of the building, but a darker interior to the ground floor.
- 4.182 Some of the exterior facades are not weathering well, with discolouration where graffiti has been overpainted. Despite this, the fabric appears to be in good condition. The glass of the two-storey is slightly reflective, making it more difficult to see what's inside the building until the visitor is quite close.
- 4.183 While there is little or no excess space in the library, there may be scope for more intensive use of the rest of the Centre. Spread over two floors, the library appears to have enough space for most library activities in a small branch library. However, the library interior is unattractive, cramped and with functional furnishings, and the children's library appears small. The library shelving is static but not fixed. In the past, staff have moved the shelves to make space for larger events and events have been held on the mezzanine level above. There are other spaces in the Centre which may be suitable for events.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Population and need

- 4.184 Although the library is no longer performing well and the population in its catchment area is relatively low, this is an area with high levels of deprivation. This includes nine LSOAs in the 20% most deprived decile nationally. Residents are some distance from any alternative library provision which is not in easy walking distance.

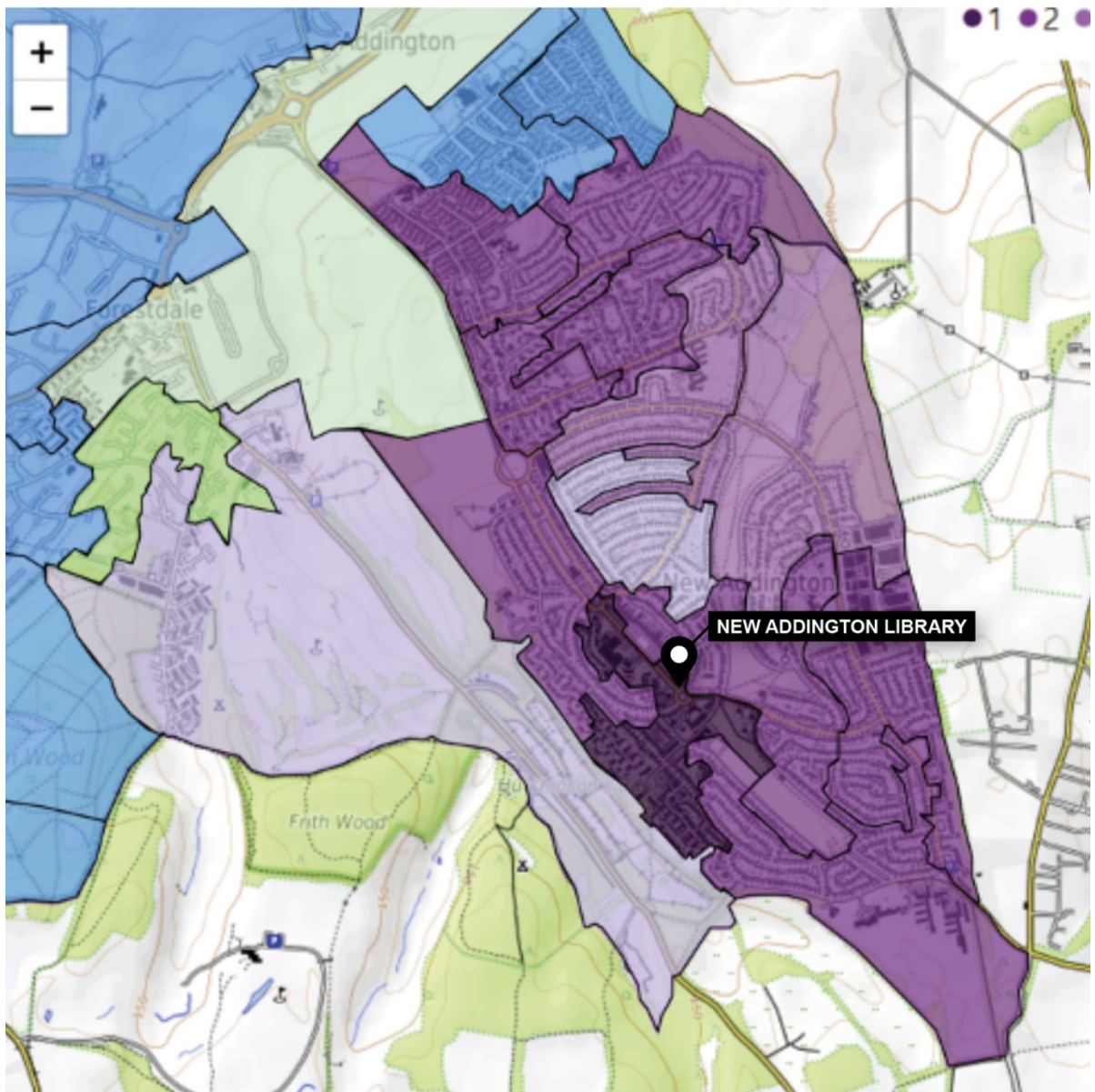
Table C4.12: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	17,912
	OA population within 1.25 miles	24,827
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	9
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Selsdon Library (2.9) West Wickham (3.5)
	Schools within 1km	1
Community use	Existing community group uses	6
	Number of volunteers	1

- 4.185 Within the library's catchment area, there are no LSOAs that are amongst the least deprived in England.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.19: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)

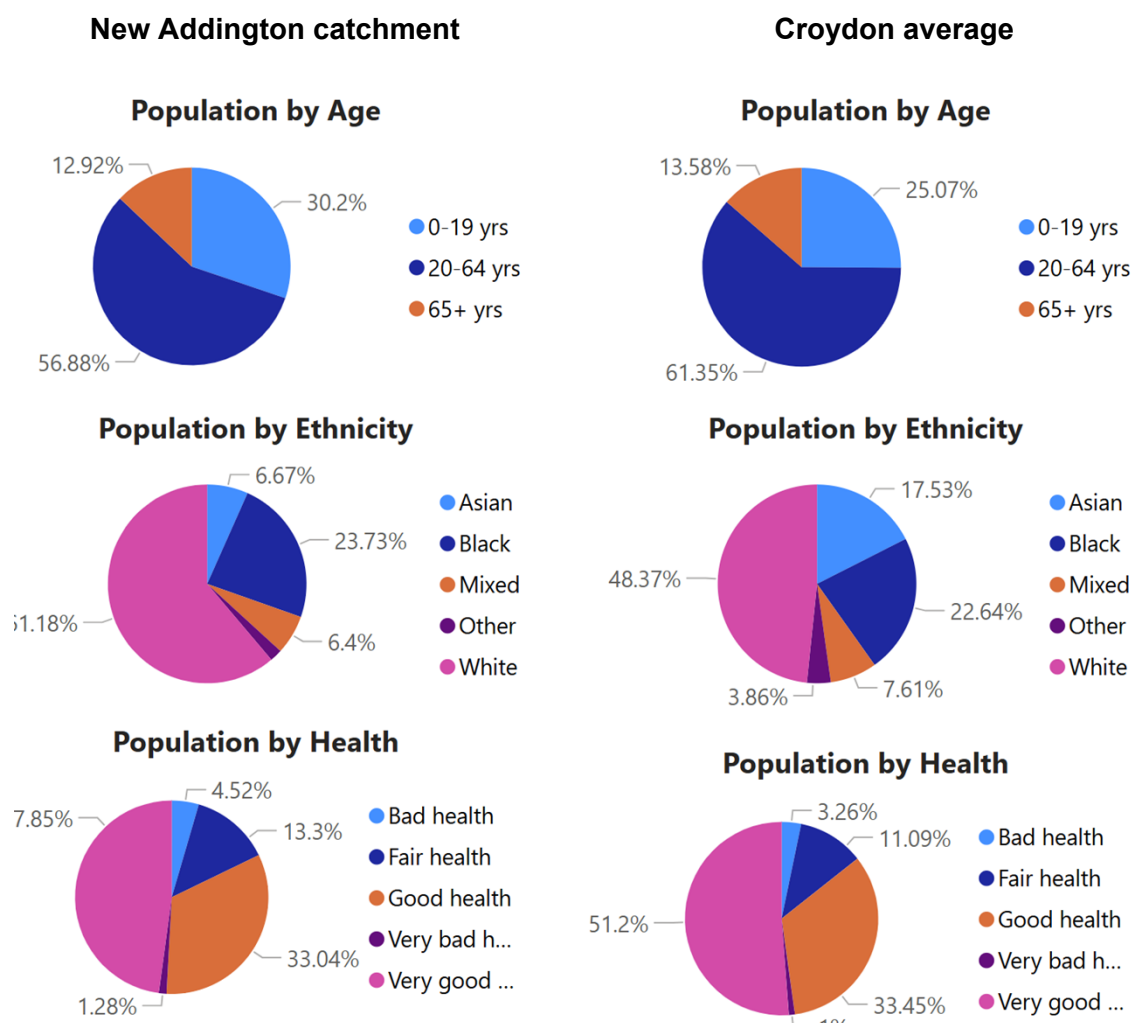


- 4.186 The library's immediate catchment area also has 11 LSOAs in the most deprived two deciles for Education, Skills and Training, issues which the library service should play a part in addressing. There are also 11 LSOAs in the most deprived two deciles for Income Deprivation Affecting Children making the library an important asset for families who cannot afford to buy children's books.
- 4.187 Within the catchment area is the area of Fieldway which should be a focus for outreach work which would become possible if resources are freed up by closures elsewhere in the network. Currently the library does not have the resource to target those most in need who are not using the library.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.188 The population has a marginally lower proportion of people who are under 65, and higher of people of White ethnicity than the average for Croydon.

Figure C4.20: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

4.189 Given that a substantial proportion of the population is in need, but the library is failing to reach many people, a rethink is required. A shared building is an asset if it is busy. The reduced activity on-site and the impression and location of the building will limit the library's growth. Long-term change might involve reducing the physical size of the library and/or relocating it in a better position on the shopping parade.

4.190 **Closure is not a realistic option given the severe level of need and remoteness of New Addington from alternative libraries.** A focus is required, supported by resources, on active outreach alongside local community centres and closer working with partners including CALAT, health and community services. A lively programme across the community is needed to ensure that people are motivated to access the benefits that the library could provide. It is recommended that this library is retained but radically improved.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Findings and recommendations

4.191 New Addington Library is an essential service for a remote area of high need and should be retained:

- The library building is not well-designed or located and change is needed to make it more effective.
- If it is to remain in the centre, improvement is needed to the library's interior design and use of space.
- A new approach to active outreach needs to be resourced in partnership with local community centres offering new service benefits.
- This new approach should also increase engagement and reach with communities across New Addington and Fieldway.

Recommendations

1. **That New Addington Library is retained but its operating model reviewed.**
2. **That the location of the library is reviewed, including the potential for the New Addington Centre to become more vibrant.**
3. **That the barriers to library use in New Addington are assessed and active outreach is introduced.**
4. **That the Council explores partnership models of service delivery to improve the offer and attraction for residents.**

Review of Norbury Library

Summary

- 4.192 Norbury Library is one of the few libraries in the network whose layout and size allow it to offer the full range of library service offers. The library has recently received significant investment with its refurbishment creating attractive spaces and interior design.

Table C4.13: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	24	3	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	29,993	6	Footfall	
Library issues	29,242	7	Public transport access	
Event attendances	3,082	4	Building	
PC hours in use	4,379	4	Suitability	
Budget (£)	185,098	5	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	6	7	Condition	
Active users	2,251	4	Internal area (m ²)	1192

Performance

- 4.193 Following an extended period of closure for refurbishment, the number of visits and issues is close to the median for the network for 2022/23 and levels of event attendance and PC hours in use are higher than most. The cost per visitor is at the median level in the network (£6). There is no active marketing of the Hall and so venue hire income is low.
- 4.194 As well as suffering a reduction in opening hours like other libraries, Norbury Library has also suffered from the legacy of a period of closure in the year before the COVID lockdown. Users are returning with visits increasing from 17,030 in 2022-23 to 29,993 in 2023-24, rising in the ranking for issues and visits to median and above respectively. Usage is still considerably down since before the refurbishment.

Location

- 4.195 Norbury Library is one of the larger libraries, in an Edwardian building in a prominent location on the busy London Road, the A23, albeit some distance from the London Road shopping parade on the approach to Norbury station. As a result, it is likely that most users of the library are making a dedicated journey to it. While signage is legible, they would not easily catch the eye of passers-by during the daytime. The entrance is on a quieter side road, Beatrice Avenue. Overall, the library is in a visible location, but its signage is too discreet to maximise awareness.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.196 The nearby shopping parade on London Road is well-provided with a range of shopping and dining opportunities and there are few vacancies at the heart of the shopping parade. There is a considerable amount of road traffic, which limits its attractiveness for retail browsing. The library is well served by buses and is half a mile from Norbury Station. This is a library that could be cycled to conveniently. The library can easily be walked to from the surrounding residential area.

Building

- 4.197 The library has an attractive 1930s frontage of brick and stone and a slate roof with large sections of glass rooflights. The library has been recently refurbished, with attractive interior design, and the exterior looking in very good condition. The building has problems, particularly with poor energy efficiency even after the refurbishment. It is expensive to heat in winter and has in the past had to be closed at times due to excessive summer heat. Most of the windows are set high on the frontage which means that it is not possible to see the interior, except through the glass entrance doors.
- 4.198 There is a high standard of interior design with attractive furniture and new shelving. There is a counter in place for a café. There is a generous amount of space for activities. The community hall is a larger space which could serve events but is limited to attendances of 60 max. There is a separate Children's Library which can be closed off for activities. The size of the building and the zoning of spaces enables it to provide the full range of library services.

Population and need

- 4.199 With high levels of housing density, the library's catchment area has a relatively large population which overlaps with that for Broad Green Library. It includes areas with significant levels of deprivation. The library's catchment area has six LSOAs identified within the 20% most deprived communities in England).
- 4.200 It is notable that the nearest library is not a Croydon library but is Merton's Pollards Hill Library which is less than a mile away. Merton Council is also a member of The Library Consortium which allows residents in both boroughs to use each other's libraries. Thornton Heath Library is just over 1 mile away and active users over the past year registered at Norbury overlap with Thornton Heath Library's distribution of active users.

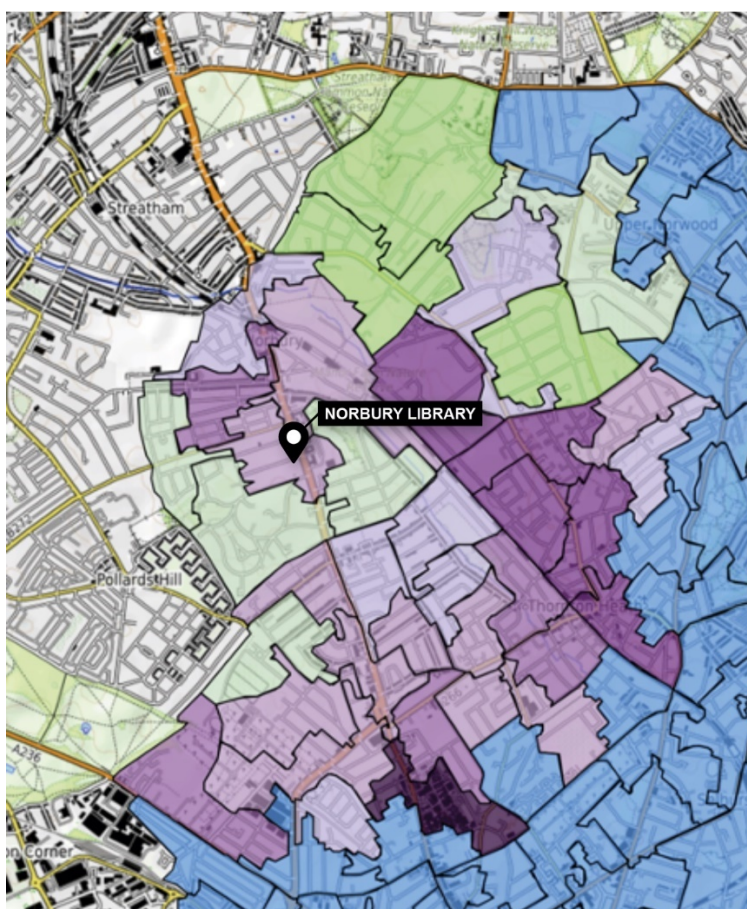
Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C4.14: summary of population, need and community

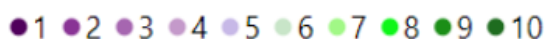
Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	45,920
	OA population within 1.25 miles	67,508
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	6
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Pollards Hill (0.8) Thornton Heath (1.2) Broad Green (1.7) Streatham (1.9)
	Schools within 1km	1
Community use	Existing community group uses	4
	Number of volunteers	2

4.201 To the north, north-east, and west, of the library building, there are also a handful of LSOAs that are less deprived compared to others located within the library’s catchment area.

Figure C4.21: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)

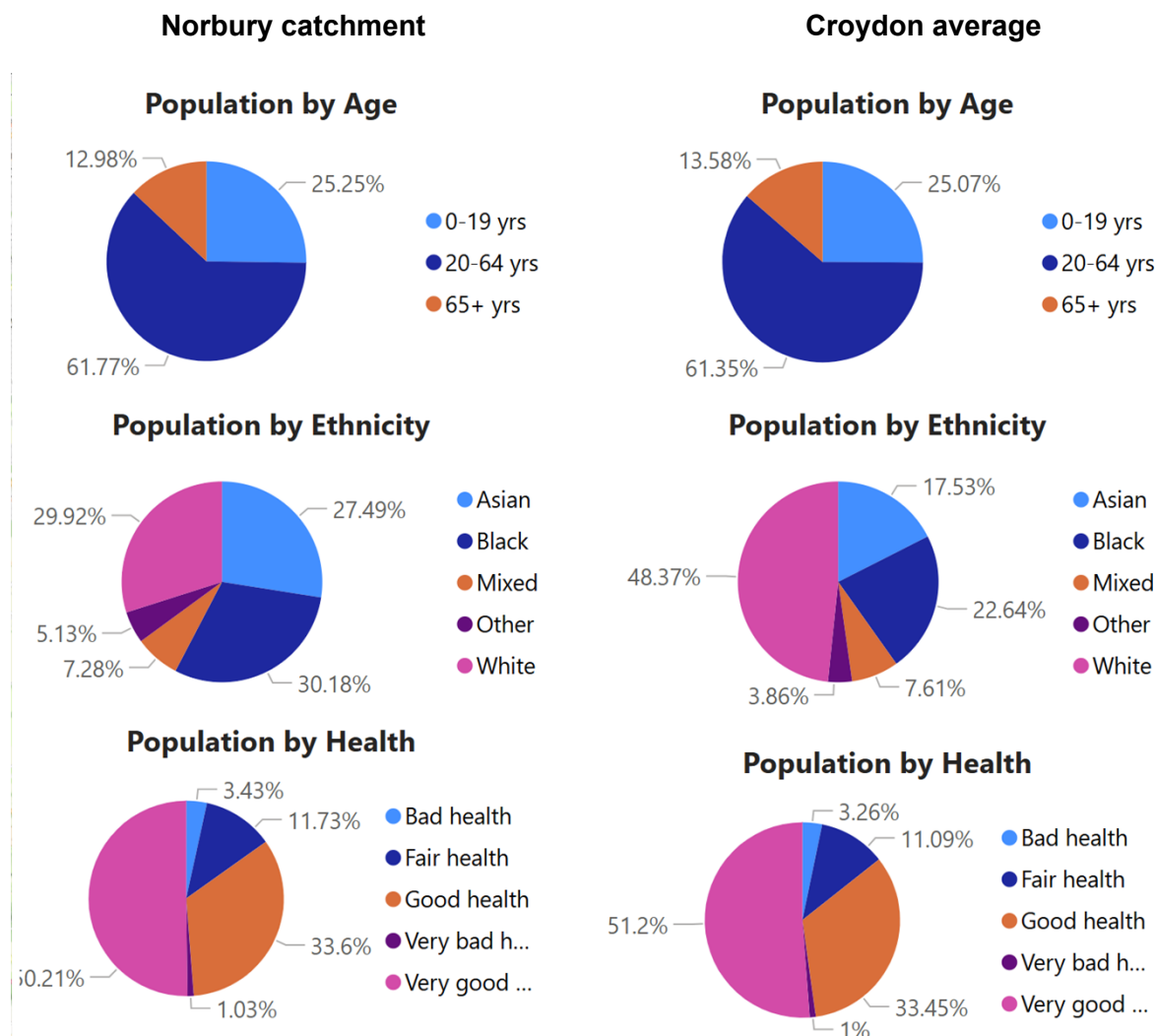


Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.202 The population has a marginally lower proportion of people who are over 65; and a lower proportion of people of White ethnicity than the average for Croydon.

4.203 The library’s catchment area includes areas of high need and a majority of Asian, Black, Mixed and Other ethnic groups, although much of its catchment area is shared with Thornton Heath.

Figure C4.22: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

4.204 Whilst the library has recently received significant investment with its refurbishment creating attractive spaces, it appears that the library’s location will continue to limit its performance. Its impressive interiors following the substantial investment in the building could reasonably be expected to result in a surge in demand.

4.205 Thornton Heath Library’s visits per hour (31 per hour) were twice the level of Norbury Library’s (15 per hour) for the period April to September 2023. The number of visits in that same financial year are only just over half of that achieved by Coulsdon Library, for example, despite being in a building three times the size. However, its attendance levels have been improving and should improve further with longer opening hours.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.206 However, it continues to meet evident need, performing comparatively well for event attendances and PC hours in use, serving a catchment area that includes areas with high levels of deprivation. With more resources and active programming, the library could fulfil a more important role in the life of the community.
- 4.207 It is recommended that this library is retained.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.208 The building's performance is improving rapidly and is now among the better used facilities with the capacity to improve still faster.
- 4.209 The building is in a visible location on a busy road and has sufficient space in a good condition to deliver a comprehensive programme across the Universal Offers for an area with a large population with high levels of need.
- 4.210 There is the potential to explore opportunities to develop the available space for hire in order to generate increased use and income.
- 4.211 The building is well supported by local community organisations with an interest in its future. There may be the opportunity for further collaboration.
- 4.212 Despite the challenges of the building, its attractive interiors and generous spaces could make it an important cultural asset, thanks to the hall's potential as a large meeting and performance space.

Recommendations

- 1. That Norbury Library is retained.**
- 2. That the operating model for the building is reviewed including options to license space for hire or tenancy to generate income and footfall.**
- 3. That the Council explores with community organisations their interest in the building and/or community management of the library.**
- 4. That further research is conducted into barriers to library use in areas of high deprivation in Norbury for active outreach.**

Review of Purley Library

Summary

- 4.213 Purley Library is one of the larger libraries, in a Grade 2 listed building, with a spacious children’s library and a large reference/reading room. Despite Purley town centre having good transport links and a large Tesco, Purley Library is in a poor location which results in a poor level of performance given its size.

Table C4.15: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	16	9	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	18,486	9	Footfall	
Library issues	29,041	8	Public transport access	
Event attendances	1,906	9	Building	
PC hours in use	1,392	9	Suitability	
Budget (£)	125,598	10	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	7	6	Condition	
Active users	1,493	7	Internal area (m ²)	610

Performance

- 4.214 The library’s number of active users and issues are at or just below the median of the thirteen libraries, but other performance is generally low given the size of the library, ranking below the median at ninth for library visits, event attendance and PC hours in use, The unit costs of the library at £7 per visit are just above the median (£6) perhaps reflecting the lower budget (the third lowest in the network).
- 4.215 The library’s performance has struggled to recover from the twin impacts of COVID and the sharp reduction in opening hours, achieving in 2023-24 just 39% of the visitor numbers in 2019-20. The library will struggle to improve its performance in its current location.

Location

- 4.216 The library’s location is very poor, as it is on a busy section of the one-way system on the A23 en route to Purley Way that is isolated from the high street and Tesco. The speed of traffic on the one-way system and poor signage make it hard to notice the building. It is a short walk from Purley's shopping district and from Tesco but is reached via several pedestrian crossings negotiating busy roads. The library can be reached on foot and by bicycle although the one-way system and gyratory are challenging for cyclists.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.217 Purley town centre is an important hub in the south of the borough. The nearby shopping district has good bus and rail links and car parking in the multi-storey car park and at the Tesco site. If the library could be relocated to the high street, possibly as part of the redevelopment of the leisure centre, it would benefit from greater visibility and could more easily fit into people's routines, whether as part of their travels or shopping.

Building

- 4.218 The library, which is Grade II listed, was built in the 1930s with a large, high-ceilinged main building and single storey side elevation. In front of the taller side of the building on Foxley Lane, is a small green which is home to Purley Fountain and is well-maintained by volunteers. The main elevation and entrance doors are attractive, but that entrance is not in use. The entrance on the side elevation on Banstead Road is anonymous. The exterior requires renovation and the size of the single-glazed windows creates difficulties with temperature control and noise from the A23.
- 4.219 The entrance is uninviting, and the windows offer limited visibility of the interior. The interior decoration is poor and neglected and makes the interior feel gloomy. The shelving in the library is fixed, limiting the ability to reconfigure the main library for other uses. The interior is very spacious which would allow for more intensive use of the space and possibly sharing with other services.
- 4.220 With investment the building would be large enough to accommodate the full range of library services, although the wisdom of such an investment is questionable given its location.

Population and need

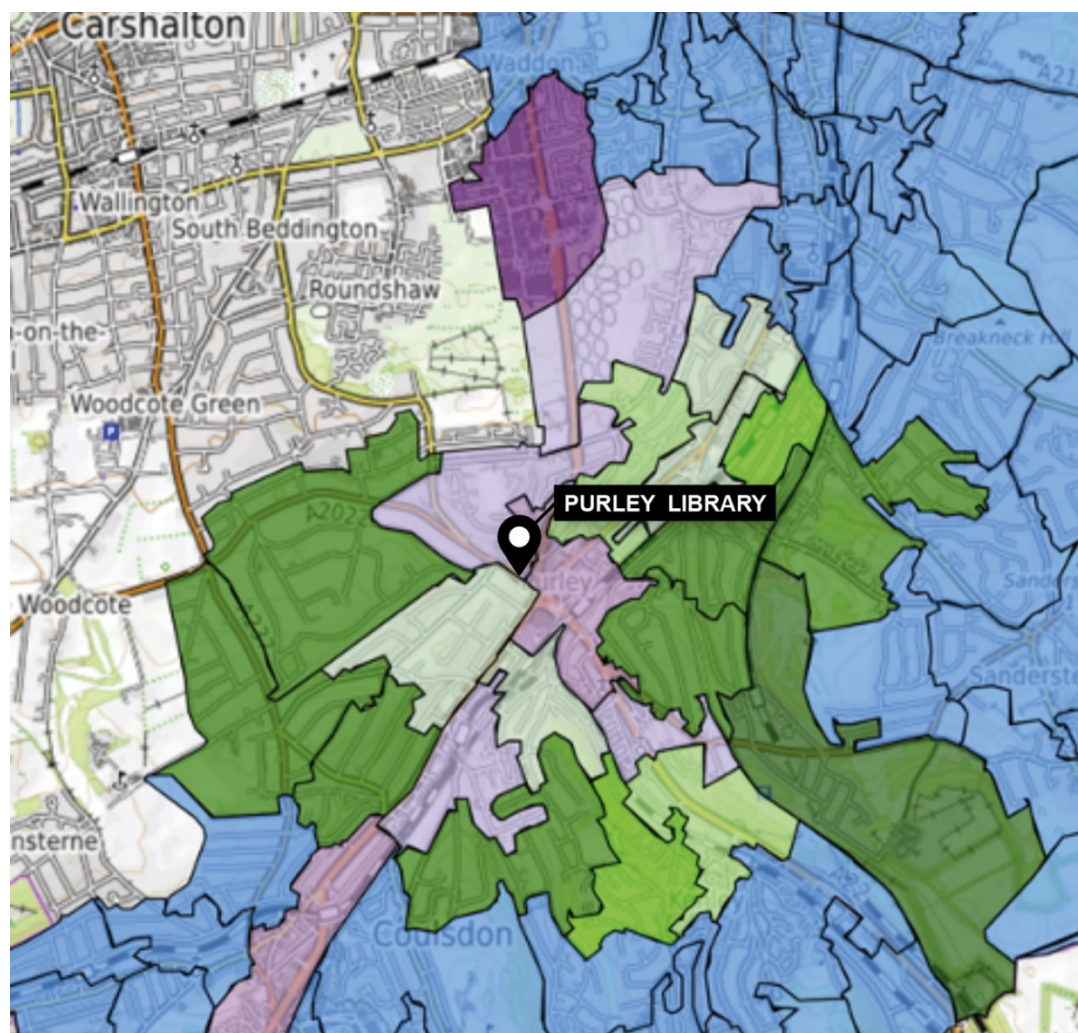
- 4.221 The population in the catchment area is comparatively small due to the generally low density of housing, but there is an area of high deprivation in Waddon to the north of the library (one of the LSOAs in the top 20% most deprived in England), outside its immediate geographic catchment area, but closer to the Phoenix Centre in Sutton. However, geography and the Phoenix Centre's location make it relatively inconvenient to reach from that part of Waddon. Generally, the catchment areas suffers from lower levels of deprivation with the majority of LSOAs being in the 5 least deprived deciles.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C4.16: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	24,561
	OA population within 1.25 miles	34,829
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	1
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Phoenix Centre (1.4) Coulston (1.7) Sanderstead Library (1.9)
	Schools within 1km	3
Community use	Existing community group uses	6
	Number of volunteers	2

Figure C4.23: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



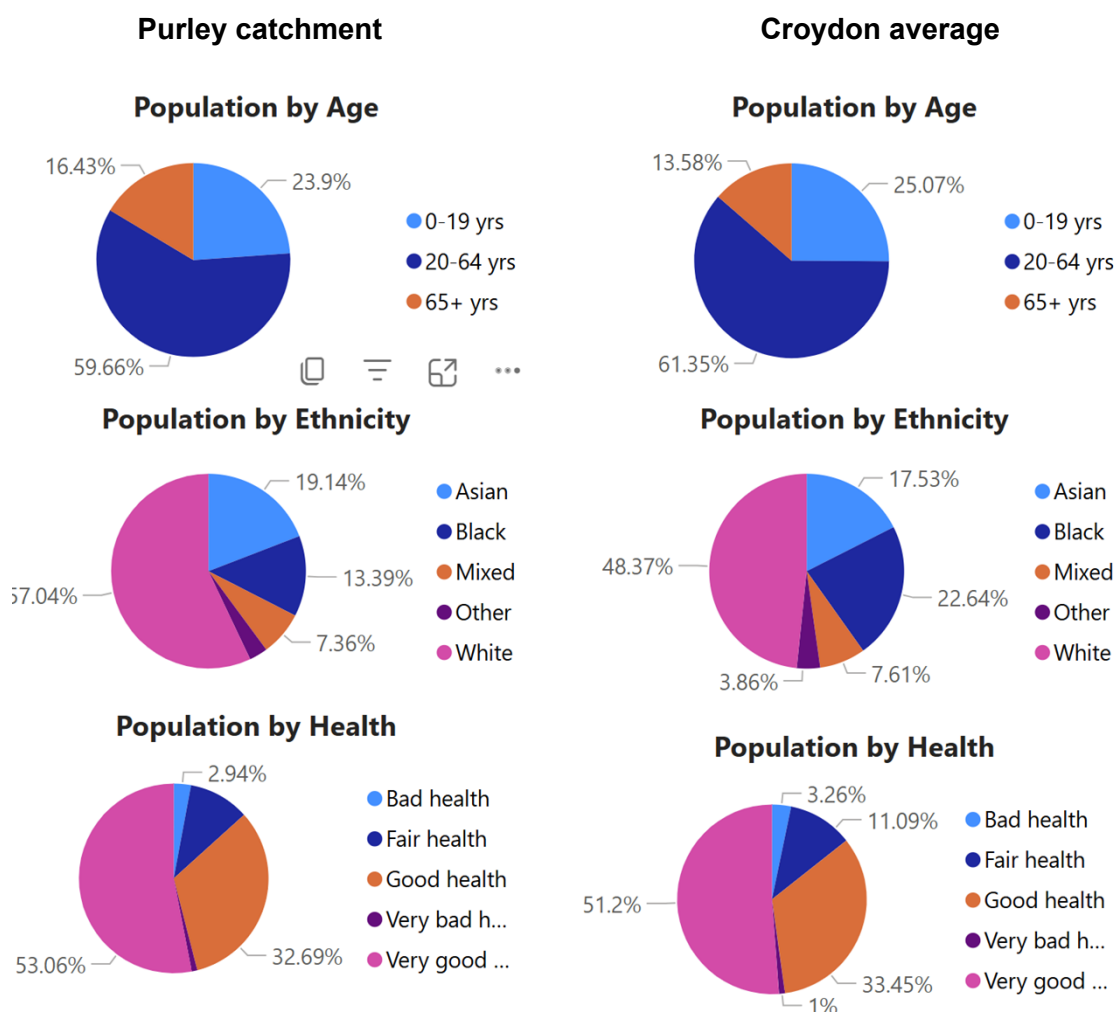
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.222 The population has a higher proportion of people who are over 65; higher of people of White ethnicity; and lower of Black ethnicity than the average for Croydon.

Figure C4.24: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

4.223 Given that it is only open two days a week, Purley Library's general performance (especially PC use) suggests that it is meeting a local need. With the proposed closure of Sanderstead Library and a potential move to better location (ideally close to the high street) the size and format of the building required can be reviewed. In the meantime, there may be interest from local organisations in sharing the site.

4.224 Closing the library would create a large area within the south of the borough with no library provision (particularly if Sanderstead Library were to close) and would miss the opportunity to take advantage of reaching more people through a better and busier location. Purley town centre should be targeted as a location for a library due to its location and the visitor numbers to the area.

4.225 It is recommended that this library be retained.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Findings and recommendations

4.226 This is a larger library in a poor location, but with a better location could reach many more people, particularly shoppers and those visiting travelling via Purley:

- The library building is large enough to house the full range of library services but would require investment.
- However, there is little point making such an investment in the current building as it is in such a poor location.
- The size and format needed for the new library would need to be reviewed to take account of increased demand, including that from the Sanderstead Library if it is closed.
- Closing the library would leave a large geographical gap in provision, particularly were Sanderstead Library to close.

Recommendations

- 1. That Purley Library is retained.**
- 2. That the Council seeks a better location and more suitable building for Purley Library.**
- 3. That the Council in the meantime seeks to improve the offer to residents through partnerships.**

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Review of Sanderstead Library

Summary

- 4.227 Sanderstead Library is one of the smallest libraries and is located in a residential area of Sanderstead within a catchment area with some of the lowest levels of deprivation in England. While most of its performance indicators are comparatively low, the level of issues is fourth highest in the network.
- 4.228 This library is one of the four that the Cabinet meeting on 31 January 2024 was recommended to consider for closure. This proposal was then consulted on as part of a wider set of proposals and the feedback informs this evaluation.

Table C4.17: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	24	3	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	22,554	8	Footfall	
Library issues	34,948	4	Public transport access	
Event attendances	1,317	11	Building	
PC hours in use	770	12	Suitability	
Budget (£)	131,112	9	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	6	9	Condition	
Active users	1,139	9	Internal area (m ²)	260

Performance

- 4.229 The library is open three days a week and its issues are just below the median and the cost per visit at £6 is lower than the median (£7). However, attendances at events are below median and PC hours in use are particularly low (representing only 1.3% of all PC hours across the network) probably reflecting the relative prosperity of the area.
- 4.230 Library issues are particularly high for the size of the library and the ratio of annual issues to active users at 31 is the highest in the network, ie Sanderstead Library's average active user borrowed 31 items in 2023-24.
- 4.231 Its rate of recovery from COVID and the reduction in opening hours has been good, with footfall in 2023/24 being 64% of the level in 2019-20, higher than the recovery rate for the whole library network at 47%.

Location

- 4.232 Sanderstead Library is set on a prominent corner position on the heavily trafficked Sanderstead Hill at a junction with the road Farm Fields but is only partially visible as the building is set back from road and is partly hidden by an impressive, mature tree when in full leaf.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.233 There are no nearby shops or leisure facilities to generate footfall. The library is located in a residential area which, to the east and west, has generous open spaces, including a golf course. This means that its geographic catchment area has a relatively low population density compared with the north of the borough. As a result, this is a poor location for a library, although convenient for residents who live nearby as the distribution of active users indicates (see figure C4.n below).
- 4.234 There is a bus route on Sanderstead Hill and free on-street parking on Farm Fields. The location allows for relatively safe walking and cycling, but the steep hill on the main road may be a deterrent for pedestrians with mobility difficulties or for parents with pushchairs.

Building

- 4.235 The library was constructed in the 1930s and is an interesting brick-built design over two storeys. The main library space on the ground floor has high ceilings and large windows at either end but its interior is small. In front of the library is a sizeable garden with a large, mature tree and is an attractive space with a picnic bench in the shade of the tree.
- 4.236 The main library building appears to be in reasonable condition externally. The grassed area appears well maintained by the Friends of Sanderstead Library who to keep the grounds in a good condition (and who donated the bench) and the WI who maintain the rose garden.
- 4.237 While aspects of the building are impressive, the entrance to the library is plain and unadorned, providing limited visibility of the inside of the building. The interior of the library is cluttered and dull, with functional furniture and shelving, but light floods into the library from the two windows at either end. The main library space is fully utilised although the counter area takes up more space than necessary and the basement rooms are cramped and not easily incorporated into the library. The children's library area is not separated off. There is no accessible public toilet.
- 4.238 The small size of the library and its design restrict the range of library services that can be offered.

Population and need

- 4.239 The population in the catchment area for the library is relatively low within a 1-mile radius. The library is also close to two other libraries, particularly Selsdon Library with which it shares a sizeable proportion of its catchment area using a 1-mile radius.

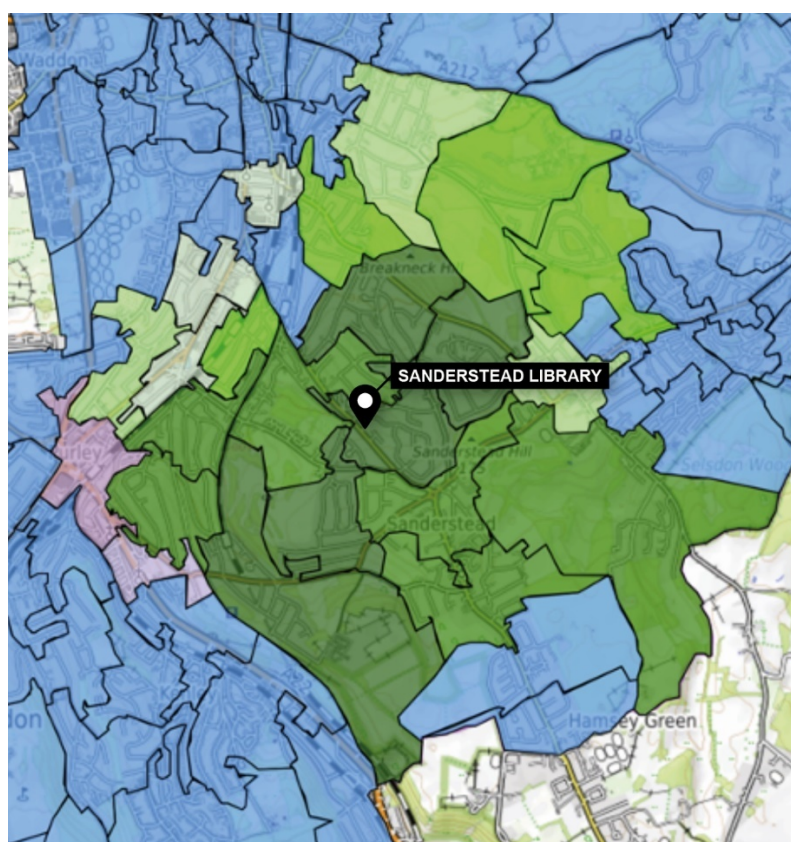
Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C4.18: summary of population, need and community

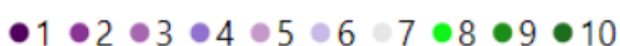
Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	22,473
	OA population within 1.25 miles	37,653
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	0
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Selsdon Library (1.3) Purley Library (1.9)
	Schools within 1km	1
Community use	Existing community group uses	2
	Number of volunteers	5

4.240 Using the overall IMD measure of deprivation, the catchment area has no LSOAs in the five most deprived deciles of LSOAs in England. 11 LSOAs of its 23 LSOAs (ie nearly half) are in the two least deprived deciles in England. This pattern of low levels of deprivation is reflected in most of the subsets of the IMD and we will include further examples below. It should be noted that the *IMD levels of deprivation are indicators of average levels of deprivation in a locality*. There will, of course, be individual households whose circumstances diverge from the average for the LSOA in which they live.

Figure C4.25: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



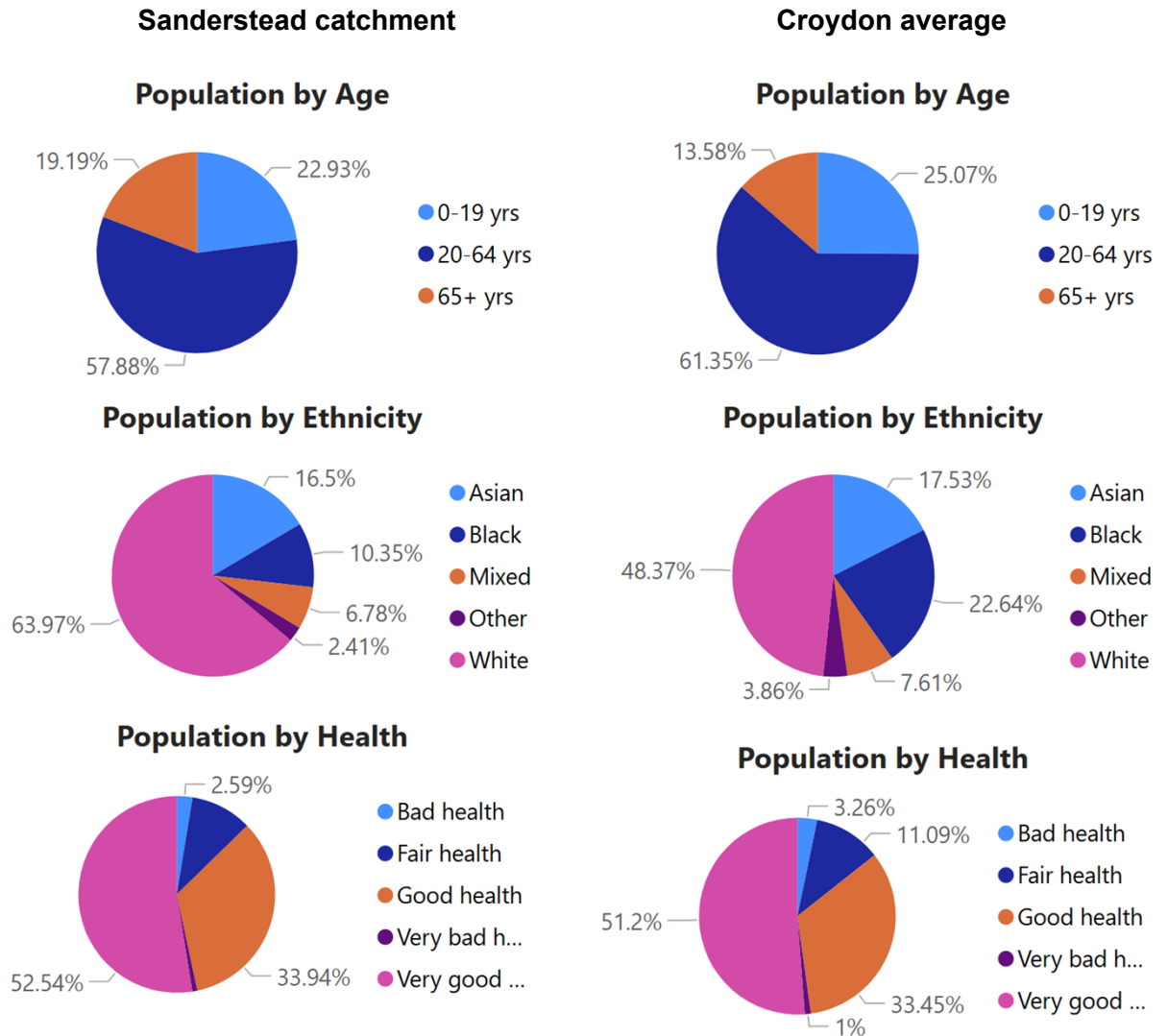
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.241 Compared with the average for Croydon, the catchment area’s population has a significantly higher proportion of people who are over-65. It has a significantly higher proportion of people of White ethnicity, and lower of people of Black ethnicity. For the data on people classified as in ‘very bad’ or ‘bad’ ill health, the catchment area has the lowest percentage in a range between 3.4% and 5.8%.

Figure C4.26: population data for library catchment area (LSOA)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

Considering the potential for closure

4.242 Sanderstead Library was recommended to be considered for closure in the January 2024 report to Cabinet because:

- The location of the library does not benefit from busy footfall.
- The building is small and unsuitable for the full range of the library service offer.
- The catchment area has a comparatively small population with low levels of deprivation.
- The catchment area overlaps to a large degree with that of Selsdon Library.

4.243 Selsdon Library was recommended to be retained given its performance levels, location and size and this would become the main library for most of those currently in the Sanderstead Library catchment area.

4.244 The level of feedback during consultation arguing against closure was high and demonstrated the deep commitment of its users and community to the library. There was extensive feedback, much of it making similar points in response to other closure proposals. These included more general points, eg about the Council's management of its finances and its service priorities, which are addressed in the main report at Appendix A.

4.245 There were a range of comments and feedback specific to Sanderstead which are summarised as follows:

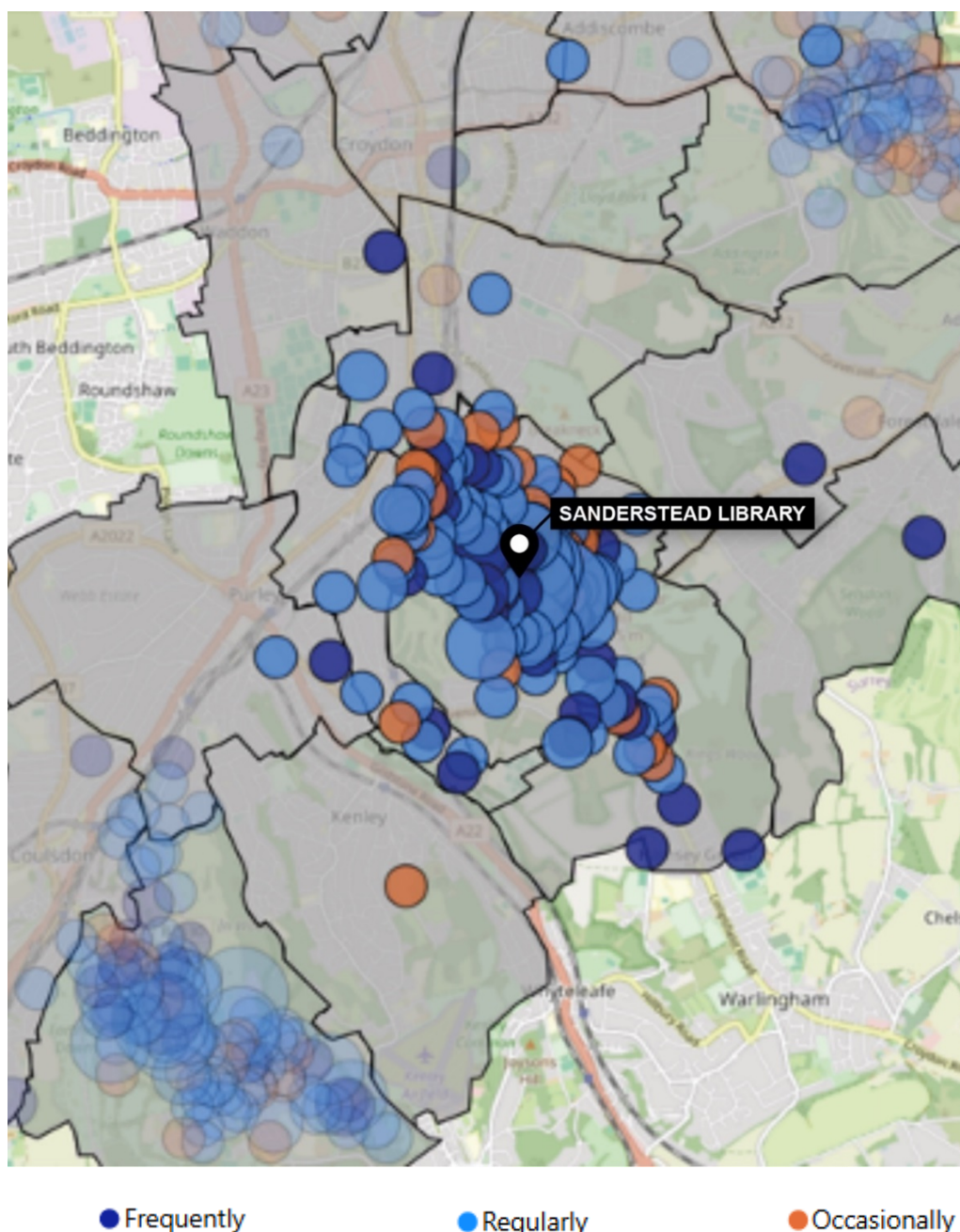
- **Travel to Selsdon or Purley is difficult** either by bus or car for those with young children and those with mobility difficulties, eg due to pregnancy, age or disability.
- **It is unfair to select this library for closure** (as opposed to Purley, for example) as it performs well and ranks fourth in the number of issues of books and other materials.
- **It will have an adverse social and health impact** on its users and increase isolation.
- **It will deprive children and young people** of a safe and accessible place to enjoy books, reading and learning.
- **The library and its activities play an important community role** as the only public building in the area.

4.246 **It was pointed out that it is easy to park at Sanderstead Library** as the on-street parking is free and it is relatively easy to find a space. This is especially important for older people who form a higher proportion of the population than in other parts of the borough. The steep hills in the area also make walking difficult.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.247 Users of Sanderstead Library were well-represented among respondents to the consultation survey with 555 responses. The survey asked which library they would use if Sanderstead Library were to be closed. 43% said that they would not be able to use another library service if Sanderstead Library closed. 40% said that they would use Selsdon Library, 12% would use Purley Library and 11% would use Central Library. 2% said they would use Croydon's library online. The postcode locations of the 43% who reported that they would not be able to use another library service are shown below.

Figure C4.27: respondents who cannot use another library and frequency of use³⁶



³⁶ This map shows the postcodes of those who responded to the consultation survey and reported that this library is their principal library; that they could not use another library; and how often they used it. 'Frequently' means more than once a week; 'Regularly' means every once a week to once a month; 'Occasionally' means every few months or once a year.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.248 Their reasons will vary. It is indeed more difficult to park near to Purley Library as there is little on-street parking in the immediate vicinity and the paid-for Council car park is some distance away, as is Tesco's car park (which is free for its customers). There is some short-term car parking on street near Selsdon Library, but of more practical use is the free car park in the basement of Sainsbury's which has an escalator and lifts which can be used to reach the library. Stays at the car park are for Sainsbury's customers and limited to two hours, so it is not suitable for longer stays at the library.
- 4.249 There is free on-street parking on neighbouring side roads although some are congested and spaces can be in short supply given the number of driveways. As a result, a short walk will be needed from the car to the library and this will not be suitable for people with mobility difficulties.
- 4.250 There are various bus routes from the wider Sanderstead Library catchment area to Selsdon Library but these can require a short walk to the bus stop and journeys from some parts of the area would involve a change of bus. For many this will be a practical option and free for children and over-60s but will incur a cost for those not eligible for free or discounted bus travel although this will not be so much of an issue in a less deprived area like Sanderstead.
- 4.251 Although central Croydon is well-served by public transport, access is not straightforward from parts of Sanderstead and, like in Purley, parking will incur a cost and will be challenging for some to use.
- 4.252 For those living in the vicinity of Sanderstead Library, reaching other libraries involves steep gradients, fewer easy bus routes and/or fewer free parking opportunities. **So for those who cannot easily travel to an alternative library, the Council is proposing that a new accessible bus transport service would be provided.** It would take Sanderstead library users with access needs from the Sanderstead Library building to activities at an alternative library. Selsdon or Purley Libraries would host existing regular activities such as Rhymetimes, the reading group, knitting groups and the bus transport would ensure local Sanderstead residents who cannot otherwise travel can continue these activities, albeit in a different library building.
- 4.253 **Opponents of the proposed closure of the library argued that it is well-used, pointing out that the level of issues was the fourth highest in the network** and that its unit costs are relatively low (they are fifth lowest at £6). This raised for them the question why Sanderstead Library was being singled out.
- 4.254 Arguments also included criticism of the condition of the library and the standard of the interior and furniture and the lack of an accessible toilet – the library had not been invested in and it had been 'set up to fail'. It was also argued that, given the level of council tax paid, the residents should be entitled to the service.
- 4.255 For its size, it is indeed comparatively well used judged by the number of visits and issues. It ranks eighth for the number of visits but, of the five libraries with fewer visits, four are open for just two days a week. The exception is New Addington Library which, like Sanderstead Library, is open for three days. For other uses, event attendances and PC hours used at Sanderstead Library are near bottom (11th and 12th respectively).

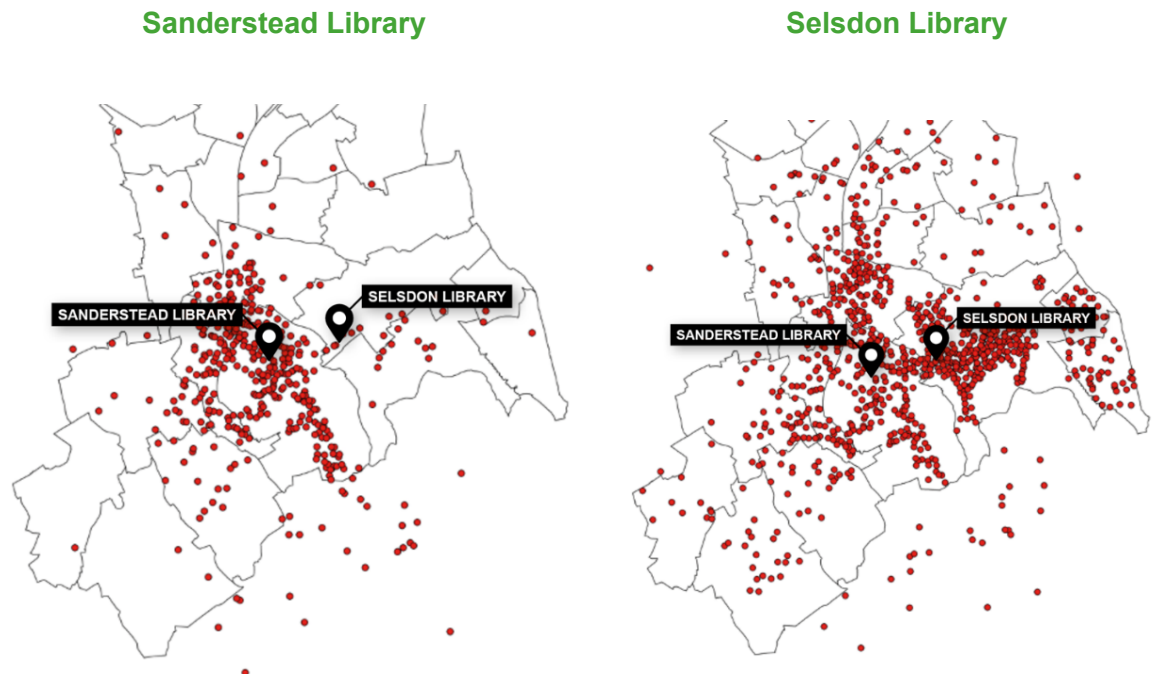
Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.256 It is recognised that the library has a group of active users who make good use of the books and other materials available from the library. However, these active users represent just 5.4% of the population in the catchment area. Also, given that the measure of active users is of those who use the services measured *once or more in the preceding 12 months*, this generally represents a low level of usage. This is not unique to Sanderstead Library as, for example, New Addington's (also open 3 days a week) proportion of active users in its population is lower at 4.3%.
- 4.257 **It was suggested that Sanderstead Library was being unfairly singled out, in comparison with, say, Purley Library.** There are libraries which are being recommended for retention which on some important measures perform worse than Sanderstead Library. These include:
- **New Addington, which has lower level of visits, active users and issues, but much higher levels of event attendance and PC usage.** As pointed out earlier in this report, New Addington serves a catchment area with high levels of deprivation and is some distance from alternative libraries.
 - Purley, which has slightly lower numbers of visits and issues, but has more active users, PC hours in use and event attendances, *despite only being open for two days a week*. Before COVID and the reduction in weekly opening hours from 34.5 to 24 for Sanderstead and 44.5 to 16 hours for Purley, Purley's issues were higher than Sanderstead's in 2018-19 and slightly lower in 2019-20 and the number of visits was much higher in both years. In 2019-20 the visits per hour were higher at Purley and the same was also true in 2023-24. Also, as argued in the review of Purley Library earlier in this report, a town centre location is more effective, especially if the library were moved.
- 4.258 In contrast, Selsdon Library, with the same staffed opening hours as Sanderstead, performs far better on every service indicator. Its budget is double that of Sanderstead's, but the cost per visit at £4 is second lowest only higher than the Central Library's. Visits are over treble that of Sanderstead's, issues more than double, PC usage over four times higher and event attendance three times higher.
- 4.259 Assessed against our four overall criteria, Sanderstead Library's overall performance is fair (thanks to the number of issues), but the building is small and not suited to the full range of library services and the catchment area has a small population and a low level of need.
- 4.260 The library's location has some advantages (eg ease of parking) but it is remote from areas of high footfall and, more significantly is only 1.3 miles from the highly successful Selsdon Library with which it shares a sizeable portion of its catchment area.
- 4.261 The maps below show the dispersal of the addresses of the active users registered at each of the two libraries. Sanderstead's are concentrated around a corridor from Sanderstead Hill southwards; Selsdon's has a concentration around the library but is more widely spread and also has users in the same corridor as Sanderstead and further west.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.262 Given the comparatively low level of population in both catchment areas (a lot of it shared), having two libraries in such close proximity in an area of low comparative need is not efficient.

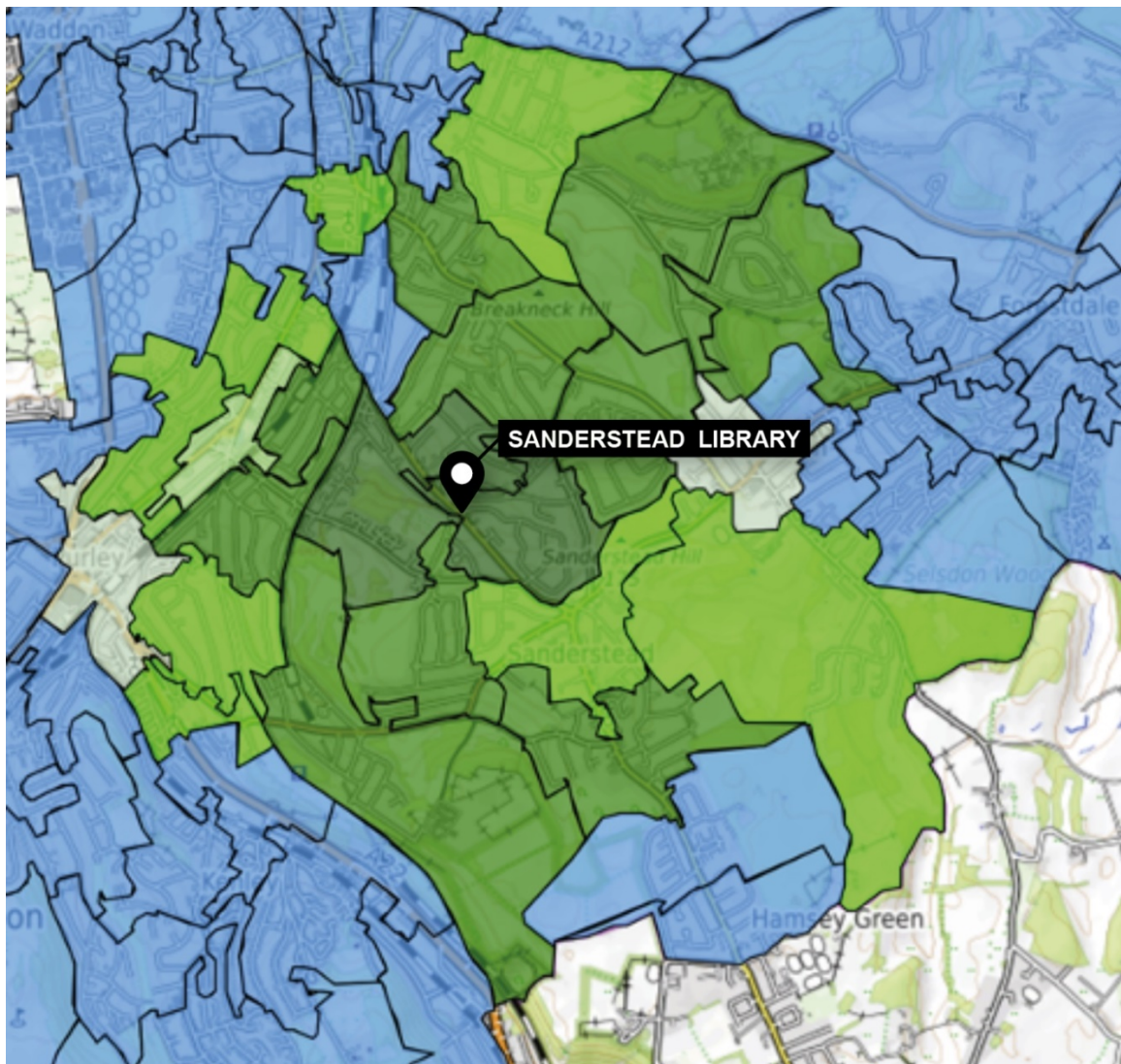
Figure C4.28: addresses of active users of Sanderstead and Selsdon libraries



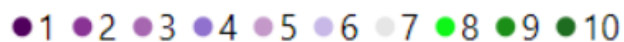
- 4.263 It was also argued by consultation participants that there was need in the area. The IMD statistics suggest otherwise as the catchment area has some of the least deprived LSOAs England for the overall IMD measure of deprivation (see figure C4.26 below).
- 4.264 The consultation feedback highlighted the potential impact of closure on health and well-being and on learning and education. Averages will mask individual suffering in health, mental health and disability, but on the IMD measure of deprivation for health and disability, the catchment area suffers from little deprivation. As illustrated below, of the 23 LSOAs in the catchment area, over half (12) were in the two least deprived deciles. There is a similar pattern with indicators such as Education, Skills and Training where 9 of the 23 LSOAs are in the least deprived decile in England.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.29: Health Deprivation and Disability by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



- 4.265 **The consultation highlighted that closure of their much-loved library would have an impact on the health and wellbeing of many of its regular users, including older people.** As argued in the consultation feedback, libraries help to reduce loneliness and offer a 'safe space' for people to explore books, learning and access information. They are often described as a lifeline for many people and closure would represent a 'loss'.
- 4.266 This is recognised in the EQIA (see Appendix D) which has recommended other mitigations focusing on outreach. This would involve moving existing hosted and library-run activities at Sanderstead Library to nearby local venues that have been suggested through the consultation might be willing to host some services. Once there is a continuity of regular activities established, library staff would begin setting up a community collection based on local requirements.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.267 This collection will be maintained by the outreach team once it is in place (expected April 2025), Library staff would also have an increased library presence at events, health settings, schools and education settings to promote the library offer and provide support with digital access. There will be further engagement with local schools and nurseries, sheltered accommodation, care homes and community groups as the service develops.
- 4.268 The proposal to establish accessible transport would enable current activities that are important to the health and well-being of Sanderstead Library's current users to continue in new locations. The increase in opening hours at Purley and Selsdon libraries would also enable users of Sanderstead Library to benefit from the more extensive offer in those libraries and enjoy new experiences.
- 4.269 **The impact of the closure on children and young people was highlighted in feedback** given the library's importance for furthering children's literacy and enjoyment of reading materials beyond the school curriculum. The value of the library as a place to study and for school visits was also highlighted. Children and young people are well-represented among the library's users and some contributed at the consultation drop-in sessions; few responded to the survey (a common issue in public consultation).
- 4.270 Of the active users of the library over the last 2 years, 45% were in the age bracket 0 to 19 and the EQIA acknowledges the potential impact of closure on them. It has highlighted the current impact of part-time opening on children and young people, including the most vulnerable, who want to use libraries in the area.
- 4.271 In Purley, local residents have urged the Council to increase opening hours including Saturdays, because working people and their families cannot access their local library. At Selsdon, residents have asked for more staff days to provide more activities and access for young people aged under 16 who cannot use Open+. The extension of opening hours at these two larger libraries would have the potential to improve overall take-up of the library service in the wider area.
- 4.272 Young people in the Sanderstead Library catchment area will be able to make use of their travel passes to use buses to reach Selsdon Library (and, for some, other libraries) for free and they will be able to take advantage (whether on their own or with the help of their parents) of a wider offer in a larger, more comfortable venue. For those less able to travel or too young to travel on their own, the outreach offer will still provide access to collections in community venues.
- 4.273 The resources freed up by the closure will enable the library service to undertake more engagement with schools. Although many schools (as pointed out in the consultation feedback) have their own school libraries, primary schools in particular value library staff's contribution to their curriculum through visits and tie-ups with programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge. Library outreach work targeting children and young people will enable the library service to reach more than they currently can with their stretched resources, particularly the overwhelming majority of children and young people who are not currently making use of what the library offers.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.274 **The role of Sanderstead as a valued local asset for the local community was highlighted in consultation.** It was argued that it is the only public building in Sanderstead and is the only community space that is not faith-based. It was also suggested that the saving from closure would be low in proportion to the impact caused.
- 4.275 The library service recognises the value of a local library to a community and the review is aiming to increase the overall take-up of libraries as community hubs across the communities of Croydon and particularly among those most in need.
- 4.276 Closures will be a blow for the users that want to retain them. However, the increase in opening hours elsewhere, and the introduction of outreach activities across the borough, but particularly in areas affected by closure, will increase the capacity of the service, making more efficient use of the larger libraries that are able to provide a broader service offer.
- 4.277 Sanderstead Library is well-supported by Friends of Sanderstead Library and Sanderstead Residents Association and during consultation feedback they suggested that there may be groups interested in the library building, although there were reservations about the sustainability and viability of any alternative community operation of the site without financial support from the Council. The library service is proposing that the vacant building is made available for community organisations to take on the management of the building if they can demonstrate a sound and sustainable business plan.
- 4.278 There is recognition on all sides that it may be difficult for a voluntary organisation to generate the funds to support such a building so some initial funding would be made available. The harnessing of voluntary effort and the potential for investing in the site could generate even greater community commitment and cohesion.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.279 Given its small size, its location and the relatively low level of need and the fact that many residents are in the wider catchment areas of Selsdon and other libraries, it is recommended that Sanderstead Library is considered for closure:
- Despite the relatively high level of issues of books and materials key aspects of service performance are poor.
 - The population in the catchment area is among the least deprived in England.
 - The library is a small building in a location that does not benefit from busy footfall.
 - Much of the catchment area for the library is within the 1-mile catchment area for Selsdon library and within a 1.25-mile catchment area for both Purley and Selsdon libraries.
 - A successful alternative library (Selsdon) is within reach for many and accessible transport would be provided to support those that would otherwise find it hard to visit Selsdon and Purley libraries.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- The freeing up of resources would enable the service to provide outreach support and collections in community venues and reach those not currently using the service, including children, young people and older residents.
- The library is well-supported by the local community and there may be the potential for keeping the building in use as a community asset.

Recommendations

1. **That Sanderstead Library is closed to allow for the reinvestment of resources in neighbouring libraries and in library outreach.**
2. **That the mitigations summarised above and in the EQIA be implemented.**
3. **That the Council explores the level of community interest in retaining the building.**
4. **That the particular impacts on people with mobility issues that might prevent them making use of another library are considered further.**
5. **That the Council explores options for outreach provision to serve the community impacted by closure.**
6. **That an accessible bus transport is provided to enable users with access needs to use services at other libraries.**

Review of Selsdon Library

Summary

- 4.280 Selsdon Library is one of the best performing libraries in the current network, located next to the local Sainsbury's supermarket. It is part of the Sainsbury's complex and sits above a community facility.
- 4.281 The library has a modern and attractive interior design and is able to provide a full library offer. It is one of the two libraries that provides self-service access (Open+) when no library staff are present.

Table C4.19: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	24	3	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	72,792	2	Footfall	
Library issues	72,012	2	Public transport access	
Event attendances	4,076	2	Building	
PC hours in use	3,471	5	Suitability	
Budget (£)	266,630	3	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	4	12	Condition	
Active users	2,694	3	Internal area (m ²)	535

Performance

- 4.282 The library's performance for visits, issues and attendances at events is the best of all libraries apart from Central Library, despite it only being open for three days a week on the days that have library staff present. The hours of PC usage is fifth highest of 13.
- 4.283 It was the first Croydon library in which Open+ was introduced. On two days a week, it allows users to access the library using a card. Although there are no library staff present, a security guard is on site. Of the 72,792 visits in 2023-24, only 3,580 took place during Open+ opening hours. Take-up is increasing despite only limited promotion (for example, it does not yet feature on the library service website).
- 4.284 Although the budget is third highest, its popularity means its cost per visit is second lowest at £4 compared with the median figure of £6.

Location

- 4.285 The library is located on the corner of the main Addington Road and Old Farleigh Road and forms part of the large Sainsbury's supermarket site. The entrance to the library is on the same level as the entrance to Sainsbury's and benefits from its busy footfall. From the outside of the Sainsbury's building the library is invisible and has a small mention on a small external notice board which itself is difficult to see. There is good passing footfall from Sainsbury's shoppers, but the library is outside Selsdon shopping parade.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.286 The entrance to the library is at the other end of a corridor from the entrance to Sainsbury's. The corridor is dominated by a travelator for shopping trolleys leading down to the car park. Beside the travelator is a trolley park. The travelator visually dominates the corridor, distracting the eye from the front door to the library with its small 'library' sign above the door. As a result, the entrance to the library is not particularly visible and welcoming.
- 4.287 There is some on-street parking for local access to high street shops and on neighbouring residential streets, but shoppers at Sainsbury's can also visit the library during the two hours allowed for free parking, though this may be insufficient for longer library visits like attending events or studying. The library is located in a residential area bordered on all sides by woods and golf courses, limiting the population catchment area of the library. The library is well-served by bus routes and its location allows for relatively safe walking and cycling compared with libraries such as Purley.

Building

- 4.288 The design of the overall building is functional and is largely obscured from the main road by trees. The library itself is a very bright and airy space, with substantial light wells at either ends of the high-level windows in the children's library which is separated by glass from the main library space. The overall Sainsbury's, community centre and library complex appears to be in very good condition.
- 4.289 The interior design is very attractive and suitable for the full range of library uses, with comfortable and quirky seating and specially designed low-level book displays combined with benches. There are attractive tables and chairs. The interior of the library appears to be well-maintained.
- 4.290 The space is flexible with movable shelving. The bookshelves in the middle of the library are on castors, allowing the space to be opened up for events. As the library is spacious, there may be scope for adapting it for other uses. The community centre end of the site appears reasonably sized and there may be scope for sharing it with other uses.

Population and need

- 4.291 The geographic catchment area for the library is relatively small and is mostly less deprived. The library serves a small population, serving just one LSOA identified within the 20% most deprived communities in England.

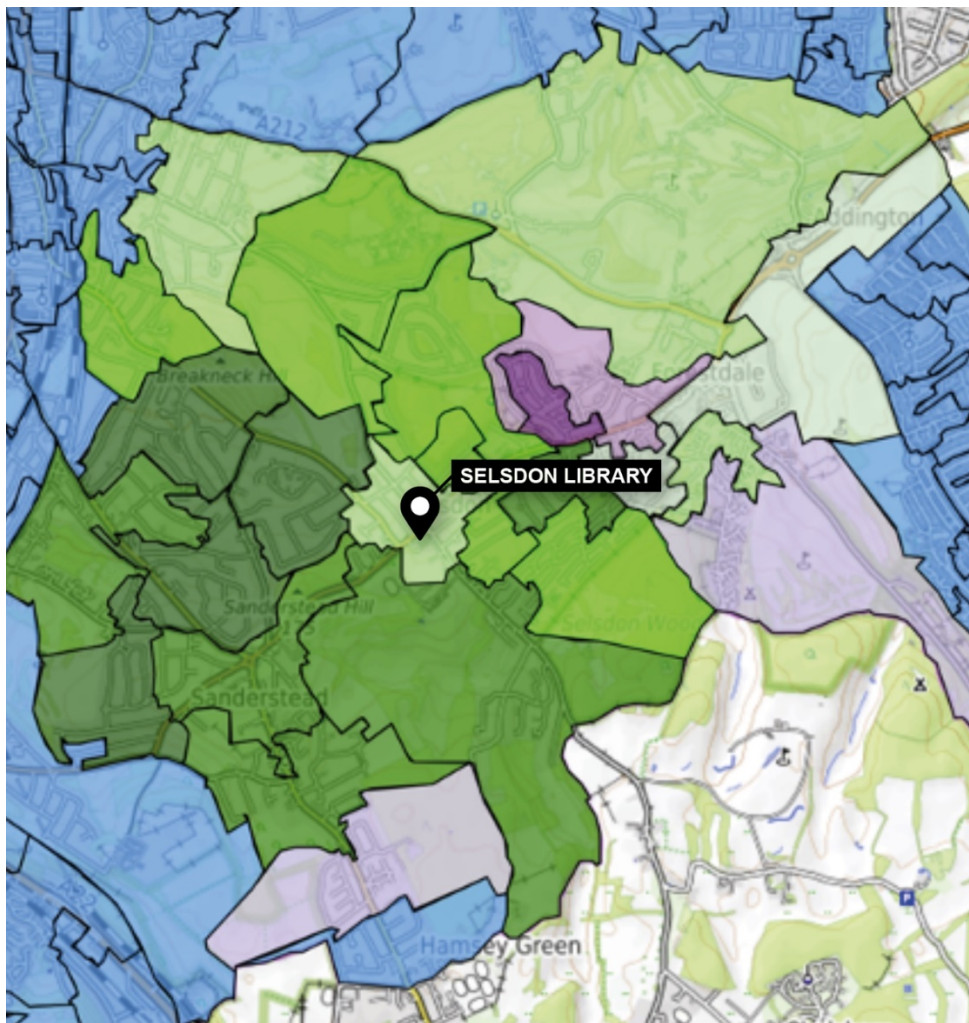
Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C4.20: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	20,312
	OA population within 1.25 miles	29,546
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	1
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Sanderstead (1.3)
	Schools within 1km	2
Community use	Existing community group uses	4
	Number of volunteers	1

4.292 Especially to the west of the library building, plus parts of the south and the north, there are numerous LSOAs that are amongst some of the least deprived in England.

Figure C4.30: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



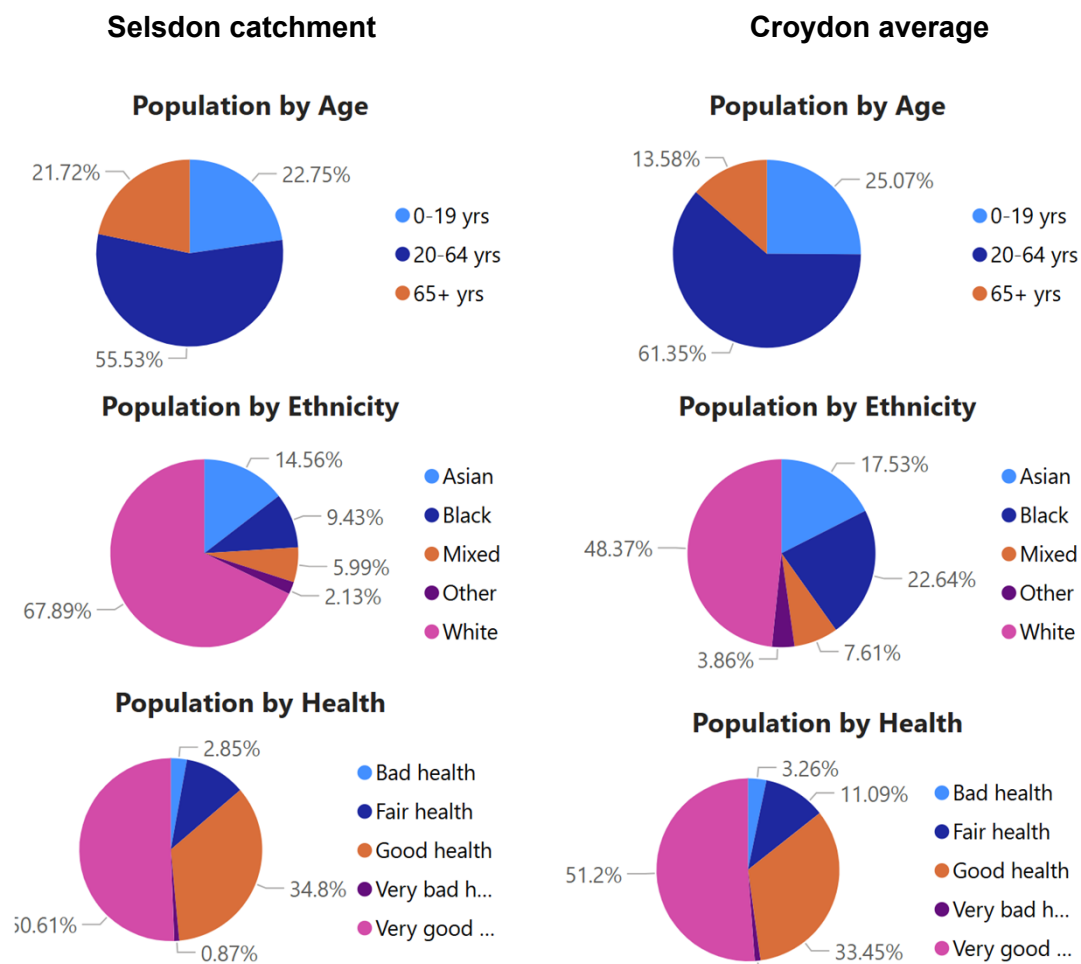
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.293 Compared with the average for Croydon, the population has a higher proportion of people who are over 65; higher of people of White ethnicity; and lower of people of Black ethnicity.

Figure C4.31: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

- 4.294 Selsdon Library is the best located and designed of the borough's library network and is the second-best performer at low unit costs. As a result it is successful and should be retained.
- 4.295 With longer opening hours during the week, it has the capacity to play a more active role in the south of the borough, hosting more events and activities and has the potential to become a lively cultural venue. This would also enable it to strengthen its role as a home for the community from a wider area (including Sanderstead). There is currently only one volunteer, but with more users from the Sanderstead area if its library closes, there is the chance to harness more community and voluntary capacity.
- 4.296 As Open+ cannot be used for under 16s, an increase in staffed opening hours would enable more children and young people to take advantage of the library and to run more events.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.297 No further physical work is required to make it a successful library that provides a full service, with one important exception: signage. The size and placement of signage are very poor and need to be addressed as a priority in close consultation with Sainsbury's. The signage should be much larger and in prominent positions, including on-street, on the outside of the building and in the entrance hallway.

Findings and recommendations

4.298 The building is well located and designed, and can host the full range of library offers:

- It has a 1-mile catchment area with a small population with low levels of deprivation but attracts users from a much wider geography.
- With longer staffed opening hours, it could be a venue for more library activities and cultural events.
- Longer opening hours would provide greater access for children and young people who cannot use the library unaccompanied during Open+ hours when library staff are not present.
- The library has the capacity and location to provide a suitable alternative for many users of Sanderstead Library.
- It requires much better signage and enhanced marketing in order to appeal to a new cohort of service users.

Recommendations

- 1. That Selsdon Library Service is retained.**
- 2. That the events programme is expanded, supported by more active marketing and outreach, so that it can play a more active part in the cultural and community life in the south of the borough.**
- 3. That improved signage is introduced to better market its presence, particularly to users of Sanderstead Library.**

Review of Shirley Library

Summary

- 4.299 Shirley Library is one of the smaller libraries in the network on a main road and close to Shirley’s shopping parade. The performance of the library is comparatively poor, reflecting in part the move to part-time opening but also historic levels of performance.
- 4.300 This library is one of the four that the Cabinet meeting on 31 January 2024 was recommended to consider for closure. This proposal was then consulted on as part of a wider set of proposals and the feedback informs this evaluation.

Table C4.21: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	16	9	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	12,918	13	Footfall	
Library issues	14,003	11	Public transport access	
Event attendances	1,106	12	Building	
PC hours in use	979	11	Suitability	
Budget (£)	110,470	11	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	9	3	Condition	
Active users	855	11	Internal area (m ²)	279

Performance

- 4.301 Shirley Library performance on every service measure is amongst the poorest three in the network. Its number of visits is the lowest and most of the other measures are third lowest, except event attendances which is second lowest. The cost per visit at £9 is third highest.
- 4.302 The library has found it hard to recover usage levels from before the COVID pandemic and the reduction in opening hours. In comparison with 2023-24, issues were only 48% of the level in 2019-20, visits 41% and active users 40%.

Location

- 4.303 Shirley Library is on the corner of the junction between the busy Wickham Road and Hartland Way. In front of the library is a lawn with a large, mature tree. Set back somewhat from the pavement, the library and its limited signage are obscured.
- 4.304 The library is just the other side of the road at the quieter end of the small shopping parade on Wickham Road. The busiest section of the shopping parade is a little distance from the library. The library may benefit from being close to the parade as shoppers can easily incorporate a visit to the shops with a visit to the library. However, the parade appears to cater for convenience shopping and is unlikely to generate a high degree of footfall that the library could benefit from.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.305 The library is in an area which, to the south and west, has generous open spaces, school playing fields, parks and sports grounds. As a result, the library's catchment area has a low density of population.
- 4.306 There are good bus links on Wickham Road and its location allows for relatively safe walking and cycling.

Building

- 4.307 The building is of a simple art deco design from the 1930s which was extended in the 1980s to create a children's library area. The side elevation of the library is in reasonable condition, but redecoration is required of parts of the exterior.
- 4.308 In the interior, the glass ceiling with leaded light detailing is striking. Other aspects of the interior are less attractive, with functional furniture and shelving. The glass ceiling appears to have suffered from water damage and discolouration and the overall décor is in reasonable condition, albeit dull.
- 4.309 The building is a small branch library, which benefits from a separate children's library area and large tables for group activities. Due to its size there is limited scope for making use of the library for events and other activities and the shelving is fixed. As a result, the building is not able to provide a full library offer.
- 4.310 There is no accessible toilet available and limited space for creating this facility (the public currently go up a step into the staff area and use staff toilets).

Population and need

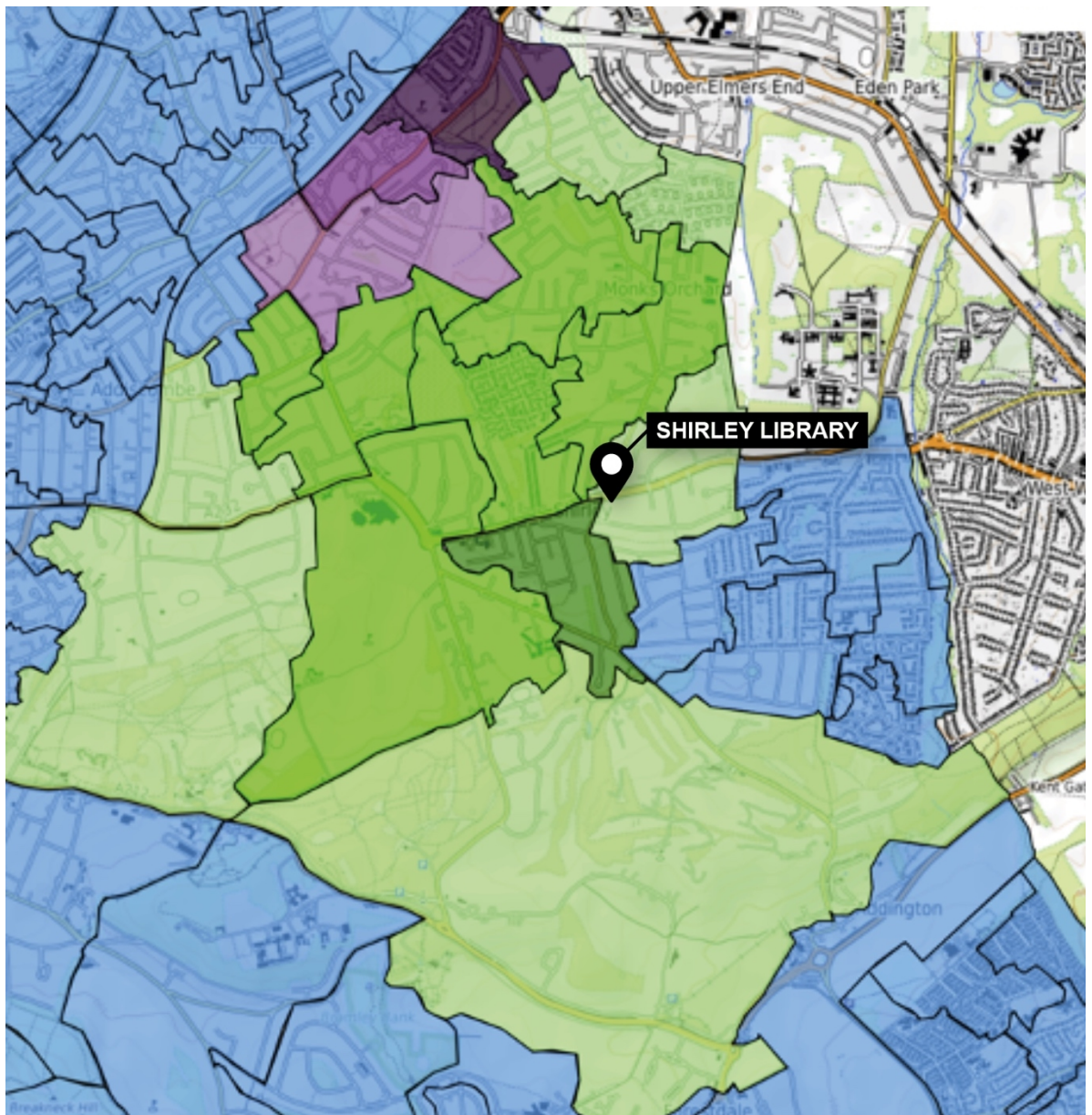
- 4.311 The population in the geographic catchment area is towards the lower end of the range among libraries in the network. The pattern of deprivation is mixed. It includes two LSOAs in the 20% most deprived in England for the overall IMD. On the other hand, 13 of the 16 LSOAs in the catchment area are in the least deprived 40%. This pattern is repeated with 3 or 4 LSOAs in or near the 20% most deprived IMD subsets for income deprivation and employment. These LSOAs cover the Longheath Gardens, Long Lane & Milford Gardens estate to the north of the catchment area and the Shrublands Estate to the south.

Table C4.22: summary of population, need and community

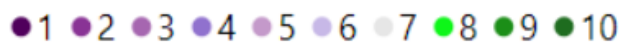
Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	24,302
	OA population within 1.25 miles	33,010
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	2
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Ashburton Library (1.2) West Wickham (1.4)
	Schools within 1km	4
Community use	Existing community group uses	6
	Number of volunteers	4

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.32: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



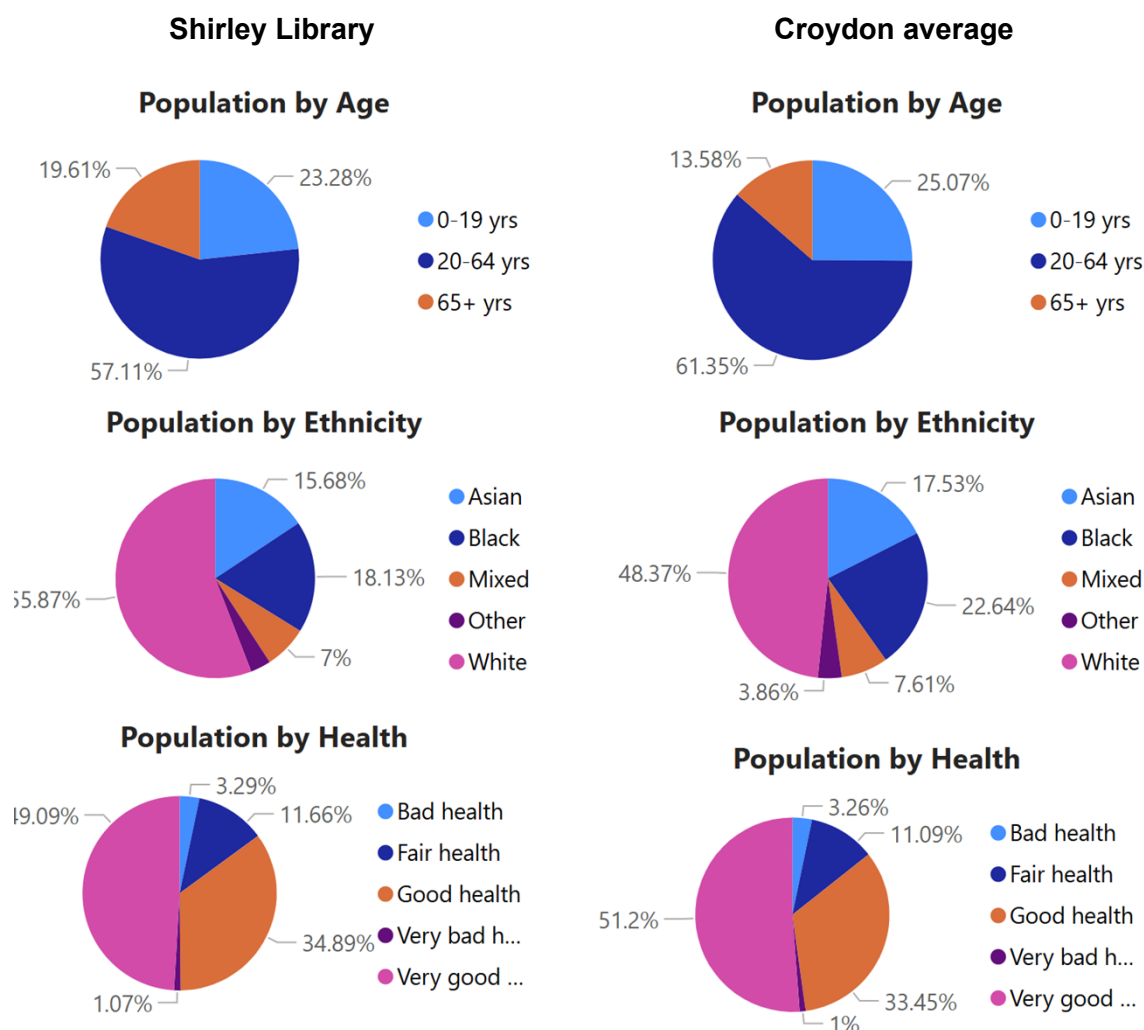
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



- 4.312 There is a significantly higher proportion of people over the age of 65 in the catchment at 20% compared with the borough average of 14%. The proportion of the population of White ethnic origin is significantly higher than the borough average with somewhat lower levels of the other categories.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.33: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

4.313 Shirley Library was recommended to be considered for closure in the January 2024 report to Cabinet because:

- The library has, historically, performed poorly and continues to do so.
- The building is small, requires investment and is unsuitable for the full range of the library service offer.
- There are two libraries within one and a half miles of the Shirley Library site.
- The catchment area overlaps to a large degree with that of Ashburton Library and, to an extent with West Wickham Library.

4.314 Ashburton Library was recommended to be retained given its performance levels, location and size and this would become the main library for most of those currently in the Addiscombe and Shirley areas.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.315 Shirley Library users expressed strong opposition to the closure during the consultation. There was extensive feedback, making many points similar to those made in response to other closure proposals. These included more general points, eg about the potential for recruiting more volunteers, which are addressed in the main report at Appendix A.

4.316 There were many comments and feedback specific to Shirley Library, which are summarised as:

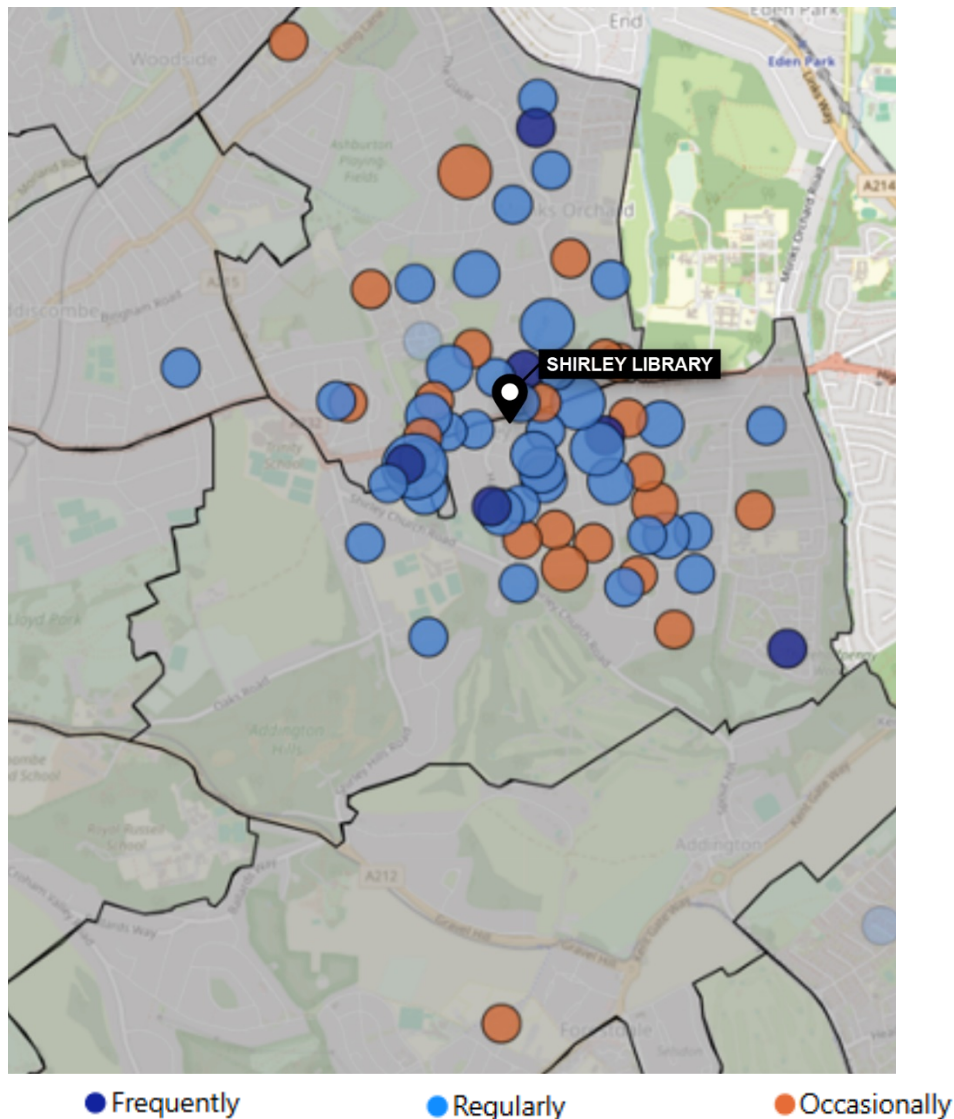
- **Travel to Ashburton Library is difficult** by bus, particularly for older people and the library is not suitable (being in a secondary school).
- **It is unfair to sacrifice Shirley Library** (in order to open Ashburton Library for longer) as residents should be able to expect some service in return for their council tax.
- **The service has been run down** through cuts in staffing and hours; closing on Saturday and after 6pm; not investing in the building and not promoting it.
- **Support is needed for people in Shrublands** who are in dire need and cannot afford books.
- **While books are important, the library service is about more** as it gives people access to computers and training and support and access to culture.
- **It will have an adverse social and health impact** on its users and increase isolation, particularly among older people.
- **The library is a safe, warm space** for people that is open to everyone.
- **It will deprive children and young people and their parents** of resources and services and life chances.
- **The library and its activities play an important community role** as the only public building in the area.

4.317 **Parts of Shirley Library's catchment area are not well served by public transport. However, there are various bus routes from the wider catchment area to Ashburton Library, but these can require a walk to or from bus stops or a change of bus.** To reach Ashburton from the current location of Shirley Library a change of bus is required or the less frequent 367 can be used. Using a bus will be a practical option and free for children and over-60s but will incur a cost for those not eligible for free or discounted bus travel. This may be a deterrent for those on low incomes, although this will not be so much of an issue in the less deprived areas of Shirley.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.318 Users of Shirley Library were well-represented among respondents to the consultation survey with 318 responses. The survey asked which library they would use if Shirley Library were to be closed. 44% said that they would not be able to use another library service if Shirley Library closed. 28% said that they would use Ashburton Library, 21% would use a library outside the borough and 18% would use Central Library. 3% said they would use Croydon’s library online. The postcode locations of the 44% who reported that they would not be able to use another library service are shown below.

Figure C4.34: respondents who cannot use another library and frequency of use³⁷



³⁷ This map shows the postcodes of those who responded to the consultation survey and reported that this library is their principal library; that they could not use another library; and how often they used it. 'Frequently' means more than once a week; 'Regularly' means every once a week to once a month; 'Occasionally' means every few months or once a year.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.319 Their reasons will vary. There is free on-street parking in the area around Ashburton Library although finding a nearby space can be difficult and so this will not be suitable for people with mobility difficulties. There are no designated disabled bays on the busy road outside the Library. They may find public transport difficult to use because of mobility challenges or the distance to suitable buses and the changes sometimes required.
- 4.320 They may also be deterred by the library being located in the same building as the secondary school, Oasis Academy Shirley Park. Encountering large numbers of secondary school children at the end of the school day can feel intimidating particularly if behaviour is bad. An example cited by a consultee of being struck by a ball may be a one-off or as part of a pattern.
- 4.321 Ofsted's most recent inspection in 2019³⁸ concluded that "The behaviour of pupils is good" and pupils are 'polite and courteous' when speaking to visitors to the school. They add that in recreational time, "the vast majority of pupils manage their behaviour well". This inspection report is a few years' old and student behaviour standards can change and while a vast majority may behave well, that could leave a small minority who don't. Library staff across the service have experience of dealing with difficult behaviour by young people (and adults) and will escalate bad behaviour to a school's management if the students' school can be identified. Where school student behaviour at Ashburton Library has been more challenging, this has been raised with the management at the school and action has been taken.
- 4.322 As set out in the EQIA at Appendix D, it is recognised that travel to Ashburton Library can be harder from some parts of the Shirley catchment area, particularly for those with mobility difficulties due to age or disability. **So for those who cannot easily travel to an alternative library, the library service is proposing to arrange a bus to collect residents from Shirley Library to travel to Ashburton Library** which would host existing regular activities such as Rhymetimes, the reading group, knitting groups, etc to ensure residents can continue these activities if they cannot be moved to an accessible local venue.
- 4.323 **In challenging the rationale for considering Shirley Library for closure**, arguments included criticism of the condition of the library and the standard of the interior and furniture and the lack of an accessible toilet. It was argued that there had not been an investment in refurbishment, in contrast to other libraries in the network. It was also argued that, given the level of council tax paid, the residents should be entitled to the service.
- 4.324 As acknowledged below, the library is valued by consultees as an important local asset, but its performance is low on all indicators. Its performance has been a long-standing issue, even before the sharp cut in opening hours.

³⁸ Source: Ofsted school report on Oasis Academy Shirley Park 2019.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

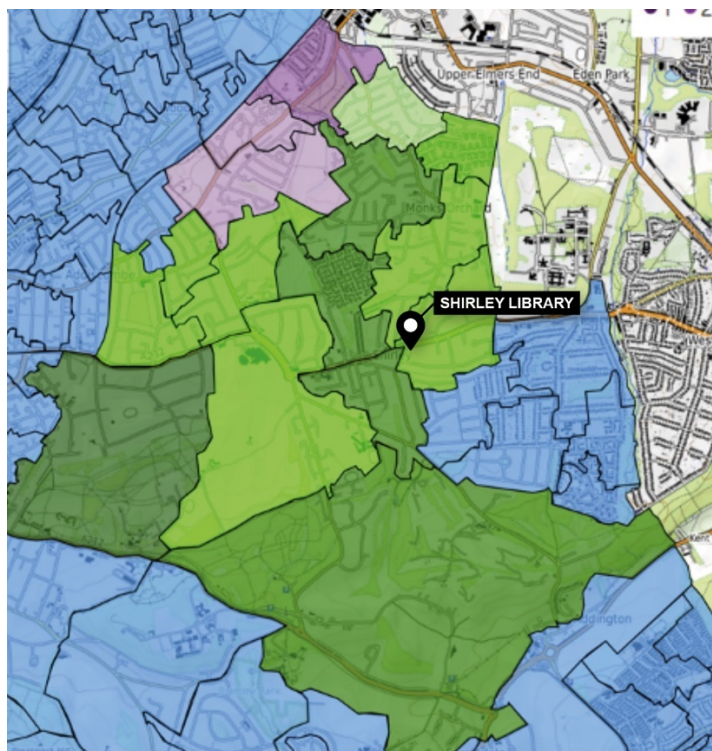
- 4.325 Even when open for 44.5 hours per week in 2019-20, the library had the lowest number of visits of the thirteen libraires and had visits per hour of just 14, in comparison with a median of 25 (at Coulsdon). In 2018-19, Shirley Library had an average of 2,143 active users, the fourth lowest level. The other three libraries that had fewer active users in 2018-19 are also recommended for closure in this report.
- 4.326 There are active users who make good use of the library but they represent just 3.5% of the population in the catchment area. Also, given that the measure of active users is of those who use the services measured *once or more in the preceding 12 months*, this generally represents a low level of usage. This is not unique to Shirley Library as, for example, New Addington's (which is open 3 days a week) proportion of active users in its population is similar at 3.8% and Broad Green's lower at 1.5%.
- 4.327 There are libraries which have some indicators that are lower and there is one library which is being recommended for retention which on some important measures performs worse than Shirley Library. **New Addington has lower levels of issues and a higher cost per visit (£10 compared with Shirley's £9), but much higher levels of active users, event attendance and PC usage and its larger size allows it to provide a wider offer.** Also, as pointed out earlier in this report. New Addington serves a catchment area with higher levels of deprivation and is some distance further from alternative libraries.
- 4.328 The proposal to close Shirley Library is designed to allow the service to reinvest in improving the opening hours at other libraries and to introduce resources for outreach and communication. The figures in the review of Ashburton Library earlier in this report point to the size of the population in its catchment area and a general level of deprivation that is higher than in Shirley Library's. Ashburton's size (and historic performance) will better enable it to reach an even wider audience if it can offer longer opening hours.
- 4.329 **The service at Shirley Library has indeed declined further since the COVID pandemic and the sharp reduction in opening hours.** The challenge of keeping 13 libraries open on a part-time basis means that the service does not have the resources to open on Saturdays nor in the evening. Neither are there the resources required to actively promote the service or run a full programme of events across the network. This would change with the library service's proposed new model using the resources created by closing some libraries.
- 4.330 **The proposed closures also free up resources to introduce outreach services,** targeting those most in need, many of whom do not currently take advantage of the support that a library service can offer. The library service, as part of the proposed changes, is planning the delivery of a local outreach service including exploring opportunities with partners suggested during the consultation (West Wickham and Shirley Baptist Church, Shirley Children's Centre, Shirley Community Centre and local care homes and sheltered accommodation settings) with a particular focus on reaching residents on the Shrublands estate.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

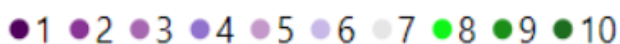
- 4.331 To test the outreach model, the service is planning a pilot of outreach at West Wickham & Shirley Baptist Church, 0.8 miles from Shirley Library in support of their existing successful community offer available to all residents which already includes activities for early years children and older people. This will include activity and resources designed to meet the needs of priority age groups for family activities and for older people. This service is also a similar distance from the Shrublands estate as the current library. Some of the other opportunities suggested in consultation that will be researched are closer to the Shrublands Estate.
- 4.332 Libraries should be more than repositories of books (which do remain core to the service) and this is recognised in the library service's commitment to the Libraries Connected universal offers (see the summary in section 2 of the main review report, Appendix A) and its plans to make libraries the focus for an expanded cultural programme.
- 4.333 Part of the universal offer is giving people access to the digital world, hence the provision of PCs in library and training support. Usage levels of the PCs at Shirley Library are comparatively low and Ashburton Library provides a good number of PCs. With longer opening hours (it is already open on Saturdays), Ashburton Library will be able to give more people access, including Shirley Library users.
- 4.334 **The closure of a much-loved library could have an impact on the health and wellbeing of many of its regular users, including older people.** As argued in the consultation feedback, libraries can help to reduce isolation and offer a warm space to enjoy company what the library has to offer.
- 4.335 The consultation feedback highlighted the potential impact of closure on health and well-being. Averages will mask individual suffering in health, mental health and disability, but on the IMD measure of deprivation for health and disability, the catchment area suffers from relatively low levels of deprivation. As illustrated below, of the 21 LSOAs in the catchment area, none were in the two least deprived deciles and 16 of the LSOAs are in the 40% least deprived in England.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C4.35: Health Deprivation and Disability by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



- 4.336 That overall picture should not mask the impact on individuals. Its potential impact on users and older people is recognised in the EQIA (see Appendix D) which has recommended mitigations focusing on outreach. This would involve moving existing hosted and library-run activities at Shirley Library to nearby local venues that have been suggested through the consultation that might be willing to host some services. Once there is a continuity of regular activities established, library staff would begin setting up a community collection based on local requirements.
- 4.337 This collection will be maintained by the outreach team once it is in place (expected April 2025), Library staff would also have an increased library presence at events, health settings, schools and education settings to promote the library offer and provide support with digital access. There will be further engagement with local schools and nurseries, sheltered accommodation, care homes and community groups as the service develops.
- 4.338 The proposal to establish accessible transport would enable current activities that are important to the health and well-being of Shirley Library's current users to continue in new locations. The increase in opening hours at Ashburton Library would also enable users of Shirley Library to benefit from a more extensive offer.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.339 **The impact of the closure on children and young people and young families was highlighted in feedback** given the importance of providing books and other resources for young people, particularly the most deprived. The value of the library as a place to study and for school visits was also highlighted. Children and young people are well-represented among the library's users and some contributed at the consultation drop-in sessions; few responded to the survey (a common issue in public consultation).
- 4.340 Of the active users of the library over the last 2 years, 34% were in the age bracket 0 to 19 and the EQIA acknowledges the potential impact of closure on them. It has highlighted the current impact of part-time opening on children and young people, including the most vulnerable, who want to use libraries in the area.
- 4.341 Young people in the Shirley catchment area will be able to make use of their travel passes to use buses to reach Ashburton Library (and West Wickham Library) for free and they will be able to take advantage (whether on their own or with the help of their parents) of a wider offer in a larger venue that is open more often. For those less able to travel or too young to travel on their own, the outreach offer will still provide access to collections in community venues.
- 4.342 The resources freed up by the closure will enable the library service to undertake more engagement with schools. Although many schools (as pointed out elsewhere in the consultation feedback) have their own school libraries, primary schools in particular value library staff's contribution to their curriculum through visits and tie-ups with programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge. Library outreach work targeting children and young people will enable the library service to reach more than they currently can with their stretched resources, particularly the overwhelming majority of children and young people who are not currently making use of what the library offers.
- 4.343 **The role of Shirley Library as a valued local asset for the local community was highlighted in consultation.** It was argued that is the only public building that is open to everyone.
- 4.344 The library service recognises the value of a local library to a community and the review is aiming to increase the overall take-up of libraries as community hubs across the communities of Croydon and particularly among those most in need.
- 4.345 Although closures will be a blow for the users that want to retain them, the increase in opening hours elsewhere and the introduction of outreach activities across the borough, but particularly in areas affected by closure will increase the capacity of the service, making more efficient use of the larger libraries that are able to provide a broader service offer.
- 4.346 There was some interest expressed in the potential for the community to take over the management of the building. The library service is proposing that the vacant building would be made available for community organisations to take on the management of the building if they can demonstrate a sound and sustainable business plan.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.347 There is recognition on all sides that it may be difficult for a voluntary organisation to generate the funds to support such a building so some initial funding would be made available. The harnessing of voluntary effort and the potential for investing in the site could generate even greater community commitment and cohesion, but consultees also expressed scepticism whether this would be realistic.
- 4.348 **Given the current and historically poor performance of the Shirley Library, determined in part by the building and its location, and exacerbated by part-time opening, retaining it is not efficient, given the small numbers served and its unit costs.**
- 4.349 Shirley Library is also only 1.2 miles from Ashburton Library and 1.4 miles from West Wickham Library (a library previously visited by Shirley residents before its refurbishment). As a result Shirley's 1-mile catchment area overlaps that of both Ashburton and West Wickham.
- 4.350 The library shares some of its geographic catchment area with Ashburton Library. The east of Shirley Library's catchment area is also close to West Wickham Library (currently undergoing refurbishment) in Bromley. Shirley residents are not restricted to using Croydon libraries. Therefore, residents can apply for membership of Bromley libraries to give them access to the nearby West Wickham library. West Wickham library is currently closed for refurbishment and due to reopen in 2025, in the meantime there is a temporary library at 77 Addington Road. It is likely that West Wickham is used for shopping by many residents in Shirley and so this could be convenient for them. The ability to use West Wickham Library is not currently marketed to Croydon residents as an option and so, as a courtesy, the library service should consult the Bromley library service before any active promotion of that library before it reopens.
- 4.351 The impact of the recommended library closures is recognised in the EQIA at Appendix D. A range of mitigations is proposed that will address many of these impacts and even introduce new services that will enable it to address the needs of the overwhelming majority of people in the borough and Shirley Library catchment area who are not currently taking advantage of the service.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.352 Given its small size, its building and its poor performance and high unit costs, it is recommended that Shirley Library is closed:
- Shirley Library's comparative performance and unit costs are poor and usage was comparatively low even when the library was open full-time.
 - Shirley Library's catchment area overlaps with Ashburton Library's (and West Wickham Library's).
 - Ashburton Library has the capacity, particularly when open for more days, to provide a full service offer to users of Shirley Library.
 - Mitigation is planned which will provide transport access for those who find it difficult to reach Ashburton Library and outreach at community locations.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- The catchment area has several areas which are among the most deprived in England that will need particular attention and support.
- Discussions would be needed with Bromley Council before the new West Wickham Library was actively marketed as an option for Croydon residents.

4.353 The impacts and mitigations are described further in the EQIA at Appendix D.

Recommendations

- 1. That Shirley Library is closed to allow for the reinvestment of resources in neighbouring libraries and in library outreach in the Shirley area.**
- 2. That the mitigations summarised above and in the EQIA be implemented.**
- 3. That Bromley Council's library service be consulted before actively promoting to residents in Shirley the option of using West Wickham Library.**
- 4. That an accessible bus transport is provided to enable users with access needs to use services at other libraries.**
- 5. That the library service engage with Oasis Academy to address any concerns about the behaviour of students and safe access and entry into Ashburton Library.**

Review of South Norwood Library

Summary

- 4.354 South Norwood is in a striking 1960s building in a prominent location on Selhurst Road within easy walking distance of the shopping parade and transport hub. The building itself is difficult to manage which contributes to the library’s mixed performance. Visits are comparatively low, but active users are comparatively high for the size of the building, and there are median levels of PC usage and event attendance, despite being open for two days a week.

Table C4.23: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	16	9	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	13,976	12	Footfall	
Library issues	22,330	9	Public transport access	
Event attendances	2,200	7	Building	
PC hours in use	1,971	7	Suitability	
Budget (£)	139,340	8	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	10	1	Condition	
Active users	1,755	5	Internal area (m ²)	365

Performance

- 4.355 South Norwood Library has for many years been one of the libraries in the network for that has performed comparatively poorly for issues and to a lesser degree visits, even before the reduction in hours. As a result, its unit costs are high with the cost per visitor being the highest in the network (£10).
- 4.356 The library’s performance presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, visits rank twelfth out of 13 and issues are below median (ninth). On the other, the number of active users is slightly above the median (ranking fifth) and the number of attendances and PC hours in use are at the median of the 13 libraries despite the library only being open for two days a week.

Location

- 4.357 South Norwood Library is in a prominent location on the corner of Selhurst Road and Lawrence Road. The building is one of the larger of the small libraries situated in a busy location with high levels of passing road traffic and has a visible sign. But it is also outside the main South Norwood (or Norwood Junction) shopping parade and so the location is not ideal. Due to the number of vacancies, the shopping parade on Selhurst Road has a limited range of convenience shopping opportunities.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.358 This is a library that could be cycled to conveniently. There are also several bus routes passing through South Norwood that would enable the public to travel to the library, as well as Norwood Junction Overground and National Rail station within a short walking distance.
- 4.359 An alternative and better located site for a library was identified on Station Road, but this plan was not welcomed by supporters of the current library building and its design was poorly executed. As a result the library has stayed in the current building.

Building

- 4.360 The exterior design of the building is in a 1960s brutalist style with prominent concrete fascia and considerable glass to both elevations. The architectural interest is undermined by an overall appearance of neglect. There is a floor mosaic artwork representing key South Norwood landmarks and events inset into the paving slabs at the building front, but this does not form a coherent part of the exterior. The considerable amount of single-glazed glass provides an airy and light interior but leads to overheating of the building in summer and it is difficult to heat in winter.
- 4.361 The entrance and internal lobby for the library are visually uninviting and the furniture and shelving are dull and uninspiring. The interior layout of the building is very impractical, divided across five levels, one of which (a PC area) is reportedly not in active use. The distribution of the library across four or five levels makes it difficult for supervision and safeguarding, i.e. staff are unable to see what is going on the different floors of the building from the main counter (particularly the children's library). However, the range of spaces and levels does allow for the full range of library uses and for zoning despite the below medium size of the floorspace.
- 4.362 The interior would benefit from a thorough overhaul to make it more accessible, practical and sustainable. This should include a thorough redesign of the interior and its furniture that is sympathetic to the 1960s design of the building. The lift has been out of action for an extended period due to procurement and supply timelines and this is a barrier to people who cannot use the staircases. We understand that the Council has set aside money for refurbishment, but the challenge and costs should not be underestimated.

Population and need

- 4.363 The library has a geographic catchment area with a large population which includes twelve LSOA areas in the most deprived 20% in England. The area also includes areas in the 10% most deprived in relation to crime.
- 4.364 Its catchment area overlaps those of Thornton Heath, Ashburton and Upper Norwood libraries, with the exception of one area which also has high levels of deprivation.

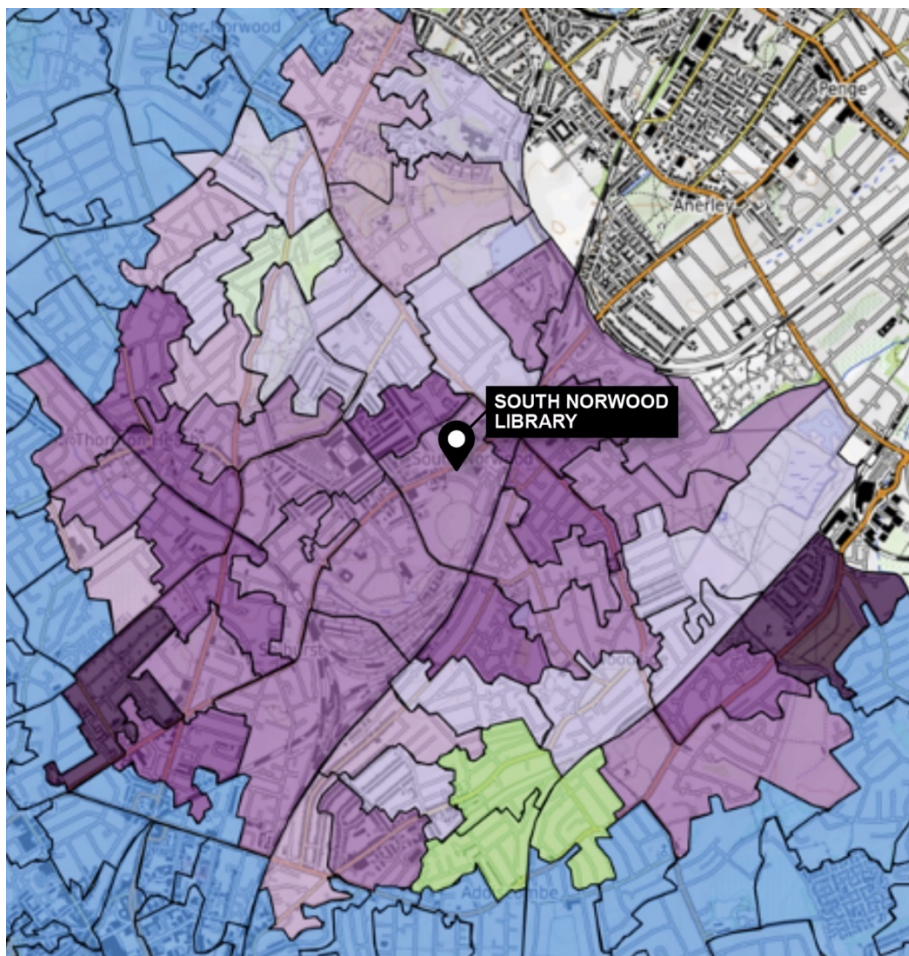
Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C4.24: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	63,423
	OA population within 1.25 miles	95,504
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	12
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Thornton Heath (1.4) Ashburton (1.5) Penge (1.7) Upper Norwood (1.8)
	Schools within 1km	6
Community use	Existing community group uses	2
	Number of volunteers	2

4.365 There are just four LSOAs that are less deprived than the median in England. Three are in the 7th decile (to the south) and one in the 6th (towards the north).

Figure C4.36: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



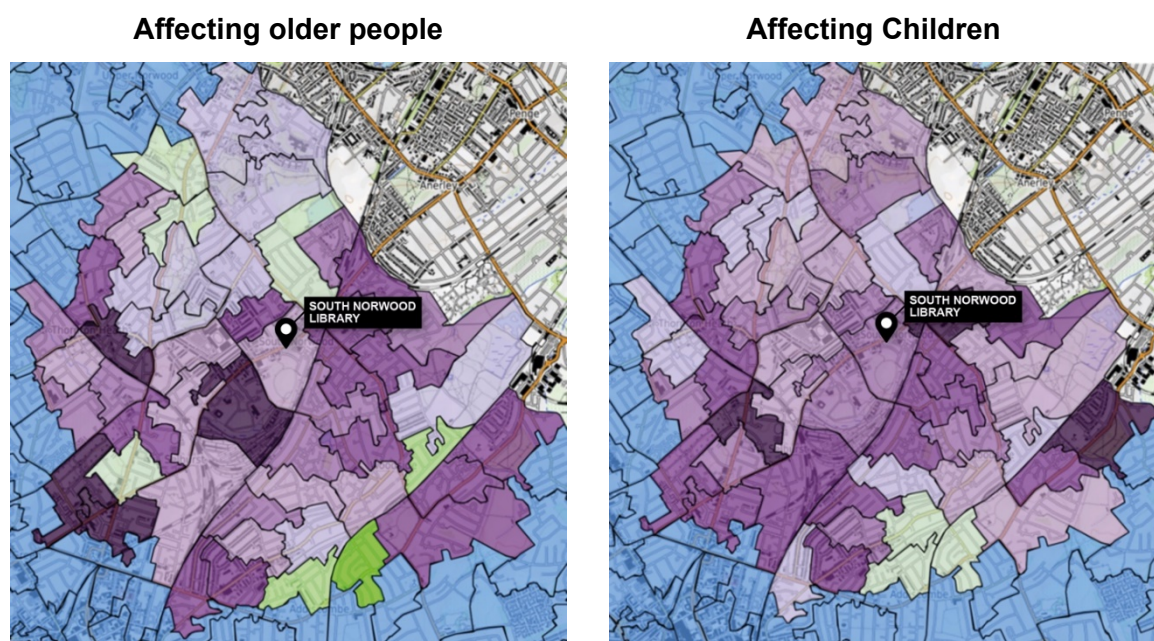
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.366 The subsets of the IMD for the catchment area are more nuanced. Only three LSOAs are in the second decile of deprivation for Health Deprivation and Disability and two in the second decile for Education Skills and Training. However, 14 of the LSOAs are in the most deprived two deciles for the Income subset.
- 4.367 Given the importance placed in the consultation feedback on the role of libraries in health and welfare and the lives of children and young people and older people, the IMD subsets for income deprivation are stark, with 17 LSOAs in the most deprived two deciles for Income Deprivation Affecting Older People and 16 in the index for Income Deprivation Affecting Children as the maps below illustrate:

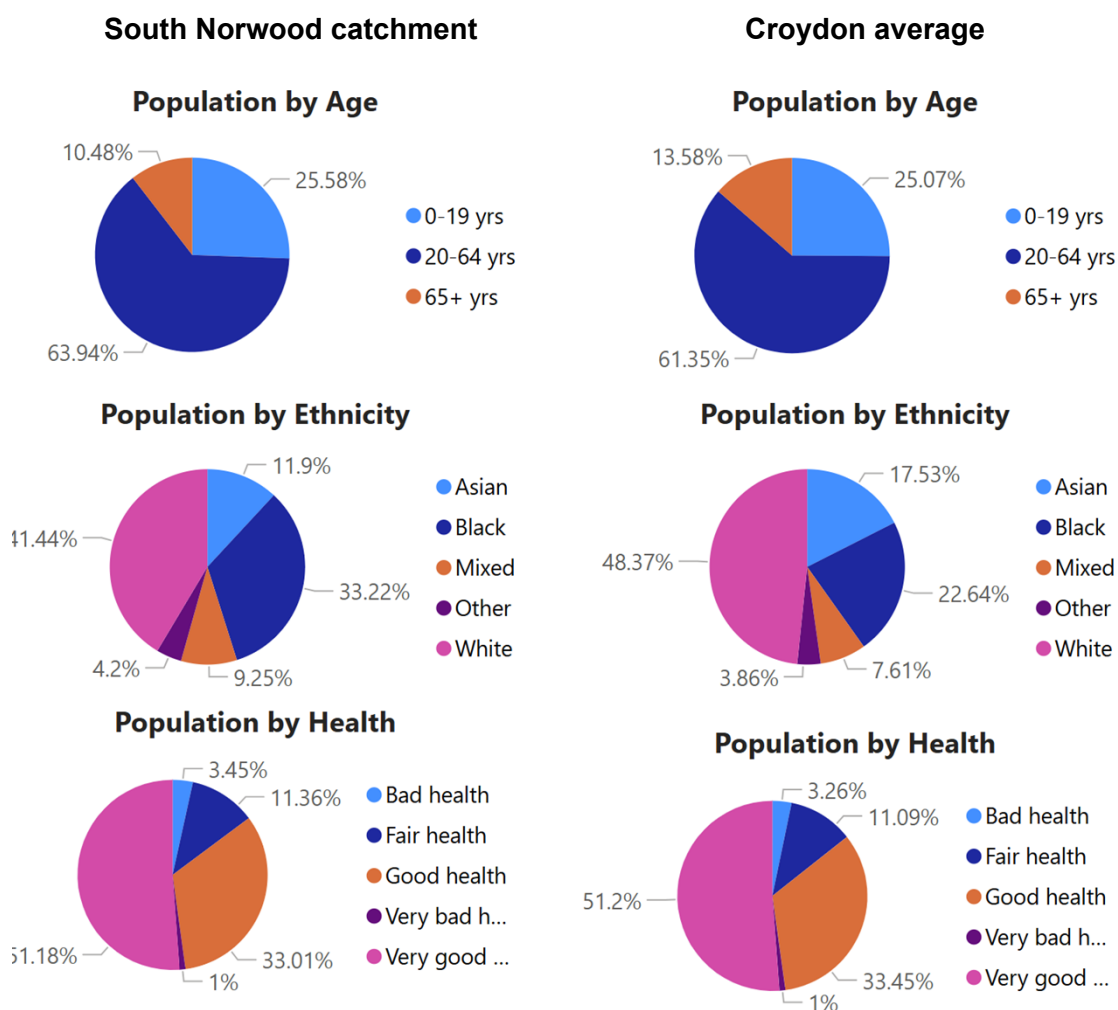
Figure C4.37: indices of income deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



- 4.368 The IMD subset for crime also shows high levels of deprivation, but we have provided more recent crime statistics for the area below.
- 4.369 The population is slightly younger than the Croydon average, with a lower proportion of people who are over 65, and a significantly higher Black and lower Asian and White population compared to the average for Croydon.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Table C4.38: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

4.370 Given the low number of visits, the issues with the building and its location, it is reasonable to consider whether the library should be considered for closure. Its catchment area also overlaps those of Thornton Heath, Ashburton and Upper Norwood libraries. The library was on the list of potential closures that was consulted upon in 2021.

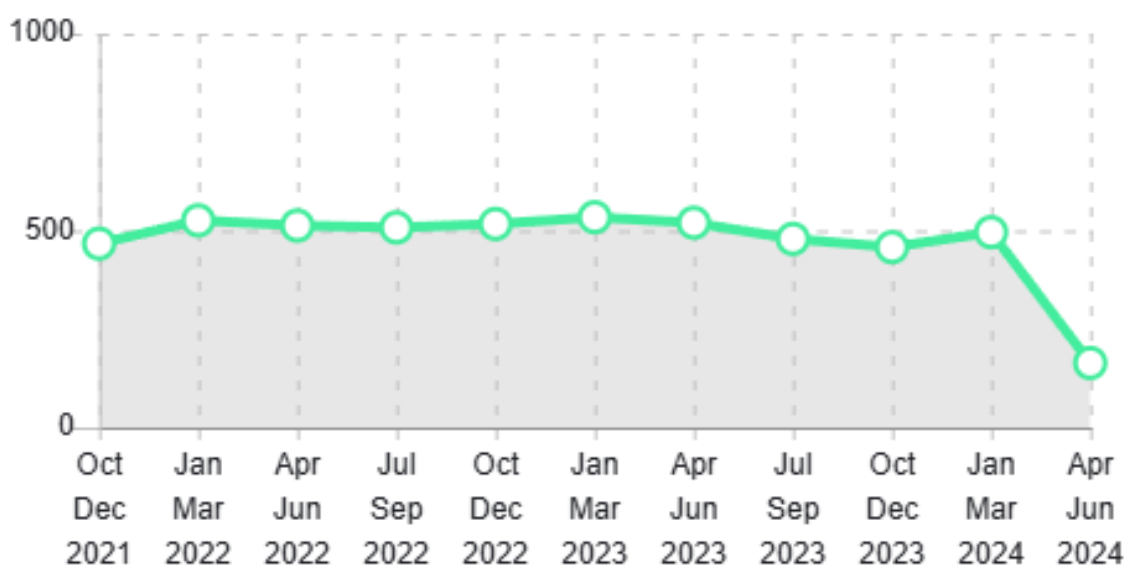
4.371 However, there are various factors that need to be taken into consideration:

- Where libraries should ideally be located in areas of high housing density.
- The levels of need and deprivation in the catchment area.
- Any special circumstances that might influence the nature and location of a library.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.372 While a reasonable maximum travel distance to a library might be a mile in some areas and further in leafier or rural areas, the ideal distances can be different in dense urban areas. Factors include the number of roads to be crossed, traffic levels, congestion and crossing points at busy junctions, all of which will slow a journey. Also, libraries should ideally be places in areas which are already busy, principally in shopping districts, so that a library contributes to an area's local character and community; contributes to the vitality of shopping areas; and can be conveniently fitted into people's busy lives. So if there are two shopping areas in distinct communities that are just a mile apart, it may be better to have a library in each in order to maximise service take-up. Committed users will be willing to make a specific journey to visit a library; the overwhelming majority who are not regular users (including many of those in most need) need the library fitted around their lives.
- 4.373 Travel between neighbouring urban areas can also be affected by the fear of crime (particularly for younger people) and people sometimes feel safer in their own 'patch'. The issue of crime and the fear of crime has been raised during consultation. The crime statistics in the north of South Norwood Library's catchment area confirm that reported crime levels are over twice that in Coulsdon Town and Old Coulsdon albeit lower than in Broad Green (see Figure C4.39 below).

Figure C4.39: reported crime per quarter in South Norwood 2021-2024³⁹



- 4.374 There are also special circumstances. There is an opportunity to transform the library and the location. As set out in the covering Cabinet report, consultation with South Norwood users suggested that communal, multi-use spaces that encouraged intergenerational activity would be an important offer for families in the locality.

³⁹ The most recent quarter's figures have been reported to have been affected by problems uploading data.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.375 The proposal to refurbish the library building and connect it with the adjoining Samuel Coleridge Taylor Youth Centre will enable more efficient sharing of resources and a wider offer for residents alongside a new Family Hub and youth services delivered with VCFS partners. This proposal, which will be able to draw on existing capital allocations and Government funding, opens up the prospecting of creating a lively new destination that will attract young people and appeal to families and older people.
- 4.376 This new facility could also increase the footfall in this part of Selhurst Road (and so the number of visits to the library). While the redeveloped site would incorporate the old library building which attracts passionate support, that building does not need to house the library service (for which it is ill-suited). Its spaces could be more suitable for other uses and remain open to the public. The scheme should allow the library to be sited in the optimal part of the site for a library that can be more easily managed and supervised.
- 4.377 Finally, although visits are low and issues are below median, the library has the fifth highest level of active users. PC hours in use and event attendance are both at the median even though the library is only open two days per week. There is demand for the library, particularly for PC use which can connect young and old to the digital world – something poorer residents might be otherwise excluded from due to the cost of IT, broadband and data. With increased opening hours, the library will be able to open on Saturdays and enable better take-up.
- 4.378 South Norwood Library is in an area of high need and significant levels of deprivation, particularly in relation to income, affecting children and young people and older people. It has a large catchment area which, although having degrees of overlap with other library catchment areas, is centred on the busy shopping and transport hub around Norwood Junction. The proportion of the catchment area population that are active users is low (at 2.8%) and outreach is planned that would engage with community groups and organisations that would enable the library service to encourage increased take-up among the excluded and disadvantaged.
- 4.379 It is recommended that this library is retained.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.380 South Norwood Library has a comparatively high number of active users although visits are low. The library's performance and its building could be improved through its refurbishment as part of plans to refurbish the Samuel Coleridge Taylor building next door and create a new multi-use site include a Family Hub and youth service:
- The library's performance is mixed: its visits are low, but it has a higher number of active users with median levels of PC usage and event attendances.
 - The current building is problematic and the location is slightly removed from the busiest part of the shopping area.
 - There is a high level of need and income deprivation that affects children and young people and older people.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- The proposed refurbishment scheme on the wider site with the Samuel Coleridge Taylor Youth Centre offers the prospect of transforming the library building and the footfall in the vicinity in co-operation with the VCS and the local Friends and Brutalist Library Group and in dialogue with partners who can contribute to making the most of the site.

Recommendations

- 1. That South Norwood Library is retained.**
- 2. That the Council explores opportunities to develop plans for an improved community facility jointly with the Samuel Coleridge Taylor youth centre.**
- 3. The community and voluntary groups are fully engaged to develop a viable model for the site masterplan and operation.**

Review of Thornton Heath Library

Summary

- 4.381 Thornton Heath Library is the third largest in the network in a traditional library building with a modern addition in a prominent location on the busy Brigstock Road. The population in its catchment area is the highest in the network and includes areas with high levels of deprivation.

Table C4.25: performance, location and building data

Performance	Total	Rank	Location	Rating
Opening hours (pw)	24	3	Visibility	
Library visits (pa)	36,700	4	Footfall	
Library issues	31,776	6	Public transport access	
Event attendances	3,086	3	Building	
PC hours in use	4,491	2	Suitability	
Budget (£)	261,425	4	Adaptability	
Cost per visitor (£)	7	5	Condition	
Active users	2,986	2	Internal area (m ²)	768

Performance

- 4.382 Although its location is not ideal to maximise visits, the library is one of the higher performing libraries in the network in terms of visits (fourth highest) and PC hours in use (second highest) and event attendances (3rd highest). Its issues are sixth highest and do not match other aspects of its performance.
- 4.383 Occupying a large, historic building, its cost per visit (£7) is a little higher than the median (£6).

Location

- 4.384 Thornton Heath Library is very visible, being located on a prominent position on the busy Brigstock Road and has striking large signage visible on three sides of the modern addition to the front of the building.
- 4.385 As the library is a short distance from the edge of Thornton Heath's shopping area and a third of a mile from the busiest part of the shopping centre, it will have limited benefit from natural shopping footfall.
- 4.386 There are good bus links and Thornton Heath National Rail station is nearby. Its location allows for relatively safe walking and cycling. There is controlled parking with paid-for visitor parking on neighbouring residential streets.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Building

- 4.387 The original Edwardian Carnegie library building is attractive with a frontage of red brick and stone. A striking modern addition with a concrete façade has been added to provide a new entrance and generous lobby space. The library is a comparatively large, two-storey building which houses the main library, children's library, PC and study areas on the entrance floor and meeting and training rooms on the lower ground floor. At the rear, with access from the main staircase and the main lower ground floor room, is an enclosed garden which has a decking terrace with benches leading to a vegetable plot managed by volunteers. Overall, the frontage appears in good condition.
- 4.388 The building was substantially refurbished in 2010 and has attractive interiors although now needing redecoration and minor refurbishments. The main library area has fixed shelving which could be replaced to allow greater flexibility.
- 4.389 Once inside the front door, the entrance and lobby area feels airy and attractive. The refurbishment has created an attractive interior with a mixture of well-designed cubicles, tables, chairs and shelving. With the library spread over two floors, there is sufficient space for all library functions. The design of the spaces allows for a variety of uses, including events and performances. This building has considerable potential for more intensive use, particularly on the lower ground floor which is currently being used as a pilot for Family Hub services.

Population and need

- 4.390 The library is in an area of high housing density and so its geographic catchment area contains the largest population of the thirteen libraries. However, its catchment area overlaps with four other libraries. The catchment area, particularly centrally and south of the library building, contains fourteen LSOA areas in the 20% most deprived LSOAs in England.

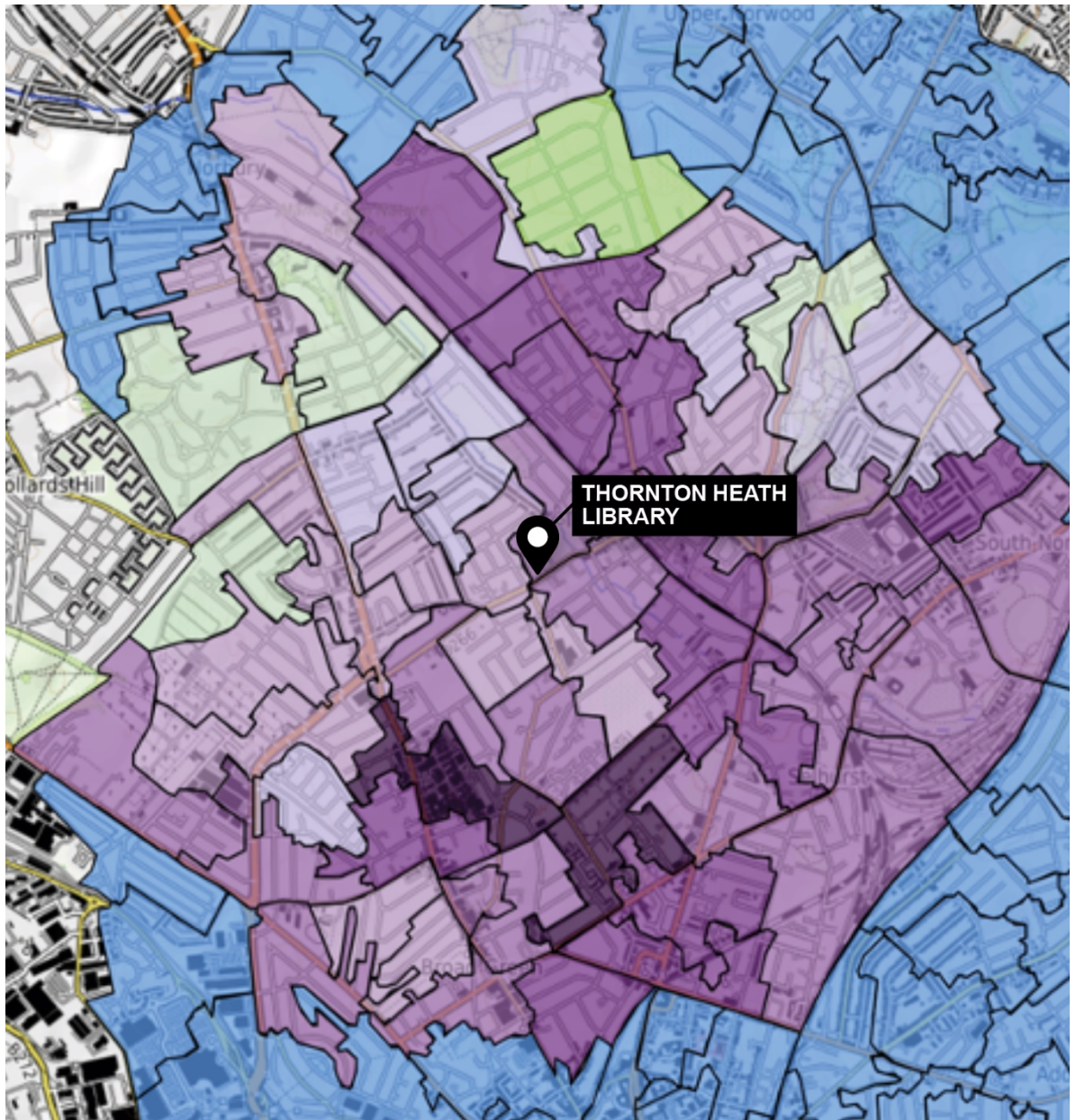
Table C4.26: summary of population, need and community

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Level
Catchment	OA population within 1 mile	83,356
	OA population within 1.25 miles	117,542
	LSOAs in 20% most deprived	14
Alternative provision	Nearest libraries (miles)	Norbury (1.2) Broad Green (1.2) South Norwood (1.4) Pollards Hill (1.5) Central (1.9)
	Schools within 1km	3
Community use	Existing community group uses	6
	Number of volunteers	3

Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.391 In the north, and north-west, of the library's catchment area, there are just a few LSOAs that are less deprived.

Figure C4.40: overall IMD deprivation by LSOA decile in 1 mile catchment area



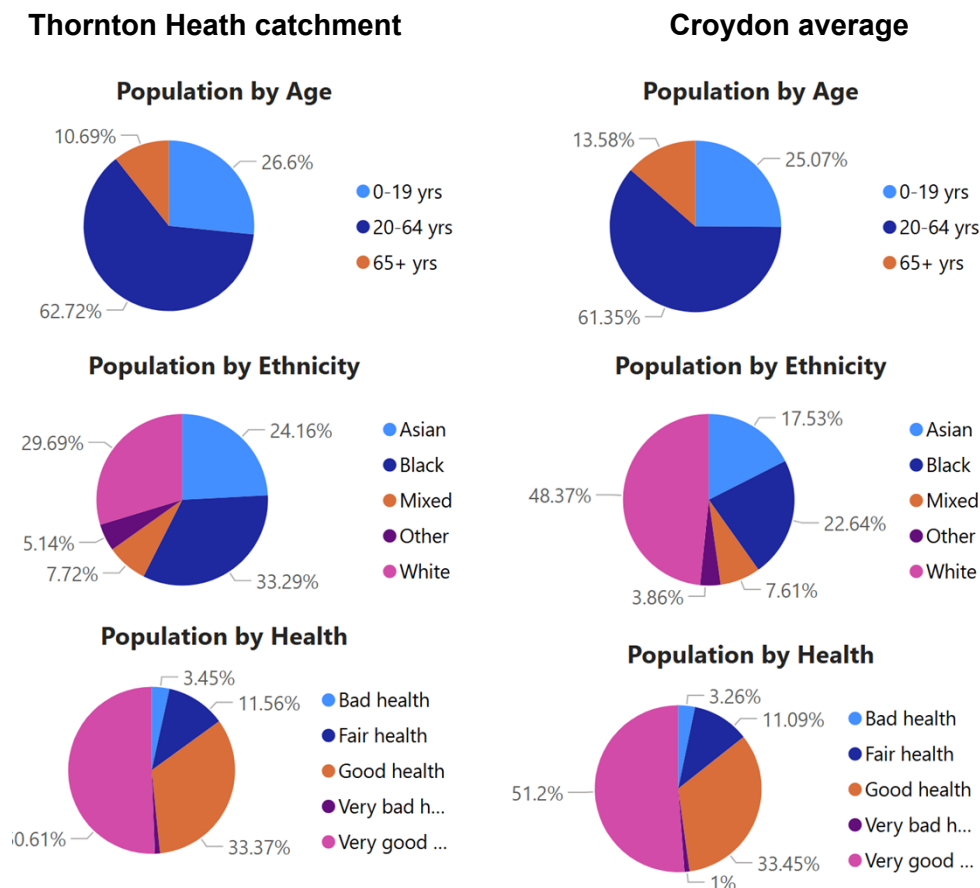
Legend for deciles (1 represents the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England)



Library services review – review of closure proposals

4.392 It has a slightly younger population, with a slightly lower proportion of people who are over 65, and a higher proportion of people of Asian and Black ethnic origin compared with the Croydon average.

Figure C4.41: population data for catchment area (LSOA)



Considering the potential for closure

- 4.393 Although it performs better than most, the size of the library means it is underused and could be the focus of more active promotion and programming and home to other services, such as training. This will be more feasible if it is agreed to increase its days of opening from three to five with the later introduction of self-service opening to allow it to open for another day.
- 4.394 With longer opening hours, there may be some scope for venue hire, although this would depend on minor refurbishment and, more importantly, the library service being able to provide professional sales and customer support. The net returns from venue hire may be limited without a sound business model and business plan in place.
- 4.395 Its size means that it could accommodate more users from the catchment area of Broad Green Library if the recommendation to close it is agreed. As part of the EQIA for the Broad Green Library and the libraries in the North Hub, there are proposals to provide transport to enable current users of Broad Green Library with access needs to continue its activities in Thornton Heath Library. Thornton Heath Library will need to plan for welcoming a new user community and tailoring its service, particularly for the Tamil community that currently makes good use of Broad Green Library.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4.396 The savings from closing Broad Green Library will enable Thornton Heath’s opening hours to increase, reversing some of the impact of the reduction in opening hours made in 2022.
- 4.397 It will also free up resources for outreach. As a proportion of the population in the catchment area of the library the number of active users is low and new resources for outreach will enable the service to target areas that suffer high levels of deprivation and who don’t make use of what the service can offer.
- 4.398 Given its performance, location, building and need, it is recommended that the library is retained (with some minor refurbishment) and with longer opening hours.

Findings and recommendations

- 4.399 The library is large enough to offer a full range of library services, and with some minor refurbishment could be a good venue for an expanded community:
- The library’s catchment area has a large population with a number of areas with high levels of deprivation.
 - The library is housed in a striking and highly visible building with a community garden to the rear.
 - The library has enough capacity to cater for users of Broad Green Library if the recommendation to close it is agreed.
 - The interiors are well-designed and attractive although minor updating and decoration is needed.
 - There may be some scope for venue hire with a suitable business model and business plan.
 - Longer opening hours would enable the library to recover some lost ground and offer a full library service to the local community.

Recommendations

- 1. That Thornton Heath Library is retained.**
- 2. That investment is made in minor refurbishment to enable more intensive use of the building.**
- 3. That the service prepares to create a warm welcome for users of Broad Green Library if the decision is taken to close it.**

5. Summary of recommendations for change

Introduction

- 5.1 In section 3 we reviewed all thirteen libraries following feedback from consultation on the proposals to improve the service by extending opening hours at some libraries, introducing more activities and events and conducting outreach. Given the pressure on Council finances as described in Appendix A (2.34), the Council’s position is that these improvements are currently only feasible if resources are diverted from elsewhere in the library service.
- 5.2 Given how thinly resources are currently stretched across the library service, the only realistic way of releasing those resources would be to close a number of libraries. In this section we set out our approach to reassessing each library. We have based our analysis on a set of assessment criteria designed to address the gaps that need to be bridged in order to achieve the outcomes for the review:

Table C5.1: summary of assessment criteria for retaining a library

Criterion	Factors to consider
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usage including visits, issues and numbers of users. • Event attendances and attendances for other activities. • PC hours in use. • Unit costs, ie cost per visitor.
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The visibility and prominence of the building. • The level of natural footfall in the vicinity. • Public transport access for users.
Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suitability of the building to accommodate the full range of library uses (ie Universal Offers). • The adaptability of the building to allow for various uses. • The overall condition of the building and the extent of remedial work required.
Population and need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The population in a library’s geographic catchment area. • The extent of deprivation in the catchment area. • Other libraries in the vicinity. • The extent of existing community group use. • The number of volunteers.

- 5.3 The recommendations set out in this appendix are designed to improve the overall service. The four proposed closures are designed to release resources to invest in increasing the opening hours in the nine remaining libraries and to fund initiatives such as the introduction of targeted outreach for those most in need in the borough. Those improvements are explored further in Appendix A, the main review report.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Recommendations for the libraries to be retained

5.4 It is envisaged that the nine libraries recommended for retention are also subject to a range of improvements, including refurbishments, improved interior design and better signage. In some cases, it is recommended that opportunities should be sought for moving the library service to a better location and building. This would not be for immediate implementation but would take place over time as regeneration schemes develop that would allow change to be achieved in a cost-effective way. Any such changes to a building would need to be subject to a clear business case and further consultation.

Table C5.2: recommendations for libraries to be retained

Library	Recommendations
Ashburton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Ashburton Library is retained and improved. • That signage, interior design and furniture of the library are upgraded. • That event programming is expanded, supported by more active marketing and outreach. • That more community use and volunteering are encouraged.
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the Central Library should be retained but improved. • That an alternative location should be sought in a more suitable building at the heart of the changing shopping district. • That, in the interim, investment is made in the interior design that could be easily transferred to a new location.
Coulsdon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Coulsdon Library is retained as the main library for residents living in Coulsdon Town and Old Coulsdon. • That investment is made in refurbishing the library’s interior to improve its design and make it more adaptable. • That remodelling of the library is explored with the aim to provide direct access to the community garden. • That further partnership work on the library service offer is explored with the Hive.
New Addington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That New Addington Library is retained but its operating model reviewed. • That the location of the library is reviewed, including the potential for the New Addington Centre to become more vibrant. • That the barriers to library use in New Addington are assessed and active outreach is introduced. • That the Council explores partnership models of service delivery to improve the offer and attraction for residents.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Library	Recommendations
Norbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Norbury Library is retained. • That the operating model for the building is reviewed including options to license space for hire or tenancy to generate income and footfall. • That the Council explores with community organisations their interest in the building and/or community management of the library. • That further research is conducted into barriers to library use in areas of high deprivation in Norbury for active outreach.
Purley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Purley Library is retained. • That the Council seeks a better location and more suitable building for Purley Library. • That the Council in the meantime seeks to improve the offer to residents through partnerships.
Selsdon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Selsdon Library Service is retained. • That the events programme is expanded, supported by more active marketing and outreach, so that it can play a more active part in the cultural and community life in the south of the borough. • That improved signage is introduced to better market its presence, particularly to users of Sanderstead Library.
South Norwood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That South Norwood Library is retained. • That the Council explores opportunities to develop plans for an improved community facility jointly with the Samuel Coleridge Taylor youth centre. • The community and voluntary groups are fully engaged to develop a viable model for the site masterplan and operation.
Thornton Heath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Thornton Heath Library is retained. • That investment is made in minor refurbishment to enable more intensive use of the building. • That the service prepares to create a warm welcome for users of Broad Green Library if the decision is taken to close it.

Recommendations for library closures

- 5.5 Following consultation, the proposed closures have been reassessed taking into account the extensive feedback received and exploring the data in greater detail. The conclusion of the evaluation is that four libraries should be closed and mitigations put in place as set out in the EQIA in Appendix D.
- 5.6 As highlighted in Appendix A, Sections 5-7, successful delivery of the new vision for the service requires learning from the weaknesses of previous changes, careful planning and adequate resourcing for implementation.

Findings and recommendations for Bradmore Green Library

- 5.7 After reviewing the feedback from consultation and examining background data in greater depth, it remains the recommendation to consider the closure of Bradmore Green Library:
- The overall performance of the library is poor with the lowest number of active users, although its unit costs appear to be comparatively low.
 - The population in the catchment area is relatively small and overlaps with Coulsdon Library's catchment area (and to a small extent with Caterham Hill Library).
 - The building is small, poorly located and is unsuitable for the full range of the library service offer.
 - Coulsdon Library already serves residents in Bradmore Green Library's catchment area and would require a short bus journey for those not using a car.
 - The closure of Bradmore Green Library would be a serious disappointment to its loyal and passionate users.
 - The ability to reinvest its resources in longer opening hours at an improved Coulsdon Library would bring significant benefits for library users.
 - There are transport challenges, particularly with longer term parking and for people with mobility challenges.
 - There is a significant pocket of deprivation in the catchment area associated mainly with the Tollers Estate.
- 5.8 There are impacts on library users with mobility challenges and for young people, particularly those using the adjacent primary school. Mitigation would be required focusing on outreach:
- To the wider school community in Old Coulsdon.
 - To people who are deprived and/or currently not taking advantage of the service, particularly on the Tollers Estate.
 - To people with mobility challenges by offering accessible transport from Old Coulsdon to Coulsdon Library on a programmed basis.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

5.9 The impacts and mitigations are described further in the EQIA at Appendix D.

Recommendations

- 1. That Bradmore Green Library is closed to allow for the reinvestment of resources in Coulsdon Library and in library outreach in Old Coulsdon, focusing particularly on the Tollers Estate.**
- 2. That the mitigations summarised above and in the EQIA be implemented.**
- 3. That further engagement and research is undertaken into travel issues, including the design of an accessible transport provision to Coulsdon Library, more disabled parking bays and levels and perceptions of crime in the area.**

Findings and recommendations for Broad Green Library

5.10 After reviewing the feedback from consultation and examining background data in greater depth, it remains the recommendation to consider the closure of Broad Green Library:

- The overall performance of the library is comparatively low, reflecting its opening hours and its poor location. The active users of the library represent just 1.5% of the catchment area population.
- Although its catchment area has a large population and LSOAs with high relative deprivation, its catchment area is largely also within the catchment areas of Central, Thornton Heath and Norbury libraries.
- Although the library itself is on a road with poor public transport access, the catchment area is served by bus routes.

5.11 There are impacts on library users with mobility challenges and for young people, particularly those using the adjacent primary school. There are also minority communities, particularly the Tamil community, whose activities would be impacted. Mitigation would be required focusing on outreach including:

- To the wider school community in the area and other community facilities.
- Support for the local Tamil community and community group to make use of Thornton Heath Library as a new community base.
- A programme of transport to enable attendees at Tamil community group activities to make use of Thornton Heath Library.

5.12 The impacts and mitigations are described further in the EQIA at Appendix D.

Recommendations

1. That Broad Green Library is closed to allow for the reinvestment of resources in neighbouring libraries and in library outreach in the Broad Green area.
2. That the mitigations summarised above and in the EQIA be implemented.
3. That further engagement and research is undertaken into travel issues, including the design of a transport provision to Thornton Heath Library, and levels and perceptions of crime in the area.
4. That engagement takes place with Tamil community groups to help ensure their activities can be continued in new locations.

Findings and recommendations for Sanderstead Library

- 5.13 Given its small size, its location and the relatively low level of need and the fact that many residents are in the wider catchment areas of Selsdon and other libraries, it is recommended that Sanderstead Library is considered for closure:
- Despite the relatively high level of issues of books and materials key aspects of service performance are poor.
 - The population in the catchment area is among the least deprived in England.
 - The library is a small building in a location that does not benefit from busy footfall.
 - Much of the catchment area for the library is within the 1-mile catchment area for Selsdon library and within a 1.25-mile catchment area for both Purley and Selsdon libraries.
 - A successful alternative library (Selsdon) is within reach for many and accessible transport would be provided to support those that would otherwise find it hard to visit Selsdon and Purley libraries.
 - The freeing up of resources would enable the service to provide outreach support and collections in community venues and reach those not currently using the service, including children, young people and older residents.
 - The library is well-supported by the local community and there may the potential for keeping the building in use as a community asset.

Recommendations

1. That Sanderstead Library is closed to allow for the reinvestment of resources in neighbouring libraries and in library outreach.
2. That the mitigations summarised above and in the EQIA be implemented.
3. That the Council explores the level of community interest in retaining the building.
4. That the particular impacts on people with mobility issues that might prevent them making use of another library are considered further.
5. That the Council explores options for outreach provision to serve the community impacted by closure.
6. That an accessible bus transport is provided to enable users with access needs to use services at other libraries.

Findings and recommendations for Shirley Library

- 5.14 Given its small size, its building and its poor performance and high unit costs, it is recommended that Shirley Library is closed:
- Shirley Library's comparative performance and unit costs are poor and usage was comparatively low even when the library was open full-time.
 - Shirley Library's catchment area overlaps with Ashburton Library's (and West Wickham Library's).
 - Ashburton Library has the capacity, particularly when open for more days, to provide a full service offer to users of Shirley Library.
 - Mitigation is planned which will provide transport access for those who find it difficult to reach Ashburton Library and outreach at community locations.
 - The catchment area has several areas which are among the most deprived in England that will need particular attention and support.
 - Discussions would be needed with Bromley Council before the new West Wickham Library was actively marketed as an option for Croydon residents.
- 5.15 The impacts and mitigations are described further in the EQIA at Appendix D.

Recommendations

1. That Shirley Library is closed to allow for the reinvestment of resources in neighbouring libraries and in library outreach in the Shirley area.
2. That the mitigations summarised above and in the EQIA be implemented.
3. That Bromley Council's library service be consulted before actively promoting to residents in Shirley the option of using West Wickham Library.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

- 4. That an accessible bus transport is provided to enable users with access needs to use services at other libraries.**
- 5. That the library service engage with Oasis Academy to address any concerns about the behaviour of students and safe access and entry into Ashburton Library.**

Library services review – review of closure proposals

The new Croydon library network of provision

- 5.16 In this section, we compare the current library network using the 1 mile and 1.25 mile catchment areas with the new network of provision if the recommended closures and outreach locations are established.
- 5.17 The current map of libraries whose 1-mile catchment areas include Croydon residents was summarised in section 2. It is made up of:
- 13 libraries managed by Croydon Council.
 - Eight libraries managed by four other councils: Surrey County Council, Bromley Council, Lambeth Council and Merton Council.
- 5.18 If the recommended closures are approved and the new outreach locations are established, the new pattern of provision open to Croydon's residents will be:
- The nine libraries retained by Croydon Council which will provide a full library offer.
 - A range of community outreach locations which would offer library services tailored to complement the host organisation's work, with a local collection of books and materials.
 - The libraries in neighbouring boroughs that Croydon residents can already use.
- 5.19 The community outreach locations that have been mapped were suggested as potential venues during consultation and are ones that the library service has identified as viable locations if the host organisations are willing to proceed. Those suggested included:
- Byron Children's Centre.
 - Shirley Children's Centre.
 - Community Voluntary Action, London Road.
 - Play Place (Fieldway).
 - Sanderstead United Reform Church.
 - Tollers Community Centre.
 - West Wickham and Shirley Baptist Church.
- 5.20 It should be noted that these locations are simply used for modelling purposes and imply no commitment to proceed on behalf of the host organisation. Outreach pilots are being planned and the experience will inform the library service's final target locations and the organisations that would like to partner with the Council.
- 5.21 The maps suggest that the population reached by the current and future map of provision is very similar whether using a 1- or 1.25-mile radius. Overall, those living more than 1 mile from library provision number nearly 30,000 now would number about 20,000 in future. Those living more than 1.25 miles from library provision number over 6,000 now and about 3,000 in future.
- 5.22 Given the geography of the borough, which is a mix of areas with high housing density and ones with more extensive green space and green belt, different catchment area radii are reasonable and offer a reasonably efficient map of provision.

Library services review – review of closure proposals

Figure C5.1: areas in blue whose residents live more than 1 mile from their current nearest library in the existing network of library provision and in future

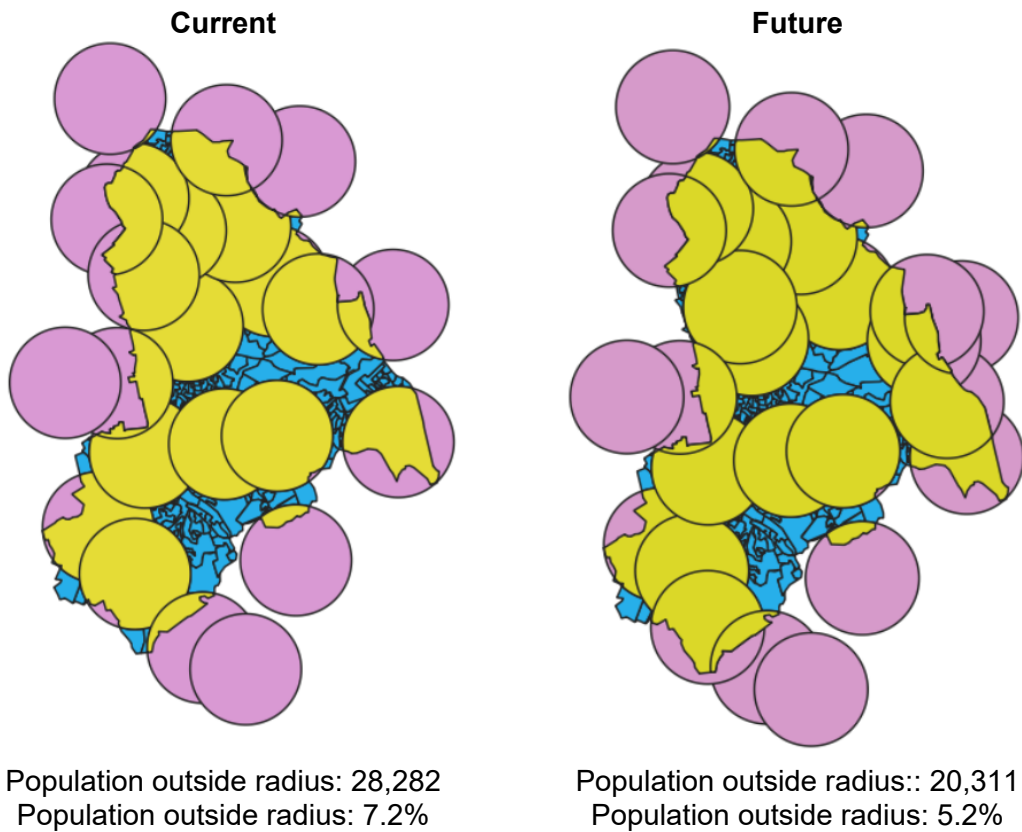


Figure C5.2: areas in blue whose residents live more than 1.25 miles from their current nearest library in the existing network of library provision and in future

