

Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to speak today.

If the policy of the County Council is followed through without amendment it puts four of North West Leicestershire's six libraries at risk. The loss of these libraries would have an irreversible impact on local communities and local people.

I welcome the news that the Cabinet looks set to pause and I urge the committee to make sure this pause is meaningful.

Libraries not only serve the purpose of lending books, they reach out to the community. They provide computer access to those who cannot at home. They put on events and clubs which support local children to learn and thrive.

Libraries need to modernise their offer. They can become greater social hubs for the community. Police or District Council contact points. Parish Council support. Space for social enterprises to thrive. A local place for NEETs to get on. I believe the County Council is the best organisation to bring in new services, and with it new funding.

Aside from the social case to protect our local libraries I welcome the Cabinet's impending decision to look into the rationale behind deciding which libraries retain support. Our point is simple: if the community cannot take over the library the County must take a long hard look at the importance of that library before closing it.

The County Council is not empowering local communities to run libraries, that option is already in law. It is forcing community delivery of services as a do or die option.

Each library is a case in point.

Measham Library serves one of North West Leicestershire's poorest communities. The building is just ten years old and is right at the heart of the community.

Ibstock Library already represents a great partnership with the local school. It provides some of the cheapest lending across the County and it would be a shame to throw away good partnerships already in place.

As Castle Donington is forced to grow the public services that support it need to grow, not shrink. Castle Donington already feels isolated and the distances of travel are simply unacceptable.

While the Kegworth community have taken a lead in reacting to this threat and are looking at ways to take over the library - where is the Council's support and back up plan? Kegworth like Castle Donington is a growing community that feels isolated. It would be unacceptable to lose libraries in years to come due to lack of support.

I urge this committee to grasp this pause to protect and improve our libraries. Let's not throw away great social hubs for our community that we can improve with the County's leadership.