

Consultation Information – Bedford Borough Library Strategy

2026-2031

Introduction

Bedford Borough Council is consulting on its draft Library Strategy 2026-2031, which sets out a vision and priorities for library services over the next five years.

Libraries continue to play an important role within our communities. As well as providing access to books and information, libraries support reading and literacy, digital inclusion, learning and skills development, health and wellbeing, creativity, culture and community connection.

The draft strategy has been informed by a Needs Assessment which considers current and future community needs, library usage, demographic changes and how library services can continue to support residents across the Borough. No decision has been made on the adoption of the strategy and we are seeking views before any final strategy is considered.

Why is a new Library Strategy needed?

Bedford Borough is changing. The population is growing and becoming increasingly diverse, while demand for learning, digital access, health and wellbeing support, family activities and community participation continues to increase. The strategy aims to ensure library services respond to these changing needs while remaining sustainable and making the best use of available resources.

What does the Needs Assessment tell us?

The Libraries Needs Assessment identifies trends that will shape future library services, including increasing diversity, an ageing population, growing demand for services for children and families, greater need for digital skills, and demand for flexible community spaces.

The assessment also highlights the important role libraries play in supporting reading and literacy, reducing digital exclusion, improving health and wellbeing, tackling loneliness, and helping residents access information, learning and opportunities.

Draft Vision

Libraries at the heart of Bedford Borough's communities – inspiring reading, supporting learning, promoting wellbeing and connecting people with opportunities.

Draft Strategic Priorities

The draft strategy proposes four priorities for Bedford Borough Libraries.



Priority 1: Inspiring Reading and Connecting People with Opportunities

Supporting literacy, learning, digital inclusion and lifelong skills development through access to books, information, technology and learning opportunities.



Priority 2: Reducing Inequalities and Improving Wellbeing

Helping residents access support, improve wellbeing and live healthy, independent lives through inclusive and responsive library services.



Priority 3: Strengthening Communities through Creativity and Culture

Bringing people together through culture, creativity, community participation and partnerships with local organisations and communities.



Priority 4: Sustainable Libraries for a Changing Borough

Providing accessible and sustainable library services that continue to meet changing needs and make effective use of resources.

Our ambition for 2031

By 2031, Bedford Borough Libraries will provide accessible, inclusive and sustainable services that help residents read, learn, stay connected and access opportunities throughout their lives.

How does Bedford Central Library fit within the Strategy?

Alongside the draft strategy, the Council is consulting on options for the future development of Bedford Central Library. There is a separate information document on this part of the consultation available at www.bedford.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation.

Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please contact us at our address below.

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