

BIDFORD COMMUNITY LIBRARY (BCL)

The new local Social Enterprise

(working with and for the local community)

As you are all aware, following the recent consultation, Bidford Library, as currently managed, will be closing on 24th March 2012..

But fear not! When doors are opened to the library on Monday 2nd April 2012 (luckily April Fool's Day falls on a Sunday, so we can avoid all the trite jokes!), they will be welcoming you to **Bidford Community Library** – a new local social enterprise set up to ensure Bidford continues to enjoy the benefits of a local library as well as a new community hub.

So what is a Social Enterprise?

Believe it or not, social enterprises, in one form or another, have been around since the Co-operative Movement in Rochdale back in 1844.

The government's definition of a Social Enterprises is *"businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners"*

Social Enterprise UK (the official body for social enterprises) defines it as *"a business that trades to tackle social problems, improve communities, people's life chances or the environment"*

You, the community, may simply say that it is Big Society in action!

Social Enterprises are on the up. According to the 2010 Annual Small Business survey, it is estimated there are about 62,000 in the UK contributing over £8bn in GDP, and with a shrinking public sector, the opportunities for local communities to set up social enterprise businesses is ever growing.

BCL is a good example of this: our local authority, Warwickshire County Council is closing the library, and the local community decided not only to meet the challenge, but to improve the services offered and widen its appeal. How? By setting it up as social enterprise, to be managed by, and for the benefit of, the local community.

So, why a Social Enterprise and not a Registered Charity?

First of all, social enterprises can be, and in many instances are, charities. The difference is that it can trade to create income and therefore be less dependent on grants and donations.

Unlike charities, that are governed by strict regulations set by the Charity Commission, which can be quite onerous and restrictive, social enterprises offer a variety of legal structures that give business the flexibility they need to take control of their future and not rely on funding outside their control.

When setting up **BCL**, it was essential that the right structure was chosen to best suit its style of management and mission. It was decided that **BCL** should be set up as a non-profit Company Limited by Guarantee, the most common structure for social enterprises, as it can be adapted to suit most purposes.

Of course, setting up **BCL** as a social enterprise does not mean it cannot, or will not, seek funding, but it does mean it is not dependent on it to survive, and this was the determining factor.

Finally, it is important to note that, although business rates discount are not automatic, as in the case of a registered charity, they are usually granted to non-profit social enterprise companies, that are set up to benefit the community. In the case of **BCL**, the Directors have checked with Stratford-on-Avon District Council and have been advised that it would be eligible for the 80% discount.

Community Involvement – Would you like to influence the management of Bidford Community Library?

The Directors would like the structure, control and direction of **BCL** to be based on a stakeholder group and will, therefore, be offering members of the community the opportunity to become "**Friends of Bidford Community Library**", for an annual subscription fee, with a right to vote and have a say on how it is managed.

The Directors hope this will give the local community a feel of social ownership of **BCL**, which will underline the social enterprise aims of the company.

At the same time, it will raise a secure annual income that will benefit **BCL** and those it serves.

Although as a social enterprise, **BCL** can have paid employees, it is envisaged that the library functions will be carried out by volunteers. **BCL** will continue to be part of Warwickshire County Council's "Library Management System", known as LMS, and volunteers will receive initial training from Warwickshire CC to ensure there is continuity as apart from the change in staff, there will be no change in the type of service being offered by the library.

Volunteers from the local community will play an essential role in ensuring the library, and any other community service offered, runs smoothly. The Directors recognise the importance of volunteers, after all they are the life and blood of the company, and without them there would be no **BCL**, and they are committed to ensure their well-being and work satisfaction

So, what of the future of Bidford Community Library?

BCL was set up because of local community support for the services provided by the library.

The Directors have taken advice on which structure would suit its aims best and have listened to the community so that **BCL** offers the opportunities and services that are most required.

As a non-profit Company Limited by Guarantee, **BCL** is flexible enough to change as and when, and if, required to ensure it continue to offer the local community what it needs and wants. If does that, if it listens and acts as its community wants, it will succeed and Bidford-on-Avon will be proud to have made a success of an institution that Warwickshire County Council had condemned as "unsustainable".

BCL was created for the benefit of the local community: the local community must ensure **BCL** continues to work for and with the local community.

Together, we will succeed

Directors of Bidford Community Library – February 2012