

## Visit to Farnborough Library

Twenty-one members had a very enjoyable and informative tour of Farnborough Library in the company of library manager Rob Bealey. He started by giving us an overview of recent developments in the library, and the challenges it faces in the future. Cuts in funding mean that libraries everywhere have to maximise their resources and look at ways to generate income.

Part of this involves engaging with other agencies, and one way they have done this is to provide space for a café within the library. This is run by Parkside, an Aldershot-based charity which provides support services for people with learning disabilities, giving young people experience of the work environment and providing a useful step towards mainstream employment.

What was once an under-used meetings room is now used by Hampshire County Council adult services to provide training and support for young people looking for work. Smaller rooms are used for a variety of educational and leisure courses which provide income for the library.

Our visit continued with a look at the Children's Library, which since a recent refurbishment has a multi-coloured chequerboard carpet and brightly painted child-sized furniture.



Each week the library holds a Baby Rhyme Time for the under-twos and a storytime for under-fives. For older children there is a Code Club, and a 'Let's Build' Construction Club using Lego (they cannot call it a Lego Club for copyright reasons!). These clubs are run by volunteers. During the summer, extra volunteers are recruited to help with a holiday reading scheme to encourage children to continue reading.

Volunteers also run a number of clubs for adults, including a book group, Craft and Chat, Knit and Natter, and a board game club. More are planned for the future, including a local studies group if a volunteer can be recruited to run it.

Rob talked about other ways in which the library has had to cut costs. Mobile libraries were expensive to run and under-used, so these have been phased out and replaced by the Home Library Service, using volunteers to deliver books to the homes of those unable to get to a library. Housebound readers and others can also use E-books, which may be temporarily downloaded from the library website free of charge. The use of DVDs and music CDs has declined dramatically and no longer provides useful revenue, so these are being phased out. Library users now issue and return their own books at self-service units, freeing staff for other duties.

We then looked at the Aviation Collection followed by the Local History Collection (which now sadly has no specialist member of staff). The library holds the News and Mail on microfiche back as far as 1894, as well as copies of Flight Magazine dating back to 1909

Computers are available in the library and are well-used by students and those without internet access at home. Assistance is given when needed by library staff, and there are plans for volunteers to be recruited to give more in-depth help where necessary.

We came away with an impression of a vibrant, dynamic library which despite financial constraints and the changing needs of users, will continue to respond well to the challenges ahead.