

Wellington Libraries

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- Wadestown (because of population size and distance to Central library)
- Brooklyn (because of distance to Central library and Newtown)
- Island Bay (because of distance to Newtown and Kilbirnie)
- Khandallah (because of distance to Johnsonville).

The policy also suggests that the Ngaio library (Cummings Park) could be downgraded from a dedicated building to 'library service' 'located with community spaces' – whatever that means.

It's also possible that some suburbs currently without library service since the closure of the Mobile Library may end up with some 'library service', though not a library as such.

Background – And how to comment

Buried in the Wellington City Council's draft annual plan for 2010/11 there is a major threat to our current library system – with potential for Wadestown, Brooklyn, Island Bay and Khandallah to lose their libraries.

Page 24 of the draft annual plan refers to 'a proposed new policy defining the facilities that should be available for city and suburban residents....'. The regular two-page Council spread in the *Dominion Post* on 13 April also trumpeted this new policy, and invited citizens to comment on it.

The 18-page '2010 Draft Community facilities policy and implementation plan' can be found at <http://www.wellington.govt.nz/haveyoursay/publicinput/pdfs/community-policy.pdf>. This is available for consultation right now, with submissions closing on May 10 2010.

It All Looks OK

The Council's website summary doesn't mention closing libraries, of course. Instead, it says the 'strategic priorities' for libraries are:

- 'Increasing community access to digital information
- Combining community development and library services
- Strengthening services in high-growth areas, such as Kilbirnie, Johnsonville and the inner city.'

And the 'spending priorities' for libraries are:

'Upgrading the Central Library and Johnsonville Library and investing in library technology and digital material'.

Sounds alright, doesn't it? But take a closer look at the policy itself. This policy matters, because it is to be a '*guide for the Council when it makes decisions about future investment in or disposal of community facilities*' (page 1). It covers pools, community centres, halls, recreation centres and libraries. Once adopted, this is the document Council will refer to in

future when it's making decisions about what facilities will be available and where, and which facilities will be disposed of.

The guideline and plan for libraries in the draft policy is as follows. There will be:

- a central library and two large libraries at Kilbirnie and Johnsonville. These three hubs are called 'Central City and sub-regional centres'.
- Four 'town centres': Karori, Miramar, Newtown and Tawa, each with a 'large suburban library collocated with community spaces'.

So far so good, although it's not clear what 'collocated with community spaces' means.

But Read Further

But what comes next in Table 2 of the draft policy really rings alarm bells. The other suburban areas will be either 'district centres' (these are Churton Park, Ngaio, Strathmore, Hataitai, Khandallah, Kelburn, Island Bay, Brooklyn and Newlands) or 'neighbourhood centres' (there are 14 of these including places like Seatoun, Aro Valley and Wadestown). These neighbourhood centres each have a population below 6,000 people.

Some of these 'district centres' currently have a library, but note a subtle change in wording about them. In future these district centres may not have a 'library' as such, but perhaps 'library services'. Each district centre will have a *'library service unless the Centre is within 3km of town, or regional centre with a library service. Where library services are provided, these will be located with community spaces'*, says the policy (page7).

On the 'neighbourhood centres' (one of which – Wadestown – currently has a library) the draft policy is silent; the cell in Table 2 is blank; i.e. no library and no library service.

This policy, if adopted, spells the end of our suburban library network as we have known it. Under this policy, the number of dedicated libraries (currently 12) could be nearly halved, so that the only remaining dedicated library buildings will number seven: Central Wellington, Johnsonville, Kilbirnie, Karori, Newtown, Miramar and Tawa. Reading what the policy actually says, it appears that other suburbs which currently have a library (Brooklyn, Island Bay, Khandallah, Wadestown, and Ngaio) may no longer have a dedicated library building, but in some cases will have 'library services' 'located with community spaces'. What does this mean? Could it mean a couple of computers and a book delivery box in a corner of the Community Hall? Or is it a fully staffed, dedicated library? If so, why not call it 'a library'?

As hinted above, the assessments about libraries are based on both population size in different suburbs, and distance from one of the seven lucky areas with their own library. The magic number is three kilometers, though it's not clear if this is as the crow flies, or by road or bus route. According to the policy if a 'district centre' is within three kilometers of one of the seven libraries listed above, the district centre will not get its own library.

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On the other hand, it's possible that some suburbs currently without library service since the closure of the Mobile Library may end up with some 'library service', though not a library as such.

For those who value public libraries as repositories of knowledge and culture, as vital community centres and free civic spaces where all citizens feel welcome, the proposed policy is a vicious slap in the face. If you want to keep our good library system, make a submission now. Public meetings will be held on 21, 22 and 26 April. And, as Council elections come closer, why not ask candidates for a clear statement that they will not support libraries closing, or library services reducing. Before you vote, ask candidates for a promise that services will expand to encourage even greater use of the civilising force of our free public libraries.