**The ‘Friends of Wash Common Library’ group applied, through West Berkshire Council’s Devolution Programme, to take over the running of their local library.**

**The new community library is now run by local volunteers and is independent of the library service run by West Berkshire Council.**

***A volunteer’s perspective:***

**Mrs Julia Calvert,** Chairman of the Friends of Wash Common Library

Whenever I visited Wash Common Library, it was always busy with people browsing, young families enjoying the children's books and people making use of the computers. The staff there were always so friendly and it was such a warm and welcoming place to visit.

When I heard that the library was going to close, it seemed such a shame to lose this well-loved community space and service. I decided to join the Friends of Wash Common Library in the hope of being able to save the library, so that the people of Wash Common would still have this wonderful resource on their door step.

The Friends of Wash Common Library, decided that if West Berkshire Council could not keep the library open, then we should run it ourselves, as a community library. So with great support from the local residents, partners and organisations, we took steps to achieve this.

In April 2017, we contacted West Berkshire Council to express and interest in the library building. Jo Naylor, who manages devolution projects for the Council was very supportive and encouraged our application. We also approached Greenham Common Trust and sought their help in producing a clear business plan and seeking grant support so the service could be sustained.

The library running costs were approximately £8,000 per year, and it was clear that significant fundraising efforts would be needed for the Friends of Wash Common Library reach their goal.

Whilst the practical aspects of the library transfer were being discussed within the local authority we found a temporary place for people to meet up in the neighbouring community centre and started up a book exchange in February 2018. Whilst helping at the book exchange, I met so many lovely people from the community and it was their continued interest and support in the Wash Common Library that made all our efforts worthwhile!

Our application, in partnership with Newbury Town Council was formally agreed and the lease signed some 20-months after the initial closure. We were able to reopened Wash Common Library to the public in December 2018.

It has been fantastic to see and hear from the library users, about how pleased they are to have their library back! It has also been reassuring that people care enough about the library to come forward and give their time to volunteer and to join the Friends of Wash Common Library. I am hopeful that over the coming months and years, the service will continue to grow and adapt to the needs of the local community.

***West Berkshire Council perspective:***

**Paul James,** West Berkshire Council’s Culture and Libraries Manager

When the residents in Wash Common learned in 2016 that the council would have to close their library, in the wake of reductions in central government funding, they were keen to organise and propose some community-led solutions.

After discussions with the Library Service a new local community group was formed to set up a community library entirely run by local volunteers. Although this isn’t linked to the West Berkshire Library Service, the service was able to donate all the book stock and furniture to the community group and the council leased the building at a peppercorn rent to enable the project to go forwards.

Libraries are about books but they are also about other things – a safe and trusted place to meet, a venue for community groups, events and activities, free access to the internet for job searches and applications; and school and higher education study. The Wash Common Community Library is all of those things, as well as providing opportunities for local people to volunteer and help their own community.