

UPPER NORWOOD JOINT LIBRARY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The only remaining independent and jointly-funded public library in the UK, the Upper Norwood Joint Library (UNJL) serves a well-defined local community which straddles five London boroughs – Croydon, Lambeth, Bromley, Lewisham and Southwark. The catchment area of the library includes the Crystal Palace district and comprises residents from all five local authorities and elsewhere.

It is a unique service, and is currently managed by a Joint Committee of local councillors from the Joint Library's principal funders, the London Boroughs of Croydon and Lambeth, together with two local community representatives.

The independent nature of the service means that UNJL is effectively a microcosmic single-site 'mini-library authority', setting its own policies, procedures and priorities and organising its own consultation process, service development and programme of promotional events.

Independent status allows for a very responsive and flexible approach to service provision, with all staff having some degree of public-facing responsibilities. This contact with the local community at all levels avoids the perceived remoteness of some larger library authorities and generates a powerful level of support from its users, many of whom have used the service for many decades.

The library is well sited in a busy shopping/recreation area on the borders of Lambeth and Croydon. It forms part of the 'Crystal Palace Triangle' and is close to many cafes, pubs, restaurants and local shops. The world-famous Crystal Palace Park is on its doorstep, as is the Crystal Palace Sports Centre.

The original building opened in July 1900, and consisted of a lending library and newsroom on the ground floor, with an 'open access' shelf stock of 8,500 volumes. The Upper Norwood Joint Library was one of the first public libraries to provide this service as most others at that time retained their books on a 'closed access' system. In 1903 a Reference library was opened on the first floor, and this was later partitioned to create a Children's library in 1929. In 1936 an extension was constructed to expand the Children's library. In 1965 work commenced on an extension at the rear of the building on the ground floor, increasing the floor space by a third, and a car park was built for library users.

After several years of limited investment, in 2003 the UNJL was successful in obtaining more than £1 million of LDA/SRB and Sure Start funding which enabled a complete transformation of the building, making it fully accessible and creating a more modern environment for both service users and library staff. The Children's library has now been relocated to the ground floor, along with the audio-visual stock and adult fiction. The reference section and most adult non-fiction are now housed on the first floor, together with increased study space and ICT facilities. The first floor also houses a new section for young adults, called 'First Base'. The library basement level has been transformed and now has a meeting room which is available for public hire, along with the new staff areas, large reserve stock and office space.