Public Libraries and the Baby Boomer Generation:
An investigation into public library service provision for
Baby Boomers

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by

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to provide an introduction to the subject of public library provision for the ‘baby boomer’ generation. Limited research has been carried out into this area to date; however, the study of the baby boomers is now reaching an important stage as the older baby boomers are nearing retirement. The purpose of this dissertation is to assess the baby boomers’ perceptions of the public library; identify any barriers to use; identify any factors which would encourage more use; and ascertain library staff members’ perceptions of this age group. In order to investigate the baby boomers’ perceptions of the public library service, four libraries within the Cheshire area were chosen as case studies. A qualitative approach was decided upon and questionnaires were issued prior to undertaking focus group sessions at the libraries. The results from these sessions were then discussed with library staff in an attempt to establish the librarian’s perceptions of this age group and their needs.

The issue of library stock was felt to be important, with a number of participants expressing the opinion that the relevance and currency of some of the stock acted as a disincentive to use. The majority of the baby boomer participants felt that they would like a degree of input through consultation to outline their needs and express their opinions of the services and facilities. The baby boomers were generally very satisfied with the library staff and enjoyed the social interaction with staff members during a visit to the library.

Overall, the library staff felt that the baby boomer generation has changed in comparison to recent years, and acknowledged that the needs of this group may need to be addressed in the future, particularly as the baby boomers begin to retire. Although no existing services or facilities have been introduced with this specific age range in mind – aside from a Silver Surfer event – each of the librarians spoken to suggested some services which could be tailored to ensure relevance for this age cohort.

Both library users and non users felt that the library had an important role to play as a focal point for the community. The general feeling was that this role should be developed in order to promote stronger community identities, through local events and the provision of meeting rooms and facilities.

The full time employed baby boomers found that the opening hours caused a barrier to use, as often they did not find the time to visit the library during the week and found it difficult to attend the library on Saturday mornings. The internet is becoming increasingly important for this age group, with the majority of participants commenting that for information purposes, the internet was now their first port of call.
On the whole, the baby boomers agreed that a rise in disposable income and the availability of books had resulted in a consumer culture, with the majority of participants, both users and non users, stating that they would regularly purchase books. However, a small minority disagreed and commented that they had rebelled against the trend for purchasing for space and cost reasons and felt that it was important to borrow books from the library so that they could be returned for others to enjoy.

The baby boomers are subjected to pressures of competing interests for their time, although, in the main, the baby boomers felt that if they enjoyed reading as a hobby, they could still find time to read. However, their overall lack of time, especially for the employed, was cited as a major barrier to library use, coupled with the opening hours of the library. The baby boomers felt that coffee facilities would be a welcome addition to their libraries and would encourage them to visit the library more often and linger within the building.

Overall, the library users felt overwhelmingly that the library was an extremely important part of their lives, with the majority of non users believing that it was important to have the library, even if they did not necessarily use it. A small minority felt that the library was becoming increasingly irrelevant. The baby boomers also stated that the library should advertise itself and its services more effectively as many of the library users and non users were unaware of the full range of services on offer at their library.

The baby boomers felt that their library use has changed in comparison to their parent's use in the past, with the baby boomers using the library for a variety of reasons and not just stock loan, although the frequency of visits tended to be less overall than their parents.

The dissertation concludes that further research needs to be undertaken into the baby boomers' use of the public library to ensure that their needs and requirements are fully identified and future services can be considered with this group in mind.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the library staff at Chester, Macclesfield, Poynton and Disley Libraries for their enthusiastic assistance and cooperation, and in particular Tonya Chirgwin who has been extremely helpful and interested in the research from the beginning.

I would also like to thank all participants who took part in each stage of the research for their time and opinions.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Professor Bob Usherwood, for his enthusiasm and practical advice.

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## Contents

**ABSTRACT** .......................................................................................................................... 2

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ........................................................................................................ 4

**CONTENTS** .......................................................................................................................... 5

1 **INTRODUCTION** ................................................................................................................ 7

1.1 **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT** ..................................................................................... 7

1.2 **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES** .................................................................................................. 8

1.3 **CASE STUDIES** ................................................................................................................ 9

1.4 **DEFINING THE ‘BABY BOOMERS’** ................................................................................. 9

1.5 **CHAPTER OUTLINE** ....................................................................................................... 10

2 **METHODOLOGY** ................................................................................................................ 12

2.1 **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH** ................................................................................... 12

2.2 **QUALITATIVE APPROACH** ............................................................................................. 13

2.2.1 **Questionnaires** ............................................................................................................ 14

2.2.2 **Focus Groups** ............................................................................................................. 15

2.2.3 **Interviews with Members of Staff** .............................................................................. 16

2.3 **RESEARCH TOOLS** ........................................................................................................ 18

2.3.1 **The Questionnaire** ....................................................................................................... 18

2.3.2 **Focus Group Questions** ............................................................................................. 18

2.3.3 **Staff Interview Schedules** .......................................................................................... 19

2.4 **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS** ........................................................................................ 20

2.5 **LIMITATIONS AND SUCCESSES** ............................................................................... 20

2.5.1 **Limitations** .................................................................................................................. 20

2.5.2 **Successes** .................................................................................................................. 21

2.6 **SUMMARY** .................................................................................................................... 22

3 **THE LIBRARY AS SERVICE PROVIDER** ......................................................................... 23

3.1 **INTRODUCTION** .......................................................................................................... 23

3.2 **LITERATURE REVIEW** .................................................................................................. 23

3.3 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION** ....................................................................................... 26

3.3.1 **Library Stock** ............................................................................................................. 26

3.3.2 **Stock Selection and Consultation** .............................................................................. 31

3.3.3 **Library Facilities** ....................................................................................................... 34

3.3.4 **Library Staff** .............................................................................................................. 37

3.4 **SUMMARY** .................................................................................................................... 39
1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The age structure of the United Kingdom is changing as the post World War Two generation begin to near retirement age. In 2002, 19.8 million people were aged 50 and over, an increase of 24% from 1961 and it is anticipated that this number will increase by another 37% by 2031 (National Statistics, 2004).

These dramatic increases in births from 1945 until 1965, with the two peaks of 1947 and 1964, means that a substantial proportion of the population will shortly be reaching retirement age which has previously been used as a marker for ‘old age’ (Bond and Coleman, 1990; Walker and Maltby, 1997). However, the emerging contrast in recent years between the ‘young old’ and the ‘old old’ has been noted (Blaikie, 1999; Bytheway, 1995; Johnson and Falkingham, 1992). Blaikie provides this definition of Third Age – also known as the ‘new old’ - provided by the Third Age Network, as:

“...beginning around fifty, when the children have left home, material and career pressures lessen and there is time to enjoy the fruits of earlier labours.” (Blaikie, 1999:67).

Recognition of this concept of a ‘third age’ has been further compounded by the establishment throughout Europe of Universities of the Third Age which aim to provide people within this age range with the opportunity of accessing higher education (Walker and Maltby, 1997). However, Illsley feels that this concept of a third age does not cover all social classes and inequalities:

"[It] is an unrealistic portrayal of the lifestyle, time-scale, planning orientation, financial resources and aspirations of the mass of today's retiring non-intellectuals." (in Arber and Evandrou, 1993:15).

The ‘new elderly’ of the so-called Baby Boomer generation are now between the ages of 40 and 60, and many within these groups will shortly be classed as ‘elderly citizens’ within the community. However, there has been some debate that this generation display different characteristics to those traditionally associated with the ‘elderly’ and therefore have different needs. According to contemporary newspaper reports (Hogan, 2004), baby boomers are turning their backs upon more ‘traditional’ hobbies and leisure pursuits in favour of travel, eating out, socialising, creative activities and physical activities (Young, 2004). In fact, following on from this shift, the term “geri-actives” has now been coined for the over 55’s by a leading life insurier. While the more traditional pursuit of gardening remains the
most cited hobby for this age group, do-it-yourself activities have sharply risen in popularity and have overtaken clothes retail therapy as a leisure interest (Gray, 2000).

For those baby boomers with sufficient funds, a rise in consumerism has been noted, with brands and luxury items high on the list of desirable items (Frean, 2004). Perhaps as a result of this consumerism and the expectations created by familiarity with retail experiences, the baby boomers have high standards and also expect public services to meet those standards. As Huber and Skidmore comment:

“The argument runs that citizens increasingly expect to have the same levels of choice, customisation and quality in public services as they would expect in the private sector and there is some evidence that for the baby boomers this may be true.” (Huber and Skidmore, 2003:37).

Many commentators of the baby boom generations caution that it is inaccurate to classify this diverse group of people as a homogenous group with similar interests and circumstances (Arber and Evandrou, 1993; Huber and Skidmore, 2003; Morgan and Kunkel, 1998; Vincent, 1999). However, as Vincent continues, it is possible for age ‘cohorts’ such as the first wave of baby boomers to have common sets of experiences which can lead to a sense of identity and common interests (Vincent, 1999).

1.2 Aims and Objectives

In order to address this perceived ‘gap in knowledge’ regarding public library services and the baby boomer, it was felt that much could be learned from an examination of baby boomers’ perceptions of themselves as a social group and their views of their local public library service.

As a result the primary objectives of this research are:

- To investigate baby boomers’ usage of their local public libraries and their perceptions of the current service;
- To identify any barriers which may prevent this age group from using the library;
- To investigate whether any factors exist which would result in the baby boomers using their public library more often;
- To investigate whether this ‘new elderly’ group have changed in their use and perception of the public library in comparison to their parents;
- To explore whether the baby boomers are viewed by library staff as a distinct group with their own needs and requirements.
1.3 Case Studies

In order to investigate the above objectives in as wide a range of contexts as possible, four public libraries from within the Cheshire Library Service region were selected as case studies for this research project. Each serves a local community which differs in size, geographical range and social circumstances in order to provide information from as diverse a sample as could feasibly be reached through the scope of this dissertation.

The four public libraries selected from within the Cheshire Libraries group were:

- Chester Library, a city centre library with 18,205 active borrowers in 2003, which constitutes 24% of the local population;
- Macclesfield Library, a town library with 18,475 active borrowers in 2003, 46% of the local population;
- Poynton Library, a village library with 5,857 active borrowers in 2003, 41% of the local population;
- Disley Library, a small village library with 1,152 active borrowers in 2003, 25% of the local population.

(Figures from Cheshire Libraries’ internal database of Library usage).

1.4 Defining the ‘Baby Boomers’

Huber and Skidmore (2003) define the ‘baby boomer’ generations as those born between the years of 1945 and 1965. However, Evandrou states that the baby boomer generations consist of those who were born between 1946 and 1965, with the first ‘peak’ in births following the end of the Second World War in 1945 (Evandrou, 1997). Pankl notes that baby boomer literature has attributed the span of the baby boom years as “anywhere between 1943 and 1946, ending between 1960 and 1965”. (Pankl, 2004:215).

For the purposes of this research, the age group selected spanned the years of birth from 1944 until 1950. The baby boomer participants were therefore aged between 54 and 60. It was decided to include those born in 1944 as this group of people will have experienced the same generational issues as those born from 1945 to 1950 and a number of those born within this year will be retiring shortly and would provide a perspective for retired baby boomers’ use of the public library.

The late 1940’s Baby Boom generation have experienced post-war austerity; were increasingly likely to attend higher education institutions; and were young adults during the
1960’s, when job markets were thriving and social change resulted in more freedom within society (Evandrou, 1997). These life experiences will have had a profound effect upon the Baby Boomer generations and will necessarily shape their outlook and opinions.

Huber and Skidmore (2003) have commented that although it is dangerous to generalise about the baby boomer generations as a whole, the characteristics of liberalism and individualism can be attributed to baby boomers. They also found that the baby boomer is more likely to be anti-establishment, non-conformist, less deferential and less trusting of those in authority than their predecessors.

It is estimated that in 2003, there were approximately 17 million baby boomers in the United Kingdom, an estimated 29% of the total population, a not inconsiderable number (Huber and Skidmore, 2003).

1.5 Chapter Outline

Section Two of this dissertation outlines the methodological approach taken and includes the reasoning behind taking such an approach and provides a breakdown of the research tools used to collect the data. The ethical considerations involved in such a study are also taken into account in this section, as is a discussion of the limitations and successes of this piece of research.

The main body of the dissertation is addressed in Sections Three to Six. Each of the sections follows the same structure: an introduction, a literature review, results and discussion followed by the summary.

Section Three concentrates upon the library as a service provider and discusses the baby boomers’ perceptions of the provision of library stock, the facilities available and the members of library staff.

Section Four examines the role of the public library as a physical place and considers the baby boomers’ patterns of use, their perceptions of the building and its layout, its accessibility and discusses whether rising internet use within this age group is having an impact upon their use of the library.

Section Five investigates the role of the library as a competitor and examines the rise of consumer culture and the bookshop, the effect of competing interests upon the baby boomer’s time and explores the trend for coffee shop culture and suggestions made by the baby boomers in the focus group sessions.
Section Six discusses the role of the public library as an institution and examines the image of the public library, its importance to the baby boomers, their perceptions of advertising and publicity undertaken by the library and finishes with an exploration of the changing nature of public library use compared to their parents’ generation.

Section Seven outlines the conclusions drawn from the research and also incorporates suggestions to the public library service and recommendations for future research.
2 Methodology

2.1 Methodological Approach

Following an initial literature review, it became clear that research concerning the Baby Boomer generation and public library use has been limited. Research has been undertaken with the ‘older’ elderly in mind, and is often linked with issues concerning disabled users of all ages and incorporates the problems caused by barriers to access such as mobility issues and sight and hearing problems (Edmonds, 1991; Kleiman, 1995). However, specific research in the area of the ‘new’ elderly appears to be lacking. It has therefore been decided that this dissertation will take an inductive approach.

Patton has described this as:

“Immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important categories, dimensions and interrelationships…by exploring genuinely open questions rather than testing theoretically derived hypotheses.” (Patton, 1990:40).

As the opinions of the Baby Boomers and the library staff within the target libraries are fundamental to this research, it is hoped that by using an inductive approach issues will be raised which will begin to go some way towards providing new information in this relatively unexplored area.

Prior to the collation of data, a literature review was undertaken in order to ensure familiarity with the literature relating to those approaching retirement and how age is seen by society. An understanding of the context within which the research is taking place is necessary, even in cases where little literature exists about the specific research topic (Moore in Slater, 1990).

However, it is also important that preliminary research into the context of the subject does not influence the outcomes of the following research. As Bogdan and Taylor explain:

“To enter a setting with a set of specific hypotheses is to impose preconceptions and perhaps misconceptions on the setting.” (In Mellon, 1990:23).

In this instance, however, as little existing research has been undertaken into this specific subject in the past, the initial literature review served as research into the context of older people within society in general and not necessarily this clearly-defined age group, as well as general issues affecting the public library service.
2.2 Qualitative Approach

It was decided that a qualitative approach would be most appropriate for the purposes of this research. Although it is the case that the questionnaire did yield a small amount of quantitative data for analysis, the overall approach taken was a qualitative approach. As the bulk of the research was undertaken through interviews and focus groups, it would not be appropriate to pursue an overall quantitative approach.

As Gorman and Clayton explain: “The qualitative approach...lies within the interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on social constructs that are complex and always evolving, making them less amenable to precise measurement or numerical interpretation.” (Gorman and Clayton, 1997:23).

A qualitative approach, therefore, based on naturalistic inquiry principles, has particular benefits which apply to this dissertation. As Patton comments:

“Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry.” (Patton, 1990:13).

Other benefits of using the qualitative approach include the flexibility of approach, the opportunity of conducting case studies and the formulation of results which are grounded within the data collected (Silverman, 2000).

The flexibility of qualitative studies is also a topic which is discussed by Mellon, who states that the principles of naturalistic inquiry will involve using the key stakeholders’ perspectives in order to establish recurring themes. This enabled the research to be constantly modified to adapt to findings during the course of the research (Mellon, 1990).

It has been stated that qualitative studies are particularly useful in areas where little is known about the subject or where new perspectives are required. The qualitative researcher “begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data.” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:12). As the issue of baby boomers and public libraries is an area where little research has previously been undertaken, the ability to collate data in this field through qualitative means is a distinct advantage.

In order to validate research findings as much as possible, triangulation has been used. Hittleman and Simon have described triangulation as “collecting information from several sources about the same event or behaviour.” (in Gorman and Clayton, 1997). By
using three research tools to obtain data – questionnaires, focus groups and interviews – the limitations of each method should be minimised, resulting in more reliable findings.

2.2.1 Questionnaires

The initial phase of research involved the issue of a library user questionnaire to all four participating libraries within the Cheshire area. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit preliminary data from library users within the target age group which would assist with the formulation of questions for the focus group sessions. Questionnaires were displayed in prominent areas of the four libraries, alongside posters and a returns box to ensure anonymity.

Peterson’s (2000) seven steps for questionnaire design were followed. The questionnaire was designed to include both qualitative and quantitative questions. In an attempt to minimise ambiguity and confusion, terminology and jargon were avoided and questions were phrased in ‘plain speech’ (Burton in Slater, 1990).

A mix of open and closed questions were used to provide variety to the respondent without deterring them by requesting a personalised response to each question. It was decided to include open questions as the qualitative data obtained would provide an initial understanding of the topic which could then be developed further through the focus groups.

Oppenheim states the principle advantage of open questions as:

“...the freedom it gives to the respondents... we obtain their ideas in their own language, expressed spontaneously and this spontaneity is often extremely worthwhile as a basis for new hypotheses.” (Oppenheim, 1992:113).

Each library was issued with eighty copies of the questionnaire. The response rates were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Response Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macclesfield</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poynton</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disley</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS:</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of ten additional questionnaires from the libraries had to be discounted as they were completed by users who did not fall within the required age range.

Of the 74 questionnaire responses, 28% of respondents were male and 72% were female.

2.2.2 Focus Groups

A series of focus groups were held to elicit both library users and non-users’ opinions and perspectives on public library services as a whole. Two focus groups were held within each case study library: one group consisted of active library users, the other group consisted primarily of non-library users or lapsed or occasional users.

Slater believes that the use of group discussion in research is an effective means of developing and identifying themes within the subject which can then provide a focus for further analysis (Slater, 1990).

It was also decided to use focus groups as a research tool in this case as a large amount of data could be collated in designated sessions over a relatively short period of time. The speed and flexibility of focus groups are principle advantages of the method (Gorman and Clayton, 1997).

Focus groups can also provide the researcher with ‘ready-validated’ data. As Patton has described:

“Focus group interviews also provide some quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other that weed out false or extreme views.” (Patton, 1990:335).

However, it is also important that those within the focus group who do provide checks do not dominate the discussion to the extent that less vocal group members are excluded (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

Theoretical sampling was employed when selecting the focus group participants to ensure that all participants fell within the required age range. The possibility of selecting respondents due to their relevance to the subject to be researched is the main feature of theoretical sampling (Silverman, 2000). This ensured that all data obtained through the focus group sessions was valid and obtained from baby boomers born between 1944 and 1950. Krueger and Casey also cite that participants of focus groups should be selected
because of certain characteristics which are central to the research topic (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

The participants within the 'library user groups' were recruited through the questionnaire or through direct advertising within the host library. As many of the willing questionnaire respondents could not attend the scheduled focus groups, other means were required to ensure as far as possible that a minimum of three attendees were available for each session, including the use of existing contacts within the areas.

The participants for the 'non-library user groups' were recruited through a variety of means. An initial set of names from those who fell within the target age range was provided by Cheshire County Council's Research and Intelligence Unit. However, further numbers were required and therefore the remaining attendees were selected via local advertising, local societies and existing contacts within the area. For the participants contacted through other means than the library, every effort was made to ensure that participants were not regular library users.

A total of 29 people took part in the focus groups. The breakdown of attendees for both sets of groups within the target libraries are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Library User Group</th>
<th>Non-Library Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macclesfield</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poynton</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disley</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Totals: | 15 | 14 |

| % of male participants | 27 | 36 |
| % of female participants | 73 | 64 |

2.2.3 Interviews with Members of Staff

It was decided to conduct interviews with members of library staff following the completion of the focus group sessions in order to gain the public library staff's perspective of the baby boomers and to discuss the issues raised by the baby boomer's discussion groups.
Due to time constraints, exploratory one-to-one interviews were undertaken with one member of professional library staff from within each case study library. In the case of Disley Library, both the Senior Library Assistant and Library Assistant attended the interview. The exploratory interview was chosen to ensure that the possibility of broadening the research with new viewpoints and the potential of identifying any differences in perspective between the baby boomers and the library staff could be examined (Oppenheim, 1992).

The approach taken for the interviews was the standardised open-ended interview approach. The questions were designed and sequenced prior to the interviews and each interviewee was asked the same questions in the same order to reduce interviewer bias as much as possible (Patton, 1990).

The importance of remaining open-minded and non-directive was borne in mind during the interviews. As Gilham states:

“Pre-conceived notions are as much a danger in the research interview as in a medical interview. A kind of expert openness is the key skill in both...It takes confidence to be a listener, to decentralise oneself and focus on the person being interviewed.” (Gillham, 2000:3).

The interview schedule was designed following completion of the focus group sessions with the baby boomers to enable the incorporation of themes from the focus groups into the interview questions.

However, although the interview was standardised to an extent, in that a list of questions was created and worked through during the sessions, the researcher was prepared to allow the interviewee to raise any linked issues which they felt were relevant during the course of the interview. This allows “the interaction to move in new and perhaps unexpected directions, thereby adding both depth and breadth to one’s understanding of the issues involved.” (Gorman and Clayton, 1997:45).

The interview is accepted to have disadvantages in that the use of particular words or phrases may create confusion as certain words may have different meanings for different people (Oppenheim, 1992). Therefore, the interview questions were formulated and phrased in as clear and unambiguous manner as possible. The use of probes and prompts was also decided upon to ensure that interviewees provided as full and comprehensive answers as possible (Gillham, 2000).
2.3 Research Tools

2.3.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire spanned five pages and incorporated a combination of both closed and open questions. As recommended by Oppenheim (1992), the section asking for personal data was included at the end of the questionnaire to ensure that potential respondents were not deterred from completing the questionnaire.

The first section of questions (questions one to four) were designed to be general in nature. These questions were closed, with the opportunity of choosing from several options. To guard against respondent's frustration if their particular option was not listed, Burton's advice was followed and an ‘Other, please specify’ option was included (Burton in Slater, 1990).

Questions five to seven concerned the baby boomer’s perceptions of the library and their likes and dislikes of the service and library as a whole. For this section, open questions were used to elicit responses in their own language, although prompts were provided for one of the questions to demonstrate the type of options which could be selected. However, the researcher attempted to make clear that other options could be chosen and that those prompts were provided only as examples, to provide against influencing the responses.

Questions seven to twelve asked the respondents for information about themselves and their interests and consisted of mainly closed questions.

Question thirteen provided respondents with the opportunity of adding any information that they thought was relevant and which had not been covered elsewhere. Following the main body of the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they would be interested in attending the focus groups and were given the option of leaving their contact details.

The questionnaire can be seen at Appendix 1.

2.3.2 Focus Group Questions

The focus group questions were designed and formulated following receipt of the questionnaires so that any issues arising from the questionnaire responses could be included within the schedule of questions.
The basis for the questions as a whole, however, were closely based upon the initial objectives and research questions identified at the beginning of the research process. For this reason, specific questions focused upon baby boomer’s perceptions of public libraries, what they like about the libraries, what would make them use the library more often and whether they felt any barriers existed to deter them from going to their local library.

At the request of the Cheshire Library Service, a question was included asking participants from where they usually obtained their books.

In order to ascertain the baby boomer’s views of the differences between themselves and their parents at the same age, a comparison question prompted participants to evaluate whether they viewed and used the library any differently to their parents.

The closing question gave the focus group attendees the option of adding any further comments which they felt were useful and which had not been covered.

The focus group schedule can be seen at Appendix 2.

2.3.3 Staff Interview Schedules

The staff interview schedule consisted of seven questions, all of which were designed to be open questions to encourage library staff members to respond with their own perceptions and viewpoints, without being constrained by predetermined responses.

In response to the questionnaire responses and focus group sessions, questions one to four reflected issues raised through the preliminary research. These issues included stock selection, consultation with users, the provision of services and facilities and suggestions for new facilities.

Question five prompted the staff members to comment upon whether or not they agreed with the opinion that people aged between 54 and 60 today are different from previous generations of the same age. Respondents were then asked to state whether they believed that this had had an impact upon existing library services.

In response to an issue raised by focus group members, question six asked the library staff members how well they felt the library publicises itself and advertises its facilities to the local population.
Finally, question seven provided staff members with the opportunity of adding any comments they felt that they wished to make.

The staff interview schedule can be seen at Appendix 3.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The ethical issues involved in undertaking research should always be given due consideration at all times. Oppenheim has outlined the fundamental principle involved in data collection:

“The basic ethical principle governing data collection is that no harm should come to the respondents as a result of their participation in the research...The respondent’s right to privacy and the right to refuse to answer certain questions, or to be interviewed at all, should always be respected, and no undue pressure should be brought to bear.” (Oppenheim, 1992:84).

In response to the ethical issues, the respondent’s permission was obtained before any recording of interviews or information commenced. The respondents were also assured that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained at all times.

Following Silverman’s description of informed consent (Silverman, 2000), the subjects were given information about the research at the start of each exercise so that a decision could be made as to whether to participate and to ensure that their participation was voluntary.

The following introduction was made before each focus group session:

“My name is Suzanne Dobson and I am conducting research for an MA dissertation regarding the public library provision for people within the Baby Boomer generation. The purpose of attending this session today is to enable me to benefit from your views and experiences. These focus group interviews are entirely private and confidential, your names will not be linked to anything you say here you will not be identified in my final report. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research.” (adapted from Oppenheim, 1992:71).

2.5 Limitations and Successes

2.5.1 Limitations

For the purposes of this piece of research, the focus will be upon this ‘first peak’ of Baby Boomers, who were born between the years of 1944 to 1950. As this group is narrower
in age range than all of those who fall within the defined age range as Baby Boomers, this meant that care needed to be taken when examining Baby Boomer literature to ensure that information relating to all Baby Boomers was not applied solely to the older proportion of Baby Boomers chosen as the focus of the dissertation.

As the dissertation process was limited in terms of time and resources, it was decided to focus the research upon the specific sample public libraries within the Cheshire area. Attempts have been made to choose public libraries from varying sizes of towns and villages and with a variety of social backgrounds: however, it was unlikely that specific issues such as those regarding minority groups would be covered during this research. The dissertation is intended as an introduction into the issue of public library provision to people from within the required age group and aims to achieve preliminary results through the examination of the four separate libraries.

When selecting participants for both the library user and non-user groups, every effort was made to include an equal number of participants for each session in an attempt to reduce bias which may be introduced by uneven numbers. However, a number of participants found themselves unable to attend some of the discussion group sessions and as a result, the total number of participants varied from group to group.

In some cases, the participants of the non-library discussion groups emerged as users of the library, although in most cases the participants were either lapsed users or non-regular library users.

2.5.2 Successes

The focus groups, whilst restricted in some cases by the number of participants, were extremely useful research tools. With minimal input from the researcher and a designated set of prompts, in each instance the conversation ranged through a variety of interesting and relevant topics. From these sessions, a number of themes could be established and used as a base for the staff interview schedule. All participants of the groups provided input and were encouraged to contribute.

The staff interviews were conducted with members of library staff who were responsible for the overall running of the libraries used as case studies and could therefore provide an insight into strategic issues and constraints which may affect the service provided to the baby boomers. The staff involved in the interviews gave frank and straightforward responses to the questions and were extremely helpful and obliging. Every effort was made
by Cheshire Libraries to accommodate the research project and provide assistance and encouragement where appropriate.

The focus groups provided non-users of the library with an insight into the facilities and services offered by the library, many of which they were unaware of as they had not visited their local library in some time. As a result, the groups heightened awareness of the library and provided a number of the non-users with an incentive to re-visit their library.

2.6 Summary

A qualitative approach was chosen as limited research currently exists within this specific area. An inductive qualitative approach allowed the researcher to develop key themes through the course of the research and consistently adapt each stage in the light of ongoing findings.

Triangulation was achieved by using the following research tools: questionnaires, focus groups and staff interviews. Due to time and scope constraints, an in-depth study into specific issues could not be undertaken: the purpose of this research was to provide an introduction to this area and highlight key themes which emerge from the research.
3 The Library as Service Provider

3.1 Introduction

“Libraries are a much valued institution built around a shared ideal: to make available resources that can be used by all members of the community to stimulate imagination and inquiry, through literature and reference, for culture and commerce.” (DCMS, 2003:6).

From figures provided by Cheshire Libraries for 2003, it would appear that the baby boomer generation are not actively using their local libraries as much as other age groups. From a total population within Cheshire of 94,154 fifty to fifty-nine year olds, it is estimated that 13,619 are members of their library, a percentage of 14.5. Whilst these figures are estimations only - as in some cases users have not provided birth dates and have therefore not been included which may skew the results - from the data it would seem that this third largest age group are ranked only seventh in the list of most active borrowers.

It may be the case that one of the reasons for this is that the public library as a service is not seen as relevant to the baby boomer’s needs:

“...60.5% of baby boomers claim that one of the most important factors in shaping their trust in public services is ‘whether it meets their needs’.” (Gillinson, Harkin and Huber, 2004:12).

However, in order to gain an understanding of why the baby boomers may not be using their local library, it is necessary to explore the issues involved with the library as a service provider, by examining the importance of library stock, stock selection, consultation with the local population, library facilities and library staff.

3.2 Literature Review

While it may be the case that the provision of library stock items for loan and perusal is not the sole purpose of the public library, it is often perceived by library users to be the fundamental function of the library. As Framework for the Future comments:

“The book stock is central to what public libraries offer. Libraries must have a rich and varied range of stock if they are to meet the needs of their users and attract new people.” (DCMS, 2003:15).

It has been stated that, in contrast to the evident popularity of fiction and non-fiction loans for leisure purposes, libraries and librarians prefer to concentrate upon information
services and can view the supply of fiction to library users as an ‘embarrassment’. (Snape in Kinnell and Sturges, 1996:67).

However, the benefits of reading as a leisure pursuit can include escapism, relaxation and self-development (Toyne and Usherwood, 2001); whereas Greenhalgh believes that the role of reading in serving emotional needs and alleviating mental health problems should be considered when evaluating the importance of fiction to the public library (Greenhalgh et al, 1995).

The ever-present problem in recent years of funding for the library service is an area which receives attention throughout the literature (Maynard and Davies, 2001; Walters, 1995; Worpole, 1993). It is acknowledged that funding constraints will limit the amount and range of stock that a public library can offer to its users. However, as Worpole points out, the sheer amount of new titles published each year can make it very difficult for a library to stock even a fraction of these, hindered as it is by space and funding issues (Worpole, 1993).

Whilst praising public libraries for the range and amount of stock held within public libraries, the Framework for the Future document also points out that according to the 2002 Audit Commission Report, only 59% of library users were successful in locating books they had visited the library to find (DCMS, 2003).

The issue of multiple copies of popular titles is a key question for public libraries and a point which can have a bearing upon the perceived relevance of the library stock as a whole. Sannwald (1998) maintains that multiple copies should be made available for the most popular items in order to minimise the risk of disappointing users. Alternatively, Walters (1995) deems such an activity to be an absurd waste of funds and believes that a wider range of fiction should be stocked by libraries instead.

Landry comments that books considered to be ‘classics’ should form part of the core stock of any public library in order to fulfil one of the public library’s assigned roles as “a repository of a society’s knowledge” (Landry, 1993:6). This apparent shortage of ‘classics’ has also been highlighted by other commentators (DCMS, 2003; Worpole, 1993).

The topic of stock selection is an area which is discussed throughout the literature (Lembeck in Whitesides, 1998; Walters, 1995; Greenhalgh et al, 1995; Usherwood, 1996). Greenhalgh et al (1995) point out that watertight guidelines for the selection of stock are not in existence and this can lead to ongoing debate throughout the library profession as to what items merit inclusion with the limited funds available.
Framework for the Future comments that library users (and non-users) should be directly engaged with to ascertain their needs and requirements in relation to library stock and services, as previous consultation has been inadequate (DCMS, 2003). Greenhalgh et al also believe that procedures and processes should be made explicit to the public, rather than being covert and made without widespread consultation (Greenhalgh et al, 1995:157). The point has also been made that it is not possible for a public library service to understand its community and their needs without being fully aware of the issues involved (Lembeck in Whitesides, 1998). Consultation procedures can assist with ensuring that the public library remains relevant to its users and local population.

With respect to stock selection for people who fall within the targeted 54 to 60 years age range, the point has been raised that a feature of recent years has been the concentration upon younger users, resulting in the neglect of older users (Lembeck in Whitesides, 1998; Bryson et al, 2003).

The American Library Association has apparently noted this and has issued guidelines to American public libraries urging them to include older adults in the planning of library services and to provide “programmes, services and information for those preparing for retirement or later-life career alternatives.” (in Whitesides, 1998:89). Kleiman has also highlighted the need for tailoring resources for the ‘young old’ by ensuring that personal finance and retirement location information is included within the library (Kleiman, 1995).

In addition to the perceived fundamental role of the library as provider of fiction and non-fiction stock, the public library enables access to a diverse range of facilities, including audio-visual items, newspapers and magazines, photocopying and fax services, enquiry services and computer and internet access, amongst others.

According to Maynard and Davies, audio-visual material is popular and increasing in popularity, leading to more expenditure upon these items as they are in a position to generate income (Maynard and Davies, 2001).

The most notable addition to the public library service following the People’s Network initiative is the incorporation of computers and internet access into libraries. Sturges (2002) noted that in 2002 public libraries accounted for up to 10% of public access, compared to 11% for internet cafes.

The installation of computers and their accompanying equipment require space and specialist requirements (Bryson et al, 2003). Another implication of this new technology is the provision of training on the equipment by library staff (Whitesides, 1998). However,
Mates (2002) believes that only a fraction of computer training has been designed with older users in mind.

Library staff as service providers are not always perceived to be professional, dynamic individuals. As Green states:

“People are left with no clear impressions of librarians or their profession. They are given nothing to replace the stereotyping that librarians, along with other professions, suffer in sitcoms or adverts.” (Green, 1994:19).

Greenhalgh comments that the ‘self-effacing culture of librarians’ can result in them being viewed as “anonymous service staff, without opinions or values of their own.” (Greenhalgh et al, 1995:52). He continues by asserting that the skill of the librarian is often not apparent to users and no distinction can be made between library assistants and librarians.

Public librarians themselves may well fall within the baby boomer generations, particularly in America where a notable percentage of the professional librarians are baby boomers themselves (Pankl, 2004). Mates concurs with this and draws the contrast between the number of baby boomer library staff within the library, compared to the number of baby boomer users (Mates, 2002).

3.3 Results and Discussion

3.3.1 Library Stock

Questionnaire Findings

From an analysis of the questionnaire results, the most popular library activities by far involved the borrowing and browsing of non-fiction and fiction, stated by 66 and 64 respondents respectively in total, out of 74 overall respondents.

It would appear that the library is still seen primarily as a physical place with a stock of books for users to borrow as 89% of respondents expressed this view. This next most relevant service perceived to be provided by the library is the access to information (32%). Other services held to be relevant to the users within this age group include the enquiry reference service (13%) and access to the internet (10%).

The questionnaire respondents were asked to list the aspects of the library service they liked the most. Of the 70 respondents to that particular question, 34 responded that the library stock was their favourite feature. However, when asked for their least favourite library
facility or service, 35% of the total replies commented that there was not enough stock in general and not enough variety of stock.

**The Focus Groups**

In general, the four different library focus group sessions for both users and non-users raised very similar issues and opinions regarding the quality, relevance and currency of library stock. Whilst most of the library user groups began by commenting upon the value of the library stock, many of the same concerns which emerged from the non-user groups were then raised.

The choice and range of library stock was not perceived to be as varied as the users would like. In particular, the problem of providing multiple copies of popular and current items was a topic of some debate, with the majority of focus group participants agreeing with Sannwald’s view (1998) that multiple copies should be made available.

"Whereas you’d think they’d get a lot of what was obviously going to be very popular. Maybe they do and they’re still out.” (Macclesfield User).

"But I think as far as the library itself, I always feel that if I go in, it’s not going to be up to date enough, or the latest releases aren’t going to be there or there’s not enough copies so they’ll all be out so I’ll have to put my name on the list.” (Poynton Non User).

"Like you, I tend to want books that are never in, perhaps they don’t have enough of them.” (Macclesfield User).

This issue was particularly debated at the Macclesfield user group session, amongst the regular and enthusiastic library users. During the course of the discussion, the suggestion was made that multiple copies should be bought of popular items with the possibility of selling them afterwards, once the initial rush had died down.

The non-user focus groups within each of the case study libraries also mentioned the range and variety of stock as a disincentive to visiting the library:

"But to be truthful, I find it virtually impossible to find anything I’d want to read in a public library. I don’t think they have enough up to date books.” (Disley Non User).

"...sometimes I think about coming, but then I think there won’t be anything I want to read.” (Disley Non User).

"If I felt that I could, every time I went, that I was going to get something then I would be more likely to go.” (Macclesfield Non User).
The provision of non-fiction stock was, in the main, decided by both sets of focus groups to be a worthwhile and useful section of the library stock. In accordance with baby boomer literature which states that leisure interests and hobbies are an important part of the baby boomer’s life (Worcester, 1999) books on the subjects of do-it-yourself, gardening and travel were particularly prized. However, both library focus groups at Poynton Library expressed concern at the rapidity with which they perceived these books could become out of date.

“If I came in for a reference book, I usually found that they were out of date, they weren’t up to date even if you wanted a cookery book or something like that, they weren’t the latest ones.” (Poynton Non User).

“I think some of the so-called craft books and the do it yourself books, that type of genre, as soon as they get out of date, they sell them but they don’t replace them.” (Poynton User).

Although the library offers a reservation system for more popular titles, most of the participants in the library user group sessions did not feel that the reservation system provided them with the items they required when they wanted them. A number of the users at each of the libraries were not sure how the system worked, with others commenting that they would rather not pay to reserve a book which may take some time to be available. Lapsed users also cited finding the reservation system problematic:

“It’s just getting the ones you want to read in at the time you want to read them and not later on. I did try sort of ordering books that weren’t at the library that I wanted to read but then you have to wait so long to get them in. And then there’s a list probably of people who have ordered it as well. You’re in a pecking order then.” (Disley Non User).

Whilst each of the focus group participants had their own particular areas of interest regarding reading material, library users at Chester, Poynton and Disley libraries queried the perceived lack of ‘classics’ on the shelves, an issue which has also been highlighted by Landry (1993):

“I note that they don’t include the classic books at all and I can understand why, because they don’t have the shelf room to do it.” (Chester User).

“One of the surprising things I think is that there are no readable classics, or very few readable classics here... So there are internationally famous authors whose work is never represented I think, or rarely represented in an ordinary public library.” (Disley User).
In addition to the comments regarding classics, both Chester library user group and the Disley library user group stated that they believed that the library stock in recent years has been ‘dumbed down’. Whilst it was the case that the other focus group participants nodded and agreed with the participant raising the question, there did not seem to be a consensus of opinion that this was indeed the case and it was not an issue that was raised by non library user groups. Those who held this opinion at the Disley library user group commented that they felt the stock had ‘gone downmarket’ and was too ‘Mills and Boonish’.

From the focus group sessions, the reading of magazines was a library activity mentioned exclusively by male focus group participants at Chester, Poynton and Macclesfield libraries. Overall, the magazines were felt to be a valuable resource, with acknowledgements being made that not all special interest magazines could be provided by the library. However, participants from both Chester and Macclesfield libraries expressed concern about the currency of the magazines:

“I read the magazines but a lot of them in the local library are hopelessly out of date. Because the magazines seem to do a tour of the libraries and, although it’s July you could be looking at a magazine from last September or something because it’s been wandering around Cheshire.” (Chester User).

“And that’s another thing, you don’t see, well the last time I was there they did have papers and magazines, but sometimes they were a bit long in the tooth. I mean it’s fine if you haven’t read them for a couple of weeks but you’d like the up to date stuff.” (Macclesfield Non User).

The attitudes to the audio visual stock was, in the main, overwhelmingly positive, with many of the focus group participants within each of the four libraries expressing the opinion that it was a good thing that the library was attempting to keep up to date with such items. This is in accordance with Maynard and Davies’ (2001) view of the increasing popularity of audio visual material. However, one non-library user from Macclesfield raised the following point:

“I mean I just wonder if a library is a book place, then perhaps an audio book and DVD’s and tapes take you away from that.”

Interestingly, nobody else within the non-user group agreed with this statement, indicating that all felt that the library should have a wide-ranging library stock, incorporating many different types of media, alongside the more traditional book stock.
Staff Interviews

Librarians within the four case study libraries were asked for their opinions on the library stock and how they aim to ensure that a wide range of material is made available for library users. The County has a Loan Stock Specialist and a Reference Specialist for each of the three sections of the county who purchase all of the stock required by the libraries:

“...in terms of trying to ensure that there is the widest possible array of stock across the age range, that is basically their responsibility.” (Librarian D).

Suggestions can also be made by members of the public through feedback forms or by speaking to members of staff. Library staff members can also highlight any perceived stock gap areas.

Stock rotation is an area where the libraries attempt to broaden the stock available by moving items between branch libraries on a regular basis:

“...we move stock about... Particularly for fiction, we do stock rotation and for spoken word and for those areas of stock where you can’t afford to buy a lot... In a larger library, you are more likely to have a broader spread of stock because there’s more space and you can carry more subjects in depth.” (Librarian C).

On the issue of holding ‘classics’ within the library, this query prompted mixed responses from the library staff members:

“Classics are strange. People think, oh they won’t have classics. The problem is that classics are often popular... If we don’t have classics in, it’s usually because they’re out on loan.” (Librarian C).

“We try to keep a balance really. We haven’t got all the classics, but we do have a fair number, of modern ones as well.” (Librarian B).

“We do have the occasional... But for the most part, there is not a great demand for them, despite what people say.” (Librarian A).

The perception of the popularity of the ‘classic’ novel varies between the different libraries and each librarian. One librarian put forward their opinion on why classics may not be borrowed as much as in previous times:
“I think the other thing is increasingly it is recognised that it is easier and easier to buy books more cheaply than it’s ever been. You know, the paperback classics at 99p…” (Librarian D).

The advent of these cheaper copies of classics which are much more affordable may undermine Landry’s (1993) view that classics should be held in public libraries as interested parties may well decide to own their own copy. However, from the focus groups, it would suggest that there is still some feeling that classics should be available at the present time as it was an issue raised by a number of participants.

3.3.2 Stock Selection and Consultation

*Questionnaire Findings*

When asked to provide suggestions for improving their library, 2 questionnaire respondents commented that they would prefer to see more stock rotation; a further 2 respondents requested more special interest magazines covering a greater range of interests; and 1 respondent specifically requested that library users have more input about stock and new acquisitions.

*The Focus Groups*

Interestingly, the subject of stock selection and user consultation was raised at three of the library user groups – Macclesfield, Poynton and Disley libraries – through the course of the general discussion about library stock and without prompts to speak specifically on this topic. The Macclesfield non-user group, consisting of mainly lapsed users, also raised this point and discussed the issue in some detail.

The underlying theme to emerge through these often spirited debates, was the sense of frustration the participants felt that they had not been asked for their input on the library stock and as a result, many felt that the stock was not as relevant as it could be in meeting their needs.

The Poynton and Macclesfield library groups particularly felt that consultation should be undertaken to assess the local population’s views about stock. Notably, Chester library did not raise this issue. Whilst this may be in part due to the fact that a specific prompt was not included to cover this point, it also indicates that the focus group participants did not feel as strongly on this matter as the smaller libraries. It may be the case that the Chester focus group participants felt that they had more access to a wider range of library stock as they could visit the central library or one of the many outlying branch libraries.
Comments from the Poynton library user group included:

"I often wonder who chooses the books and why because there are some glaring omissions on the shelves... But it intrigues me, who chooses, because presumably it's a local thing, not centralised, but..."

"Maybe the library should ask for reader's lists. I'm not saying they could order a book for you, but do you know what I mean? If they're going to rebuild the stock at some point during the year, it would be nice to think they would consider taking our opinions."

"I just wonder, like you said, how do they know what to buy, whether it's for a particular reason. I think it would be good to get people's opinions on what books they'd like to read."

Both the Macclesfield library user group and the non-user group questioned whether there was a purchasing policy and how it operates for the library, lending support to Greenhalgh et al's point that library policies and procedures should be made explicit to the lending public (Greenhalgh et al, 1995):

"I wonder what the purchase policy is. How they actually decide, who decides what method." (Macclesfield User).

"I mean, they never do a survey do they. There's no consultation where they say what sort of...I mean that might be useful in a way, because how do they know?" (Macclesfield User).

"The other thing is, it might not be underfunded it might be whoever buys them is buying the wrong books!" (Macclesfield Non User).

The Macclesfield non-library user group seemed to feel particularly strongly about this issue. As many of the participants were lapsed users - a result at least in part because of expressed concerns about the stagnation of library stock – this indicates that their disillusionment with the public library service has led to frustration that the library does not consult with them about stock issues. The following exchange took place during the lively discussion:

"I'm sure that if they'd pick people's brains, of what people thought and facilities that they wanted to see...
They need to speak to the general public, not to someone who's paid to have their view on it.
Yes, I mean who's their customers? Is it the council or is it the public?
Perhaps they need better focus on who their end user is."

32
Interestingly, the Poynton user group raised the issue of the library concentrating upon younger users rather than their specific baby boomer generation who may already have a history of using the library and are perhaps not considered a prime group for consultation:

"Do you think a lot of the books in the library are trying to attract the younger readers? Because those of us who are older, once you’ve gone to libraries, it’s part of our lives and we’ve grown up with it and we’re going to come no matter what and have a look, they need to attract the younger people… So they don’t have to bother attracting us or the older generation then because we already come." (Poynton User).

In spite of these issues, each of the focus groups at the four libraries made some reference to the limited resources on offer to the public library service, acknowledging that funding is finite and all requirements for every member of the community cannot be met:

“If you’ve got that particular interest, how many books do you expect any one library to have in? I mean physical space alone they can’t do it, never mind cost.” (Chester User).

“It must be difficult though, because they’ve presumably got limited resources and also perhaps the books you’re looking for are not the same taste…” (Macclesfield User).

Although frustration does exist regarding the range of library stock and perceived lack of consultation procedures, this indicates that the baby boomers are aware that the public library is a service which is constrained by budgetary factors and although improvements could possibly be made for this age group, the means may not be available to implement them.

Staff Interviews

One of the librarians interviewed acknowledged the curiosity that surrounds the issue of stock selection, again reaffirming Greenhalgh et al (1995) who feel that such library procedures should be explained to the user public:

“People often wonder how we buy books. Well, we look at what’s published by publishers and then make our selections from that. So we’re not the primary selector of what is available, but the publisher is the primary selector… because they choose to publish it.” (Librarian C).

When prompted to speak about consultation with the local community regarding stock selection choices, similar responses were made by each librarian with regards to existing feedback mechanisms and whether they feel consultation to be an important issue:
"We don’t really have a formal thing...there’s no specific mechanism...I suppose to some extent most of the library staff are of that generation and perhaps feel that they don’t need to consult them [the baby boomers].” (Librarian C).

“It raises expectations and perceptions that we can’t meet almost. Because basically, although we are a public service, our masters are politicians. So in terms of consultation, it’s really communication face to face or it’s the feedback forms or the book suggestion forms.” (Librarian D).

Each librarian commented that they felt able to make suggestions to the Stock Specialists for new stock in specific areas and many passed on comments made from members of the public. However, some concerns were expressed about the efficacy of library staff feedback for improvements:

“We are under a lot of constraints. Budgetary, and there is this hierarchy as to who’s responsible for what, who makes the decisions...And so we might think we’ve got some good ideas but if people above don’t agree then that’s it and we just have to accept that.”

3.3.3 Library Facilities

*Questionnaire Findings*

Questionnaire respondents undertook a variety of activities when at their local library including: browsing reference material (54%); using the internet (34%); reading newspapers (30%); photocopying (30%); borrowing films (27%); borrowing music (22%); borrowing talking books (15%) and borrowing languages material (11%).

*The Focus Groups*

Each of the library user focus groups within the four libraries displayed enthusiasm for the introduction of computers and access to the internet at their public library, with each group commenting that it was an important and valuable development.

However, despite the questionnaire findings showing that approximately 34% of the respondents use the internet at the public library, very few members of the user focus groups used the internet at their local library. The majority had access to personal computers at home and preferred to use the internet in their own homes and at their convenience.
Those with home access did express the opinion that they felt that internet access should be available in the library for those without their own computers:

"I'm sure I would do [use the internet in the library] if I didn't have access at home. It's such an invaluable resource." (Poynton User).

Within the Macclesfield library user group, two of the participants felt strongly that it was important that training and support should be given by staff to library users who may not be as proficient on the computers as other library users, an issue explored by Whitesides (1998) and Mates (2002).

During the following discussion, it was suggested that library staff should make themselves available to assist with computer-related queries and provide training assistance:

R2: I haven’t got a computer at home and I would like a bit more help than they're prepared to give. They log you on and that's it... you don't get enough help.
R4: So you're asking for tutoring in a sense, at the library...
R1: Somebody who'll take some responsibility for it. So if you’ve got a problem, you go to them and say, or can you show me how to do this, yes.

All but one of the libraries examined felt that the library was an important source of local information and the matter was discussed independently of prompting. The focus groups held at the central library at Chester did not raise the issue of local events, leaflets and information. However, this is not necessarily a reflection upon the lack of interest in such matters at the Chester library. It may be the case that as a specific prompt regarding local information was not provided within the general question regarding library services that the participants did not have the issue brought to their attention and therefore did not express an opinion.

Both user and non-user groups alike felt that the local information section was valuable and of interest:

"I think they're useful as well for an information centre as well as the books. There's always lots of information in the library about, you know, local things, what's happening locally. Everybody puts their leaflets in the library so it's one place where you can go and find out what's happening or if you want to get your message out there." (Poynton NonUser).

"I think the information bit is important too, I mean, because I always pick up the leaflets about theatres and what's going on and I wouldn't really know where to go and get that if I didn't go past them. I always go out with a couple of those." (Macclesfield User).
Overall, both the user and non-user groups felt that the varied services offered by the public library service was useful and in-keeping with technological advances. However, there was a noticeable difference in the depth of feeling when the focus groups were specifically discussing library stock compared to the library services. It may be the case that, as Toyne and Usherwood (2001) have commented, that the library users still perceive the library to be a place of books primarily, with the full range of services viewed as ‘non-core’ but useful additions.

**Staff Interviews**

The library staff were asked to comment upon whether they felt that any services or facilities had been introduced with this baby boomer age range in mind. Responses tended to cover existing general services such as the local information sections and acknowledged that this specific age cohort had not been considered as a separate entity from the general library public.

The only specific facility or event mentioned as having possible relevance to the baby boomer generation was the holding of a Silver Surfer day at one of the libraries. This event was held with the aim of introducing older library users to the Internet and to provide training and advice in an attempt to remove barriers to use. This is a subject which was raised by the Macclesfield User group as a desirable facility and it would appear that the event was a success. However, such events are by no means widespread throughout the County and are not scheduled to take place on a timetabled basis.

Other suggestions made by the librarians when prompted to think of services which could be of use to the baby boomers included: provision of more retirement information, development of the local interest section and enhanced stock for hobbies and leisure pursuits for those who are about to retire and wish to take up a new hobby.

However, in general, this generation has not been highlighted as a group with specific needs and requirements which the library service can attempt to meet. One librarian felt that this was an area which would need to be explored for the future:

“...a lot of emphasis is on the other end of the market if you like, on getting children as new users... So I suppose they [the baby boomers] are the forgotten majority really, in many ways... it is something we will probably have to face and indeed, as more people do retire their demands may become more forthright, they might say, what's the library doing for us?” (Librarian C).
This supports Lembeck (1998) who states that the ‘young old’ have been marginalized and are not considered as much as children and young people when library services are considering their services and facilities.

### 3.3.4 Library Staff

#### Questionnaire Findings

When asked to list the aspects of the library service they liked the most, 28 respondents (40% of the total) responded with the comment ‘the helpful staff within the library’. However, conversely 2 respondents commented that negative staff attitudes or appearances featured upon their list of least liked library-related services and facilities. As these two responses constitute just 3% of the total, it is feasible to view these negative responses as a minority viewpoint.

#### The Focus Groups

Each of the four library user focus groups held extremely positive views of the library staff at their local library, commonly using words such as “pleasant”, “friendly” and “helpful”. In addition, both the Chester and Disley non library user groups also made similar comments based on previous experiences.

The social interaction with library staff was an issue which was discussed as a positive experience for a number of library users when visiting the library:

“*The staff here are really very good. Sometimes when I take a video out, they'll actually say 'Oh, you'll enjoy that one' or you know, 'Oh you won't like that one'. It does make you think.*” (Macclesfield User).

“*It would be awful if you just clicked into a computer and had a barcode read or something without a person there... you see people working there you can perhaps ask or, you know, get some help or something... As I say, I wouldn't like any sort of automated alternative to that.*” (Chester User).

Other library users mentioned occasions where they were assisted with queries or even offered bags to help carry their books, all of which led to the library users expressing satisfaction overall with the library staff. Interestingly, when expressing negative opinions about other aspects of the library service, such as stock issues or limitations, some library users felt the need to clearly state that such perceived failings were not a reflection upon the library staff, indicating a feeling of goodwill:
“And I’m not being disparaging about our librarians who are ever so helpful and always keen to find me something.” (Disley User).

An interesting exchange took place, unprompted, during the Poynton Library user focus group, concerning the skills and professionalism of library staff:

R3: I have never imagined that the library staff are super keen readers or know a lot about books and I don’t know why I think that, but...
R2: I think you’re wrong.
R3: I suppose because I’ve never had the chance of talking about books with the library staff because they’re all doing other things. It would be quite nice to have a bit more interaction with the customer. Tell me, do you think if you’re asking about a certain subject you think they’d know, do you?
R1: I think they’d find out for you if they didn’t know.
R3: Well that’s what I’m saying. I mean, so what you are saying is that they are people who read books, not book experts... I mean, if you go into Waterstones and talk to people about books I suspect they’ll have a much wider knowledge of books than library staff... I don’t know why I think that, I just don’t feel surrounded by experts when I come into the library, they’re just people who help me to take my book away when I’ve chosen it.

This view - expressed by a regular library user – goes some way to supporting Greenhalgh et al’s (1995) theory that librarians are often seen as anonymous service staff without obvious opinions. The above discussion continued to include a debate over the status of library staff and the lack of perceived differences between librarians and library assistants which concluded that librarians must, however, be “much more clued-up about books” than the library assistants, again reaffirming Greenhalgh et al’s statement that many library users have difficulty in distinguishing differences between librarians and library assistants.

Staff Interviews

The librarians interviewed were asked for their opinions about the baby boomer generation aged between 54 and 60 and whether they felt that this age generation had changed over recent years. Interestingly, all of the librarians interviewed – with one exception – fell within this definition of a baby boomer and therefore could offer personal viewpoints.

The librarians felt that this baby boomer generation had begun to redefine previous perceptions of those approaching retirement. When asked whether they agreed with the statement that this generation had changed over the years, the following responses were made:
“Yes! Because I’m one of them. I think we’re a lot younger, a lot more lively. I think when I was a child, once your parents were forty they were old and I don’t think that’s true any more… we’ve all got more money, we all drive, we’ve all got interests we pursue.”

“Yes, most of us have completely different lifestyles…”

“I do. I think they’re younger and the baby boomers don’t think of themselves as ‘old’.”

Two of the librarians felt that the ‘Catherine Cookson’ era was on the wane, with people within the baby boomer generation more likely to have wider reading tastes and be more demanding of their stock.

In relation to the library stock, it was felt by one librarian that this baby boomer generation would be less likely to be associated with one particular genre of fiction, unlike the ‘clogs and shawls’ image of the previous generations approaching retirement:

“They don’t see their reading tastes as any different, what they read according to their age. They don’t read any differently to what they’ve read in the past.” (Librarian B).

3.4 Summary

The issue of library stock was, in general, seen by the baby boomers to be fundamental to the role of the library as a service provider. Particular concerns were expressed about the variety of stock and the availability of popular items. A number of non-users cited the relevance and availability of stock as a disincentive to using the library.

The currency of stock was also felt to be an area of concern, with non-fiction and magazines pointed to as items which were not always up to date: this led to frustration for those who regularly used these sections of stock. It was acknowledged by those interested in the magazines that not all special interest topics could be housed within the library.

Overall, the provision of audio visual material was felt to be a useful addition to the library stock, offering good value and a wide range of interests.

There exists a depth of feeling that the baby boomers – and, indeed library users in general – should be consulted about the library stock and services and its relevance to their needs. None of the baby boomers who raised this subject were aware of selection procedures and most were interested to know how stock is selected and how input could be provided. The baby boomers tend to be aware of the financial constraints surrounding the
library service, however, a sense of frustration that they are not given the opportunity to state their needs and opinions was in evidence during the focus group sessions.

The library staff commented that no formal feedback mechanisms are in place for consultation purposes, although contact can be made with the library service through feedback forms and in direct contact with staff.

In general, the baby boomers felt that the internet was an important facility at the library, although most of those spoken to used their home computers for internet use. Local information was also seen to be an important service at the library.

From the staff interviews, it would seem that aside from a Silver Surfer event, no events or services have been introduced with the baby boomers in mind, although most library staff members came up with suggestions, such as the development of the hobbies and interest sections, the provision of more retirement information and the enhancement of local interest sections. It was acknowledged that libraries tend to focus upon younger users and that the baby boomers may need to be addressed in the future.

Overall, the baby boomers saw the library staff as helpful and pleasant and many valued the social interaction. However, a number of baby boomers found it impossible to distinguish between librarians and library assistants and did not necessarily appreciate the skills and knowledge of the staff.

The majority of the library staff felt that the baby boomer generation has changed from previous generations of the same age, and two librarians felt that the baby boomers were more likely to have wider reading tastes, which may need to be reflected in the stock selection in future.
4 The Library as a Physical Place

4.1 Introduction

"Libraries are places: their tangible look and feel still matters hugely to people. Libraries need to be conveniently located, in buildings which are well appointed and which open when people need them, including weekends and evenings." (DCMS, 2003:22).

This chapter investigates the importance of the public library as a physical place. It explores the perception of the library as a building, as a community centre, its accessibility and the potential impact of the internet upon the library as a physical building.

4.2 Literature Review

The library building is an important aspect of the overall library service. The idea of the public library building as a ‘sanctuary’ or a ‘haven’ from the bustle of everyday life is not a new one (Black and Crann, 2002; Landry, 1993; Greenhalgh et al, 1995).

There exists a train of thought that libraries should be as open and visible as building restrictions permit, in order to show the interior to the people outside and encourage accessibility through removing the barrier of the unknown (Greenhalgh et al, 1995).

Libraries are housed throughout the country in a diverse range of purpose-built and commandeered buildings and as a result it is not possible to generalise about an overall building style or interior layout. However, according to the 2002 Audit Commission report, more than half of the public libraries examined were not in a prime location and were in poor repair (Bryson et al, 2003).

Greenhalgh maintains that the well-located public library within a town or city can contribute to other retailers and the local community as a whole:

"...the contribution of public libraries to the vitality of town or city centres has not been recognised. City centre libraries attract people. They generate a flow of people from the moment they open until they close..." (Greenhalgh et al, 1995:75).

In recent years, arguments have been put forward to support the exploration of locating libraries within retail centres (Bryson et al, 2003; Morris and Brown, 2004). Advantages of locating within such a retail area include: access to parking areas, heightened levels of security and access to toilets (Morris and Brown, 2004). Disadvantages can include: the difficulties of adapting to a retail space which may not have been designed with a library
in mind, possible lack of space, and the loss of visibility as the libraries tend to be located on higher levels in order to reduce rent charges (Dewe in Kinnell and Sturges, 1996).

From research, it would appear that library visits are often combined with another activity in order to save time and minimise trips (Bryson et al, 2003; Morris and Brown, 2004).

The public library is also an important part of local community life. As Kent asserts:

“We believe that the library in almost every case is the heart of the community and, in many cases, the only public facility. I think the public library is strong, because no other public institution does what we do: we provide a ‘place’, a place that’s for them.” (Kent in St. Lifer, 2001:62).

According to the ‘baby boomer’ literature, two distinct views have emerged of the baby boomer’s attitude towards the sense of community. Huber and Skidmore (2003) claim that baby boomers tend to feel like outsiders, and are much less involved and interested in their local communities than previous generations. However, a MORI report from 1999 discovered that the baby boomers are “more focused on the community than other age groups.” (MORI, 1999:14).

For those who decry the fragmentation of community life and the rise of the isolated individual, the library fulfils an important role as a focal point for the community, where people can meet and interact (Lembeck in Whitesides, 1998; Mitchell in Bryson et al, 2003; Landry, 1993; Kinnell and Sturges, 1996). It is therefore important that meeting rooms and facilities are available within libraries for the community to use, a point which is raised within the Framework for the Future document and which is supported by other commentators (DCMS, 2003; Bryson et al, 2003).

The ideal of the public library as the hub of community life, however, is discounted by Harris, who comments:

“…while they are based in the community, they are not community based – that is to say, they seldom give any sense of community ownership, community management or accountability.” (Harris in Matarasso, 1998:42).

The issue of library opening hours is an ongoing debate which has the capability of rousing strong opinions. Framework for the Future directs that public libraries should aim to be as accessible as possible by arranging opening hours to suit their local population and also acknowledge the 2002 Audit Commission report findings that non-users in particular wish to see more weekend opening and late evening opening hours (DCMS, 2003).
Greenhalgh has pointed out that for those who work a regular 9 to 5 working week, there is a serious risk of exclusion from the library and its services and that previous financial restrictions have resulted in the past in opening hours being reduced still further (Greenhalgh et al, 1995). Wadley et al (1997) believe that the full-time employed should have as much right as any other members of the community to have access to their local library when they are available.

Where possible, commentators believe that convenient opening hours should be maintained in order to increase relevance with the users and potential users of the service (Bryson et al, 2003; Raymond, 1998).

Another development has emerged in recent years which may also have an impact upon the library as a place: the internet. The possibility of library users fulfilling their information needs online may, for some, remove the need to visit the library. As Chisek has noted, “home access detracts from the library as a gathering place.” (Chisek in Whitesides, 1998:11). This view is also supported by Whitesides (1998) who believes that home computer access may result in the library not being seen as necessary to fulfil the needs of their community.

Although ownership of home computers is by no means universal and for some it may never be possible, a survey undertaken by Russell and Drew (2001) showed that 48% of those surveyed in the United Kingdom have the use of a personal computer. Home computers are not subject to opening hours or timing restrictions and with the advent of competitive telecommunications packages, it is possible to ‘surf the Internet’ extensively within the comfort of your own home. This also means that end users have the opportunity of accessing the Internet at any time.

According to a report by DEMOS, 62% of baby boomers use the internet, compared with 13% of the over 65 age group. (Huber and Skidmore, 2003:78). Age Concern offer “Silver Surfer Events” through its website and also host the baby boomer chatroom, the ‘Baby Boomer Bistro’ for baby boomer internet users (Age Concern Website, 2004). However, as with all age groups, not all baby boomers are carefree internet users. Two of the main factors deterring the baby boomers from becoming proficient internet users may include the cost of the equipment required and the ‘fear factor’ of not understanding the equipment and processes and subsequent frustration and failure (Aldridge, 1999).

Through the People’s Network initiative, the public library is now in a position to offer computer and internet access free of charge for allotted times. As this service is only
available within the library, it may be the case that while some users may remain at home to access their required information sources, others will visit the library in order to enjoy the same access.

However, for those who are anxious that internet access will detract from the public library and its use as an information source, Usherwood comments:

“Public library collections can reflect every recorded point of view or shadow of opinion. Compared with the stock of the average library, the range of material on any given subject presented by the electronic media is shallow and narrow.” (Usherwood in Kinnell and Sturges, 1996:193).

4.3 Results and Discussion

4.3.1 Patterns of Use

Questionnaire Findings

Of the 74 questionnaire responses, 30% stated that they regularly visited the library every fortnight. In total, 91% of respondents visited the library on a regular basis ranging from several times a week to monthly.

93% of the respondents had been members of the public library for more than 21 years.

The Focus Groups

During the focus group sessions, the library users commented that they visited the library regularly, either on a regular basis within the three week loan period, or they would take out their maximum allowance and return them once they felt they had finished with them, renewing them as necessary in the meantime.

The non-users participating in the focus groups did not visit the library regularly. The majority of these ‘non users’ were in fact lapsed users who had stopped visiting the library for a number of reasons, including perceived lack of relevance, stagnation of stock and lack of time:

“I mean I haven’t been in for so long. I used to come in and get say five books and then found that I hadn’t gone through half of them and then forget to bring them back in time and then have to pay the fines and so on.” (Poynton Non User).
"I think public libraries are just something I've got out of the habit of. For a long time, I just didn't have time to do any light reading at all..." (Poynton Non User).

"Well I don't actually use the library very much at all. Um, so, but we used to use the library when the children were little, we used to take them to the library and encourage them to read. I found it very useful then." (Disley Non User).

In spite of the above, a number of non users did state that they would visit the library on a very occasional basis if they required information, usually on special interest topics such as local history, do it yourself or to use the reference material.

4.3.2 Building and Layout

*Questionnaire Findings*

The respondents were asked to comment upon the aspects of the library they liked the most. 38 respondents (54% of the total responses to this question) stated the library building and its environment. However, when asked to list the aspects of the library service they liked the least, 24% of responses specifically stated the library building, library layout or graffiti issues. One respondent asked that a public toilet be made available to users who may spend some time within the library.

*The Focus Groups*

The focus group participants’ opinions about the library buildings were subjective and reflected personal preferences and tastes. Therefore, it was possible for one library to be both praised as being welcoming by the library user group and then denounced by the non user groups as being ‘oppressive’ and ‘unwelcoming’. One library in particular was held in high esteem by one library user:

"I've never been in such a nice building... It's got a great ambience, presence, it makes you feel comfortable. I'm not saying I've not been in libraries that I've felt comfortable in before, but this is one of them." (Macclesfield User).

Negative comments made included the interior layout of shelving, the proximity of the children's library to the adult library, and issues of graffiti to the exterior of the buildings. However, the general feeling was that the construction and layout of the building was not of
paramount importance, as long as the services and facilities contained within the library were accessible. As the following exchange demonstrates:

R1: I think the building is ghastly!
R4: I think you're right, but as long as there's books in the building, that's all that matters.” (Poynton Users).

Both user and non user groups felt that the library had an important role to fulfil within the local community, by providing a visible community place where people could meet, interact and use the facilities. A number of focus group participants stated that they felt the community aspect of the library could be expanded further in order to host local societies, promote local events and facilities and provide meeting places.

“I just think that we're all getting more insular in our lives and we tend to sit at home and order stuff online and we don't have the same sense of community and I think that's where the library should be a meeting point for people.” (Poynton User).

“In an ideal world, the library would be at the centre of the community, a building with rooms available for groups to meet, and not as isolated. Seminar rooms could be hired out.” (Chester Non User).

These comments support the views of commentators who see the library as an important community asset (Landry, 1993; Kinnell and Sturges, 1996).

Regarding the building and its facilities, focus groups within Chester and Macclesfield also raised the issue of public toilets. Opinions were expressed that for any library user who spends any length of time within the library for research purposes or browsing, should have access to public toilets, with a number of comments being made to the effect of ‘I thought all public places had to have them now’. The general opinion was that access to toilet facilities would be beneficial to library users.

**Staff Interviews**

The library staff members were asked to comment about the issue of public toilet facilities within their libraries. Currently, Macclesfield library makes one disabled toilet available for library users. However, the librarians commented that in Chester and Macclesfield libraries, the main public toilets have had to be closed due to vandalism and misuse. At Poynton library, library users now have the option of visiting the civic centre adjacent to the library.
All of the librarians stated that space was a major issue, as well as the cleaning and monitoring of the facilities. The cost implications of providing public toilets was also raised as a negative factor:

“Public toilets are a curse because they’re a cost to us, if you’re Marks and Spencer, you can cost it into what you do, the cleaning and things like that. We haven’t got budget for that. So if we do it, it’s got to come from somewhere else... to the detriment of another part of the service.” (Librarian C).

4.3.3 Accessibility

*Questionnaire Findings*

It would appear that most library users from within this age range find their library to be accessible, with only two respondents stating accessibility when prompted to list the least liked features of the library and its service.

When asked to respond to their most convenient time to visit the library, respondents to the library questionnaire stated that mornings were the most convenient time to visit the library (49%); followed by afternoons (31%) and evenings (24%). The day of the week was not specified on the questionnaires, however 4% of respondents specifically wrote on their forms that they would prefer extended Saturday opening hours.

The questionnaire prompted users to state the aspect of the library service that they liked the least. 13 of the 49 respondents to this question stated that the opening hours of the library were not sufficient.

*The Focus Groups*

The *Framework for the Future* document (DCMS, 2003) asserted that more than half of libraries examined in the 2002 Audit Commission Report were poorly located. During the course of the focus group sessions, both library users and non users felt that Chester and Macclesfield libraries were well-placed:

“I like this library because I think where it is is just so convenient.” (Macclesfield User).

“It’s so central though isn’t it, one real thing about this library is it couldn’t be more central, could it.” (Chester User).
Conversely, the library at Poynton was seen by a member of the library non user group session to be inconveniently located. Poynton library is located off the main street, set back amongst the civic car park and adjacent to the civic centre. Whilst maintaining a central location within the village, the non user felt that the detour needed to visit the library while in the village was a disincentive:

"I don't often happen to be passing the library, you know, it's a specific journey to come here. I mean, it's not far, but it's a definite thing to be going to. I don't happen to go past the door." (Poynton Non User).

However, Poynton library is located next to the large and free of charge civic car park which library visitors can use. This was seen as a distinct advantage by the Poynton library user group, who preferred this situation to the occasions when they had visited Macclesfield library, where there is no designated car park and charges apply for parking. Six of the participants within the Macclesfield focus group sessions complained about the need to pay for parking and the issue of carrying heavy books some distance to the car parks.

Parking was also seen as a barrier to use at Chester library. As the library is centrally located within the town – itself a popular tourist destination – parking is expensive and not necessarily in close proximity to the library. Unless trips to the library can be combined with shopping and other business, a number of library users and non users felt that a library visit would prove too expensive:

"The only thing with this particular library, I'm sure it must deter people from coming. Because they've got to come in on the bus or they've got to pay an awful lot to park their cars. Especially if it's for a length of time." (Chester User).

"The car parking fees are quite crippling." (Chester Non User).

One of the Chester library users went as far as to comment that reasonable, accessible parking was ‘top of the list’ in factors which might stop them visiting the library as often.

The Disley library focus group participants also identified parking as being a problem at their library, as free parking in the small car park surrounding the library was often used by shoppers and workers in the village. However, the problem was not perceived to be as crucial an issue as at the other libraries, as most of the focus group attendees lived near to the library and tended to walk.
The issue of opening hours continues to be a source of contention for many of the library users and non-users. Many of the baby boomers work full time or part time and a common complaint throughout all of the focus groups was that library opening hours are not amenable for those who work between 9am and 6pm up to six days a week. This confirms Greenhalgh et al’s (1995) concern that those who work may find themselves excluded from using the library services.

Both Chester library users and non-users felt that the library’s central location and opening hours made it difficult to visit the library during the week and on Saturday mornings for those who work:

“I used to get a bit frustrated sometimes on Saturdays when I was working regularly and I wanted to get to the library to exchange my books but I had other things to do.” (Chester User).

“You know, if you’re working nine til five and you live out somewhere and it’s not right next to the city... That’s pushing it a bit. To get in to town, to get into the library, find what you want before it’s closed.” (Chester Non User).

A small number of the focus group attendees had retired and stated that they could visit the library at their convenience. However, the majority of participants who do work discussed the possibilities of opening for longer on Saturdays, on Sundays and later evening opening on a more regular basis. Macclesfield non-user group questioned whether it would be possible for the library to open on a Sunday and close on a Monday to ensure that those who worked could visit the library when they are available at the weekends. This idea was strongly agreed with by the other members of the focus group.

A common complaint at the Disley library sessions were the non-regular opening hours. Four of the focus group participants mentioned that they had difficulty in remembering when the library was open and felt that regularisation would be helpful. However, one of the library users did acknowledge the reasoning behind the opening hours:

“On the other hand, I can see what they’re trying to do is leave it open at different times for different segments of the population... It’s quite good that it’s open early evening because when I did work full time that might be the only time I could get here.” (Disley User).

On the whole, the impression given by the focus group attendees was that they understood that it was not possible to be open every day, all day and one Poynton user commented that she had ‘learned to live’ with the opening hours. However, one Chester user put forward the suggestion that limited opening hours may result in looking for information elsewhere:
“...the times that the library opens could influence whether you can get to
the library or whether you think, I'll try and find out some other way.”
(Chester User).

**Staff Interviews**

The staff interviews did not specifically cover the issues of accessibility and opening hours as opening hours tend to be a topic which applies to library users in general and not just the baby boomer generation. However, one library staff member brought up the issue of opening hours and stated that opening hours regularly featured in any surveys carried out by Cheshire libraries. Opening hours were reviewed where possible but were limited by financial constraints and staff issues. It was commented that where reviews of opening hours had taken place, some users were still not aware that opening hours had changed:

“...the library has been open at lunchtimes for two years now and people were saying that it would be nice if it would open at lunchtimes!” (Librarian D).

### 4.3.4 The Impact of the Internet on use of the Library

**Questionnaire Findings**

When asked to comment upon the aspect of the library service the user liked the most, the internet was not specifically mentioned by any respondents. Preferred responses included helpful staff, stock and the building and environment.

Of those who responded to the specific question regarding access to the internet, 54 respondents (76%) stated that they did have access to the internet. Of these, 95% of the respondents used the internet to find information. 61 of the respondents to this question (90%) asserted that they had access to a personal computer at home.

**The Focus Groups**

As previously discussed, the majority of focus group attendees have access to the Internet through their personal computers at home. The participants in the sessions were asked whether the Internet as an information tool had changed the way they used the library. Chester, Poynton and Disley users and non users all commented that the Internet had changed their library use, as it had now become in many cases ‘the first port of call' when seeking information about a new topic.
Access to the internet at home had also resulted in less visits to the library to use the reference section as the participants felt that they could search for themselves at home without having to make the journey to the library:

“If I wanted to find something out, I would probably look on the internet first because it’s there on the dining room desk. Especially in the winter, I haven’t got to trek out to get the information, it’s there at my fingertips at home. I think that has changed quite a lot of things that I would previously have come to the library to look up.” (Chester User).

“And it’s only in the last few years… that I’ve really had the access and I just think it’s a terrific boon. A godsend, an encyclopaedia for everything… But I find the internet so terrific for serious… documentary stuff and facts etc that now I seldom have recourse to come down here other than for a permanent record like a bird book.” (Poynton Non User).

“The problem is that I’m afraid the internet is such a wonderful, easy tool to use to provide yourself with information, you actually need never go out your four walls to find out practically anything you ever needed to find out again.” (Disley User).

However, conversely, it would seem that the internet is also providing a means for increasing usage of the local library. Cheshire Libraries has a presence on the internet, with a website featuring stock details and individual library information. A non user from each of the Chester and Poynton sessions commented that following an initial search on the internet for general information, they had then visited the library to follow up on the subject, having undertaken a stock search through the website beforehand. Both had been pleasantly surprised at the wealth of information in the library, particularly as they had ceased using the library regularly some years before. This supports Usherwood’s assertion that libraries hold much more comprehensive wealth of information, covering all angles of the topic (Usherwood in Kinnell and Sturges, 1996:193).

4.4 Summary

The library users regularly visit the library ranging from weekly to monthly visits. The non users tended to be lapsed or occasional users who did not visit the library with any frequency at all. However, overall the non users did state that they would use the library if a specific need arose.

The library users tend to view their libraries positively, with non users often commenting that the same libraries were ‘unwelcoming’. Both groups felt overall that the library was an important focal point for the community and that this aspect of the library should be developed, by providing meeting places and rooms for local groups to use.
The majority of the baby boomers felt that their libraries were accessible, even if detours were required to visit the library when in the local area. Parking was seen by most of the baby boomers to be an important issue, particularly in areas where no designated parking exists and charges can be prohibitive. In these cases, it was felt that this could serve as a deterrent to both users and non-users alike.

For those baby boomers in employment, many felt that the opening hours were not necessarily conducive to using the library. The majority of the workers felt that increased evening and weekend opening hours were required to increase the possibility of a visit to the library. The retired baby boomers, however, did not find the opening hours to be an issue as they could visit the library at their convenience.

The internet has changed the way the majority of the baby boomers would use the library, with most using home access to the internet as their ‘first port of call’. Many felt that the reference section was becoming redundant because of the internet and that the internet had resulted in reduced trips to the library to seek information.

However, a minority of those interviewed also felt that the internet had given them a reason to visit the library once they had discovered relevant stock and services through the Cheshire Libraries website.
5  The Library as Competitor

5.1  Introduction

“Libraries increasingly provide added-value services which extend well beyond the loan of books. That is one reason why public libraries are not just publicly funded versions of bookshops. They take on roles bookshops never would.” (DCMS, 2003:15).

The public library is facing increased competition from a variety of sources which serve to distract users and potential users from visiting the library and using its facilities. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the change in circumstances of the baby boomer generation, the increasing consumer culture, the rise of the bookshop, the impact of competing interests and the implications of a growing ‘coffee shop culture’.

5.2  Literature Review

The rise over recent years in a ‘consumer culture’ has also resulted in implications for the baby boomer generation. As Michael Cutbill of SAGA (the over-fifties insurance and travel company) comments:

“Older people nowadays live a completely different lifestyle to their own parents. They don’t give up doing things. This generation is fitter and wealthier than ever and they are adventurous consumers and livers of life.” (Cutbill, 2004:4).

Baby boomers are seen by marketers as one of the most viable and desirable groups of people as they are more likely to have relatively high incomes and be more affluent and are not afraid of spending money on items and services that they perceive to be worth buying (Huber and Skidmore, 2003; Morgan and Kunkel, 1998; Roberts, 2004; Blaikie, 1999; Bentley, 2004; Johnson and Falkingham, 1992)

Carvel (2003) points out that the baby boomer generation have grown up in a consumer society and have constantly been surrounded by advertising and therefore expect a high level of satisfaction from their expenditure. Evandrou (1997) outlines the expectations that the baby boomers have of their retirement which many see as a time to engage in leisure pursuits and interests as older people stay active and healthy for longer.

The leisure interests of the baby boomer generation are likely to be more active, with gardening, do-it-yourself, travel and community activities featuring highly on the list of preferred pursuits (Worcester, 1999). Travel in particular, is one of the fastest-growing areas
of expenditure for the baby boomer generation, with many seeing travel as a necessary and desirable activity (Worcester, 1999; Gillinson, Harkin and Huber, 2004; Martin, 2004).

Greenhalgh (1995) believes that the trend for all users of services to be seen as consumers has had an impact upon the public library service and concludes that:

"The civic version of the public realm is also losing ground both to the private consumer and to the private home... Public libraries walk a fine line between a commercial and a public world, and the competing languages of citizenship and consumption, which often produces stresses and strains in library management philosophies and policies." (Greenhalgh et al, 1995:65).

According to Riggio (in Sannwald, 1998), the retail experience of shopping for books can be associated with a sociable consumer experience, where the purchaser can be ‘dazzled’ by the displays on offer and purchase anything which catches their eye (in Sannwald, 1998:209). He also comments that bookshops are much more flexible with their opening hours and are more likely to be open at weekends and late at night, a state of affairs that Walters (1995) would like to emulate within his library.

With the rise of a consumer culture, the attitude towards books in particular as objects has changed. As Worpole states:

"As artefacts, books have perhaps lost their unique aura as sacred objects, and have increasingly become consumer objects which people buy, lend, borrow and dispose of as they wish. People now may buy a book at an airport and throw it away at the end of their journey." (Worpole, 1993:5).

The bookshop has, therefore, been pointed to as a very real threat to the public library as a provider of fiction and non fiction material (Greenhalgh et al, 1995; Black and Crann, 2002; Worpole, 1993; Sannwald, 1998). However, Raymond (1998) comments that bookshops and libraries are “completely different species” which should not attempt to emulate each other, but should instead learn from each other’s successes and maintain and promote their strengths and overall ethos.

The evidence suggests that book borrowing within public libraries is falling and book sales are rising, following the end of the Net Book Agreement (DCMS, 2003). Greenhalgh (1995) does not believe that the public library can compete with the book retailers and that it should concentrate upon providing the back catalogue of items instead, something which bookshops cannot guarantee, with increasingly shorter print runs.
The library is also much more than simply a provider of books and so it is unlikely that the increasing trend for purchasing books will result in a negative impact upon the public library service. In addition, it has been noted that book purchasers also tend to borrow books, in order to explore new areas and so will continue to use the library (Greenhalgh et al, 1995).

The public library has been subjected to a number of competitive forces over recent years, most notably the advent of television which is now believed to be the “number one leisure activity for people of all ages” (Bond and Coleman, 1990:284). It is also an activity which apparently increases with age: according to a 1999 MORI report, 55 to 64 year olds are second only to the 65+ age group for watching television (MORI, 1999:17). Webster asserts that the television is the primary source of information for most citizens in developed countries (Webster, 1999).

It has been stated that in spite of the fond regard within which public libraries are held, it may not be possible to hold the public’s attention in the face of so many other distractions (Bryson et al, 2003). In America, for example, Chisek believes this has already started to happen:

“...the library is replaced by home access to information and entertainment...for some people, television has already replaced books; libraries suffer from the consequent passivity and devaluation of reading.” (Chisek in Whitesides, 1998:11).

Conversely, however, Kinnell and Sturges (1996) maintain that reading has maintained its position as a popular activity in the face of other distractions from competing interests, resulting in a strengthening of the position of the public library.

For those who cite a lack of time as a reason for not visiting the public library, Greenhalgh (1995) believes that once retirement has been reached, lapsed users will visit the library once again, following on from the patterns followed in childhood.

Alongside the issues of consumerism and competing interests, the public library must also contend with the increasing ‘coffee shop culture’, much in evidence on the high streets and in the retail centres of the United Kingdom today. As a result, the issue of incorporating coffee areas into the public library is often debated within the literature and is even mentioned as a ‘vital’ component in the Framework for the Future document (DCMS, 2003).

Bryson et al (2003) explain that the inclusion of restaurant or café facilities can encourage users to visit the library and can also give them an incentive to linger. However,
the idea also appears to cause negative feeling, perhaps to do with the close proximity of the library stock to liquids and foodstuffs.

Public libraries in America appear to be more accepting of the idea of a café on the library premises. Predictions have been made that by 2010 every public library in America will host a coffee bar, such has been the success of those which have already been installed (Johnson, 2000:1).

Despite being a fervent ‘anti-coffee culture’ devotee, Hawley (2003) believes that housing coffee areas within the library in response to user requests can be valuable:

“If coffee is an effective way of attracting new users, then it seems that the argument for a café is clear. So let’s have a coffee shop, but let’s also take the opportunity to show why libraries are different from bookstores and then high street generally, and at the same time bolster the buzzphrases with some real action.” (Hawley, 2003)

In-keeping with the library’s position as a public institution, however, Hawley (2003) also recommends that charities or local firms are approached to run the coffee area instead of a franchise, as it can be more easily related to the key concepts of social inclusion and community focus.

5.3 Results and Discussion

5.3.1 Consumer Culture and Bookshops

The Focus Groups

From the focus group findings, it would appear that reading as a hobby is still viewed as a very popular pastime, with most of the users and non-users commenting that they liked to read. This indicates that the situation Chisek finds in America where the library is suffering from passivity is not yet the case in the United Kingdom (Chisek in Whitesides, 1998:11). However, what did emerge from the sessions is that the baby boomers are fully prepared to purchase books on a regular basis and often in preference to borrowing new and popular books from their local library.

According to the focus group participants, there appear to be a number of reasons for this: the shopping experience, the desire to keep the items, and an increase in disposable income are all contributing factors.

One library user described the consumer culture that exists amongst her friends and colleagues:
“Not many of my friends use the library and I think they’ve got a bit of that retail experience, part of their enjoyment of books or videos is the buying of them, the going out and spoiling themselves, you know it’s like sweetsies, it’s in that sort of self-gratification thing… you can get the up to date things, and there’s sort of the smell of a new book isn’t there and taking it home and so on. I mean, if you can afford it.” (Chester User).

This comment subscribes to Sannwald’s (1998) statement that buying books is often seen as an enjoyable consumer experience. The majority of focus group participants, both users and non users, stated that they enjoyed purchasing books and shopped around the various high-street bookshops and internet providers for the best deals.

One Poynton non user attributed the trend for buying books as opposed to or in addition to borrowing them as being in part due to increased disposable income. Another theme to emerge from the sessions included the purchaser’s desire to keep and own the book —particularly if they intend to read it again - rather than return it to the library when the loan period has ended:

“You know, I look upon a book as a think of beauty as well as something to read, so if I’m going to read something several times, probably, I’ll buy a nice copy.” (Poynton User).

“I like to keep books. A lot of people I know just read a paperback and then it goes to a charity shop and so on. But I tend to keep them…you like to keep them rather than give them back to the library.” (Poynton Non User).

“If it’s buyable, I buy it. From wherever.” (Chester Non User).

Coupled with the increase in disposable income mentioned by the Poynton non user, participants in each of the focus group sessions discussed the availability of relatively cheap paperbacks within shops and available online. Both users and non users within each of the focus groups at Macclesfield, Poynton and Disley stated that they would purchase a current, popular title rather than reserve it through the library, with one non user commenting:

“If you can buy them cheap enough, then you don’t need to come to the library really. And struggle through and try and find in a month’s time when somebody else has brought it back perhaps.” (Poynton Non User).

“And I mean when you think nowadays the paperbacks are so cheap to buy aren’t they.” (Disley Non User).

Interestingly, however, while the majority of respondents were willing to spend money purchasing required books from booksellers, a number of users and non users did
not seem willing to pay a reservation charge at the library to reserve a popular item which may have a waiting list, preferring to pay the higher price to buy the book:

R1: I very rarely order books.
R2: If I get that desperate for a book then I would buy it.
R4: Yes. (Poynton Users).

The Macclesfield user group also commented that they would rather buy than reserve an item, even though it was more expensive to purchase the book than pay the reservation charge. The feeling appeared to be that a charge should not be made to reserve a book, particularly if it would take some time to become available. This is reflected in the following exchange between Chester library users:

R1: The staff there are very cooperative, they normally get books in about two or three weeks. It would be nice if the service was done for free of course.
R4: Yes, I know, I've just ordered one now and I've had to pay for it.

The Poynton user group continued their discussion on this subject, with one regular library user stating that if the library introduced charges to borrow individual items, this user would purchase more books from booksellers, as 'we pay our rates don't we?' This seems to indicate that users of the library expect the library stock to be available free of charge and are not willing to pay any charges when they have the ability to purchase new books from a retailer, admittedly at a higher cost.

Both users and non users within the Poynton and Macclesfield user groups regularly bought books to take on holiday from charity shops or ‘bargain bookshops’ so that they could be left behind when they returned. This trend confirms Worpole’s (1993) theory that the image of the book has changed to the extent that they can be disposed of readily today, whereas in the past the book was viewed as a hallowed item. This may be yet another indicator of the rise of the consumer society.

However, somewhat encouragingly for the library, a large number of participants who purchased books also tended to borrow material from the library, consistent with Greenhalgh et al’s (1995) suggestion. The tendency to purchase items also appeared to fall within three types of categories: books that purchasers wished to re-read; reference books such as bird books or travel books; and new, popular items such as bestsellers or prize-winners.

Indeed, two of the library users at Chester and one of the library users at Macclesfield felt very strongly about not purchasing books, preferring to use the library for their own needs:
“I don’t actually own books, I don’t need to own them… a lot of it, they’re just of the moment and they’re of interest and then it’s nice to pass them back to the shelves for other people to enjoy.” (Chester User).

“I don’t like the idea of buying novels. It’s one thing maybe buying a reference book or something that you wanted to keep, but I would hate the idea… most of my colleagues at work will go out and buy a book to read and I just think that’s awful. You know, partly because it would be expensive, even though I could afford to do it, but the idea of continually using resources that, at the end of the day you throw away or pass on - I mean why not just borrow it then pass it on?” (Macclesfield User).

For one of the Chester library users, not just the cost of the items, but space at home was a major issue in using the library instead of purchasing books:

“I used to buy most of my books, but then I realised that I live in a small house and I realised I was rapidly going to run out of space… And I decided that really I couldn’t afford to go on doing this, as much as I really wanted to own the books… And so I get the bulk of my books now via the library and have encouraged everybody in the family to do the same.” (Chester User).

The Poynton library user group also felt that in using a bookshop to purchase books, they were in same way simulating the social interaction they would receive from the library staff on a visit to the library, with the added ‘perk’ of treating themselves to a purchase at the same time:

R4: I like to talk to people when I go in a bookshop, if you go to a proper bookshop then they know about books don’t they.
R1: They usually share our enthusiasm as well.
R4: Yes, they do yes. It’s nice to have that conversation, isn’t it?

**Staff Interviews**

The library staff members were not specifically asked to comment upon the impact of the bookshops upon the public library service as they were instead asked to focus upon the services and facilities they provide to users, and the baby boomers in particular. Aside from three of the librarians mentioning the discounted bookshops where ‘classics’ can be purchased for a minimal amount, the issue of consumer culture was not provided as a prompt and did not arise throughout the semi-structured interview.
5.3.2 Competing Interests

**Questionnaire Findings**

The questionnaire respondents were asked to list their hobbies and spare time activities. Perhaps unsurprisingly for regular library users, reading was cited by 57 of the respondents (78%); followed by physical leisure activities (55%); travel (51%); gardening (38%); crafts (29%); music (18%) and socialising (15%). This list of hobbies relates closely to Worcester's (1999) findings, with the exception of do-it-yourself, which proved to be very popular in the focus group sessions and was cited as a major interest by the librarians monitoring the non-fiction stock. It may be the case that do-it-yourself may not be classed as a hobby or leisure pursuit, but more as a necessary activity, which may account for it not being cited.

**The Focus Groups**

The Poynton non user focus group felt that television and other technological advances had had an impact upon their reading habits. One of the users had previously been an avid reader and a regular visitor to his local library, however, this user now found that they preferred to watch television for relaxation purposes instead:

"I suggest that television has perhaps also killed a lot of book reading. I mean, you sit down, having had a long day, and I tend to be a bit square eyed. And then you get things done that need to get done and then I go to bed and do a bit of reading but it's not enough really." (Poynton Non User).

This feeling was substantiated by another member of the same focus group who was of the opinion that competing interests had resulted in looking elsewhere than the library for entertainment and lending purposes:

"But things have changed, communications, television, videos, tapes all this sort of thing tend to push it [reading] to the background I think." (Poynton Non User).

However, it was also the case that a number of the library users at each of the four libraries felt that they could still read avidly and find time for the other interests competing for their time and attention. As one Disley user commented:

"But I still think that without books life is so much, so poor if you don't read. And you think, what do you do if you don't read? All that pleasure you miss and you certainly won't get it from a tv screen or the internet."
The overall impression given was that while television and other interests had become more popular over recent years, those with an interest in reading were still prepared to make time to read. This would indicate that television and other media have had an impact upon reading and library visits, but that the situation is not as extreme as that described by Chisek in Whitesides (1998).

However, the issue of lack of time to visit the library was an emergent theme agreed with by a number of participants within each focus group and particularly those who worked full time. For the baby boomers who have retired already, they felt satisfied, on the whole, that they could make the time to visit the library at their convenience. The working baby boomers, in contrast, felt that it was very difficult attempting to visit the library during their leisure hours, particularly during the week:

“I've noticed a difference this year because I've been working almost full time and I haven't used the library as much as I have done when I've not been working full time.” (Chester User).

“When I come home in the evening all I want to do is just flop for quite a while before I come round. But I wouldn't really want to go to the library actually.” (Poynton Non User).

“At the moment I work too many hours to even come you know.” (Macclesfield User).

“As I say I used to read a lot. I don't have a lot of time to read and I can't be bothered going to the library…” (Macclesfield Non User).

One non library user at Disley commented that as time was limited at weekends, a visit to the library was combined with shopping or trips to the Post Office in order to reduce multiple trips to the village.

The view was also expressed by users at Macclesfield library and non users at Poynton library that they hoped to be able to visit the library more and do more reading once they had retired, reflecting Greenhalgh et al's (1995) opinion that lapsed users are more likely to use the library again once they have retired.

On the other hand, another non library user at Disley stated that it was not a lack of time which resulted in not visiting the library, it was a perceived lack of relevance of the library service:

“I'm afraid I just don't feel the need to go to the library really. It's not that I can't find time.”
5.3.3 Coffee Shop Culture and Suggested Improvements

Questionnaire Findings

When prompted to offer suggestions for improvements to the library services and its facilities, a total of 32 respondents (43% of the total) put forward a variety of suggestions.

Of these suggestions, 6 respondents requested that café facilities be made available to users of the library. A request was made for more comfortable chairs to facilitate browsing and reading within the library. Two respondents requested that more special events are organised - particularly visiting writers - and one respondent requested audio visual facilities specifically for use in conjunction with the languages material.

The Focus Groups

Reflecting the questionnaire findings, the most often suggested improvement for the library which would make the baby boomers more inclined to visit was the introduction of coffee facilities, in accordance with Bryson et al (2003) and the Framework for the Future’s assertion that this facility is ‘vital’ in today’s society (DCMS, 2003). This suggestion was made by both the user and non user groups at Chester and also the Macclesfield user group. Interestingly, these are the two largest libraries examined for the purposes of this research and both are central to the local shopping areas and amenities:

“Borders the big bookshop has that, you know, it has like a coffee shop as well doesn’t it, a coffee shop and big comfortable chairs. That would be nice.” (Chester User).

“Well some libraries now have coffee facilities as well. It would be nice to come in, I mean if you’re able to come in and spend the morning or whatever reading, something like that would be nice.” (Macclesfield User).

“It may be that some of the larger city libraries, not necessarily in the suburbs, may well have space where they could have a dedicated small room where there’s perhaps tea or coffee facilities.” (Chester Non User).

The discussions surrounding coffee shops in libraries did, in each instance where it was raised, cover the issue of liquids and food near stock and computers. However, overall, the general opinion regarding coffee facilities was positive and viewed as a welcome addition to the library’s facilities.
The baby boomers did feel that improvements could be made to make them feel more motivated to visit the library. The Poynton non-user group was particularly interested in increasing accessibility and awareness of the book stock within the library. The suggestion was made by one lapsed library user that a list of similar authors is created for each category of books, with suggestions for further reading. The proposed list would take the form of the question: “Do you like [specific author]? Then perhaps you’d like these…” followed by a list of authors within the same genre and style.

The Poynton non-user group also agreed that a book club would be well-received and would encourage them to return to the library in order to discuss books and develop their reading tastes.

The Macclesfield library user group was particularly interested in increasing the amount of special events held at the library, particularly visiting authors and talks. These were felt to be valuable activities which could promote interest in new authors and topics.

Requests for more comfortable chairs and browsing areas were also made at Macclesfield, Chester and Poynton libraries.

Staff Interviews

The library staff members were asked to comment upon the issue of coffee shops in libraries and provide their views on installing such facilities within their libraries. The question provoked a mixed set of reactions, ranging from interest in the idea to being labelled as not practicable.

“I don’t think people higher up would be very keen, to be honest. But it would be very nice to be able to offer that because it just makes you feel that you’re being more welcoming.” (Librarian B).

“I can’t believe that people would be thinking that they could drink coffee in the library with the books around and the mess involved.” (Librarian E).

“When you think of all the competition in the local area, there’s hundreds of coffee traders. I can’t imagine that anyone would be interested in a franchise here.” (Librarian D).

“As soon as everybody says library, they say let’s have a coffee shop because the bookshops have them...But in the bigger towns you have the competition, and the likelihood of being able to run it in a branch is, I think, almost negligible as you would have to subsidise it to such a degree that it would become totally uneconomic.” (Librarian C).
The library staff at the two smaller libraries felt that it would be impossible to house coffee facilities within their existing buildings due to space constraints. All of the staff interviewed at the four libraries also raised the problems involved in staffing the facility and ensuring the quality of the service.

5.4 Summary

Overall, the baby boomers appear to be fully prepared to purchase books, particularly if the item is a new, popular item, a reference book or a book that they intend to read several times. Conversely, the focus group participants did not seem willing to pay a reservation charge to reserve popular books, with some believing that their ‘rates’ should be payment enough for such services.

The baby boomers also make good use of charity shops and discounted booksellers when purchasing books. A minority of those spoken to also view books as more disposable than previously, and are willing to dispose of books – particularly on holiday – rather than viewing them as cherished objects.

However, a small group of library users were in disagreement about the rise of in consumer culture and felt that cost and space were significant factors and they preferred to borrow books. This was a minority view, however, with the overall majority purchasing books on a regular basis, citing a rise in disposable income and cheaper books as enabling factors.

The majority of baby boomers believed that competing interests had distracted them – at least in part - from reading as a hobby, with some preferring to watch television or use the internet. However, those who still maintained an interest in reading commented that they could make time to accommodate all of their interests and that competing interests did not generally affect library use.

The issue of lack of time was cited by the majority of employed baby boomers as a major barrier to visiting the library. This, coupled with perceived limited opening hours, acted as a deterrent to many non users. However, retired baby boomers disagreed and stated that they could visit the library at their convenience.

The most popular suggestion for a service which could increase baby boomer usage of the library was that of a coffee bar. The overall opinion of the baby boomers was that this would be a positive development and was viewed with some enthusiasm. Other incentives to visit included: raising awareness of book stock, book clubs, special events and the provision of browsing areas.
While some librarians were open to considering the idea of coffee facilities, the majority felt that they were not feasible due to space and resource constraints, as well as local competition.
6 The Library as an Institution

6.1 Introduction

“Libraries have always been there and we assume that they more or less always will be. Our familiarity with the library idea has encouraged a certain neglect, if not indifference, among many of us, including some elected representatives.” (Matarasso, 1998:3).

This chapter will examine the role of the library as an institution, incorporating the image and importance of the public library, and the changing nature of the public library as regards previous use by baby boomer’s parents in the past.

6.2 Literature Review

The image of the public library is an important factor in determining whether or not non-users will use the library, or whether their perception will act as a disincentive. As Green explains:

“The images of libraries as institutions are barriers to use. Grand, deteriorating buildings or large, modern structures, with perceived petty rules and bureaucracy deter entry.” (Green, 1994:21).

The perception of the library as a place of regulations and compulsory silence still exists (Bryson et al, 2003; Greenhalgh et al, 1995). Black and Crann (2002) believe that overall the public library has a positive image, but that they can be seen as ‘stagnating’ or ‘lacking sparkle’ (Black and Crann, 2002:150).

Sannwald (1998) comments that a library can soon tarnish its image by not having relevant stock, by not maintaining its facilities and by not providing a high level of customer service. The view also persists that the library is always seen as being available and ‘nice to have around for when it is needed’ (Walters, 1995:22; Matarasso, 1998). And despite the wide and diverse range of services offered by the public library, it still finds itself being perceived simply as a place of books, where reading matter can be located and found (Toyne and Usherwood, 2001).

The importance of the public library within the community is very much the subjective opinion of each individual. One of the fundamental benefits of the public library is now perhaps less relevant today than previously:

*Public libraries are about coming together to share in the wealth of literature which cannot be individually owned. Even this piety could be said to be less valid than it once was with...the
The public library service is a fragmented institution, with many decisions being taken at local level. The Framework for the Future document requests that decisions regarding image and publicity should be taken by the local authorities (DCMS, 2003). With no national advertising in place, criticisms are often made that library services are not well promoted and do not make users and non-users aware of services and facilities (Greenhalgh et al, 1995; DCMS, 2003; Lembeck in Whitesides, 1998; Green, 1994).

Landry (1993) is bemused at the obsession with identifying non-users and their reasons for not using the library service, questioning how many other institutions expect or are able to serve every single member of the community, particularly when the library may not have the resources to be able to cope with more users.

The public library has proved itself time and again to be adaptable and flexible in the advent of new technologies and changing society (Kinnell and Sturges, 1996; Greenhalgh et al, 1995). As the baby boomers age, the libraries will need to adapt once more as the baby boomers are likely to become more vocal as they request a more tailored service from their libraries:

“No longer satisfied with a second-rate service of a shelf of large-print books and the once-a-month meeting of the gardening club, tomorrow’s older patrons, better educated and less impaired, will demand more from the public library.” (Kleiman, 1995:33).

6.3 Results and Discussion

6.3.1 The Image of the Library

The Focus Groups

A traditional image of the public library is one of a building bound by rules, regulations and the need for silence from its visitors (Bryson et al, 2003; Greenhalgh et al, 1995). It has been suggested that for some non users who have not visited their local library in some time, this image still prevails. During the course of the focus groups, the issue of silence within libraries was raised by the Chester library user group, the Poynton library user group and the Disley non user group. Both the Poynton user group and the Disley non user
group reflected on the past image of the library as a place of silence, but acknowledged that the library of recent years has since changed:

“It used to be very sort of ‘shhh!’ didn’t it. But I think when I have been in recently it seems a lot better.” (Disley Non User).

“I can remember going to the library as a child and it was polished lino on the floor and ‘hush!’ you know…” (Disley Non User).

“It has changed though, in terms of the, you know, the silence regime and so on. You wouldn’t have children running about or laughing… that’s different now, which is good.” (Poynton User).

Interestingly, however, a library user at Chester commented that other users within the central library still held the view that all users should remain quiet within the library, going so far as ‘policing’ those who make a noise:

“There is also a ‘sh!’ atmosphere and you can be afraid of disturbing people, particularly the children. It’s the other users shushing, not the librarians.” (Chester User).

Overall, the discussions upon this subject resulted in the decision that the newer, more relaxed regime as regards noise was a definite improvement on the previous insistence upon quiet.

When prompted to discuss the image of the public library, only two users of the library at Macclesfield and one library user at Disley commented that they thought the image of the library was positive. A number of participants also did not have a particular opinion upon the subject pointing out that the image of the library was not something they had considered before:

“I’ve never given it a thought, it’s just there, like the city hall or the police, it’s just there…an institution.” (Poynton User).

However, for those who did volunteer their opinions, the general feeling appeared to be that the library was perceived by some to be old fashioned and ‘staid’:

“Old-fashioned I suppose. I wouldn’t expect to find the latest technology.” (Poynton Non User).

“I mean my perception of the library is that it’s not changed much since I was reading books in my twenties, which was a while back.” (Poynton Non User).
“It tends to have a stuffy image, which suits me, I don’t mind that…” (Macclesfield User).

“It doesn’t seem to have moved on with the times, it almost seems to be stuck in a time warp, but that’s my perception of it.” (Macclesfield Non User).

The issue of image was an area which was covered in some depth at the Poynton non user group, where lapsed users felt that nothing had changed since they had stopped visiting the library in previous years. One non user felt quite strongly that the image of the library was a barrier to people using the facilities and felt that a change was needed:

“I think the image definitely needs an update... Unless they get, you know, into it with a more up to date image so that people will come in and think that it’s a bit more dynamic.” (Poynton Non User).

6.3.2 The Importance of the Library

The Focus Groups

Both the library user and non user groups were asked how important the library was in their lives. Not surprisingly, there was a difference in responses between the regular library users and the lapsed or non library users. The library user groups displayed great depth of feeling about the importance of the library to them, both as an institution but also more particularly as a place where many of the avid readers could indulge their passion for reading books:

“I wouldn’t like to not have it! I mean, I rely on what I take out for relaxation and that’s really important... It’s invaluable.” (Chester User).

“I’ve always used the library. It’s been sort of a constant thing in my life, really, something wonderful.” (Poynton User).

“I couldn’t live without reading I don’t think...It’s a necessity, it’s part of breathing for me.” (Poynton User).

“I mean, I still feel quite privileged to be, to work so near the library because I think it’s such a good resource. I’d be lost without it.” (Macclesfield User).

“I can’t exist without books. So for me, it’s really important that there’s a library.” (Disley User).

Only one library user out of the library user group participants didn’t feel that the library played a large role in their life. This user regularly attended the library to use the
internet, but did not borrow books and preferred to buy them. This could be an indication that
the depth of feeling displayed regarding the importance of the library may be linked in with
the availability of reading material at the library and the pleasure to be obtained from the
activity, rather than the library as an overall service provider.

The non library user participants tended to fall within two categories when asked to
respond about the importance of the public library in their lives. The first category included
those who like to know that the library is in existence and available for when they need its
services and facilities and would not like to think that they are not available for use. The
majority of non users at Macclesfield and Poynton subscribed to this view, while one non
user at Chester felt this to be the case:

“I would say that the way I use the libraries, for when I want them they
are fairly important.” (Chester Non User).

“You need it here when you want it. You like to think that it’s there, that if
I ever need to use it I can go in and use it.” (Poynton Non User).

“I don’t use them that often, but when you’re looking for something it’s
great to think, oh I’ll go and see if I can find it in the library.”
(Macclesfield Non User).

The second category included those who felt that libraries have lost relevance and
have been edged out by the internet and technological developments. Three of the non
library users at Chester held this opinion, and even though some of them were occasional
users of the library and its facilities, the following exchange took place during the discussion:

R2: I think, with the internet you could almost live without it now... I mean,
if somebody said tomorrow, oh the libraries are closing, it would be an
inconvenience, I wouldn’t be slashing my wrists or anything.
R3: But you’re right, if somebody said ‘sorry, there’s no more libraries’ I
can get by. I’d have to buy more and I’d have to use the internet more.
R4: I think the electronic age is diminishing the value of places like this.
I’m sure it is.

6.3.3 Advertising and Publicity

The Focus Groups

Overall, the focus group participants believed that the library does not do enough
to publicise itself or its services. Participants within each of the sessions commented that
more could be done to raise the profile of the library and inform the local population of its
facilities and special events.
A non regular library user at Chester described ‘discovering’ that books could be returned to any Cheshire library and not just the lending library, not having been aware of this benefit until recently, showing, perhaps, that this facility had not been highlighted by the libraries.

The Chester library user group held strong views that the library should advertise itself:

R1: I think they should splash themselves about a bit as I think they do provide an excellent service and they should be more widely advertised.
R2: And should perhaps advertise exactly what it offers as well, it’s not just going and reading novels, there’s a lot more to the library than that.

A Poynton library user commented that they were not aware of the full range of services on offer at the library, despite visiting the library on a regular basis:

“I suppose I don’t know the full range of the services they offer. If all I do is come and borrow books then we won’t be as familiar with the services the library offers.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the non library users at Poynton, Macclesfield and Disley believed that they did not know what facilities were available in the libraries. Some of the non users within these group sessions were surprised to find out that the library stocked DVD’s, had photocopiers for use and housed computers where the internet could be accessed. One of the non users suggested that a way to improve the library may be to ‘have some computers so people could use the internet and make themselves more relevant’, not realising that the library already provided this facility. This implies that the People’s Network initiative is not widespread knowledge throughout the communities the libraries serve.

Each member of the non library user groups agreed that more advertising should be undertaken to increase awareness and update the image of the library. This was particularly the case for those who had not ventured into a library for some time, as they felt that nothing had changed since their last visit as they had not heard that new facilities and services were available. The Disley non user group made the following suggestion:

“I’d like an up to date list of the facilities that are available you know. Because everything has moved on so much since I used to go regularly that I don’t really know what’s on. And they never seem to publicise anything much.”
Staff Interviews

The issue of advertising and publicity was raised with the librarians at each of the four libraries, for their comments and opinions. One librarian felt very strongly that advertising was a problematic area and agrees with Landry’s (1993) view of attracting more users to an already under pressure resource:

“We try hard. We do things like press releases, get ourselves in the newspapers... We offer a whole range of things, but people stop listening when they've heard what they want to hear... you might say, why would we want to attract any more people in here, we can't cope with what we've got at the moment. But that's perhaps a bit defeatist. But, if we can't cope with what we've got at the moment...why do we want to get any more in?” (Librarian C).

The opinion that publicity and promotion is a problem area was also held by another of the librarians, who stated the lack of a promotional budget and a lack of existing mechanisms to publicise special events and facilities resulted in not making the most of promotional opportunities. The County does have a central publicity section, however, it is not perceived to be feasible for a photographer to travel from Chester to the libraries in the far east of the County to cover presentations and special events.

One of the libraries expected to run a promotional campaign for the People’s Network, but were still awaiting the promotional materials. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was this library’s non user group member who was not aware that computers were available within the library.

All of the librarians commented that word of mouth was often an effective way of disseminating the library’s facilities throughout the community; and all mentioned using the local papers to promote activities and events. However, the issue of budgetary constraints restricted the amount of advertising the individual libraries could undertake and all major campaigns need to be given central approval. The problem of competition for advertising was also discussed:

“It's a difficult one because you are in competition in the marketplace with people who spend thousands. You know, like television advertising and local radio. But again, even if you contact them, it's in the lap of the gods as to whether you actually achieve anything.” (Librarian D).

Interestingly, the possibility of a national advertising campaign was only raised by one of the librarians. This may be a reflection of the Framework for the Future’s depiction of the public library service as highly fragmented (DCMS, 2003) as well as the librarian’s view that county libraries tend to be ‘very parochial’. This librarian commented:
“We don’t really join together and say ‘this is what the library’s got for you’ and that’s possibly what the Regional Bodies should be doing – and the National Bodies.” (Librarian C).

6.3.4 The Changing Nature of Public Library Use

The Focus Groups

The focus group participants were asked to comment upon their perceptions of whether their parents used the public library service any differently to the way they use – or do not use – the library.

From the responses, it was clear that the majority of focus group attendees felt that their parents used the public library much more in general than they do now and this was even the case for the regular library attendees. However, within each focus group, at least one participant commented that due to individual circumstances or preferences, only one or even none of their parents ever used the library. This trend did not follow any particular pattern and as many library users as non library users noted parents who did not use the library at all.

Overall, the focus group participants viewed the way their parents used the library as different to their current levels of usage, with more frequent library visits and library use consisting almost exclusively of borrowing fiction:

“But I can remember when I was growing up, when I was a child, everybody went to the library…” (Chester User).

“My parents, up until they died virtually, they used to go regularly. But they would just go for their reading, their novels, you know whatever they were reading. I don’t think they ever used it for reference.” (Macclesfield User).

“Yes, well my parents used the library regularly too. I think they used it for the same purpose as I do, for fiction.” (Disley User).

The most often cited reason for their parents using the library on a more frequent basis was the limited availability of paperbacks and lack of funds to purchase books:

“I think she used the library a lot, it was a cost thing wasn’t it. They never used to buy books in those days, so it was useful to belong to the library.” (Poynton User).
"And the difference is of course where our parents used to use the library, they couldn’t get cheap books like we can... So if they wanted books, that’s where they had to go because they couldn’t afford to go and buy books, pay full price for books.” (Macclesfield Non User).

"They used the library a lot more. Because it was a lot harder to buy books, and I mean, the number of books published was considerably less I suspect.” (Disley User).

This would indicate that the increase in available and reasonably-priced books, coupled with a rise in disposable income has affected the amount of library usage from the days when the baby boomer’s parents visited the library for their fiction needs. In addition, in general the library users and occasional non library users believed that they were more likely to use the library now for a variety of reasons rather than simply using the library as a repository for book stock.

6.4 Summary

In general, the majority of users and non library users felt that the image had improved in recent years, with relaxed regulations and more approachable staff. Many of the baby boomers did not hold an opinion about the library’s image, however, those who did felt that it could be seen as ‘old fashioned’ and ‘staid’. The image of the library was even cited as a barrier to use by one non user.

Overall, the library user groups felt that the library had had an important and positive effect on their lives and they had strong feelings about the library as an institution. However, the non users felt that it was not necessarily essential to them, but they liked to know it was there. Other non users stated the library was no longer important in their lives, following the development of the internet as an information tool.

The baby boomers tended to feel strongly that the library does not publicise itself or its services enough, with many of the library users and non users unaware of services and facilities. In general, the library staff felt that more efficient advertising could be achieved. However, the library is limited in its advertising activities due to the centralisation of promotional activities, limited funds and autonomy for local advertising and a lack of national direction. However, some libraries expressed the concern that increased advertising may result in an overloaded service which cannot cope with increased numbers.

The majority of focus group participants felt that their use and perception of the public library has changed in comparison to their parents, with most of the baby boomers being more prepared and more able to purchase books, resulting in decreased use of library stock on the whole. The baby boomers believed that in the main, their parents tended to use
the library almost exclusively for fiction as they were not necessarily in a position to purchase books; whereas the baby boomer generation state that they view the library more as a service provider and will use it for a variety of reasons and not just for borrowing stock.
7 Conclusions

7.1 Research Conclusions

Firstly, the baby boomers tended to fall within two distinct groups: the regular and enthusiastic library users and the lapsed or very occasional users, many of whom had used the library extensively in the past. A common theme of these lapsed users was that they had become disillusioned with the library as they did not feel that the library stock and services retained relevance to their needs and requirements.

Regarding their perceptions of the current service, the baby boomers felt overall that the library stock was a hugely important part of the library service and many felt that the range and currency of the stock was not sufficient for their needs and interests.

For the library users, the library is seen as an extremely important part of their lives, whereas the non library users are much more ambivalent, believing the library to be useful when required, although a small group of non users did feel that the library is becoming increasingly irrelevant with the advent of the internet.

There exist strong feelings that the baby boomers should be consulted for their opinions of the service to ensure that their perceived needs can be taken into account when new or existing library services are reviewed.

In general, the baby boomers agreed that the image of the public library had improved over recent years, although many still perceive it to be old fashioned and not up to date with the latest technological developments.

A number of barriers exist which can act as a deterrent to library use for the baby boomers. The perceived lack of relevance of library stock as previously mentioned has resulted in some users ceasing to visit the library as they feel that there may not be anything of interest for them.

Overall, the libraries were deemed to be accessible and fit for the purpose. Parking facilities are important to the baby boomers, especially where parking charges are made for spaces which are not necessarily adjacent to the library and therefore inconvenient. In order to reduce costs incurred by visiting the libraries, trips are often only made when they can be combined with another activity in the same area. In some extreme cases, the lack of affordable and convenient parking was felt to be a major disincentive to visiting the library.
The opening hours were overwhelmingly seen as inconvenient by those who are in full time employment. Although the baby boomers are aware of the budgetary constraints, many felt that a more creative approach to the opening hours issue could improve their usage of the library, particularly at weekends. A lack of time was also seen as a major barrier to use by the employed baby boomers. Whilst this was not the case for the retired baby boomers, those in employment felt that they had to prioritise their leisure time and therefore could not necessarily attend the library during the week.

The baby boomers also felt that the library should publicise itself more. Many of the baby boomers – both library users and non users – were not aware of the services and facilities on offer and found this lack of awareness a major barrier to use. Even those who visited the library on a regular basis felt unsure of the full range of services available at the library.

The baby boomers believed that factors did exist which would encourage them to use the library more often. The most frequently made suggestion for improvements was the request for a coffee shop or coffee facilities within the library building. Whilst acknowledging the issues involved in providing such a facility, the majority of baby boomers who raised this topic felt that such a service would be very welcome, particularly where a great deal of time is spent at the library.

The issue of book clubs was also raised as an incentive to visit the library more often and as an opportunity to meet with others. The hosting of special events was also felt to be important, with baby boomers stating that attending talks and author visits would be seen as a desirable activity.

The baby boomer groups felt overwhelmingly that their use and perception of the public library had changed in comparison to their parents. It was felt that previous generations used the library more often, mainly to borrow stock items. However, with the rise in disposable income coupled with the availability of reasonably priced books, the baby boomers are far more likely to purchase books than their parents were in the past. The baby boomer is also more likely to use the library for a variety of purposes, rather than purely to borrow fiction.

Overall, the library staff agreed that the baby boomer generation are different from previous generations of the same age and are going some way towards redefining stereotypical images of those approaching retirement. Despite the acknowledgement that the baby boomers have particular needs that the library can serve, to date library services have not been reviewed or provided with this group in mind.
A number of suggestions have been made by library staff of possible areas where baby boomers can be provided for, including more retirement information, the development of the local interest section and information specifically aimed at those who are about to retire about hobbies and interests. A number of baby boomers felt that the provision of assistance and tutorials for computer use and the internet would be helpful. At least one of the libraries has already begun to address this issue by holding ‘Silver Surfer’ days.

It is likely that the public library service will need to address the issue of service provision to the baby boomer generations in the future. Particularly as they retire, the likelihood is that the baby boomers will seek to re-establish a connection with the public library in order to investigate what the public library can do for them. By addressing the issues raised from this research in the near future, the public library service can be prepared to reaffirm its position as an important community institution for this age group.
7.2 Suggestions to the Public Library Service

- Feedback mechanisms should be established which enable the baby boomers to provide input to the library service, outlining their needs and giving their opinions of the library service. Discussion groups would be a valuable tool for the library as they provide the opportunity for the baby boomers to meet and be recognised as valued users of the service.

- A review of the highlighted barriers to use should be undertaken to establish whether improvements can be made to existing operations and services to ensure that the library is available to all within the community.

- The library service should investigate its publicity and promotion services to ensure that all current users and potential users are made aware of the services and facilities available at the library.

- The library service should investigate the demand for the outlined suggestions to increase library usage and explore the feasibility of new facilities, in particular, coffee facilities and comfortable browsing areas.
7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

- That more research is conducted into the changing nature of the baby boomers and that further in-depth investigations are made to establish areas where the library service can be tailored to meet their needs.

- That research is conducted to assess the full impact that the internet is having upon library usage and whether the library’s value as an additional source of authoritative and wide-ranging information is appreciated.

- That research is undertaken into assessing how well the needs of the minority groups within the baby boomer generation is being met.
Bibliography


Appendices

Appendix 1:

User Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of research for an MA dissertation regarding the public library provision for people within the Baby Boomer generation (born between 1944-50). Your response to this questionnaire is entirely private and confidential and the information gathered will only be used for the purpose of this dissertation.

Please mark each relevant response with a tick (✓) between the brackets if you fall within this age range (born 1944-50).

1. How often do you use this public library?
   ( ) More than once a week
   ( ) Weekly
   ( ) Every fortnight
   ( ) Monthly
   ( ) Other (please specify) _________________________________

2. How many years (approximately) have you been a member of a public library?
   ( ) Between 0-5 years
   ( ) Between 6-10 years
   ( ) Between 11-20 years
   ( ) 21+ years

3. What do you do when visiting the library?
   (More than one option may be chosen).
   ( ) Borrowing fiction: novels etc.
   ( ) Borrowing Non-fiction items
   ( ) Read newspapers
   ( ) Use the internet
   ( ) Photocopying
   ( ) Borrowing Films
   ( ) Borrowing Music to listen to away from the library
   ( ) Borrowing Talking books
   ( ) Borrowing Languages cassettes/material
   ( ) Browse reference material
   ( ) Other (please specify) _________________________________
4a. Do you attend the library on a regular basis (for example, every week or every month) or do you visit the library only when you have a specific reason?

( ) Regular basis
( ) Specific reason

4b. When is the most convenient time for you to visit the library?

( ) Mornings
( ) Afternoons
( ) Evenings

5a. Which aspect(s) of the public library services do you feel are the most relevant to you personally (e.g. book borrowing, use of the internet, access to information, meeting people, photocopying, enquiry reference service)?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

5b. Why?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
6a. Are there any services or features you feel are relevant to you that you would like to see introduced?
( ) Yes (please give details below)
( ) No (please continue to question 6b).
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

6b. What do you like most about the library?
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

6c. What do you like least about the library?
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

7. If you have a general query, are you more likely to:
( ) Browse the library materials yourself
( ) Ask at the reference enquiry desk
( ) Use the internet

8a. Do you use the Internet within the library or elsewhere?
( ) Yes (please continue to questions 8b and 8c)
( ) No (please continue to question 9).
8b. Do you use the Internet to find information?
   ( ) Yes
   ( ) No

8c. Do you have access to a computer at home?
   ( ) Yes
   ( ) No

9. Which leisure activities/hobbies do you enjoy doing in your spare time (e.g. reading, sport, travel)?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

ABOUT YOU

In order to compare your response with those from previous research, it would be most helpful if you could provide the following information.

10. Are you male or female?
    ( ) Male
    ( ) Female

11. During which year-range were you born?
    ( ) 1944-1945  ( ) 1946-1950

12. Are you retired?
    ( ) Yes (please go to question 13)
    ( ) No (please go to question 12b).

12b. Do you intend to take early retirement?
    ( ) Yes
    ( ) No
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please post into the returns box provided or return to the library counter when completed.

If you would be willing to take part in an informal discussion group to further help with my research, please fill in your contact details below:

Name: 
Telephone Number: 
Email address: 
Appendix 2:

Focus Group Schedule

My name is Suzanne Dobson and I am conducting research for an MA dissertation regarding the public library provision for people within the Baby Boomer generation. The purpose of attending this session today is to enable me to benefit from your views and experiences. These Discussion Group interviews are entirely private and confidential, your names will not be linked to anything you say here and you will not be identified in my final report. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. Please can I confirm that you have no objections to taking a tape recording this session, in order for me to be able to transcribe your comments accurately?

1) What do you think of public libraries in general? (In general terms, what does the public library mean to you).
   Prompts: Its image, your perceptions, the services it provides. How important is it in your life?

2) To what extent are the needs of your particular age group provided for by the library and its services?
   Prompts: Library stock (Printed and AV material), computers, magazines, reference material.

3) What would make you use the library more often?
   Prompts: New services, new stock, opening hours, building and layout.

4) Are there any reasons which may make you not want to go to the public library?
   Prompts: Access, opening hours, parking, lack of interest, get information elsewhere, lack of time.

5) From where do you obtain most of your books?
   Prompts: Library, bookshops, online booksellers, gifts.

6) Do you think your use and perception of the public library is the same or different from those of your parents when they were your age? Explain.

7) Finally, is there anything you would like to add about your experience of the public library that we haven’t covered in this session?
Appendix 3:

Staff Interview Schedule

1) How does the library attempt to ensure that a wide range of stock is available for all ages and all types of user?

2) What consultation procedures, if any, are in place to enable people to express their views about the library and its service?

3) Have any services or facilities been introduced with the Baby Boomer generations in mind (particularly those aged 54-60 who may be nearing retirement)?

4) Are there any plans to introduce new facilities within your library, such as designated coffee shop areas or ‘language laboratory’ audiovisual facilities for instance?

5) Recent literature suggests that people now between 54 and 60 are different from previous generations of the same age. Do you agree with at view? How, if at all, has this impacted on the planning/provision of library services for this age group? How might it/should it impact on future planning/provision of library services?

6) How well do you feel that the library publicises and advertises its services and facilities to the local population?

7) Is there anything else you would like to add?