

The best thing about Harbury community-managed library, according to volunteer Annette Hughes, is that they are able to open their doors for much longer than Warwickshire County Council ever did.

The library is open for five and a half days a week now. Under council management it was only ever open for one and a half days a week. It has been under community management since May 2012.

Annette said: “We are thriving. We’re based in an old school house in the centre of the village and we have a café, too, that’s open four mornings a week. That finances us and we don’t need to fundraise.”

Harbury is a large village with a population of about 3,000. About 50 villagers are regular volunteers and about 40 are more ad hoc. There are also about 45 volunteers doing shifts in the café. There are two volunteers per morning or afternoon shift.

Annette, who is a retired medical secretary, said the volunteers weren’t fazed by the library management systems and received good training from the council. Warwickshire County Council also got them off to a good start by decorating the room and laying a new floor.

Annette said they enormously regret that county councils are obliged to close their libraries.

They operate the council’s library collection and get good ongoing support from the council. They have a system of their own for books, bought or donated, that are just for Harbury.

“It’s quite straightforward,” said Annette.

The library has a steering committee and a library committee. They organise events – like a murder mystery game – and rent space to local groups.

There are lots of events for children, including craft days and reading challenges. And the café is a meeting place for all ages.

“The volunteers tend to be retired people,” said Annette, “but we do have younger volunteers, as well as volunteer experience placements for Duke of Edinburgh Award students.

She added: “We’re enormously valued by the community. We get 350 people through the door every week. I look forward to my shifts. We’re all very happy to do it. We get a lot of satisfaction from keeping the library running and providing such a valuable service to our community.”

