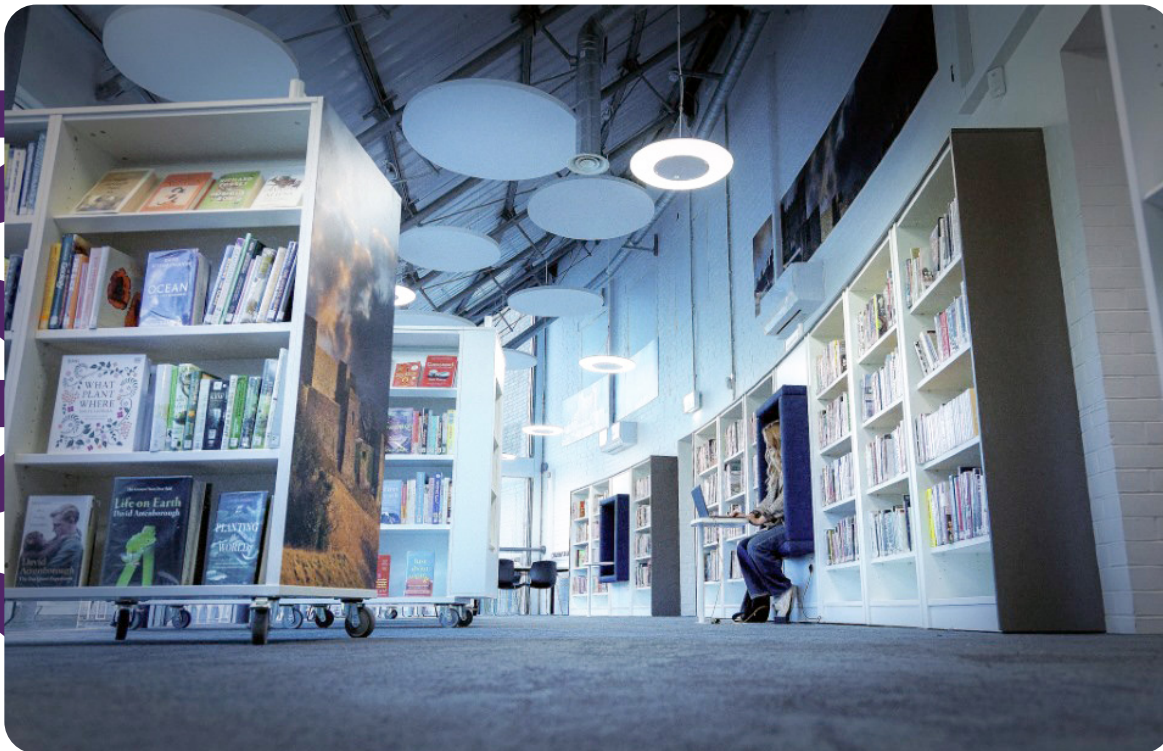


Dover Library Case Study

In the library's first 2 days of opening more than 400 visitors passed through the doors and over 630 books were borrowed.



“ Customer testimonials ”

‘Really impressed with the space, lots of lovely spaces to work and the kids area looks fab’

‘Lovely area, light, spacious and clean- good flow and most importantly comfy seats! Very relaxing’

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In October 2025, Dover Library reopened its doors, completely transformed. The new design celebrates the area's rich heritage while delivering a modern, inclusive space that truly places the community at its heart.

The project journey

In 2021, Kent County Council engaged Gresswell through Fusion Project Management to undertake a feasibility study, developing concepts and early costings for the library's transformation. This early involvement positioned Gresswell as a trusted partner; once the project received approval in 2024, we were named as the preferred supplier within Walkers Construction's build contract.

Throughout the process, we championed the library's vision, ensuring priorities were protected, potential service-delivery issues were identified early, and design solutions were developed collaboratively and effectively.



Design and installation

Located within the Dover Discovery Centre on the town's Market Square, the library comprises a distinctive curved outer space filled with natural light, flowing into a lower-level interior with far fewer daylight sources, an important design challenge. The site also includes two extraordinary heritage features: the remains of a Roman fort within the library itself, and the ruins of the Church of St Martin-le-Grand outside.

The Library team's core design priorities were clear: ensure the space honours Dover's heritage while providing the flexibility required for an extensive programme of community events. To support this, all island shelving was placed on castors, allowing staff to effortlessly reconfigure the space for classes, workshops, and activities.





One early challenge was the proposed registration area. Initially planned as a windowless room in a central location, the Library team felt it would not provide the right environment for sensitive conversations. In response, our designer, Vivien Low, sourced a soundproof glass pod and placed it into the curved conservatory area, now a bright, calm, and uplifting space with lots of natural light, that the team is delighted with.



Design challenges and bespoke solutions



To meet shelving capacity and display requirements, Vivien integrated face-out shelving, end-of-bay displayers, and Everna Towers, enabling dynamic, promotional, and high-visibility book displays throughout. Design challenges and bespoke solutions Several architectural and building-services constraints required creative solutions. A major hurdle was incorporating large heating and mechanical units within the shelving design. By working closely with other trades, our designer successfully integrated these units into a seamless run of bookcases, maintaining visual continuity from the Adult Library to the Children's Area and preserving the bright, flexible character of the space.

Spaces that inspire: Teens and children

Among the most celebrated aspects of the design are the areas dedicated to teens and children.

The teen area

To encourage young people to stay, study, and socialise, Vivien created a variety of settings, from collaborative zones to quiet study spots. Discreet power access supports bring-your-own-device use, while comfortable sofas, high-backed chairs, and acoustic ceiling panels create a calm, inviting atmosphere. According to the Head Librarian, teen engagement has already significantly increased.



The children's area

Relocated to the rear of the library, this enclosed and safe environment allows families to relax with confidence. Stunning hot-air-balloon graphics featuring the silhouette of Dover Castle brighten the space, alongside quotes from local children who answered the question: "What does reading mean to you?" The four winning quotes now appear on the walls, a moment of pride for the children who saw their words unveiled on opening day. The area includes a sensory zone with dimmable lighting to support children with autism, flexible furnishings for sensory sessions, and tables for older children accompanying siblings.

"We came to the baby group today and the children's space is lovely and has lots of space, looks so much bigger in there now."

— Zoe Simmons, Community Member

Celebrating heritage in adult spaces

Meeting the brief for a heritage-led design, the Adult Non-Fiction Area is a bright, peaceful space situated away from the Children's Area. It curves around the historic church ruins and features a balanced mix of shelving and seating. End panels display a striking photograph of Dover Castle by Marcus Groombridge, a consistent design motif that guides visitors through the adult spaces across both floors. The colour palette is also drawn from this image, creating a cohesive and calming visual identity.

This zone also houses the registration pod, intentionally located away from family areas to provide privacy and sensitivity for grieving parents, whilst also providing a light welcoming space for registering births and marriages. Adjacent shelving holds carefully curated books on coping with loss, reflecting the library's commitment to compassionate service.

The design and installation of Dover library is a testament to the 38 years of experience held by our designer and the incredible vision of our highly experienced team.



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