

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**17 January 2012**

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**Public Participation**

**Statement from Mr Richard Hawkins**

**Proposed Creation of Central Devizes Customer Access Point and the Closure of Browfort, Urchfont Manor and Bradley Road Buildings**

**Statement**

The Agenda document notes:

1. Page 309 – Point 4 - To continue the delivery of the councils' policy to ensure all its property holdings are sustainable, fit for purpose, and represent value for money for Wiltshire residents, both now and in the future.
2. Page 312 – Para 12 - The current 'traded' service run from Urchfont has a projected £120,000 overspend for 2011/12.
3. Page 312 – Para 16 - In relation to Urchfont Manor, the disposal of this facility will result in a limited loss of revenue to local businesses. This will include provisions from the local farm and a potential loss of revenue to the local public house. Other services, such as grounds maintenance, are provided through the council's Sodexo contract and so have little or no benefit to the local community. Depending on the future use of the building by a purchaser, it is possible that its disposal may, in the longer term, have a beneficial impact on the immediate local economy, but that is not possible to predict at this time.
4. Page 314 - Para 25 - In relation to Urchfont Manor, there are currently five weddings and one 90th birthday party with confirmed bookings in the period up to the end of August 2012. There are a small number of provisional bookings, which have yet to pay a deposit, after this date. Closure in September 2012 will allow all confirmed bookings to go ahead.

I wish to comment on these statements.

1. The statement states '*and represent value for money for Wiltshire residents, both now and in the future*'. The council is the proud owner of a building and grounds of exceptional quality and beauty which as an educational college has not been used to its full and best potential. Indeed one has to ask why it is not producing an income for the Wiltshire residents! This is probably due to a lack of interest within Wiltshire council in producing a long term

business/development plan for the property. The sale of this building and its grounds will produce a 'one off income' for Wiltshire residents with no long term benefits. Surely even a leasing arrangement would be better value than an outright sale? The statement '*represent value for money for Wiltshire residents, both now and in the future*' is hardly appropriate for the proposed actions.

2. The projected overspend of £120,000 represents a daily overspend of approximately £329 – a small amount in the big picture which one would hope a simple business plan could and should rectify.
3. In the present financial situation I would suggest that the income from Urchfont Manor to local business, and in particular The Lamb Inn and Urchfont Community Shop, is extremely important. Whilst the sale to a future purchaser **might** have a beneficial impact on the local economy the retention of Urchfont Manor in its present status **will definitely** be of benefit.
4. If the sale of Urchfont Manor is approved I would suggest that the current bookings may well be affected, as confidence in achieving the expected high standards for which the Manor is known will be compromised.

The public have had little time to respond to these proposals. As a Wiltshire resident, and in particular a resident of Urchfont, I find the proposals somewhat misguided. Selling off the family silver will indeed add to the 'Income Column' for one year but the long term financial benefits possible from such a property will be lost forever. The council would do better producing a business/development plan to enable Urchfont Manor to achieve its full potential and to be of considerable financial benefit to Wiltshire residents.