

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**17 January 2012**

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**Public Participation**

**Statement from Sally Boehme and Clifford Johnson**

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

**Statement**

This is a plea to Wilts Council to consider carefully the option to close Urchfont Manor. As a student of Urchfont, attending 2-3 times a year for the last 15 years (along with my husband) and LIVING IN KENT I would hope the Council consider what a contribution Urchfont makes to the Adult Ed community, not just in Wilts but to the country as a whole. I have met people who attend regularly from Essex, Surrey, Worcestershire, Berkshire and even Lancashire (a 5 hour drive) who all value the educational opportunities Urchfont offers in the highest regard.

In this time of holidays increasingly being taken at home in this country and the increasing interest in arts and crafts, Urchfont offers a unique experience and the fact that it offers it in such a beautiful part of Wiltshire has meant that we have got to know a part of the country that we love and often return to. Urchfont makes a significant contribution to the economy of the county in this manner, which is something the Council may not have considered.

We have only just heard about this debate and feel it is too short a notice to allow all to voice an opinion. However, I doubt the council will postpone the meeting but please know that there are a lot of people around the country who will feel that a short sighted decision will have been made if Urchfont is to close.

I would be grateful if the meeting could consider the example of Higham Hall; a college such as Urchfont which was threatened with closure but which now acts profitably as a charitable trust. As Urchfont is so valuable to a lot of people this would seem to be the best option for all and would preserve the valuable tenets of adult education, which has been so much under threat over the last few years. Trying to sell such a property in the current climate would take time and would cause the building to degrade. As it is listed, this would not be good. Retaining it would also mean that the Urchfont village community would retain an essential part.