

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

17 January 2012

Public Participation

Statement from various members of Staff at Urchfont Manor (details at end)

Proposed Creation of Central Devizes Customer Access Point and the Closure of Browfort, Urchfont Manor and Bradley Road Buildings (Item 9)

Statement



URCHFONT MANOR

Purpose of Report

Economic impact of the proposal

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.**

Statement by Staff at Urchfont Manor

DEATH OF A HOUSE, COMMUNITY, JOBS & EDUCATION

It was once said by Jane Scott that Urchfont Manor was the Jewel in the Crown in the eyes of what was once Wiltshire County Council.

So what has gone wrong for this to have changed?

WE ARE NOT JUST A COLLEGE WE ARE A CREATIVE COLLEGE CATERING FOR THE ARTISTIC NEEDS OF MANY STUDENTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY.

We are still in shock at the 'possible' closure of Urchfont Manor. Many of us have worked at the Manor for many years and to some of us this is our dream job. We have come to love everything the Manor stands for, the educational courses it

provides which is so different from other colleges. This house has become an institution to so many over the 60 years it has been running. It is an iconic place where many people have graced the building and grounds with their presence over the years. Many students come back year after year. They come for the variety of courses which is from the 'norm'. The courses are only a part of their being there. They come for the relaxed atmosphere, the tranquillity of the grounds, the wonderful food which we at the college cater for all those with special or specific diets. We all know one another, staff and students; it is like greeting old friends every time they come back. It is a college of education, friendship and company.

Some students use their time at the Manor whilst on their course as holiday. Meal times are always such a joy where staff and students have gathered and chatted and laughed about the day's events. They work well into the evening and this is because it is a residential college and there are not many left in the country. After their hard day they retire to bed feeling happy, relaxed and elated at what they have accomplished. Where else can one go where you see squirrels running around the premises, up and down trees, rabbits greet you as you pull into the drive. Then there are the deer which use the grounds regularly, you can see the family of them together. We have a bee hive in the grounds where they make Urchfont honey and recently Urchfont Apple Juice from the fallen apples from the Manors orchards.

There are beautiful walks round the village and Oakfrith Wood is always a joy to walk round, especially when the Bluebells are out. The students can take time out when doing courses to relax by taking a walk in the woods. The Open University courses have been buzzing with the knowledge of such courses such as Creative Writing and Shakespeare. Other courses include lace making, chair making, foreign languages, photography, art as well as the City & Guilds courses which all come to Urchfont Manor. We have Tai Chi, Meditation and Buddhism, courses which need space and quiet. There are walking courses and day trip courses, there are travelling art courses which tour the countryside and the groups stop and paint. They go for the day and come back by 6pm ready for their evening meal. We have stained glass, bookbinding, enamelling and silver jewellery making. All these are courses which cannot be transferred to places like council libraries, the heritage centre and the Family Learning Service; the facilities will not be able to handle these types of courses. We have GP's who come to stay with us, teachers and let's not forget two groups which come each year and book the whole of the Manor and grounds, the Manor suits their full requirements as the groups are of a sensitive nature and they need to have total privacy during their stays, where will they go now? Urchfont Manor provides their every need for total privacy and plenty of rooms for the groups to break up for the different discussions they require.

Students travel from Europe for some courses including the Open University. We also have many well-known artists and local artists who grace us with their presence on doing private painting groups. We at Urchfont are unique in our approach to specialised courses which I feel will not be undertaken anywhere else.

This is a place where you can escape the day to day hassles of life; we only have one TV in the whole of the College. In your break you can sit and read the newspaper. Students are never hurried during their stay, they are well taken care of, and everything is thought through for their needs right down to their special diet requirements. Students never have to remind the staff about their little ailments, diets, whether they prefer a bath or shower. All this information is there at our fingertips and we always check when booking that these things are still in place.

Weddings are now becoming a favourite spot. Couples get married in the local church and then come to Urchfont for their wedding breakfast and evening reception.

They have their photographs taken in the beautiful grounds outside the Manor House. The weddings we have held here have been a huge success. This is only the start, our new addition to the staff has done a wonderful job these past months and we have more weddings booked this year and there is lots of interest for the next year. Weddings need to be booked well in advance and it would be such a shame if the dreams of those wishing to use Urchfont Manor as their venue be refused. We have ample off road parking at Urchfont for guests to park their cars.

The closure of Urchfont Manor will have a huge impact on the local economy. It will be a devastating loss to all those who live in the village and the staff, many from Urchfont Village and surrounding villages and who have dedicated most of their working lives to the Manor. We will find it hard to find other employment as a number of us do not have a car or drive, therefore making it difficult for us to seek employment too far away.

It will also have a huge impact on many students, who not only come to Urchfont for courses, but they also use this time as a holiday. The staff at the Manor treats everyone with respect and is very conscious and courteous of their individual needs.

Our facilities (although not 3*) and food (which is at least 5*), makes it one of the best places to come to relax, enjoy your course and mingle with new people each time you attend a course. All the staff is friendly and the environment makes our students stay relaxing. Some of us have also attended a number of courses at Urchfont Manor and each time we have left with a feeling of total satisfaction and relaxation. We were all hoping to attend many more over the years.

In December 2011 we became the venue for the local school when they had water problems and they thought they would have to cancel the children's Christmas Dinner. They called us for help and we did. We set up some of our outside buildings for them and we watched the children come marching through our grounds, all excited at their little adventure they were going to have at Urchfont. The school also have a vegetable patch in the Manors grounds where the children come and plant their produce and come and visit to see its development and then dig their produce up.

Then there are the croquet lawns which are kept neat and tidy by the local croquet teams. They are always on hand to show how the game is played for students and day groups if they are having an away day at the Manor. It is a joy to see the players out in the summer playing croquet while you are busying about setting up the tables in the dining room for the residents and conference courses.

The cricket pitch, the croquet, even the walks are only a few examples which have benefited the community and wider community over the last 60 years. I feel it is very short sighted of those who have no dealings with the Manor except for the occasional meeting; you do not see the unique facility we offer here and that is not available anywhere else in the country. We need for you to see how we function and operate before making an informed decision.

**This is what makes Urchfont Manor different from any other college.
Please give us a chance to turn this around and show you how it can work.
Give us until the end of 2013 to prove what a team we are at Urchfont.**

**WE HAVE SERVED THE COMMUNITY FOR 60 YEARS AND ONCE YOU
DISCARD THIS PRECIOUS JEWEL IT WILL BE LOST FOREVER**

**Eleanor Young (Receptionist/Admin/Bookings) Dianne Hayward
(Housekeeping)
Margaret Simper (Pantry) Catherine Brown (Housekeeping) Dionne Surman
(Housekeeping) Christine Bozier (Housekeeping) Audrey Laurie
(Housekeeping)
Jessica Scull (Conference & Events Assistant) Marie Smith (Administrative
Assistant)
Sharon Davies (Conference & Events Manager)
Christel Smart (Services Manager) John Young (Maintenance), Pete Rutt
(Gardener)
Martin Brown (Volunteer)**