

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

17 January 2012 (morning meeting)

Public Participation

Statement from Nicola Mitchell, Chairman of Urchfont Parish Council

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

Statement

Urchfont Parish Council is deeply disappointed to learn of proposals by Wiltshire Council to sell Urchfont Manor. For many years it has been regarded as one of the 'Jewels in the Crown' for Wiltshire Council and the former Wiltshire County Council.

The Manor and its associated facilities provide a much valued centre for adult education and community activities. It is a unique venue for both day and residential courses drawing students, not only locally, but from all over the country. It is used by local residents for family and celebratory occasions and the Croquet Club enjoy and maintain two beautiful croquet lawns in the garden. This year the apple orchard has provided the opportunity to develop a community fruit juice project: harvesting, pressing and bottling delicious apple juice to sell locally.

The surrounding land of Urchfont Manor is also very important. The community benefits from the Playing Field which provides recreational facilities for children and the tennis courts. Oakfrith Wood Nature Reserve is very popular with local residents, walkers, school and pre-school pupils, as well as the Richmond Fellowship for Woodland Craft Activities. The cricket field is leased by John Snook, a local farmer, who has generously loaned it to the Cricket Club for the past 30 years. All of these community activities involve a substantial number of dedicated volunteers in their maintenance and management.

The Manor also provides valuable local employment opportunities and support to the local businesses: The Lamb Pub, the Community Shop and the Post Office - the only three remaining businesses in the village!

In spite of the current economic climate it seems a great shame for Wiltshire Council to part with such a unique asset as Urchfont Manor and it will be a very sad day for the village of Urchfont if it is sold.