

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**17 January 2012** (morning meeting)

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**Public Participation**

**Statement from Mr C P Cook**

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

**Statement**

The recent announcement of the possible closure and sale of Urchfont Manor must come as a surprise and shock to all those connected to adult education. As a member of the public and a council tax payer in Wiltshire, I feel we have not been given the case for such extreme and final action.

Urchfont Manor has provided the venue for further learning, study and skills. It has attracted a large variety of tutors and students and now, when there are more people than ever who live for many years after retirement who are keen to further their knowledge and skills, it is proposed to remove the only dedicated adult residential education venue in Wiltshire. Neither a University (none in Wiltshire) nor a Wiltshire College can provide the facilities which are available at Urchfont Manor.

There is always the necessity not to waste public money and every public service should be examined to ensure there is no waste. We can not see the accounts for Urchfont Manor but I understood it pays its running costs from the charges made for adult education. That is a good record to have. The income may not meet major structural repairs and maintenance but often those costs are inflated by failures to keep on top of deteriorations as they occur. That failure should not be held against the Manor and be a reason to close it.

It is not clear from the limited information available if the Council want to rid themselves of this asset because annual costs exceed income or they want an instant injection of capital. It is obvious to say it, but the sale will provide a one off sum, once and that will be the end of any further income the Manor could generate and the end of residential adult education in this large county. Selling a property in the current financial situation may raise much less capital than the Council might expect.

The loss of Urchfont Manor to adult education will be damaging, profound and permanent not only to the communities in Wiltshire but beyond our boundaries. The Manor has a fine reputation that stretches beyond the County boundaries. It is a source of good income. The capital raised in any sale will barely be noticed in the accounts of Wiltshire Council but educationally it will be final and devastating. The closure of Urchfont Manor should not be permitted.