

LEADER OF COUNCIL  
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COPY LETTERS

April 3, 2016  
Your ref: IRT/LCD

Dear Mr Thompson,

Thank you for the courtesy of a reply. Your letter dated March 21 answers some of my questions about Darlington library services.

The opening hours at the Dolphin Centre will, you say, be a significant improvement. Fewer staff and longer hours is an interesting concept.

I am not reassured to be told the borough collection will be relocated to a suitable location. Where?

I am not reassured by a non-informative statement that local history material "will be available to access as part of the local studies offer within the relocated library. The local studies service will be relocated into the Dolphin centre, however with reduced resource, but will still be available for residents and others to use."

Unanswered questions include: effects of chlorine; books stored in the basement; work carried out in the basement.

The proposals are predicated on reduced staff and service. It seems plain to me that the decision has been made. Has anyone considered the status quo: the service ain't broke.

Mr Thompson, the assistance of trained and helpful staff such as the borough already has is the keystone to opening up the library services to the public. The redundancies will, in addition to being personal tragedies, mean there is less help available to the public – the council tax payers – which has a right to expect a proper service in a town the size of Darlington.

I'm sure it is naively simplistic to comment that, according to figures I have not seen repudiated: saving £330,000 a year up to 2020 is rather less than *estimated* costs of £1.1m to move from Crown Street to the Dolphin Centre.

Times will change. That is time for improved negotiations with national government and time for local government to get its house in order.

The town is growing at its western edge. It seems perverse to close Cockerton library, the closest and with the massive advantage of parking. The distance from West Park roundabout to a point on the ring road approximately behind the Crown Street library is 2.8 miles and approximately behind the Dolphin Centre is 3 miles. The current and future populations of West Park, and of at least some of Branksome, already a deprived area, will live outside a two-mile zone from a library.

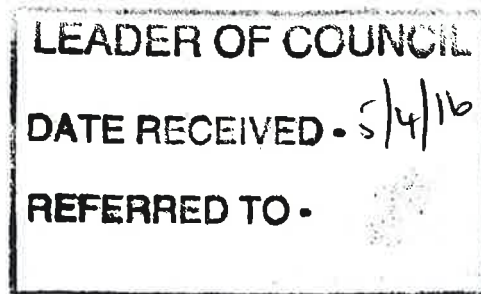
There could be some shuffling up in the Crown Street premises. Add the abandoned TIC (volunteer-led?); a breakfast 'bar'; pop-up shops; teaching basic English to the foreign adults living in the borough;

As a borough employee I understand you are not able to answer some of my comments. You tell me they will be available to councillors. In the current discussions, both officials and councillors are in their role from choice. The public has a right to assume all will choose a future which combines the town's rich heritage with a modern service.

Yours truly,



32 Thornfield Road  
Darlington  
DL3 9TQ  
April 3, 2016



COPY  
LETTERS

Darlington indoor market

Dear Mrs Burns,

When I first heard the borough council was to close the Market hall, I had a McEnroe moment: you cannot be serious.

Then I read on to a convoluted scheme to pass on the responsibility, at little notice but rich in demands, to market traders and realised it was dealing in weasel words. If this scenario failed, the borough council would have washed its hands of the matter and could point the finger of blame elsewhere.

There was no thought-through strategy in place. Hmm.

Now, the situation appears to have moved on and I understand that, belatedly, the council is holding talks with the stallholders.

I ask that there will be a proper focus on maintaining the market for the future. Without the market, Darlington will lose not only its long-standing identity but also shoppers. Shoppers=money, money to circulate and prosper the town. Shoppers once estranged are not easy to entice home.

Country-wide, markets are enjoying a resurgence and are thriving on their *difference* to modern shopping malls with customers enjoying their special atmosphere.

The market in Darlington returns a profit.

In any negotiations, the stallholders must have a prime place and be given honest facts and figures; they are the workers who have built up this treasured asset.

In all negotiations, the stallholders must be fully happy with conditions on offer – I am confident they will make the right choice, this is after all their livelihood.

Get a long-term time frame in place so there is security for stallholders to develop and invest in the market. That investment will attract customers.

A long period of stability has seen the council spend significant sums which were not universally popular. An investment in effort about the market is a reasonable request.

In the current discussions, both officials and councillors, are in their role from choice. The public has a right to assume they are working towards a town of which its residents can be proud.

I urge you all to choose to retain the indoor market and to look to revitalise the town by choosing a future of which we can all be proud.

The market hall clock is in the centre of your logo. What the market hall offers

is central to the shopping habits of many people from within and without the town. It is an iconic building.

Few will deny that Darlington is an increasingly poorer place to shop and less of a draw than in previous years. Main shopping streets have a proliferation of empty shops, charity shops, pound shops, indicating a lack of interest from businesses. Debenhams withdrew its interest in North of England Newspapers' site and at the time of writing a question mark hangs over BHS. The loss of the market hall could be the final straw.

Don't be the organisation which knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Yours truly,

(Mrs) Patricia Dean

PS: whatever would you do with the building if you fail? A sad legacy to have on record.

Cc: Mr Alex Blackham, Darlington Market Retail Stallholders' Association  
Coun Bill Dixon  
Coun Heather Scott