

Re the proposed closure of Crown Street library and its move to the Dolphin centre

FAO Nick Wallace

Crown Street Library is a jewel of a building in public ownership and, thus, open to the public. Although its grade 2 listed status means it can't be pulled down, there is no guarantee that it will remain accessible to the people of Darlington.

Bill Dixon says in the latest issue of 'one Darlington', "*Many people in the Borough do not use most council services but I know you care deeply about those services that you do use.*" Sometimes, people care about services they don't use and find at some point in the future, they care about services they have lost.

Here are some of the services I care about but rarely if ever use:

The Dolphin Centre, Hullabaloo, The Civic Theatre, The Covered Market, The Head of Steam.

I still think they should exist to cater for those who do use them regularly. I think this about Crown Street Library and all the services it provides, including the art gallery (which I do visit). I rarely borrow books from the library. The building contains more than just books and the centre for local studies.

You indicate that the proposals are not a done deal but this is not how it feels from my attendance at public meetings. I found these very disappointing as a method of trying to find out what people think.

I would like you to consider the strength of feeling about Crown Street Library building – this is about people and buildings. There is no short-term savings in the move proposal, quite the reverse. The cost quoted in 'one Darlington' is £1.7 million. You have time to reconsider and look at other sources of funding.

My view is that you want to move the library and cited, at the public meeting on March 16th, other authorities that had done the same thing. It's also my view that you have been considering this for some time and have done the research in support of this move long before you have gone public with the proposals. This is being represented as a need to cut.

I know this is all about politics – the politics of a local authority bashing agenda by central government and the implementation by a labour controlled local authority. You don't have to make yourselves more unpopular than you need to be by closing a building that is dear to the heart of so many Darlington residents. If it's your view that libraries are better in leisure centres, come clean and don't hide this political view behind a cuts agenda.

Here are my questions:

- When did you start looking at the possibility of moving the library to the Dolphin Centre?
- How long has the authority been referring to it as Central Library, when everyone calls it Crown Street?
- Has it cost anything to develop these plans?
- When did you first let the public know?
- What consultation have you done with the public (e.g. through one Darlington, surveys) about the possibility of the move, prior to announcing the proposed cuts?
- What feedback are you getting about this proposal?
- Given there is a significant cost involved, are you prepared to change your mind on this one?
- What is the rush to implement Tory cuts?
- Which authorities have moved their libraries to leisure centres? Why emulate them?
- What will happen to the art gallery and all the other things Crown Street houses?
- If it's not a done deal, what will help you change your mind?


Darlington