



Saving our Chichester Law Courts

Sarah Sharp and other colleagues from the Green Party organised a petition in 2015 and a community write-in event in 2016 to save the Chichester Law Courts. We organised a stall at the Cross in the spring asking people to write letters to the Minister for Justice, Shailesh Vara, asking him to save our Law Courts. Sarah delivered the 260+ letters collected to the Ministry of Justice in London in person, but sadly it seems the Law Courts will be closed. However, Sarah and a group of concerned lawyers asked Chichester City Council for a Public Meeting to raise awareness of the possible closure back in October 2015 and finally, a year later, there was a Public Meeting on Sept 22nd 2016 chaired by the Mayor with lawyers, an ex-judge and the leader of West Sussex County Council all

speaking in favour of keeping the courts, or at least the Magistrates' Court building being converted to a combined crown and county court. It was clearly demonstrated at the meeting that the process undertaken by the Ministry of Justice had been in the words of Andrew Tyrie MP 'shambolic' and 'nothing short of a scandal'. The blame was laid at the foot of "incompetent, unaccountable and undemocratic civil servants" with no one from the Conservative party wishing to accept any responsibility. All who attended the meeting were encouraged to write to our MP and the new Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Justice, MP Elizabeth Truss in protest.

To mark the closure of the Magistrates' Court on Sept.30th 2016 Sarah and others held a short vigil in front of the courts where candles and flowers were placed. The candle stayed alight despite the wind and rain that day until Sarah returned at 9pm to clear away the flowers and candles. The Magistrates Court is now closed but a new group has been formed to Save Chichester's Justice and a judicial review is looking increasingly likely to go ahead.

