

Friends gather to save their library

By Lauren Pyrah

lauren.pyrah@nne.co.uk

A FRIENDS group has been set up in the hope of saving a popular library from closure.

Almost 100 people crowded into Cockerton Methodist Church Hall on Thursday evening for a meeting to discuss Darlington Borough Council's proposal to close Cockerton library, which has about 10,000 active users.

The gathering followed an earlier meeting of the council's place scrutiny committee, where councillors recommended that the library, which costs about £100,000 a year to run, gets a one-year stay of execution.

Tensions ran high at the methodist church with one resident calling on attendees to take any measures, including "all forms of civil disobedience," to ensure the library's future.

Cockerton resident Chris Binney said: "I do not even know why we are here, this is ridiculous.

"This library serves a group of people who really need it.

"It is the only one we have and it is morally wrong to close it. If it goes, then people in this area will have next to no services. It should not be happening and we should not be discussing it."

Ideas discussed to save the library included protests, petitions and everyone at the meeting taking out their full quota of books on a weekly basis to send a message to the council.

Residents shouted down the councillors present, telling them to get back to the issue while they debated the different stances taken on the situation by the various political parties.



'MORALLY WRONG': Members of the newly-formed Friends of Cockerton library

Picture: STUART BOULTON

After about an hour of open debate, seven people nominated themselves to form a friends group who will coordinate any protest activity.

Earlier on Thursday, at the place scrutiny committee meeting which was held in the town hall, Cockerton library featured high on the agenda.

Councillor Fred Lawton said the borough's libraries had among the highest active borrowing rates in the country, but expenditure on libraries was among the lowest nationally.

"I do not know how we got to this ridiculous situation where we are proposing to close Cockerton library anyway," he said.

Councillor Dot Long, committee chairwoman, said: "We

got a ridiculous (financial) settlement (from the Government), that is why.

"No one agrees with this closure. It is a situation which was forced upon us."

Councillor Bob Carson, who represents Cockerton, said Darlington was a long way behind other local authorities in the Tees Valley on library provision.

"Hartlepool has six libraries, one which closed last month.

"Middlesbrough, although it is 30 per cent bigger in population than Darlington, has 12 libraries.

"There were proposals to close four, and they are only closing two, so Middlesbrough will still have ten libraries.

"Stockton and Redcar both

have more libraries than Middlesbrough.

"Why we should be discussing this at all is beyond me. I feel angry and upset we are doing this."

Richard Alty, director of place, said: "The council has to produce a balanced budget. The reasons for the closure is that Crown Street is a very accessible library.

"The review showed that even if Cockerton closed, most of the people in the urban areas would be able to get to Crown Street by public transport, walking or cycling."

The decision on whether to close the library as part of council cuts will be made when the budget is decided later this year.