

# Library closure plan fails to get backing

By David Roberts

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PLANS to close a Darlington library have failed to win the backing of an important council committee.

The place scrutiny committee has said it can not endorse the closure of Cockerton library until more investigations have been done into alternative solutions.

The closure of the popular library is one of a raft of measures being proposed by Darlington Borough Council as it seeks to reduce its budget by nearly 20 per cent because of government public spending cuts.

The scrutiny committee has been asked to review the proposals and give its ideas.

As reported earlier this month, the place scrutiny committee, an internal council watchdog, called for a 12-month stay of execution for the library.

A report of the place com-



**UNDER THREAT:**  
Cockerton library

mittee, which is being put to the council's efficiency and resources scrutiny committee, reads: "Bearing in mind Darlington's poor position in a range of measures of library provision, including being the worst in the country for its number of service points per head of population, and given the importance of libraries to disadvantaged groups in times of economic recession, this scrutiny committee cannot endorse the closure of Cockerton library."

The report adds that it will only endorse the closure once a number of ideas have been

pursued, including:

- Approaching schools and JobCentre Plus to see if they can make a contribution;
- Looking at different governance options, such as collaborating with a neighbouring authority, setting up a charitable trust or an "employee owned" mutual company;
- More research into the library being run by volunteers and a professional librarian;
- Community Partnerships and "Friends" organisations be approached for assistance in running the library service;
- An investigation carried out into the effect on local

businesses if the library closes.

A spokeswoman for Darlington council said the budget proposals would be considered by the cabinet on February 22.

She added: "Consultation on all the budget proposals is still under way. Members of the public, along with scrutiny committees, have the opportunity to put forward their views.

"Detailed work has also been carried out on understanding the impacts should the closure go ahead.

"This has included gathering further information at Cockerton library from library users, contacting businesses in Cockerton and gathering information through questionnaires sent to schools that use Cockerton library.

"Information from the consultation and from the impact assessment will be presented to members in the report to cabinet in February and then full council on March 1."