2013 marks the 800th anniversary of Cupar as a seat of justice.

As well as denying people in rural communities in north and east Fife access to justice, the loss of the court would have a grave impact on the economy of the town.

There is overwhelming opposition to the proposed closure of the court and we as the local paper would like to add our voice for the following reasons:

Justice being seen to be done

The Fife Herald and its sister paper, the St Andrews Citizen, provides news coverage for the whole of North East Fife and the East Neuk.

We cover Cupar Sheriff Court regularly and have a court page which is widely read. We believe it is important for justice to be seen to be done and that 'naming and shaming' those who appear in court provides a deterrent effect within the community.

Should Cupar's court business be transferred to Dundee, we would no longer be able to cover proceedings.

A one-stop shop

Cupar Sheriff Court is situated within the County Buildings, which also accommodate Fife Council's local office, the social work department, criminal justice team and Citizens Advice. A move by Cupar police into the buildings is imminent. Therefore it would provide a 'one stop shop' of services – a model favoured by SCS. Transferring JP and Sheriff Court business to Dundee would involve a huge waste of time and money in travelling costs for social workers, police and other relevant professionals. Cupar Sheriff Court has a disabled lift, segregated witness rooms, and an excellent canteen that sells hot food. It’s also one of the few courts that has video link facilities, which were used recently in a trial involving witnesses in America.

Travelling problems

In terms of criminal cases, getting the accused to the court is likely to prove problematic. They may have to share transport with alleged victims and witnesses. The Sherifffdom covers many rural areas of Fife where the bus services are infrequent or non-existent. Getting to Dundee for 10am will prove virtually impossible for some, causing increased delays, an increase in warrants, re-citing of witnesses etc, all of which creates significant additional expense. The SCS has projected travel costs to Dundee Bus Station in Seagate, but the court is in Bell Street, nowhere near the bus station, and there is no appropriate town service. Witnesses, accused, jurors and others attending court will have to walk or take a taxi. Those travelling by private car face charges of £6 a day in Dundee, whereas there is ample free parking just across the road from Cupar Sheriff Court. It is not only those involved in criminal proceedings who will be greatly inconvenienced. Those have to attend court for
child or mental health welfare hearings or civil matters such as small claims and executries will all be significantly affected.

Loss of continuity

The resident Sheriff at Cupar provides a continuity when dealing with cases that will be lost if they are sent to Dundee. Besides knowing more about the cases appearing in court a local Sheriff also has background knowledge of the area and can make a huge difference to the quality of life in the area covered by the court. The same is true of local JPs in a local court. All of that will be lost if the closures are implemented. Cases will take much longer to be heard; therefore witnesses’ memories may not be so reliable and cases may fall when they should not.

Effect on the economy

A number of solicitors’ firms have built their business around the court and will undoubtedly suffer as a result of its closure, as will local bakeries, takeaways and other businesses who will lose a significant lunchtime trade.

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