

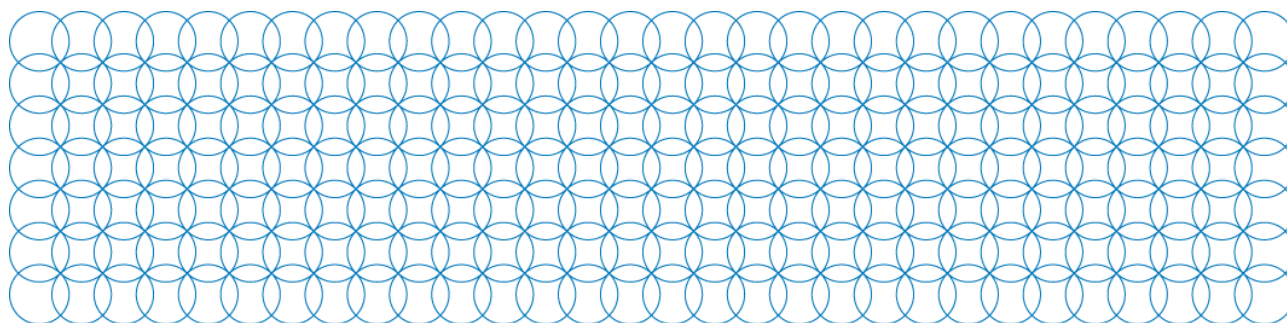


Ministry  
of Justice

# Proposal on the future of Knutsford Crown Court

This consultation begins on 25 June 2014

This consultation ends on 6 August 2014







Ministry  
of Justice

## **Proposal on the future of Knutsford Crown Court**

**A consultation produced by the Ministry of Justice. It is also available on the Ministry of Justice website at [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)**

## About this consultation

- To:** This consultation is aimed at court users, partners, staff and other parties with an interest in the provision of local justice arrangements in Knutsford and the County of Cheshire
- Duration:** From 25 June 2014 to 6 August 2014
- Enquiries (including requests for the paper in an alternative format) to:** Ann Elliott – North West Regional Business Change Manager  
North West Regional Support Unit  
1 Bridge Street West  
Manchester  
M60 9DJ  
Tel: 0161 240 5007  
Fax: 0161 240 5817  
Email: [ann.elliott@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ann.elliott@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk)
- How to respond:** Please send your response by 6 August 2014 to:  
  
Ann Elliott – North West Regional Business Change Manager  
  
North West Regional Support Unit  
1 Bridge Street West  
Manchester  
M60 9DJ  
Tel: 0161 240 5007  
Fax: 0161 240 5817  
Email: [ann.elliott@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ann.elliott@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk)
- Additional ways to feed in your views:** For further information on this consultation, please use the Enquires contact details above
- Response paper:** A response to this consultation exercise is due to be published at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk>

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## **Foreword**

HM Courts & Tribunals Service is committed to running an efficient and effective courts and tribunals system, which enables the rule of law to be upheld and provides access to justice for all. As part of our commitment to continue the reform of our estate, HM Courts & Tribunal Service is consulting on whether Knutsford Crown Court should close.

Knutsford Crown Court has two courtrooms, but due to reduced workload across the County of Cheshire, it has not been used for hearings since May 2010. All Cheshire Crown Court matters have since been heard at either Chester Crown Court or Warrington Combined Court, an arrangement which has not received any recorded complaints.

Bringing Knutsford Crown Court back into commission would demand significant additional maintenance costs of approximately £300,000 and require a full review of the facilities for jurors and witnesses, which are currently inadequate for use. In addition to this, the cell area is unfit for purpose due to damp, and parts of the ceiling are falling down. However, given the workload forecasts for Cheshire, there is no prospect of Knutsford Crown Court being utilised in the future.

Knutsford Crown Court is owned by HM Courts & Tribunals Service. An independent high-level report estimates the current market value of Knutsford Crown Court to be between £800,000 and £1,000,000. In our analysis we adopt a conservative lower bound figure of £800,000 and apply a 10% reduction to allow for optimism bias, leading to a market value of approximately £720,000. The closure of the Court would also offer savings in the region of £50,000 per annum, and will reduce surplus capacity across the estate by closing and disposing of a Crown Court which is no longer used for hearings. The proposal will ensure HM Courts & Tribunals estate is used more effectively.

This consultation seeks the views of local users, judiciary, criminal justice agency practitioners and elected representatives to better understand the impact that this proposal would have on the Knutsford community.

**Gill Hague**

**North West Delivery Director**

## **Executive summary**

Knutsford Crown Court opened at its current site between 1815–1818. Due to reduced workload across the County of Cheshire it has not been used since May 2010 and on the basis of workload forecasts it will not be needed in the future. HM Courts & Tribunals Service could not therefore justify the significant upgrade work it would need to carry out to bring it back into commission.

As the Court is no longer being used, there are no immediate travel implications for users. Since the workload has been transferred from Knutsford Crown Court to Chester Crown Court and Warrington Combined Court, there have been no recorded complaints about the current arrangements.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service is therefore proposing that the Court is closed.

The closure and sale of Knutsford Crown Court would enable the site to be utilised as a potential improvement or re-development site within Knutsford town centre.



## Introduction

This paper sets out for consultation the proposal on the future of Knutsford Crown Court. The Court has two courtrooms and due to reduced workload across the County of Cheshire, it has not been used for any Crown Court hearings since May 2010. All Cheshire Crown Court matters are now heard at either Chester Crown Court or Warrington Combined Court.

The consultation is aimed at court users, judiciary, and anyone else with an interest in the provision of local justice arrangements in Cheshire.

An Impact Assessment, which indicates the groups that might be affected, is attached. Comments on the Impact Assessment are welcome.

Copies of the consultation paper are being sent to:

### Unitary Authorities

Halton Borough Council

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Warrington Borough Council

Cheshire East Council

### Members of Parliament

The Rt Hon George Osborne, MP for Tatton

David Rutley, MP for Macclesfield

Stephen Mosley, MP for the City of Chester

Helen Jones, MP for Warrington North

David Mowat, MP for Warrington South

The Rt Hon Stephen O'Brien, MP for Eddisbury

Andrew Miller, MP for Ellesmere Port and Neston

Graham Evans, MP for Weaver Vale

Fiona Bruce, MP for Congleton

Edward Timpson, MP for Crewe and Nantwich

Derek Twigg, MP for Halton

### Criminal Justice Stakeholders

John Dwyer, Police and Crime Commissioner, Cheshire

Simon Byrne, Chief Constable, Cheshire Police Constabulary

Claire Lindley, Chief Crown Prosecutor, Cheshire & Merseyside

Roz Hamilton, Head of National Probation Service (North West)

Local Criminal Justice Board, Cheshire

Head of Youth Offending Service, Cheshire

Head of Youth Offending Service, Cheshire East

Head of Youth Offending Service, Cheshire West

Head of Youth Offending Service, Warrington and Halton

Divisional Manager Victim Support and Witness Service, Cheshire

Legal Aid Agency, Cheshire and Merseyside

Lord Justice Gross, Senior Presiding Judge for England and Wales

Mr Justice Holroyde, Senior Presiding Judge on the Northern Circuit

HHJ Elgan Edwards QC, Recorder of Cheshire

District Judge (Magistrates' Court) Knight

District Judge (Magistrates' Court) Abelson

Moira Chapman, Bench Chairman, West Cheshire

Gordon Ellis, Bench Chairman, North Cheshire

Margaret Smith, Bench Chairman, South and East Cheshire

This list is not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive and responses are welcomed from anyone with an interest in or views on the subject covered in this paper

## The proposals

Knutsford Crown Court is a two courtroom building and is one of three Crown Courts in the County of Cheshire. The Court has not been used for any Crown Court hearings since May 2010. The only use made of the building since then has been:

- A meeting room for the former Macclesfield Magistrates Annual General Meeting and bench panel meetings and used two to three times per year. It is not proposed that Knutsford Crown Court is used again for meetings as the Macclesfield Bench has now merged with South Cheshire to form the South and Cheshire Bench;
- Temporary use as Macclesfield Magistrates' Court between December 2010 and March 2011 whilst the magistrates' courthouse was being refurbished.

In addition, to bring Knutsford back into commission would require a range of updating work at additional maintenance costs of £300,000. This includes:

- The toilets throughout the building and the kitchen to the custody area which require replacing;
- The floor coverings to the custody area, corridors and associated areas throughout the building need to be replaced, and new internal doors to the custody area are required. Parts of the ceiling are also falling down;
- There is clear evidence of damp issues to the basement corridor walls, which if the building is re-occupied, will require specialist waterproof tanking remedial works;
- Patch repairs are required to the surface of the hard landscaping to the rear of the building; and
- New doors are required to the external toilets to the front of the building on health and safety grounds.

Due to the building being of listed status, any works should receive prior approval from the conservation officer to ensure compliance with Listed Building regulations. HM Courts & Tribunals Service would not be able to justify the cost of this work, given that the Court is no longer being used for Crown Court matters.

An independent high-level report estimates the current market value of Knutsford Crown Court to be between £800,000 and £1,000,000. In our analysis we adopt a conservative lower bound figure of £800,000 and apply a 10% reduction to allow for optimism bias, leading to a market value of approximately £720,000. Closure of the court would result in savings of £50,000 per year.

### Workload

Due to reduced workload across the County of Cheshire, all Cheshire Crown Court matters are now heard at either Chester Crown Court or Warrington Combined Court, an arrangement which has not received any recorded complaints.

## **Accommodation**

Knutsford Crown Court is located in Knutsford town centre. It was erected as Sessions House circa 1815-1818, extended in 1847 and 1867, and has a Grade II listing.

The accommodation is spread over three stories comprising of basement, ground floor and first floor. Courts and associated administration rooms are located on the ground floor, with waiting areas and conference rooms to the first floor. The accommodation includes two formal courtrooms. The courthouse faces Toft Road, with an area of soft landscaping to the right of the parking area which is maintained by the local council. To the right elevation is Knutsford Police Station, and the rear of the property, which is enclosed by high level brick walling, is accessible via double height secure timber gates to the left of the building. The facilities for jurors, victims and witnesses, and the disabled are poor.

## **Location**

Knutsford is an affluent town and civil parish in East Cheshire, a largely rural area. It is approximately 18 miles southwest of Manchester and 12 miles northwest of Macclesfield. It is approximately 14 miles away from Warrington Combined Crown Court with an estimated driving time of 30 minutes. The journey on public transport is approximately 1 hour 20 minutes, at a cost of approximately £13.90 (total bus and train). Knutsford is approximately 27 miles from Chester Crown Court with an estimated driving time of 45 minutes. The journey on public transport is estimated at 45 minutes at a cost of approximately £12.30 day return (total bus and train).

## **Staff Impact**

There are no staff based at Knutsford Crown Court.

## **Questionnaire**

We would welcome responses to the following questions set out in this consultation paper.

- 1. What comments would you like to make about the proposed closure of Knutsford Crown Court?**
- 2. Please describe any particular impacts that should be taken into account and why.**
- 3. Will the closure of Knutsford Crown Court have a direct impact on you? If so please provide additional details.**
- 4. Do you agree that we have correctly identified the full range and extent of equality impacts for the proposals set out in this consultation paper? Please give reasons.**

Thank you for participating in this consultation exercise.

# About you

Please use this section to tell us about yourself

<b>Full name</b>	
<b>Job title</b> or capacity in which you are responding to this consultation exercise (e.g. member of the public etc.)	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Company name/organisation</b> (if applicable):	
<b>Address</b>	
<b>Postcode</b>	
If you would like us to acknowledge receipt of your response, please tick this box	<input type="checkbox"/> (please tick box)
Address to which the acknowledgement should be sent, if different from above	

**If you are a representative of a group**, please tell us the name of the group and give a summary of the people or organisations that you represent.

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## **Contact details/How to respond**

Please send your response by 6 August 2014 to:

**Ann Elliott – North West Regional Business Change Manager**

North West Regional Support Unit

1 Bridge Street West

Manchester

M60 9DJ

Tel: 0161 240 5007

Fax: 0161 240 5817

Email: [ann.elliott@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ann.elliott@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Complaints or comments**

If you have any complaints or comments about the consultation process you should contact the Ministry of Justice at the above address.

### **Extra copies**

Further paper copies of this consultation can be obtained from this address and it is also available on-line at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/index.htm>.

Alternative format versions of this publication can be requested from the above address.

### **Publication of response**

A paper summarising the responses to this consultation will be published online at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/index.htm>.

### **Representative groups**

Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent when they respond.

### **Confidentiality**

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that

confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Ministry.

The Ministry will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.



## **Impact Assessment**

An Impact Assessment has been published on the Ministry of Justice Website ([www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)) alongside this consultation

## **Consultation principles**

The principles that Government departments and other public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders when developing policy and legislation are set out in the consultation principles.

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Consultation-Principles.pdf>



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Alternative format versions of this report are available on request from the HMCTS North West Regional Support Unit, 1 Bridge Street West, Manchester M60 9DJ