Reprieve sought for courts

HOPES of saving four Dyfed magistrates' courts from closure have been dashed.

Now only a reprieve from Home Secretary Mr William Whitelaw can prevent closure notices being served on the courts at Whitland, Narberth, Lampeter and Egwyswyrr.

Under the magistrates' courts committee cost-cutting package, Whitland, the home of the 16th century law-maker Hywel Dda, will have its sitings transferred to St Cleary.

Lampeter sittings will eventually shift to Aberaeron, Egwyswyrr to Cardigan and Narberth to Haverfordwest or Tenby.

Only two closure-threatened courts, at Pembroke and Milford Haven, look like being spared after opposition from the county council.

But Whitland Town Council have made it plain that they will not give up without a fight and are planning to petition Mr Whitelaw.

Access

Councillors have warned that the closure of the court will cause hardship to townspeople, who need easy access to magistrates as part of what they describe as "business and domestic life."

They have also warned of added expense for witnesses and court officials by the transfer to St Cleary.

The closure of the four courts has come after a three-month survey of 20 court buildings by the county estates department which was asked to produce a plan for more efficient use of premises.

In a report it was revealed that the case loads at many rural courts were light. During 37 sittings at Whitland last year, only 62 defended actions were heard. At Narberth, 282 defendants appeared at 53 sittings.

The county policy committee's decision not to oppose Whitland's closure has come at a time when it has backed calls to endorse a £30,000 appeal for a memorial in the town to Hywel Dda.

The memorial will be sited in a landscaped garden on the former mart site, and the national appeal has already won the support of several eminent Welshmen, including Lord Ciedwyn of Penhos and Judge Watkin Powell.