

Strategy and Resources Committee – 28th March 2023

Public Questions (to be taken at the relevant agenda item)

Agenda Item No.5 – Question from Mr John Preston

I am John Preston, Mill Road area resident and former Historic Environment Manager for Cambridge City Council. I have been involved professionally and personally with the former Mill Road Library for over 30 years, and I am here to speak for the building and to raise issues with the proposed sale.

The Library was built by the Cambridge Borough for local people, and is the only listed building on Mill Road. But the County Council's decisions to let it to Wintercomfort and then to the ICCA alienated it from sections of the local community. The County could have celebrated the repair of the building by holding open days for the local community, but chose not to.

The report before you is scant and inaccurate. I had dealings with the ICCA regarding the building, so I appreciate the challenges the County officers have faced. But para 1.1 does not mention that the building was let to the ICCA on a full repairing lease.

Para 2.2 is seriously misleading because it completely fails to acknowledge that it was the County's failure to inspect the building and enforce the terms of the repairing lease that let the ICCA get away with allowing the building to deteriorate. No action was taken until I pointed the issues out to a County officer at a meeting in the building in 2017. Had inspection checks been made in timely fashion, the building would not have been allowed to deteriorate, £500,000 of public money might not have had to be spent, and you would not be considering this report.

Para 6.6 "Localism and Local Member involvement": no attempt was made to involve the local community directly in ideas for the building, and no Open Days were held to enable the local community to see it before or after its occupation by Hill.

I appreciate that financial information has to be confidential, but why is there nothing to allow comparison of what the submitted bids might offer in terms of public benefit, involvement of the local community, or crucially, feasibility given the planning and listed building constraints? To what extent has compatibility with the listed building formed part of the officer assessment?

Planning, conservation, building control, environmental health, access and fire officers, and County Council highway engineers will all need to be involved in trying to resolve these constraints, which were made more difficult by the County's failure (in spite of my prompting) to make any representations in relation to the City's depot site development to safeguard its listed building asset.

Any prudent bidder aware of the challenges would make their offer conditional upon planning permission and listed building consent being granted. For the County to agree a

preferred bidder at this stage, and without providing for further scrutiny by the full Committee before these vital feasibility issues have been fully explored, would be premature and irresponsible.