

Strategy and Resources Committee – 6th July 2021

Agenda Item No.4 Petitions and Public Questions

Text of the petition titled ‘The Council should stop the sale of Milton Road Library immediately and then keep it as a community resource permanently’ containing 1207 signatures at the time of submission.

"We call on Cambridgeshire County Council to use its influence as the sole shareholder and controlling entity of This Land Ltd to pause the sale of the Milton Road library building with immediate effect. This is to allow time for alternative solutions to be explored which would allow the site to be permanently saved as a community asset. If the sale of the freehold goes ahead the library will be lost within 25 years when the current lease runs out. A great deal of community effort has gone into creating this new community resource and it would be a tragedy to lose it when it has already existed for about 100 years. This petition is being submitted by The Hurst Park Residents Association of behalf of all the residents in North Cambridge who have an interest in the library."

Presented by Mr Andrew Milbourn, Chair of the Hurst Park Residents Association.

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

Agenda Item No.5 – Question from Ms Anne Hamill

"Paragraph 2.7 of today’s agenda papers states that ‘[the new administration] will also start a radical overhaul or replacement of the Council’s development company ‘This Land’ with the aim of redirecting it towards building genuinely affordable housing and supported living facilities’. Action reference F.4 also states ‘[the] position of This Land to be considered within LGA Peer Challenge and an action plan produced’bwith a target date for completion of September 2021.

By the end of 2020 the county council had extended loans totalling £123million to This Land Ltd and the company had made cumulative losses of £15.7million to Dec 2019. Its financial year was extended to March 2021 but, with accounts so far unpublished, its recent financial performance cannot be assessed.

In the light of the company’s recent developments of luxury housing in Cambridge, and its recent purchase of farmland in Hertfordshire, will the Council now undertake an immediate forensic audit into the affairs of the company, seek publication of its latest accounts (even on an interim basis) and also make public its Business Plan?"

Agenda Item No.5 – Question from Ms Nicky Webb

“When HPERA heard about the proposed sale we launched a petition on the council website which has already been signed by more than 1200 people in just a fortnight. We believe that it is totally in line with the policy statement at the end of para 2.3 in this committee’s agenda papers, namely ‘We will keep the county’s libraries open, in public ownership, and ensure their services remain free for everyone on Universal Credit’. In view of This Land’s reliance on loans from the county council for its operations it would seem reasonable that the executive directors on behalf of the council as shareholder should remind the board of its stated policy to keep libraries, and in particular, Milton Road library, in public ownership.

Can officers and/or councillors therefore assure us today that the sale of Milton Rd library has been, or will be, paused to enable alternative options to be explored?”

Agenda Item No.5 – Question from Cambridge City Councillor Jocelyne Scutt

“This Land’ proposes selling the freehold of Milton Road Library (including the Library and flats). I request that the County Council immediately publish, for the benefit of Cambridgeshire residents and Council taxpayers, who are concerned particularly but not only because the County Council has been raising Council tax annually to cover provision of services, a complete and open accounting of all monies lent by Cambridgeshire County Council to CHIC/This Land, the lending terms, including interest rates, dates upon which interest payments were/are to be made and dates upon which the loans are to be repaid to the County, with a complete and open accounting of all or any payments of interest made on these loans by CHIC/This Land with a precise calendar of dates, and of all or any repayments of these loans and date/s of payments and, if no interest has been paid or delays in payments have occurred, upon what basis and authorised by whom and, if no repayments of loans have been made, what repayment requirements exist and when are the loans expected to be repaid.”

Agenda Item No.6(b) – Question from Mr Antony Carpen

“Please could the County Council provide an update on the works/negotiations for the old Mill Road Library and the Shire Hall site - and indicate whether in principle they have asked Brookgate if any of the Shire Hall Site can be used as an expansion facility for the Museum of Cambridge”.

Agenda Item No.7 – Question from Cambridge City Councillor Jocelyne Scutt

“As one of 3 Town Green Applicants, I request a copy of the press release issued or about 29 June in relation to the future of Shire Hall and of the Council’s legal advice on the limitations of the Heritage Act as to any protection of free access at all, and in perpetuity, of the public to Castle Mound and the Green Space and, if there is no such legal advice then what is the Council’s understanding as to the Heritage Act’s limitations in that regard, based on what and, further, a clear adumbration of precisely what the Council means by

its assertion that the lease to Brookgate will 'significantly enhance the environmental layout of the site' and 'enshrine and increase public access both to the site and the historic Castle Mound', together with a clear statement of the Council's intentions as to Castle Mound and the Green Space in relation to the lease to Brookgate, and what provision and/or protection is intended for the Civil War earthworks. In blunt and readily to be understood terms: Castle Mound could be fenced; charge for entry onto Castle Mound could be levied; canopy-covered awnings covering a stand/s or booth/s could be erected for the selling of tickets, etc as the Heritage Act does not prohibit this and, further, the Green Space is not covered by the Heritage Act – meaning an hotel could prohibit public access, to benefit hotel guests."

Agenda Item No.7 – Question from Mr Michael Page

"Will all of the green space outside the proposed Shire Hall apart-hotel be legally protected for use by members of the public at all times, and the operators of the hotel prohibited from cordoning off any outside green space for the use of hotel residents, guests or third-party operators?"