



Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society

23rd February 2022

Attn: Tom Dawlings

Leader of TWBC

Dear Tom

Following our recent exchange of emails we have now seen the report for the F&G CAB next week, with attachments indicating that the Council intends to make an agreement for the exclusive management of the whole Town Hall by a commercial partner for fifteen years.

I'm afraid this overtakes our earlier discussions. In spite of assurances from you it confirms our fears that for the 15 year duration of the contract, there would be minimum rights of public access, and no possibility of developing an integrated plan for the whole complex, as agreed by the Council in 2019. As you know we have no objection to co-working in part of the Town Hall but only to the way this is achieved.

Several statements in the report to the CAB seem inadequate, or at odds with what we have been told. In particular it misrepresents the 2019 resolution "**which was accepted by Full Council**", that "**the Council should develop a long-term plan for the Town Hall, Assembly Theatre and 9/10 Calverley Terrace.**", emphasising the need for a staged comprehensive plan for the Civic Complex as a whole based on structural assessment to achieve civic, community, cultural and commercial objectives, of which repurposing the Town Hall would be part.

There has been no subsequent Council resolution adopting alternative priorities. The October 2021 resolution was strictly about setting a budget to facilitate co-working.

The proposed contract, as detailed, has the realistic potential to prevent such a comprehensive plan from being developed to provide the town with a civil complex and community facilities of a quality appropriate for Tunbridge Wells. Of special concern are the statements that "**The award of the contract will result in the Council giving up control of the ... Town Hall...for the next 15 years**", and that "**During the term of the lease the Council, Members and Officers will have no legal right to interfere in the operation of the Town Hall**, as well as "**the partnership with a co-working provider will not necessarily bring an income stream into the Council.**"

The report also refers to consultation with the Civic Society and the Town Forum. There has been no consultation, and even basic information only appeared on the Council website after the form of contract was settled, and then elicited by the Society by repeated asking of questions. The Cross-Party Group published no minutes, and even the existence of the Group was not recorded or generally known. The Town Forum was not briefed beyond passing references to `co-working`.

It is with deep disappointment that I record that we cannot accept what is now proposed, and in view of the late stage reached I am writing to all councillors with our objections and releasing the same to the press. I believe we all need time to agree an acceptable way forward and I will ask the members of the CAB to defer the item to allow a constructive and meaningful consultation to take place.

Yours Sincerely

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