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Dear Mr Thomas

Ashton Gardens - Land Disposal

Almost exactly a year ago, we corresponded about Fylde Council's plans to dispose of part of Ashton Gardens.

You may recall I was concerned *inter alia* about the value for taxpayers such as myself, if the Council disposed of the land without having funds in place to complete the restoration process.

Although it is unwilling to make public the figures involved, I have been reliably advised that the cost of moving the Ashton Institute building (in order to release the land in which it stands for sale) will be in the region of £150,000. In addition to this, there is an expected cost of around £300,000 or £350,000 to undertake the restoration of the building itself.

I also understand that the developer/purchaser of the land will contribute something in the order of £38,000 toward the moving costs as part of the contract to purchase. In reality this is probably academic because he might have paid £38,000 more for the land had he not been required to contribute to moving costs as part of his tender.

So we have an expenditure in the order of £150,000 to move the building

You will remember I was encouraged by your letter (Fylde/FM/2) of 20 July 04, which said: "*I would expect the analysis of the options in relation to Ashton Gardens to become clearer as the lottery funding bid progresses.*"

I understood you to share my concern that a land disposal and expenditure of this magnitude effected without knowing that the other finances were in place was at best premature, and quite possibly foolhardy.

I came to this view when you said in your letter to me: "*My expectation would be that once the outcome of the Heritage Lottery funding bid is known that a full appraisal of the options for matching the funding would be undertaken. This would probably include the sale as previously discussed but as you rightly point out should also consider other options in the context of the longer term capital strategy and medium term financial plan.*"

The lottery bid has still not yet been submitted (let alone the outcome being known), but the Council has to-day issued a press release. I now quote from it: "*Deputy leader of the Council Roger Small said: "It's good to see work on preserving the Institute now underway. Our conservation architects are currently cataloguing features and dismantling the building for future restoration. This is the first step before we submit a £2 million Heritage Lottery Bid to*

renovate Ashton Gardens. We have received significant levels of support from a range of community groups which will give us the best chance for a successful Lottery bid."

Funded by the sale of land, which was completed this week, and the Lottery bid, the ambitious plans focus on Ashton Institute as the centrepiece of the Gardens.

Subject to a successful bid, this building will be restored and relocated between the entrance lodges on Garden Street. Proposals also involve a York stone courtyard at the front of the Institute and a traditional tea room within the building."

It therefore appears that the land sale transaction has been completed, and the building is to be dismantled, all before the lottery bid is even submitted, let alone determined. It is therefore quite possible we could find the building has been dismantled without there being funds in place to re-erect it - let alone restore it - if the lottery grant is not successful. To my personal knowledge several of the community groups asked to express support for the bid have declined to do so. I am therefore not surprised to see the *"subject to a successful bid...."* caveat in the Council's press release.

It is also evident that the Council's action prejudices consideration of the *"options for match funding"* as per your expectation of a year ago - an expectation that itself required the outcome of the lottery bid to be known before the funding option was determined.

In terms of alternative funding options, there are several. Without increasing council tax expenditure, and at the same time meeting the artificial requirement of ensuring "St Annes" meets the cost (a wholly improper desire expressed by the financially incompetent leader of Fylde Council), it is perfectly feasible to borrow the money over ten years (with repayments in the order of £60k) and to ring-fence repayments of principal and interest from the income arising from sandwinning on St Annes foreshore which is producing around £80k per year, or half the income arising from the St Annes miniature golf course income of approx £120k per year. That is before we even consider the use of capital reserves that I heard you endorse as being at a level greater than was necessary for prudence at the special Elswick council meeting earlier this year.

Have you now changed your mind about the need to take unprejudiced decisions about funding options when the outcome of the bid is known, or is the Council wrong to be acting in the way it is presently doing, and if so, is there something you can or should do about it?

Can I also ask you to prompt your colleague Mr Winstanley to reply to my emails of 3rd March 2005, and my subsequent emails of 18th March 2005 and 8th June 2005 regarding what I believe to be wholly improper financial and other arrangements made by the Borough Council in respect of the Saint Anne's on the Sea Parish Council. I do not appear to have received a reply to date, and had intended contacting the Commission in London about this matter, but will delay doing so for the moment.

Yours sincerely

Fred Moor