

Although it may not be the official view of the Council, their Chief Executive Officer, Mr. K Lee, has made his own views on the matter known in an internal staff newsletter.

The January 7th edition of the newsletter - which is called "**Ken's Concerns**" (sic) says:

"I note from the press that the controversy over this is still ongoing.

You would think that we were proposing taking an historic monument that was visited by millions and used by hundreds of thousands.¹

Now I haven't been here very long, but in that time, I have found out that the Institute has not been in use for a number of years.

The former Director of Tourism and Leisure - you may have heard of him during the debate - one Fred Moor, was unable to find a suitable tenant for the building²

The proposed uses that are now being put for the building require a considerable investment in it - over £100,000.³

I would rather see that sort of money being used to improve services to the public rather than shore up a building that the inhabitants of the town have failed to use over a considerable period.

Also, if we sell the building we may be able to release some money to improve the rest of the Gardens and the area around it.⁴

What is better, a preserved monument - the institute or say a restyled cafe reflecting the style of the Institute. I know which I would prefer."⁵

Notes:

1. The Gardens are used by hundreds of thousands of people. Just think about the number visiting in a single day for the St Annes Carnival that takes place in the Gardens every year! The Institute is an important part of the setting of the Gardens.

2. It was not the Director of Tourism and Leisure but (quite properly for a democratic organisation) the elected members of the Council who decided that they did not want to support a subsidised leisure user in the building, and sought to offer it to a wider range of users. They transferred responsibility for the building from the Leisure Committee to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee, whose Terms of Reference encompassed a wider range of options, including, for example, leasing for a small business or office use. A use such as this could at least have maintained the external appearance and been less damaging to the setting of the park than the demolition and redevelopment which is now proposed.

3. The Councillors have not been told that anyone is proposing to use the building. At least two recent requests for use - one for a theatrical use and one for a local youth group - have not made it onto the Councillors agenda papers.

The £100,000 is the figure from the Scott Wilson report. It is not an accurate costing, but a rounded, ballpark estimate to completely restore the building to its original condition, and includes for example, replacing "modern" bricks used to repair a section of the gable end with ones that are more like the original bricks. This has nothing to do with useability, and it could be made useable for a lot less than the £100,000 suggested. The structure of the building is sound and it does not require "shoring up"

4. The Council's current stated aim is to use the money to re-develop the Town Centre, not the Gardens. (Policy and Resources Committee 15 January 2001). I guess that means more

of the domes and other "improvements" in the Square. Maybe these are the "improved services to the public" referred to?

But more than that, the principle here is wrong. I think most people would agree that selling an original heirloom, and replacing it with a tacky reproduction so that you can pocket the difference is more the trick of a con-man than what you might reasonably expect from a respected public official.

Worse still, selling part of the Gardens and the building will, according to the Heritage Lottery Fund, (and the Garden History Society and English Heritage) put at risk £750,000 of grant aid that the Council is committed to applying for. (The following is a quote from a Heritage Lottery Fund letter to Fylde Borough Council dated 6 January 2000: "The HLF requires assurance that no part of Ashton Gardens will be sold or otherwise disposed of by Fylde Borough Council for commercial or other development. Please therefore clarify the current status of the Safeway, in addition to any other, development proposal"

5. Whilst Mr. Lee is entitled to his opinion about preserving monuments, if his respect for our heritage is so scant, and his train of thought adopted, would more of our "preserved monuments" be sold off, and the money used for more modern commercial purposes nearby? Extending the principle he advocates, you may well shudder to think what would happen to say, Lindisfarne, or Stonehenge if he were in charge of their future. You might even begin to worry about the future of some of the other old St Annes buildings.