

CYNGOR TREF CONWY TOWN COUNCIL
GUILDHALL, CONWY
MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25th MAY 2016

PRESENT: Councillors P Hart (Town Mayor & Chair) B Chapman, E Leighton-Jones, S Allardice, B James, S Cotton, J Hughes, T James, E Hughes, A James, C Rigal, H Roberts,

IN ATTENDANCE: Helen Barritt (Town Clerk)
Councillor J Vaughan, Conwy County Borough Council
M Pavey, The Last Bastion
Ms J Mills, The Last Bastion
A Franks, The Last bastion

APOLOGIES: Councillors - G Edwards, V Macdonald

Declarations of Interest – Code of Local Government Conduct:

Agenda Item 3 - Civic Hall, Conwy – Councillor Allardice is a member of Conwy County Borough Council's Civic Hall Project Board

Minute Number

The Deputy Mayor and Councillors B James & A James left the meeting during the following agenda item

1. Civic Hall, Conwy

Mr Pavey thanked the Town Council for allowing members of The Last Bastion to come along and speak about the Civic Hall.

Mr Franks spoke to the Town Council about "social capital". This encompasses all activities that provide benefits to the community and is one of the promises behind Conwy County Borough Council's "One Conwy" document. One of the key drivers of this document is the culture of the community.

Mr Franks said that, before it closed, the Civic Hall was used by 64 groups. He gave a brief history of the Civic Hall, the options it had faced over the years in development and the costs the various local authorities had incurred. He said that the site was essential to Conwy and that a mid-level art facility is needed in the County.

Mr Pavey said that:

- funding is available though the Welsh Government's Community Asset Transfer scheme for the Civic Hall to be transferred to a community group at market value or less. The group would also be looking to make a Heritage Lottery Funding application. A grant could be available for initial development plans.
- communication with Conwy County Borough Council's officers was poor. Officers either replied with a standard reply or did not reply at all.

Councillor Vaughan said that any plan for a takeover of the Civic Hall had to be sustainable.

Mr Pavey said that he would like the Town Council to write to Conwy County Borough Council to ask that the disposal process is halted to allow for time for a community interest group to develop its plans. He said that the Project Board was not properly constituted and that the period of the proposed lease was too long. He would like to see the Town Council and The Last Bastion form a Steering Group as had been with the Pier in Colwyn Bay. He stated that the Theatres Trust had wanted to visit the Civic Hall but had been denied access on health and safety grounds.

The Last Bastion had already engaged professional services but needs a letter of support from Conwy County Borough Council to proceed with a Heritage Lottery Fund application.

Ms Mills said that Conwy was an amazing community and important internationally. Small businesses were important to the town and it had the second highest amounts of independents in the UK. A National chain would tear the heart out of the community. JD Weatherspoon is known to close unprofitable sites and she was afraid that if they were successful in their bid for the Civic hall, that if it was not profitable, then they would board it up. She did not know how a chain would benefit the town or how cheap drink and food would be of benefit. She was also concerned that there was nowhere for community groups to go.

Members of the Council said that the Town Council had objected to Costa Coffee coming to Conwy and it does not want another chain coming to the Civic Hall

Mr Pavey and Mr Franks said that they would be looking for an “anchor tenant” to run a restaurant in the downstairs area. This would provide funding for an arts area upstairs.

Councillor Vaughan said that she wants the Civic Hall to be of value to the community. Ciwb Conwy Cube’s business case had not been strong enough and that any new group must build up a relationship with County Council officers. They need to have a strong argument to delay the disposal process and that The Last Bastion were late in coming to the table. Conwy County Borough Council must believe in a Community Independent Company in going forward and there must be sustainability and strength in any proposals.

At the end of June the disposal process will be going out to the wider market.

Members felt that the Project Board needed to know about JD Weatherspoon closing unprofitable venues.

Members said that it would be a good idea to link theatre productions with meals in a restaurant.

Councillor J Hughes said that she had written to County Councillors about the Civic Hall but had not received a reply. Councillor Vaughan said that they had been told not to reply or to just send a standard reply.

Members said that it was disappointing that the County Council took this stance and it was poor how it was dealing with its citizens. The Civic Hall is a huge asset for the community and the way Conwy County Borough Council has dealt with the process has been abysmal and obstructive. The Town Council’s view on the disposal needs to be taken into consideration.

Members asked that the press and public be excluded from the meeting so they could continue the discussion confidentially

RESOLVED that in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings Act) 1960 & with Standing Order 65, in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the press & public be temporarily excluded & instructed to withdraw.

Councillor Vaughan, Mr Pavey, Ms Mills, Mr Franks and the press & public left the Council Chamber

Some Members were concerned about The Last Bastion’s proposal. They felt that they needed more business knowlegde

Other Members felt that a community group along with a local restaurant would be the best solution for the Civic Hall rather than a commercial entity from outside the area.

Some Members felt that The Last Bastion covered all the required areas – Mr Pavey represented local artists, Ms Mills represented local businesses & Mr Franks represented local organisations. Members said that the disposal process should have been structured differently and could have been geared to community interest groups bidding for Heritage Lottery funding. The commercial process was not ticking boxes in the “One Conwy” document.

Councillor Allardice said that she was aware of another community group putting a bid together. **RESOLVED** that a letter is written to Conwy County Borough Council’s Project Board stating the Town Council’s support for community interest groups to be considered in the disposal process with the following text being included:

“It is very easy to imagine how the process could have been structured differently, in a way that could have been more helpful to third sector enterprises.

In the light of Conwy County Borough Council’s commitment to culture, the Welsh language, the health and well-being of its residents and the local economy, we believe a community group should be a partner to any commercial interest in the Civic Hall.

We ask that the County Council communicate fully and respectfully with all community groups seeking an interest in the Civic Hall.

It is felt that the disposal process does not reflect the funding application process third sector organisations are required to go through”

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 8.54pm