


John Illingworth

11/01/2006 01:14

To: Ian Walton/CED/LCC@Leeds_City_Council
 cc: Cllr David Blackburn/MEM/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Keith Wakefield/MEM/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Les Carter/MEM/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Mark
 Subject: Re: Access to Information Appeal 

Dear Ian,

I have already sent you my initial points on 6 January that I want to put to the panel. I now understand that Kirkstall Ward members will be briefed at lunchtime on Council day on the Draft Questionnaire to be used for Public Consultation, so this may be a dead issue by the time my appeal is considered. However, the Panel should still look at this issue, because if the Questionnaire can be released this week, what legal reason existed for withholding it before Christmas?

My concern is that the Questionnaire may not accurately describe the issues facing the Council, and may not comply with our own Council Procedure Rules or with current government advice on public consultation and political balance. By keeping it under wraps the Development Department has unlawfully sought to frustrate the normal democratic processes. I suspect that the Development Department may be hoping for a snap decision before anybody has time to check the facts. I think it very unwise to push ahead with public consultation before we have received the forthcoming external audit report.

On the second issue, I have attached two documents relating to two separate applications to Yorkshire Forward for grant aid to refurbish St Ann's Mills as incubator units. I asked to see the corresponding designs for conversion of the mill buildings, but these were refused. At present I suspect that these drawings never existed, and the Development Department was making up multi-million pound funding applications "on the fly" with no research and no evidence that the scheme was likely to succeed. This is an entirely legitimate question for an elected member to pursue, particularly when the funding applications to Yorkshire Forward seem to be incompatible with the earlier decisions of the Executive Board, and the public assurances that were given at the "call in" hearing.



accelerator proposal 0305.doc incubator network.doc

The Development Department says that these drawings do exist, but I cannot see them because they are only "drafts". They must be sufficient for costings if the funding applications were properly prepared. If the drawings are sufficiently precise to enter into negotiations with external partners, and to make promises to our existing Council tenants, then they must be sufficiently stable to show elected members of this Council, with an accepted "need to know" what is going on.

This is a separate issue as to whether the Department has actually disclosed all the other paperwork relating to the Yorkshire Forward applications. They say they have, but these seem very "scrappy" documents, considering the substantial sums of public money involved. Perhaps they are only drafts?

One argument advanced by the Development Department is that the Council will not be fully committed to the Yorkshire Forward scheme until it has formally accepted the grant. They say that this is the point when drawings cease to be "drafts". In my view this is a ridiculous argument: pigs will fly before Leeds City Council turns down an offer of money from a QUANGO no matter how lunatic the scheme. There is no realistic prospect that proffered grant aid would ever be rejected by the Council. The "key" decision was the decision to apply.

There are four reasons why members need to know about "incubator units". One is that these seem to duplicate what the private sector already provides in abundance, at a lower price than the Council can achieve without a massive government subsidy. There is a "best value" argument as to whether the Council should be doing it at all.

The second reason is that if it is decided to pursue this activity, it appears very much more efficient to do it somewhere within the Domestic Street / Barkston House / Croydon House complex. There is again a "best value" discussion about whether St Ann's Mills is the most appropriate place.

The third reason is that there are alternative proposals from the voluntary sector for the future use of St Ann's Mills. It seems that the Council's officers only consult with the public on their own terms, having already made up their mind, and loaded the dice in favour of the desired result.

The fourth reason is that the major beneficiary of the Kirkstall Mills saga appears to be Mr Paul Caddick and the various companies associated with Leeds rugby who would gain hugely valuable road access to two separate and potentially very marketable development sites. This same group are already the recipients of a series of unusually favourable planning decisions from the Council, and will benefit directly from the recently announced multi-million pound loan to the Yorkshire County Cricket Club. We are not so far from the Poulson era that members should not be concerned about these things.

John Illingworth

Ian Walton



Ian Walton

10/01/2006 15:13

To: Cllr David Blackburn/MEM/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Les Carter/MEM/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Steve Cllr Smith/MEM/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Keith Wakefield/MEM/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, John Illingworth/MEM/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Nicole Jackson/CED/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Stuart Turnock/CED/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Paul Brook/DVD/LCC@Leeds_City_Council, Mark Turnbull/CED/LCC@Leeds_City_Council

cc:

Subject: Access to Information Appeal

Dear All,

Since the issue of the agenda yesterday I have been informed that the documents which are the subject of the appeal are :

Draft plans for the refurbishment of St Ann's Mills
Draft questionnaire to be used during public consultation

Upon receipt of submissions from Councillor Illingworth as to why these documents should be released to him, and from the Department as to why access has been denied I will circulate them to all recipients of this message

Regards

Ian Walton

Principal Governance Officer

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