

DEPUTATION 3 – DANOPTRA LTD.

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council which should not be longer than five minutes, and please begin by introducing the people in your deputation.

MR N HAWKINS: Lord Mayor Members of Council, thank you very much. I am Nick Hawkins and the members of my delegation are John Weir and Phillip Myers.

Lord Mayor, Members of Council, my colleagues and I are very grateful to you for the opportunity to speak to you as a deputation.

As I only have 5 minutes and a lot of information to get in, I hope you will all forgive me if I speak quite quickly. After I have spoken we have material to provide any of you who are interested.

Most of you probably will not know us. I am the Company Secretary and Legal Director of Danoptra Ltd. We are a leisure and sports group. We employ a bit under 4,000 people nationwide – we have many subsidiaries – and our national headquarters is in Low Lane, at the Kirkstall end of Horsforth, in a mill building built in 1905.

I am going to talk to you about a number of what we believe are serious procedural faults in a conversation area plan and failures to follow clear national guidance, which your planning officers have been involved in, but this is not a wholesale attack on your officers, and I should stress that Paul Stephens, your Head of Economic Development, has been very helpful to us as a company.

However, I do want to stress what the adverse effects of these failures can be. I am sure all Councillors, regardless of political party, are concerned about jobs – keeping jobs and making sure we do not lose jobs – especially here in Leeds. The purpose of our deputation is to highlight to you what we believe the mistakes have been to suggest to you all that there is a solution and that this solution will protect a successful local company.

Predecessor companies which are still part of our Group, which some of you may recall, include Music Hire Group and Kunick – spelt K-U-N-I-C-K, and if you go past our Mill today you will see the name “Gamestec” on the building – that is one of our big trading subsidiaries, the biggest supplier in the UK of machines, pool tables, juke boxes, media screens and the like, to all the big national pub chains. We are also successful manufacturers and exporters and parts of our business are growing worldwide.

We take our responsibilities very seriously; we have an excellent reputation with our regulators, and we raise and contribute a lot of money to charities.

We therefore believe we are good “corporate citizens” and when something crops up in the Council which affects us, we hope that we will see the correct following of procedures and guidance..

I will turn to how that has not happened here. Last Spring we suddenly discovered (at the very last minute, because the consultation document was not addressed to the Chief Executive or to me but just arrived in the general post) that there was a consultation on creating a new Conservation Area in Horsforth – and in the very corner, on the very edge of that proposed area, our Mill building had been include.

I should stress we are not against conservation. If our Mill was genuinely historic – if, say, it had been built in 1705 or 1805, I and my Company would be the first to say it is a candidate for conservation, but it was built in 1905, it is not even Victorian and, as you will hear, it is nothing special and, as you will all know, such 20th Century mills are ten a penny across the North of England.

Just because a building has a bit of age, it does not automatically mean it must be kept, or we would never make progress. You cannot freeze everything in aspic.

So what happened and what went wrong here procedurally? It is quite clear that the junior planning officer just followed a pre-planned formula in putting the plan together. How do we know this? Because in the original documentation, a completely different area, miles away from Horsforth, is mentioned. In the first version of the Consultation, it reads that the Draft Appraisal "...provides a clear understanding of the special interest in Barwick in Elmet..." If officers just do a "cut and paste" job, that is the kind of error which slips through, so we are not just talking about us – we are talking about fundamental flaws.

We have gone to a leading national expert, Roger Wools, who has been advising Councils on conservation issues across the North for 30 years and he is a particular expert on old mills. What he says is: "My conclusion is that conservation designation would not accord with the legislation or guidance in that the area fails to demonstrate sufficient special interest." What he says is, "Horsforth Mill, which your company owns, is early 20th Century, has seen significant alterations and additions, such that it is of little intrinsic interest. It is also in an area that has seen considerable commercial development eroding its former historic character."

The final thing that I want to say before my five minutes is up is this. We respectfully request that, because of the various flaws, relevant officers and Members halt this process pending a review of the proposed conservation area boundary and a more robust and substantive analysis of the perceived special qualities contained therein. As it stands, the process fails to stand up to scrutiny, as does the rationale or evidence base which seeks to underpin it. We could have this conservation area but without our mill included. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you. Can I call on Councillor Gruen, please?

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board, Lord Mayor.

COUNCILLOR LOBLEY: I second, my Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: Can we have a vote on that, please. (*A vote was taken*) That is CARRIED.

Can I thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. Good afternoon.