

Madam Chairman

Thank you for allowing me to address this Scrutiny Committee.

You have heard Brian Roberts speak. As Local Member, I had expected, by this point, that this Committee would be comparing two equally well worked up business plans and deciding between them.

You have before you two hundred pages both describing and criticising plans to hand Snibston Museum to a community Trust with the expectation of running it at lower cost to the taxpayer.

This committee also has Appendix 1, a back-of-an envelope sketch without detailed costings.

This plan, which includes demolishing the current Museum and moving the collections, will cost this Council around £2M.

The residuary body for British Coal has a position on the covenants that prevent selling the Snibston land for housing. It is not clear where this transitional £2M is to come from.

I am surprised that officers of this Council are putting forward this sketch for Scrutiny. Cllr Blunt has himself raised concerns about the Council's ability to progress it.

Madame Chairman, I wish to draw this Committee's attention to the nature of the relationship between this Council and the Friends of Snibston.

The Friends were set up, under the auspices of this Council, with the blessing of the Lead Member at that time.

The Friends of Snibston should not be criticised for failing to unilaterally 'set up a Trust' or demand ownership of public heritage assets. As 'Friends' they had hoped to work with this Council, within the legal guidelines of the Charities Commission, to act as 'midwife' to such a Trust.

The contrast with the case of the Libraries needs to be made.

In the case of Snibston, a much larger project, the Friends Group has done a great deal of groundwork for the Council, unpaid.

The Friends of Snibston have amongst their members and supporters experts in museum management.

The core team includes Stuart Warburton, formerly an officer of this Council.

Stuart Warburton is a fully qualified curator, a full member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, with qualifications in museum development and management. Having honed his skills here in Leicestershire setting up Snibston and Abbey Pumping Station he has since gone on to senior positions in Heritage Development in Walsall and Essex. He has experience outside the public sector as an ex-officio 'trustee' of the Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome Ltd. and Colne Valley Railway Trust

The Friends have taken advice from the East Midlands Museums Service at Nottingham Trent University. Their plans have been critiqued by an internationally renowned expert in Museum Trusts from the National Coal Mining Museum. It has had early discussions with English Heritage.

The recommendation before Cabinet is to throw all that work away and direct officers to work up Appendix 1.

When setting up a complex Museum Trust, there will be splinters you can pick out of the plans. Hence the need for Scrutiny Committees. As Local Member, I am concerned that officers of this Council appear to have spent so little time shoring up the planks in their own.

This demolition plan risks putting in jeopardy Heritage Lottery bids in Coalville to regenerate the town centre.

When this Committee realised that, without support, community groups would be unable to take over the Libraries and they would close, it recommended that officers work with those groups to come up with sustainable solutions.

Given the lack of progress with their own plans, as evidenced by Appendix 1, I ask this Committee to consider making a similar recommendation for Snibston.

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County Councillor for Coalville