

Future of Snibston

Comments to Cabinet 01/04/14 Dr Terri Eynon CC (Coalville)

A consultation that does not contain alternative options is not a consultation but a foregone conclusion.

As the local Member for Coalville, I wish to reiterate my concerns expressed to Cabinet on 5th February 2014 that the proposed consultation has prematurely closed down the options for Snibston Discovery Museum, putting the Council at financial and reputational risk.

Other suggestions for cost improvements, as suggested in the Black Radley report commissioned, paid for and ignored by this Council include:

- Rather than dispersing the collections, make savings by centralising all the museum collections on the site, thus reducing storage costs elsewhere (saving £100k pa)
- Develop the educational offer to schools, Colleges of Further Education and Universities.
- Offer the Museum as a corporate venue for conferences
- Develop the 'Memory Plus' service providing cognitive stimulation in dementia
- Increase the income from catering
- Consider Charitable or Trust status as a means of increasing philanthropic income and reducing tax liability.

The public sector has a reputation for making decisions first and consulting afterwards. The 'Snibston Proposed Future Offer' report seeks approval to progress with the 'necessary consultation process' but does not provide any alternative options. It gives the impression of a 'fait accompli' rather than a consultation.

I am concerned that the report claims, with remarkably little evidence, that this 'transformation will save £9.4M over 25 years'. Even if this figure were believable, it compares poorly with the £105M of economic value that, by projecting the current STEAM analysis, the current Museum will bring to the same area over the same period.

The report estimates that it will cost around £2M to make the changes. This figure includes £1.2M in capital investment and £730,000 in contingent liabilities. It does not include unquantifiable transportation and storage costs. There is an assumption that these upfront costs will be offset by the sale of the land.

North West Leicestershire District Council is currently working on its Local Plan for development. It cannot be assumed that this area will be zoned for housing and the capital receipts may be considerably less than hoped for.

Even if all these risks were worth taking, the proposed Future Offer would still cost around £350,000 to run. About £225,000 of this relates to maintaining the Scheduled Ancient Monument in good repair. The current £750,000 of visitor income from the Main Gallery will be lost and is unlikely to be matched by a small museum focused around Mining.

The report suggests 'there is a possibility that the future museum could be transferred to a suitable community trust/voluntary group'.

There appears to be little basis for this statement. Volunteers would need to be prepared to take on a Museum which huge ongoing liabilities and limited capacity for income generation. Coalville is a down-to-earth community and I suggest the Council is unlikely to find many volunteers who are that financially naïve.