

Item 6. Public Participation (i) Public Statements Received

Statement 1 – Cllr Clark Mitchell, Kettering Town Council

A couple of weeks ago I lost my temper in a meeting of KTC, I'm really embarrassed about it and apologise to the residents who elected me to represent them in that chamber.

It took me a few days but I realise what it was that tipped me over that edge.

A member of NNC's executive said that they had shed blood for that building and that they really do want to save it (KLV) but someone once said to them "don't risk your political career for that building."

That's it.

That's what made me so angry I couldn't stop myself shouting.

Because that person was wrong.

They did that executive member and everyone here a massive disservice.

If they had said "don't risk your family life, your house or your health" I'd 100% agree with them.

But your political career? Really?

They were wrong and I am here to right that wrong and to ask you to do exactly that.

Actually no not ask beg.

Please risk your political career for that building.

I also ask the same of the other Conservatives who represent old KBC areas.

When KBC merged with NNC we handed over £34 million in reserves.

Other areas had been on spending sprees Other areas used theirs to pay off landlords who were unfairly imprisoned.

But KBC didn't.

KBC was "responsible".

KBC saved its money and gave it to the Unitary and how did they spend it?

Well they used some of it to pay off legal costs for East Northants mistakes.

Surely it's time to call in some of that money.

I ask it of the cllrs for different areas. The cllrs who have their council owned theatres and pools that aren't crumbling.

Don't deny Ketterings residents the services yours enjoy and that we all pay for.

Please everyone put your political careers on the line for KLV.

Because it's not really that "building" you would be risking it for.

It's for the silver medal winning cheerleading squad, the Northampton Saints wheelchair rugby squad. Starlight dance and the thousands of children who dream of performing on stage.

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The dozens of people who gave testimonials as to what the gym means to them and their mental health at St Andrews Church.

Surely that's what your "political career" is actually about.

The people.

Everyone who sits in this chamber from executive member to backbencher.

They are temporary.

This could all come crashing down on a Friday afternoon in May 2025

What's real and permanent are the people who you represent the people of North Northamptonshire.

What do you want your legacy to be?

In 20 years time when you look back on today what do you want your memory to be?

Did you fight for the people who elected you.

Or the people who sit in elevated positions because of those people and yourselves.

Please support CHI· Hakewill's Motion

Please ignore any whips that have been put in place and vote to save KLV vote to support the people of Kettering and North Northamptonshire.

Because that is who you are failing if you don't.

Statement 2 – Miss Janie Simper

Good evening, Mr Smithers and members of North Northamptonshire Council

I would like to speak with regard to this evening's second motion about why it is so important that a speedy solution is found to keep Kettering Conference Centre open before its scheduled closure on 3rd July and allow more time to find a feasible business partner for the long-term future of the venue.

I am the Head of Drama at Kettering Science Academy, where many of our students, including a Year 8 girl in the award-winning cheerleading squad, use the facilities offered by Kettering Leisure Village on a regular basis. If the building closes on 3rd July it will be so detrimental to their physical and mental wellbeing. I took our first group booking since the pandemic to the Lighthouse Theatre on Thursday 27th April and many of the students had never been in a theatre before. You can imagine how emotional some of them became as rumours spread of the closure that day and they thought that they may never repeat the experience. District and county primary and secondary school sporting events will also be impacted as KLV hosts a variety of competitions for the area. This safe and versatile venue offers a recreational space for our young people and if it is no longer there for them, we risk having more teenagers aimlessly wandering the streets and potentially a growth of anti-social behaviour in our town centre.

This evening, I am also representing Anderson School of Dance, where I have taught part-time and both of my sons attend. The dancing school has been teaching children and adults, some of whom have become professional performers, for 20 years in Kettering and the 20th anniversary show had been booked into the Lighthouse for July 2024. Where else can such an important event be staged in the area with only a year's notice? Other local stages aren't large enough for dance, their backstage spaces too small for our number of students and parents will be required to drive further for rehearsals and shows, which has an environmental impact, too.

Yes, the classes will still continue at the Studios but without a performance venue what will these students be working towards? How will they overcome the 'stage fright' and gain the sense of accomplishment and achievement when they have shone on stage and conquered their fears? Dance provides benefits both mentally and physically. My 11 year old was distraught when he could not dance during lockdown and the Anderson Lighthouse show was postponed. He missed dancing more than school!

I appreciate that there have been negotiations 'behind the scenes' to find a solution to keep KLV open which we will not be privy to. As I suggested to Kettering Town Council, if we have an overall operator, the facilities could be divided with experts

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running each section of the building. Northamptonshire Arts Management currently run the Royal, Derngate and Core Theatres. Could we not negotiate with them for their portfolio to include the Lighthouse, have the venues' programmes co-ordinated and not put them in competition with each other?

Mr Smithers, I am aware that keeping KLV open will have logistical and financial implications for North Northamptonshire but surely these are outweighed by the vast benefits that this facility offers to so many? Please don't let the acronym cease to stand for Kettering Leisure Village and deteriorate to Kettering Lacks Vision.

Thank you.

Statement 3 – Alex Kingsley

Firstly thank you to the leader of the council and this body for giving me the opportunity to speak on the potential closure of the Kettering Leisure Village.

My personal connection to the KLV is that I play squash there, it has 4 great glass-back courts, a welcoming club that runs weekly club night, 3 teams that represent Kettering against other clubs in the county and I coach the juniors every Sunday. The courts are busy with 800 - 1,000 bookings every month.

I was devastated to hear about it closing, it only got worse when I heard stories from the other groups and clubs who use the facility.

You may have heard about the cheerleading squad who only just came back from the US with a silver medal soon to be without a home, or the best wheelchair rugby team in the world who have now lost their training space weeks before the start of the new season.

But you won't have heard from some of the individuals whose quality of life will shattered if the doors close, in a survey of over 400 users of the KLV across 27 postcode sectors in North Northamptonshire one person said:

“I am a partially sighted person and feel very comfortable using the gym and pool as I know my way around it . . . I don't think I could join another facility as it would be too much for me to get use to. This is my social life and it would devastate me if I lost it. ”

Another said:

“I am disabled and love Balance swimming pool as I can enter unaided and it's warm for me to exercise my arthritic joints in. Kettering Pool is too cold and hoist not working.”

In the same survey two in three of those in retirement age told us they would be unlikely to exercise to the same level if KLV closed and it was more than this in those who reported themselves as disabled or neurodivergent.

But this isn't just a loss for Kettering, it's the whole county. In the recent Visitor Economy Strategy produced by the NNC the counties meetings and conference sector is under-developed in relation to our neighbours and has potential for development. Losing the Kettering Conference Centre would only push us further behind.

Tonight I feel a sense of duty to all the other users of the KLV to demonstrate what the site means to us and its potential. It's the same sense of duty you have to the voters who put you in that chair, bluntly put, the duty to get value for taxpayers money.

To the councillors of Corby, you had your council squash courts closed. To the councillors of Desborough, you had your courts.

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If KLV closes, then the only pay to play squash courts in the whole of the North Northamptonshire will be in Wellingborough and Rushden. Value for money is not leaving the county threadbare of places for sports, community and culture.

The story of the Kettering Leisure Village should be one of community and triumph and still can be. Like the motion, I am calling upon the council as the head lease holders for the site to step in and keep the KLV open whilst a sustainable, long-term, future is secured with the help of local people and organisations, for their benefit and the wider economy of North Northamptonshire.

Thank you.

Statement 4 – Julie Hawkes

I have lived in Northamptonshire all my life and in Kettering for 60 years. Kettering matters to me and my family. We have used the venue for family events and also in my work with disabled children and young people, particularly the swimming pool, kids play and the theatre. My daughter and son in law have worked in the building for 12 years since they left school.

My main concerns are as follows:

Staff redundancies:

The fact that they've been blindsided and shocked by the decision Compass came to about closure of the entire building. They've had no voice as they fear their redundancy packages will be effected if they speak up.

A lot of the staff have worked there for many years up to 30 years some of them.

They are like family and treat the venue as a second home.

There are also lots of volunteers who give their time and effort to help run the theatre and have done for many years, and enjoy doing so.

Local Community:

Loss of a venue for small businesses who rent parts of the building to run their businesses from.

Loss of a venue to exercise and play sport and socialise.

Many friendships have developed within this building.

Loss of a venue to run clubs, such as badminton, martial arts, cheerleading, football, table tennis, wheelchair rugby, volleyball, premier education to name a few.

Wider Community:

The venue has also run larger events across the year with such as Epic Gaming Events, Volleyball UK, Gospel Conference, Judo competitions, Foothealth conference, Train conventions as well as one day events for the NHS and Social Services amongst the many.

Also the impact on the local businesses that benefit from the conferences when guests stay in hotels and use the food outlets and local shops whilst they are visiting the town.

During a recent meeting of the NNC and WNC joint councils on tourism one of the positive points from the consultation was that this area is the best place in the country for access by road and rail, but the councils have not lead the way with resources to market and improve what we already have in the area.

I questioned my daughter months ago about the sign on Northampton Road that has been left in a terrible state, that should signpost people to the venue and advertise events. She went to her manager who told her there was a disagreement over who should be funding the upkeep of the sign, therefore nobody has.

I always think if the sign looks tatty, the venue would be the same. Not good management overall of who is responsible for what!

Mental health:

The mental health of staff, volunteers, business professionals and users of the venue have been affected already and the building isn't closed yet!

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The lack of support from NNC is appalling with a promise of an update last week but the update is, there is no update!

There are thousands of new houses being built in the surrounding areas that won't have a theatre, an indoor children's play area, or suitable sports facilities.

By keeping Kettering Leisure Village open and marketing the venue to its full potential will bring lots more revenue to the area.

Kettering people deserve a fantastic venue to enjoy their leisure time.

Thank you.

Statement 5 – Gerry McCrory

I would like to express my gratitude for giving me the opportunity to speak at this evening's meeting. My name is Gerry Mac, and I am the captain of the Northampton Saints Wiltshire rugby team. I wanted to bring to your attention to the recent closure of KLV, where our team has been training. This came as a shock to us, as it was the only venue in Northampton that met all our requirements as a club, including disabled parking, accessible toilets, and showers, and everything being on the ground level. We are currently the league champions, Premiership champions, and the number one wheelchair rugby club in the world.

We have been searching for a new venue, but we have not been able to find one that meets all our needs. As we are in the middle of trying to retain our Premiership title, we urgently need a new training facility. The Saints had big plans to make KLV our flagship and our home, and now those dreams and ambitions are quickly slipping away from us as we find ourselves in limbo land.

I understand that the council has big plans for the future, including slogans "for the people of Kettering to live their best lives," "to be healthy," "to be fitter," and "to have good access to the arts and entertainment." I want to emphasize that all of the above is taking place every day at KLV, with people from every aspect of our community.

Our club provides fitness, wellbeing, social interactions, and friendships that would never have been made by people with different abilities if we had not started the club. Now, our members face a very upsetting future with no place to call home or train. I hope that I can bring back positive news to our club members soon so they can continue to live their best lives, be healthier, be fitter and continue to have social interaction and make friends this is something they would never be fit to do if we can't find a training venue.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

End of Public Statements