

Item 6. Public Participation (i) Public Statements Received

Statement 1 – Chris Stanbra

Good evening councillors. A special good evening to the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member with responsibility for Libraries to whom this statement is directed. I am here tonight to speak in support of the motion on the library service proposed by Cllr Hakewill and seconded by Cllr Best. You have a long agenda tonight. Please keep in mind what's been said by members of the public by the time it comes to the debate.

I am speaking in a personal capacity but should make you aware that I am a volunteer at Danesholme Library, a community managed library in Corby. I invite all of you to pop in when the library is open, and if any of you would like to become a volunteer at Danesholme Library, see me afterwards.

Cllr Hakewill's motion is very clear in its call for a "clear, compelling, financially sound, and customer-service-oriented business case" before any disaggregation changes are made to the way our libraries are run. Who could disagree?

It has been estimated by your council colleagues in West Northants that disaggregation of the library service could end up costing that council increased revenue costs of either ninety five thousand pounds per annum or two hundred and five thousand pounds per annum depending on which option is chosen. Similar costs would surely be incurred in North Northants, possibly more as we don't have a central library or a distribution base for books in the North as both of these are located in Northampton and we would surely have to set up and pay for such facilities.

The leaders of this council make a virtue of financial probity and prudent budgeting. Surely you will all want to ensure that any decision to incur increased revenue costs is backed up by the business case that Cllrs Hakewill and Best are calling for and that it has been "subjected to wide public consultation" as called for in the motion. I urge you to support the motion as written. Thank you.

Statement 2 – Cllr Clark Mitchell, Kettering Town Council

Firstly, chair thank you for letting me speak, I understand there was confusion over the 9am Monday deadline so I do appreciate you allowing this.

I am here to day to ask council to support Cllr Lee's motion in full I will explain why however if you were at the scrutiny panel on Tuesday you will have heard a lot if what I am about to say already.

I was on the planning committee back in January 2021 that first approved the new build element of the GLaM project (gallery library and museum) I'm really proud of the fact that I am able to say I voted for this project because it is a fantastic opportunity for the town of Kettering and the region of North Northamptonshire, when open it will increase footfall which will boost the town centre and the new business hub will give the people who work in the town a fantastic facility to support themselves, the officers and executive of KBC deserve thanks for getting the grant from SEMLEP that made this possible. I know its frowned upon to mention names but they know who they are. Well done.

I didn't expect to have to be here speaking about it, I thought it would have opened and been great but unfortunately here we are over two years down the line and it is only the library (a statutory service) that is open.

This got me concerned enough to send in an FOI asking about the conditions put on the funding. It was after all the Gallery, Library and Museum project, I wanted to know if there was a risk that the funding could be with held. The answer I got did not alleviate these fears.

I asked (amongst other things)

If NNC were to fail to achieve these conditions could you advise of any funding that would need to be returned and to whom.

The answer I got was.

The Get Building Fund committed £3m via SEMLEP. It is not clear at this point what might have to be repaid if some elements are delayed or not opened. BIPC will be opening in 2023 so, for example, this element of the criteria would have been fulfilled.

I Then asked

Are there any other grant conditions that would require NNC to repay any or all of the funding received?

The grant is dependent on milestones for the build being met, which has been achieved. Also dependent on outputs being delivered as agreed in the monitoring and evaluation procedures, there remains a risk if these are not achieved that there could a claw back of part of the grant already received.

These answers really worry me, there is a risk (albeit small) that if this facility doesn't open fully the money could all be called back by SEMLEP and then the residents of this region end up with nothing. I have already been told that the museum may never reopen.

I asked Tuesday's scrutiny panel to chase up the answers to what the risk to NNC actually is and what mitigations are in place but the easiest way to stop any risk is to get the facility fully open as quickly as possible and give Kettering the cornerstone of its heritage quarter that it deserves.

Please support Cllr Lee's motion and once again thank you for your time.

End of Public Statements