

## MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Wednesday, 15 April 2015 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

**PRESENT:** THE DEPUTY MAYOR Councillor Flavell (in the Chair).

**COUNCILLORS:** Ansell, Ashraf, Aziz, Beardsworth, Begum, Bottwood, I. Choudary, N Choudary, Conroy, Eales, Eldred, Ford, Glynane, Golby, Gowen, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, King, Lane, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Marriott, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Sargeant, Stone and Strachan.

### 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hadland declared a personal non-pecuniary interest as a Trustee of Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust.

Councillor Ford declared a personal, disclosable pecuniary interest as his wife had worked as the catering manager of the Delapre Abbey tea room. He left the Chamber and took no part in the rest of the meeting.

Councillor Meredith declared a personal non pecuniary interest as he had used the Delapre Abbey tea room.

### 2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from the Mayor (Councillor Caswell) and Councillors Duncan, Hill, Larratt, Nunn and Yates.

The Deputy Mayor stated that she was chairing the meeting as the Mayor was unwell. The Council joined her in passing best wishes to the Mayor.

### 3. TO GIVE DIRECTIONS ON PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS RELATING ONLY TO THE MOTION ON THE AGENDA

The Deputy Mayor stated that the issue of public speakers had been discussed at the pre-meeting earlier in the day and it had been agreed that the seven speakers who had asked to speak on the motion contained on the agenda should be asked to do so for up to three minutes each, as per the usual practice.

The speakers registered, in order were:

Mr Huffadine-Smith  
Mr Giddins  
Mr Jwanczuk  
Mr McKeever

Ms Davenport  
Mr Spears  
Mr Townsend

Mr Huffadine-Smith addressed Council as summarised herewith. He was sad to see the item brought to a special meeting of the Council. He had checked with the Chief Executive who had confirmed that the meeting was not a breach of Purdah. Mr Huffadine-Smith thought that the intention was mischievous and conveyed no dignity to the election process or fair play. He was aware of the publicity surrounding Delapre tea rooms so that no one really knew what had happened there. He wished that the issue could be left until after the elections and then be dealt with fairly in the public eye.

Mr Giddins, Chair of Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust (DAPT) and member of Friends of Delapre Abbey (FoDA) addressed Council as summarised herewith. Consultation on the proposals for Delapre had been very extensive and people had been aware of what was proposed and Council members at the organisation's AGM in late 2014 had indicated there was cross party support. It had been known that buildings would be lost as part of the proposals. FoDA and DAPT had worked hard to keep people informed. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant had been made jointly to NBC and to DAPT for the restoration of Delapre Abbey. The issues were a distraction for the officers and for the project when £800,000 had to be raised through fundraising activity. A restaurant would be provided and money raised would be put into making the project sustainable. NBC had met its commitments, now including the provision of a pop-up catering facility. Mr Giddins paid tribute to the Trustees of FoDA who had had to leave office. It was proposed to establish a new Delapre Alliance to support the restoration of the Abbey.

Mr Jwanczuk addressed Council as summarised herewith. He was the chair of a community group in Far Cotton. He referred to a letter from the Leader of the Council he said many people had received, stating that NBC had not closed the tea rooms but had stepped in to provide a facility when they had been closed. Mr Jwanczuk said the letter referred to the costs of running the tea rooms, which he disputed and said the tea rooms had contributed financially to the project which they could not have done had they run at a loss, and to "scare stories" being circulated. Mr Jwanczuk stated that FoDA had made decisions contrary to their constitution and had produced no minutes since January 2015. He implored members not to be "whipped" and to overturn the decision regarding the tea rooms.

Mr McKeever addressed Council as summarised herewith. He welcomed the regeneration of Delapre Abbey and felt the community should be at the centre. There was great sadness at the divisions currently. He paid tribute to the work of FoDA and hoped they would be the preferred bidder for the restaurant. He stated that any facility in the stable block was bound to fail. He considered the motion and second amendment to be a reasonable way forward.

Ms Davenport addressed Council as summarised herewith. She had been a volunteer in the FoDA office and said she had every day met people outraged with the proposals. She stated that FoDA had stifled democratic debate, including

amongst its staff, telling them it put the HLF grant at risk. She stated that the HLF had not been informed of the depth of feeling in the town by the Council and therefore thought people were happy with the decision and she believed this had put the HLF grant at risk.

Mr Spears addressed Council as summarised herewith. He had written two books on Delapre Abbey and been involved in a study of the Abbey. He believed the community centre aspect was key. He appreciated NBC giving rooms in 2007 for use as tea rooms. This had become a community focal point. He was looking forward to FoDA volunteers working with DAPT. DAPT was around the third such body in approximately eight years. Council officers had lodged figures for the HLF grant and with volunteers had met the HLF and similar bodies and this had led to the grant awarded to NBC.

Mr Townsend addressed Council as summarised herewith. He stated that since he returned to the town ten years ago many features had been swept away and money wasted. He stated that the tea rooms should have been kept open and money spent on them. He stated that the facility had been closed and a lot of money wasted on it.

#### **4. MOTION FOR EXAMINATION**

Councillor Glynane proposed and Councillor Beardsworth seconded that:

“This Council recognises that the proposals of this administration as regards Delapre tea rooms are inadequate on a number of levels, and recognises the failure of this administration to consult adequately with the local community.

This Council notes the huge local and town wide interest in this issue, and acknowledges the significant anger with the administration regarding their handling of it.

Council further recognises that proposals to relocate the tea-room to "dog poo alley" and to reduce the seating from 130 to 28 would make the tea-room unviable, forcing its closure. We further recognise that according to the charity commission's website, where accounts are lodged, the tea rooms made a profit last year, despite statements to the contrary.

Council affirms its thanks for the hard work of the local community and the membership of Friends of Delapre Abbey over a number of years, and recognises that without their input the heritage lottery bid would not have been successful, and resolves the local community and FoDA members will be fully included and meaningfully consulted with regards to developments and changes to Delapre Abbey.

Council further resolves to honour the promise to offer the FoDA tea room a rolling lease in their current location, including access and provision for seating in the walled garden, up until the time work makes the location uninhabitable. During this period, Council will ensure there is a suitable alternative provision prepared for the tea rooms during the works. Council resolves that in this context, "suitable" must be signed off by a free vote of the members of FoDA.”

Councillor Glynane accepted an amendment proposed by Councillor Marriott and seconded by Councillor Stone, as revised from the original amendment tabled to the meeting:

Insert at the end of the motion,

“So this Council therefore resolves,

1. To confirm its aspiration to have a non-profit / social enterprise organisation operating the tea-rooms, preferably FoDA. The tea rooms must have the capacity and surroundings so users can keep enjoying the tranquillity of Delapre Abbey.
2. Acknowledges a ‘pop-up facility’ was not available over the Easter Holiday, despite promises to the contrary. The Council will now provide an estimate as to the loss of revenue, an explanation of why it was late and details of the tender process for these temporary tea rooms.
3. Believes that the future of Delapre Abbey depends on strong partnership working between Friends of Delapre Abbey, Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust, Northampton Borough Council, Far Cotton Residents Association and the general public. Strong partnership working will mean the successful restoration of Delapre Abbey.”

The motion as amended then became the substantive motion.

Councillor Hadland, as proposer of the amendment, stated that he did not accept the substantive motion and amended his amendment to exclude the words from “So this council therefore resolves ....” to the end of the substantive motion. Councillor Hadland proposed and Councillor Markham seconded that the motion be amended as follows:

Delete:

“proposals of the administration as regards” and “are inadequate on a number of levels, and recognises the failure of this administration to consult adequately with the local community.”

Insert:

“have now closed following a decision taken by the Friends of Delapre Abbey. The Council understands this was due to large staffing costs and notes that an employee was the wife of a Liberal Democrat councillor. This Council notes that any councillor with a personal and pecuniary interest must declare this at meetings of the Full Council and may be advised they are unable to take part. This Council also notes, coincidentally, that there is currently an election campaign underway with elections on 7th May.”

Delete:

“the significant anger with the administration regarding their handling of it.”

Insert:

“this must have been a difficult decision taken by the FoDA Board.”

Delete:

“to “dog poo alley” and to reduce the seating from 130 to 28 would make the tea-room unviable, forcing its closure. We further recognise that according to the charity commission’s website, where accounts are lodged, the tea rooms made a profit last year, despite statements to the contrary.”

Insert:

“are now being re-considered by the administration to allow for discussions with the Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust, in consultation with FoDA.”

Insert:

“Council recognises that a new refreshment facility has been organised by the Borough Council to allow people to continue using the Walled Gardens over the summer whilst longer term plans are discussed with Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust, in consultation with FoDA.”

Delete:

“Council further resolves to honour to the promise to offer the FoDA tea room a rolling lease in their current location, including access and provision for seating in the walled garden, up until the time work makes the location uninhabitable.”

Insert:

“of redevelopment at Delapre Abbey” after the words “During this period”

Delete:

“Council resolves that in this context, “suitable” must be signed off by a free vote of the members of FoDA.”

Delete:

“So this Council therefore resolves,

1. To confirm its aspiration to have a non-profit / social enterprise organisation operating the tea-rooms, preferably FoDA. The tea rooms must have the capacity and surroundings so users can keep enjoying the tranquillity of Delapre Abbey.

2. Acknowledges a ‘pop-up facility’ was not available over the Easter Holiday, despite promises to the contrary. The Council will now provide an estimate as to the loss of revenue, an explanation of why it was late and details of the tender process for these temporary tea rooms.

3. Believes that the future of Delapre Abbey depends on strong partnership working between Friends of Delapre Abbey, Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust, Northampton Borough Council, Far Cotton Residents Association and the general public. Strong partnership working will mean the successful restoration of Delapre Abbey.”

Council then debated the amendment.

Upon a requisition for a recorded vote:

There voted for the motion: Councillors Ansell, Aziz, Begum, Bottwood, Choudary I, Eldred, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, King, Lane, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Oldham, Parekh, Patel and Sargeant.

There voted against the motion: Councillors Ashraf, Beardsworth, Choudary N, Conroy, Eales, Glynane, Gowen, Marriott, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Stone and Strachan.

There abstained the Deputy Mayor.

The amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

Upon a vote the substantive motion was carried, as set out below:

This Council recognises that the Delapre tea rooms have now closed following a decision taken by the Friends of Delapre Abbey. The Council understands this was due to large staffing costs and notes that an employee was the wife of a Liberal Democrat councillor. This Council notes that any councillor with a personal and pecuniary interest must declare this at meetings of the Full Council and may be advised they are unable to take part. This Council also notes, coincidentally, that there is currently an election campaign underway with elections on 7th May.

This Council notes the huge local and town wide interest in this issue, and acknowledges this must have been a difficult decision taken by the FoDA Board.

Council further recognises that proposals to relocate the tea-room are now being re-considered by the administration following the closure of the FoDA tea rooms to allow for discussions with the Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust, in consultation with FoDA.

Council recognises that a new refreshment facility has been organised by the Borough Council to allow people to continue using the Walled Gardens over the summer whilst longer term plans are discussed with Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust, in consultation with FoDA.

Council affirms its thanks for the hard work of the local community and the membership of Friends of Delapre Abbey over a number of years, and recognises that without their input the heritage lottery bid would not have been successful, and resolves the local community and FoDA members will be fully included and meaningfully consulted with regards to developments and changes to Delapre Abbey.

During this period of redevelopment at Delapre Abbey, Council will ensure there is a suitable alternative provision prepared for the tea rooms during the works.

The meeting concluded at 7:43 pm.