

26 November 2003

NEWS RELEASE!

MELTON FIRST ACTION GROUP ANNOUNCES APPOINTMENT OF "DETERMINED" CHAIRMAN



The Melton First action group, formed by Melton residents intent on bidding for the Melton War Memorial Hospital site, today announced the appointment of its new Chairman, local businessman and entrepreneur, John Southerington.

Mr Southerington, a past Borough Councillor and Senior Town Warden, said he was 'delighted' to be asked to head the new group.

"Over the past 80 years Melton has lost one building of historical significance after another. From the Jacobean mansion located where Woolworth's now stands, to the recent demolition of Round Houses, Melton has shown scant regard for its historical heritage."

"Melton First can change all that. I'd ask anyone concerned about the future of our built heritage to step forward, support this initiative, and prevent the wholesale destruction of one of our last remaining historic buildings and outstanding parkland."

Committee member, Sue Gowans, echoes the belief that success lies in the hands of local residents;

"As a town, we must find the confidence and determination to back John Southerington and Melton First; together we can really make a difference. It would be so easy to let this glorious site fall victim to housing developers, especially as the closing date for bids has been set to put off all but the most determined."

As well as investigating the Primary Care Trust's ownership and right to sell the estate, the action group will shortly be launching a petition to encourage the PCT to reschedule the offer deadline of 16 January so that development plans and suitable backers can be found for the Melton First's community bid.

"The petition will allow local residents to express their support for the Melton First initiative. When Col Dalgleish made his original bequest, Melton Cottage Hospital was the pride of the area. Local health care facilities have improved greatly over the past 80 years, with quality health care available for young and old alike and a new, modern hospital planned,."

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"The quality of health care we demand today is no longer able to be delivered in the now deteriorating surroundings of the War Memorial Hospital," Sue Gowans explained. "However, as we begin to consider how the land and buildings may best benefit the community in the long term, through business, education or tourism, for example, we are striving to achieve an option that could once again make the War Memorial Hospital site the pride of the area."

Raising the necessary monies to purchase and develop the site will not be easy, but enthusiastic Melton First member, Allan Jackson, says other towns manage it, so why not Melton?

"With a bit of imagination it's not hard to see the closing of the War Memorial Hospital as an opportunity to contribute to Melton's regeneration. It would be criminal to see it wasted for simple commercial gain by a developer. There are realistic opportunities to obtain funding if we have a viable scheme that will benefit the community; we've just got to have the vision and confidence to get that right. I believe John's leadership and management skills will help us achieve that. But above all we need the support of the people of Melton regardless of background or political affiliations to join with us in truly putting Melton First!"

URGENT! WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW TO SUPPORT THE MELTON FIRST INITIATIVE:

- Write to the PCT asking them to delay the offer deadline until May 2004. Write to the Chairman; Melton, Rutland & Harborough PCT, Pera Innovation Park, Nottingham Road, Melton Mowbray LE13 0PB.
- If you have an hour to spare on Sunday 7 December, come to Melton's Victorian Christmas Fayre and help gather signatures in support of this **urgent** initiative.
- The action group urges anyone who feels strongly about the War Memorial Hospital site remaining in community hands to forward comments, ideas and any donations, to MELTON FIRST, Steans Yard, 12 Burton Road, Melton Mowbray LE13 1DJ. Tel 01664 561700 or email meltonfirst@theeventmakers.com

ENDS

Editor's Notes:

The War Memorial Hospital site was bequeathed by Lt Col Dalgleish to the people of Melton for the provision of health care and passed into the hands of the newly-formed NHS in 1948. The PCT now has a new site on which to build improved health care facilities and no longer needs the Ankle Hill hospital which was advertised for sale three weeks ago.

For further MELTON FIRST information contact:

Mitch de Faria at The Event Makers

Tel 01664 561700 email meltonfirst@theeventmakers.com

John Southerington, Melton First Chairman, is available for interview today, Weds 26.11.03, 11.30am – 5pm; and Thurs 27.11.03, 8am-4pm. Tel 01664 562017 email john@southeringtons.co.uk