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NEWS RELEASE!

MELTON FIRST ANNOUNCES PROPOSAL FOR DESIGN ARTS CENTRE ON WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL SITE



Local action group, Melton First, has announced that it will shortly become a not-for-profit registered charity in order to turn the Melton War Memorial Hospital into a regional centre for arts and design communication, when the site is vacated by the Melton, Rutland & Harborough Primary Care Trust in 2005.

Action group Chairman, John Southerington, said today, "We've put together a proposal for the site that complements other local initiatives and provides a range of facilities that are currently unavailable and would help to develop tourism to the area. Through the Hill House Project we hope to work with educational centres across the region and to become the country home away from London for a prominent design facility."

In a bid to win a place on the purchaser shortlist for WMH, Melton First proposes that the Hill House Project maintains the Grade 2 listed buildings as studios, workshops and conference rooms. Other blocks will be developed into accommodation for students, guests and staff, with a restaurant, buttery, indoor and outdoor event and exhibition space and a shop where local crafts and artist's work may be exhibited and sold.

Workshops will be available for use by local artists; master classes and seminars will be available with acclaimed experts in a wide range of subjects; companies will use the facilities to build design partnerships, while the intrinsic hotel facilities provide resources for art and craft-loving guests to enjoy holidays where they can engage in a variety of courses, from candle-making and photography to slate engraving, from willow working to jewellery design and film-making.

Parkland and trees are essential

The action group believes the site's rural beauty adds to the creative environment, with parkland and trees essential to the design theme. A well-known horticultural broadcaster is to advise how best this may be achieved, and a local expert has expressed interest in helping to maintain the site's wildlife. Almost 300 tree preservation orders will be respected and trees that need to be removed will be replaced elsewhere on the site.

John Southerington explained, "We want all sections of our community to become passionate about Hill House Project, and to visit often. We hope to achieve this by inviting residents to participate from the very beginning. We'll develop the parkland so that there's something for everyone, with paths, mass planting and seats to sit and enjoy the scenery and artworks."

"We're hoping to introduce some unique features too, including a lit sculpture on the hill, 'natural' play facilities for children and young people, and a performance 'bowl' at the lower end of the site. This will let us use Hill House's natural amphitheatre for concerts and musical events of all sorts."

Fighting funds

To get the action group's plans off the ground, a 'fighting fund' has been established by Melton First supporter, Melton Mowbray Building Society, to complete architectural drawings, site plans and other information required by potential funders and by the vendors.

Gordon Wells, MMBS Chief Executive, said, "Our Building Society has been at the heart of Melton's community for almost 130 years. We're part of the town's heritage in just the same way as the War Memorial Hospital, and we're happy to help the Melton First campaign to return that heritage to the people of the community."

"By contributing to the 'fighting fund', donors are agreeing with Melton First that the WMH should be saved for the community", John Southerington said. "This is a means for the entire community to demonstrate its support and to become involved in saving Melton's heritage."

But the 'fighting fund' won't provide the multi £m required to purchase the site or develop Hill House Project. Instead, it is anticipated that significant monies will come from regional, arts, lottery and heritage funds, from educational and skills development grants and commercial sources. Melton First will make a firm financial offer to the PCT as soon as funders have committed to the Hill House Project. The group expects these monies to be in place in May.

Future realities

"The Hill House Project will provide significant employment and educational opportunities, and if the economic results are one tenth as good as that experienced in St Ives following the arrival of the Tate Gallery, or of the Eden Project, then we could be looking at the beginnings of a regeneration process in Melton, with increased visitor numbers leading to shopping and dining improvements that so many have wanted for so long", explained Mr Southerington.

"If Melton First isn't successful then WMH will become a housing development, possibly a gated estate from which the community will be totally excluded. As soon as houses are built the land will be lost and a resource that was meant for all – and has already belonged to the people, will belong to the few who can afford to buy the flats and houses built there."

John Southerington concluded, "Hill House Project is an exciting opportunity for Melton, from which everyone can benefit. And WMH will never be sold again because Melton First will ensure that it belongs to the people of the community in perpetuity."

Help Melton First to save WMH for the community; make a donation to at any Melton Mowbray Building Society branch, or via the banking transfer system, to Melton Mowbray Building Society, Sort Code 40-32-14; Account Number 10572780, Ref Melton First 3315711. Or write to Melton First, Steans Yard, 12 Burton Road, Melton Mowbray LE13 1DJ. Tel 01664 561700.

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EDITOR'S NOTES:

The War Memorial Hospital site was bequeathed by Lt Col Dagleish to the people of Melton for the provision of health care and was dedicated as a War Memorial by the local authorities of the day. The Hospital passed into the hands of the newly-formed NHS in 1948.

In January 04 the PCT turned down a petition by Melton First to extend its 6-week bid deadline. As well as continuing to plan its purchase of the site, Melton First is also investigating the legality of the property's transfers of ownership since its bequest in 1921.

For further MELTON FIRST information contact:

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