

13 January 2004

NEWS RELEASE!

PRIME MINISTER REQUESTED TO INTERVENE IN MELTON WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL SALE



The Melton First Action Group seeks to purchase the Melton War Memorial Hospital and surrounding parkland in order to keep the site in community hands. But their endeavours have not impressed the local Primary Care Trust which has refused the Group time to assemble a credible bid. MFAG has now asked the Prime Minister to intervene.

"All we're asking for is a level playing field of opportunity", said John Southerington, MFAG Chairman. "When the Melton, Rutland & Harborough PCT gave just 6 weeks for bids they undoubtedly knew that organisations like ours couldn't possibly produce the information needed in the time available."

"We've repeatedly asked the PCT to extend the submission period and they've refused. They may believe that we're not serious – and of course it would be much more convenient if the community wasn't interested; then the site could be sold simply to the highest bidder."

MFAG is concerned that if the Group doesn't purchase the site that it will pass into private control and its parkland, trees and wildlife habitat will all vanish, to the detriment of the town. "We've seen too many of Melton's historic buildings disappear for want of local action, and we're determined to do all we can to safeguard the future of the heritage that remains", explained Mr Southerington.

"We asked the PCT to extend the sale period until the end of May 2004, by which time we believe we'll have a multi-£m scheme in place. But they're not interested, despite the fact that they won't be vacating the property until mid 2005. It doesn't matter to them that the community has a moral right to the land that was originally bequeathed to the people of the town back in 1921."

"Last week we wrote to local and county councillors asking for their support, to the Strategic Health Authority and to the Secretary of State for Health. With thousands of local residents behind us, we've now gone to the top", said Mr Southerington. "We'll see whether the Prime Minister believes that the community should have the opportunity to have a say in its own future."

ENDS

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: Melton First's petition will be presented to the PCT Chairman at 1.45pm on Thursday 14 January outside Melton Borough Council, Nottingham Road, Melton Mowbray, in advance of a meeting of the Melton, Rutland & Harborough Primary Care Trust (2-4pm) at Melton Borough Council offices. *Details to be confirmed 14.1.04.*

**For further MELTON FIRST information and to arrange interviews call:
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