

# NEWS RELEASE!

26 April 2004

## RESIDENTS SAY MELTON FIRST 'ONLY WAY TO PREVENT HOUSING ON WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL SITE'



**At a meeting held by Melton First, last Thursday, Melton residents voiced their support for the group's proposed, fully sustainable Hill House Project, to be developed on the War Memorial Hospital site when it is sold by the Melton, Rutland & Harborough Primary Care Trust in early 2005.** Some 90 people attended Melton Working Men's Club to see a highly informative presentation by Melton First Chairman, John Southerington, Founder, Mitch de Faria, and project partner Environ's Ric Ellis.

Introducing the presentation, John Southerington explained that Melton First was determined to keep the Hospital and parkland in community hands. "Whilst the Primary Care Trust may feel they have the right to sell the site, they do not have a moral right," he said. "The Hospital and grounds were given to the town as a War Memorial, and since the PCT no longer requires the facilities, they should make an honourable gesture and donate it back to the townspeople."

Acknowledging that the NHS Estatecode obliged the PCT to make as much money as possible from the sale, Mr Southerington told the audience that Melton First would continue to pursue the question of legal ownership 'until every possible avenue is fully explored'.

"The NHS Estatecode is clear; the onus is on the PCT to attract Open Market Value for the site. And housing will always have a greater financial value than social amenities, no matter that the amenities Melton First has planned through Hill House Project will bring creative, cultural and ecological tourism to the area."

"There is a clause in the Estatecode which states, 'Exceptionally it will be reasonable to consider wider issues and accept a price lower than OMV for the public benefit', but in reality every expert and advisor that Melton First has spoken to, has told us that the gap between our bid and that for housing is simply too wide."

Mitch de Faria agreed, "In selling off this most attractive of Melton's amenities, Melton will lose both the amenity and the landscape forever - and the money the sale generates. The small 'delegated amount' that can be retained by the PCT when the remainder goes into the national NHS Estates pot, is unlikely to find its way back to Melton."

Mitch believed the town would lose more than a valued local resource. "We were pleased to see Melton Borough Council's draft development brief state that the Grade II property should be maintained and new build was to be limited to the existing footprint. But we have to be realistic. The NHS has let the Hospital deteriorate and it's going to cost £millions to return it to a reasonable state of repair."

"The NHS Estatecode spells out what's likely to happen; it'll be seen as unrealistic to restore the historic building without subsidy from 'enabling development'. Melton First has no doubt that within two years this 'enabling development' will cause MBC to grant planning permission for housing across the site, supposedly to fund the original restoration. In fact, because of the huge amount of restoration required, Melton First wouldn't be surprised if some or all of the property, and Melton's heritage, were to be demolished entirely."

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Author and historian Jenny Allsop, agreed. "When I give talks on the history of the town there are always questions about why certain of Melton's heritage buildings have been destroyed. In this case we know what's going to happen and thanks to Melton First we can do something about it. When the property's gone and those wonderful grounds are covered in new homes, there will be no point moaning about what's lost to the town forever."

Local resident John Herlihy also felt strongly; "Hill House Project could make a significant contribution to the regeneration of Melton Mowbray and the future prosperity of the Borough. It's outrageous that a gift given to the community should be stolen by the state to the detriment of our long-term prosperity."

Environ's Ric Ellis hoped that a solution could be found. He explained that the environmental charity thought Melton First's Hill House Project an 'excellent scheme' and one that they intended to support 'unreservedly'.

"We're very excited that Melton First proposes to renovate and redevelop using best practice. It's a hugely exciting venture and one that will have enormous benefits for the community, and will undoubtedly become a major eco-tourism attraction in the region."

"The Hill House Project achieves the triple bottom line of social, economic and environmental benefits. Melton First's scheme not only potentially supplies cheaper power to homes in the area, it also provides employment, education and training over the long-term. No housing development can do that. And by investing in existing and new trees, which no residential insurer would consider an acceptable risk, also assists in the prevention of possible future flooding. We believe that Hill House has the potential to be a highly successful fully sustainable project."

Mitch de Faria explained that despite all the time and money invested in researching the Hill House scheme, there was limited likelihood of Melton First being successful with a dozen housing bids vying for preferred bidder status; "Whilst there's a possibility that we will be successful, we'll keep up the fight", she said. "That's what we do when we believe in something; we fight for what we believe to be right."

### **ENDS**

#### **Editor's Notes:**

#### **NHS Estatecode'; Chapter 8, Para 9.2**

DNH guidance emphasises that the maximisation of receipts should not be the overriding aim in cases involving the disposal of historic buildings: disposal strategies must be consistent with Government policies for the protection of historic buildings and areas, and these policies are likely to limit opportunities for the realisation of development value. The aim should be to obtain the best return for the taxpayer having regard to the development plan, the policies set out in (PPG 15), the building's current state of repair, and likely future costs of maintenance and repair, together with the recognition that the most appropriate long-term use for an historic building may not be the use which generates the optimum financial return.

#### **NHS Estatecode Para 8.47**

Exceptionally it will be reasonable to consider wider issues and accept a price lower than OMV for the public benefit. The benefits must be clearly identified.

#### **Enabling development**

It can be unrealistic to restore a building to former glory without subsidy from enabling development. In such a situation it is reasonable to request planning permission in order to build elsewhere on site, in order to fund the original, historic redevelopment.

Donations to Melton First's Fighting Fund can be made 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.

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ON WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL SITE 3/3**

Messages of support are essential to ensure a successful outcome. If you feel strongly that the Melton War Memorial Hospital should be kept in community hands, please send a brief support message by email to [meltonfirst@theeventmakers.co.uk](mailto:meltonfirst@theeventmakers.co.uk) or by post to Melton First, Steans Yard, 12 Burton Road, Melton Mowbray LE13 1DJ.

Companies or individuals able to assist Melton First by supplying manpower, copying, franking or other resources, are asked to call Tel 01664 561700.

**Available for comment:**

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