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# NEWS RELEASE!

## MELTON FIRST PUTS RECORD STRAIGHT IN ADVANCE OF WMH DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL



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The Melton First Action Group is shortly to announce its proposals for the Melton & District War Memorial Hospital site. Melton First Chairman, John Southerington, said today that the Group has been developing its plans so that all the required information can be pulled together for submission in May.

**"Back in September the Melton, Rutland & Harborough Primary Care Trust told the press that it welcomed and looked forward to working with the community on a proposal," Mr Southerington explained. "But in refusing to delay the January deadline for bids – and for no good reason, the PCT has shown that it has no regard for the site's history or the feelings and wishes of the community. Its primary goal is evidently to make as much money out of the site as possible."**

Mr Southerington went on, "Since Melton First announced its intention to develop the site, the PCT has made a number of statements which are contradictory at best. Its time the record was put straight with a few facts;

- Building Melton's new hospital is NOT dependent on monies raised from the sale of the War Memorial Hospital – entirely different pots of money are involved.
- Only a proportion of monies raised from the sale of WMH will be kept by the PCT. Since Melton makes up only one third of the Trust it's unlikely that much of that money will find its way back. So in selling WMH only the PCT will benefit, not the town that has supported WMH over so many years.
- The sale was announced in the Melton Times of 6 November 2003 with a closing date for bids of 12 noon on 16 January 2004. At no time did the PCT extend the sale period as has been maintained.
- The PCT claims that it doesn't want the cost of securing or maintaining the WMH site once it vacates the property, and has used this as one reason for refusing a bid extension. A community bid, secured by grant funding, is every bit as secure – perhaps more so, than the fickle negotiations of housing developers, which additionally have the well-founded reputation of putting pressure on Borough planning departments in order to obtain best value for their end users – the eventual flat and house buyers of their developments.

- Securing the property will not cost £25,000 per month; research has shown monthly security estimates of 10-12% of this figure. Since Melton First proposes that building work should begin immediately the PCT vacates the premises, these costs would be absorbed within the project development.
- Maintaining the WMH property may concern the PCT, yet the PCT has failed in its responsibility to upkeep the listed property over many years. This can be seen by anyone visiting the Hospital and is recognised by the Borough Council in its draft Development Brief for the site. Community ownership will ensure that the site is well cared for, and will continue to be well used by all sectors of our community.
- County Councillors who are paid Non Executive Directors of Primary Care Trusts are in no position to criticise 'non-elected groups'. Rather they should decide which hat they are wearing and support either their employer or their constituents. In this case they are clearly unable to support both."

### **Invitation to submit further information**

Following Melton First's expression of interest in purchasing the site, made on 16 January, the Group has now received an invitation to submit more information on their proposed bid to Bigwood Chartered Surveyors on behalf of the Primary Care Trust. The bid will need to be well considered – a proposal fit to compete with quality developments from companies specialising in converting historic building into distinctive, expensive homes.

But Mr Southerington is clear, "The first to know about the Action Group's plans will be the community. The community is behind our fight to keep the property and parkland in public use – almost 3,000 local people signed our petition, tremendous support in such a rural area. It's the local people who respect the heritage of the site and who have a vested interest in it and in the future of Melton."

"We anticipate that our first, draft plan for the future of the site will be ready to be presented to the public within the next fortnight. In the meantime Melton First is setting up a scheme to enable members of the community to support our initiative by becoming a part of the Melton First project. More information will be made available next week."

### **ENDS**

#### **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.

As well as planning to purchase the site, Melton First continues to investigate the legality of the property's transfers of ownership since its bequest in 1921.

#### **For further MELTON FIRST information contact:**

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