

APPENDIX TO COUNCIL MINUTES: 27TH JANUARY 2005

MINUTE 100: QUESTIONS WITHOUT DISCUSSION

(1) Question 1 (Councillor Stephen Hewerdine)

Can you please tell me are there any plans or money in the future to safeguard the war memorial plaque in Wyndham Park in Grantham Museum on public display which is being desecrated all the time by vandals as this is an important chapter of history which cannot be forgotten.

Response: Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright

Thank you for the question. There are no plans to remove the plaque from its present site. I don't know if you have noticed, Councillor Hewerdine, but you should have seen a difference, as our staff are cleaning and repairing the memorial on a voluntary basis and this has already been reported in the press.

(2) Question 2 (Councillor Mrs Joyce Gaffigan)

[Mrs Gaffigan prefaced her question by stating that another meeting of the Stamford Local Area Assembly had taken place following the submission of her question. The question therefore referred to the previous meeting of the assembly.]

Twenty five members of the public were present at the Local Area Assembly meeting in Stamford.

In view of the fact that most of the public's concerns were either non-priority i.e. tourism, or were subsequently dismissed by the Cabinet, i.e. CAB funding, how does Councillor Neal see the public perception of the L.A.A. meetings?

Response: Councillor Mrs Linda Neal

Obviously, as this was question that was penned to the previous Council meeting, I will provide the same response that I would have done on that particular occasion so in one sense my response will be out of date also. Thank you Councillor Gaffigan for giving me the opportunity to remind the Council that the next meeting of the Stamford L.A.A. is on Thursday 20th January and obviously, the 20th January, Mr Chairman, has now gone. Unlike Councillor Gaffigan, I am not a member of the Stamford L.A.A. although like her, I did vote at the Council meeting in May for the authority's priorities. Explaining the need for priorities, including the current ones and potential future ones, is the responsibility of all members of L.A.A.s. To do this, we must get the facts right and not distort them to our own ends. As Councillor Gaffigan knows, the funding of the CAB was not dismissed by Cabinet; it was considered and resolved by full Council. It is the repeated assertion of inaccuracies like this that causes the greatest public confusion and disenchantment with those who hold public office.

Supplementary Question: Councillor Mrs Joyce Gaffigan

I wasn't questioning what was done here in Council. I am questioning how the public see us. I am not questioning how we see each other or indeed my own perception of what goes on here. It is the public perception of these people in Stamford that I am worried about. I am not criticising the Local Area Assemblies at all. I am just asking: how do you feel the public feels about us? I include myself in that.

Response: Councillor Mrs Linda Neal

I would just reiterate that it is all of the Councillors' responsibilities to promote the policies of the Council accurately and all L.A.A. members have a responsibility in that. I would urge every one of us, when we go to our respective L.A.A. meetings, to take that on board and try and promote the priorities of the Council.

(3) Question 3 (Councillor Stephen O'Hare)

Put in Councillor O'Hare's absence by the Chairman.

Given the fact that the Chief Executive has now confirmed that this Council has not received and does not have a copy of the CAB internal audit report will Councillor Bryant now take this public opportunity to apologise for his incorrect public statement that this report was available to any Councillor who asked for it?

Response: Councillor Teri Bryant

The short answer is: no. But, out of courtesy to the rest of the Council, the public, the press who have no doubt waited with absolute bated breath for the answer to this burning question since it was first posed eight weeks ago, I will reply. Having used my common sense, life experiences and having read all the available papers, I was aware that Peter Cowley, the past chairman of the CAB, had stated that he was happy to discuss the CAB audit report with any Councillor. Therefore, the information in that report was clearly available to any Councillor who asked for it. I hesitate, in his absence, to mention that Councillor O'Hare patently did not ask for this, despite being on a Scrutiny Panel tasked with looking into the subject of CAB funding. I believe that the DSP actually recommended refusal and, funnily enough, I did not see Councillor O'Hare's descent with the decision recorded.

(4) Question 4 (Councillor Stephen O'Hare)

Put in Councillor O'Hare's absence by the Chairman.

Does the Leader of the Council agree that decisions of this Council should be based on

- i) written reports from officers
- ii) documents held by this Council
- iii) material which is in the public domain

and nothing else?

Response: Councillor Mrs Linda Neal

No, I don't, Mr Chairman. Quangos, Government Agencies and even the Liberal Democratic party may make decisions only on these criteria but the Council is different, it is democratic. As such, the most important element in reaching its decisions is the very one that is missing from his list. This is the views of the local people, whether expressed directly or through their Councillors as their local elected representatives. I will not delay the meeting by speculating why Councillor O'Hare forgot to include the views of local people and their representatives in his checklist, I will simply reiterate that these views are the best guarantee of effective public decision making.

(5) Question 5 (Councillor John Hurst)

Will Councillor Neal, in the interests of restoring pre-existing friendly relations (which I greatly wish to see) and the dignity of the Council, withdraw the word "lie" which she audibly uttered, when I was speaking, at the last full Council?

Response: Councillor Mrs Linda Neal

Until I saw this question, I didn't even know that pre-existing friendly relations had disappeared. Had Councillor Hurst come and spoken to me privately, I am sure this could have been resolved before now. Just to clarify why I wasn't aware that pre-existing friendly relations had disappeared, there was an occasion after the Boxing Day hunt meeting when I was walking back to my vehicle and I actually popped into a shop. I didn't see Councillor Hurst, he actually followed me into the shop, wished me a Happy New Year, shook my hand, kissed both cheeks and hoped that things would be absolutely fine. So, obviously, as you can understand from that, it's very difficult to realise that these friendly relations had actually disappeared. Perhaps it is as we walk through the Council Chamber door that we become different people and we forget what happens outside. In short, I will not apologise to Councillor Hurst and the reason I will not apologise is that, I sincerely believe what I said was the truth. I do not believe that anybody should be expected to apologise for speaking the truth. If I had a single grain of doubt in my mind that what Councillor Kirkman was also saying, and what I was saying at that meeting, was not true then I would unreservedly apologise. Perhaps it would just be pertinent to mention that there has been a Counsel's opinion on this and although I would not like to use the word "lie" freely, because I do believe that that isn't the way we would like to conduct ourselves, but there is a Counsel's opinion that actually supports what I said; it was not out of order and it should therefore not be contentious because I sincerely believed and continue to sincerely believe that what I said was the fact.

Supplementary Question: Councillor John Hurst

The issue was not friendly relations, fundamentally, the issue was not law. In the light of the fact that the Council has here my word of honour that the letter I sent out on 14th December, is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, will Councillor Neal reconsider what she has just said and take into account before she answers,

what the consequences are likely to be for the dignity of the Council if she does not withdraw the word “lie”, which was clearly on the recording?

Response: Councillor Mrs Linda Neal

The correspondence that Councillor Hurst put out, I do believe was a little constructive with the truth. I wouldn't go as far as to say that it was untrue, but the way that it was written implied that my referral to the word “lie” was not about what I actually referred to it as being about. May I remind members that Councillor Hurst said that the words “overtly political” were not used by him at a group leaders' meeting. That is what my reference was to. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind at all that what I said was correct. The letter that Councillor Hurst put out, because of the way it is written, implies, through reading it, that the reference to the “lie” was about the breakdown of the agreement and that was not the case. I again refuse to actually apologise to Councillor Hurst, because Councillor Hurst, on this occasion, I am afraid, is wrong, most definitely wrong. One thing that I have tried to do whilst being Leader of this Council, is to be honest, open and approachable and I am not going to change being honest now by apologising to something that I know is not true.

(6) Question 6 (Councillor Mrs Fereshteh Hurst)

Will Councillor Neal explain why recommendations from the Environment DSP are neither adopted by the Cabinet nor rejected with an explanation to the Panel?

Response: Councillor Mrs Linda Neal

I wasn't actually aware that this was happening. Perhaps the question might more have appropriately been put to Councillor Auger as the Environment Portfolio Holder. I will speak to Councillor Mrs Hurst privately to try and establish what is at the root of the question because clearly I don't know and we'll see if we can come to some satisfactory conclusion on it.

Supplementary Question: Councillor Mrs Feresteh Hurst

Since I became a Councillor last year, we keep recommending and I am the only Labour member on that Committee. We vote for it, we explain, we research, we recommend something and we send it to Cabinet and nothing happens; we never hear again, anything. We are spending time, sitting three or four hours in that Committee and also wasting staff time, who are writing down and nothing happens. We are just wasting the Council money because there are staff coming, writing down and nothing happens. Could you please explain why you are wasting Council money?

Response: Councillor Mrs Linda Neal

If Councillor Mrs Hurst is talking about the whole of the time that the Environment Panel has existed, I do not believe that the statement that she is making is entirely true because I do believe that on various occasions, the Panel's recommendations will surely have been adopted by the Portfolio Holder. However, I can only repeat that

if she wants to give me specific examples where she is concerned, then I am perfectly happy to look at those. I can only say that perhaps the reading of Cabinet minutes and Portfolio Holder decisions will give the information to Councillor Mrs Hurst that she is now seeking.