

ANNEX TO REPORT ON CONSULTATION EXERCISE ON THE POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF SANDGATE WOODS AND MARTELLO TOWERS 6 AND 7

RESPONSE TO OPPOSITION LETTERS

1. I believe it has a Section 106 placed on it, surely this should ring loud alarm bells with any one with property knowledge on SPC. That is why the developer is unloading it, now that planning permission has failed, onto ANYONE so he can get rid of it. He can see the disaster coming, like a run away train. What are the Section 106 restrictions imposed for the owner, please make this document public & tell us all the facts. As these may become ours - the residents.

RESPONSE: I have read the s106 agreement in full. It relates to a planning permission which the Parish Council do NOT intend to enforce – it is for the enabling development of five houses and the conversion of the two Martello towers for domestic use. The agreement runs to some 92 pages and includes provision for the creation on an Escrow account in order to set aside funds from the profit of the Military Road housebuilding and the detailed list of works required to make the Martello towers habitable as homes. Whilst the second part gives an insight as to Historic England's general expectations it has a higher specification than would be needed for the community uses the Parish Council has in mind.

2. The developer was only interested in buying the towers and to develop the site into housing which would eventually handsomely repay him his investment - hopefully. He must be cock a hoop that he has found a willing novice buyer – he may soon be laughing all the way to the bank!

RESPONSE: we are not novice buyers. I am a former Assistant Chief Executive with a London Borough and the Parish Councillors come with a mixed range of expertise. I can't comment on the vendor's position.

3. SPC are buying it with no thought whatsoever ever of recouping any of the finance on that huge scale. FOOLISH MOVE. Financial return is zero - on going maintenance costs forever can be horrendous, think of a number, any number above £5,000,000.00 or more!

RESPONSE: This is not a business venture. The Parish Council only want to preserve and conserve the woodland and Martello towers. This reflects the public concern expressed by the Sandgate public at the time of the planning application which led to the Parish Council opposing the application.

4. Currently on the market for £425,000 - that is what they call an asking price, BUT nobody wants it, so it is overpriced – simply as that. It is pretty bl...y obvious. It is worthless to the residents. What due diligence has been carried out on this purchase?

RESPONSE: The Parish Council's view on this is set out in the leaflet. Essentially it is a judgment as to whether the site was worth TO THE COUNCIL AND THE COMMUNITY. It is a take it or leave it situation.

5. Being offered for £375,000 or knock down to you governor, special deal now £355,000 to you really, so why should we buy it. Leave it a few more years and developer will be giving it away for FREE. I am staggered that you have already agreed to purchase subject to contract, on what authority?

RESPONSE: The Parish Councillors are democratic representatives for the community. Your judgment is that the owner might give the land away for free. There is no evidence to support this. The greater likelihood in the opinions of me and the Parish Councillors is that the owner will seek, and receive, an even more draconian planning permission for the enabling development of more houses on Military Road to finance the saving of the Martello towers.

If some councillors think that it is such a good idea, why don't you form your own company and get your own finances together and make a go of it yourselves.

RESPONSE: This model was considered by a community group a few years ago but failed to achieve sufficient uptake. The current model spreads the debt thinly over a very wide base and therefore is more affordable. If the Sandgate population agree with you, the response to the consultation will be negative and the proposal will not proceed.

6. You say that it could be used for Hosting exhibitions of the towers, Local groups to use towers & moats that are not big enough - has SPC been inside these towers ?, scout camps, men in sheds. Lovely idea but not very practical and the costs would be horrendous.

RESPONSE: Access to one of the moats is probably achievable at relatively low cost. So outward bound ideas are achievable. The moats are very large and could certainly provide a safe camping environment for at least 30 people each. In terms of exhibitions within the tower(s) that is very much a long term aim. I have personally been inside Martello tower 6. There will be considerable works before access to that tower is feasible (I believe the interior of tower 7 is similar). But if the grant aid is forthcoming then we hope to gain access to the interior of at least one tower within five years.

7. SPC are not going to sell off the towers etc after refurbishing so why are you buying it. Therefore it has no resale value, no recovery of costs outlaid - pie in the sky moment. Site is an odd shape, horrible topography & terrible access the list goes on & on.

RESPONSE: correct. The Parish Council wish to preserve and conserve the woodland and Martello towers. There is no intention to sell and no wish to recover costs. It is a long term investment in the community for the community's benefit.

8. Alarm bells should also be ringing in all of the SPC councillors ears as I read that the towers are Scheduled Ancient Monuments & Grade 2 listed buildings, a myriad of regulations & conditions, restrictions and compliance is time consuming & is very expensive. Just think about that in greater depth, anyone involved with this scenario as I have been, it spells financial disaster. I was on one refurbishment project where the conservationist spent 3 months deciding on the type of mortar to be used for repointing brick & stonework walls etc contractor was collecting different types (sources) of sand, cement and lime and doing sample mixes & testing panels to get the right colour / texture that was over 900 years old, costing the owners thousands of pounds in delays, scaffold & overheads to the main contractor and ultimately passed onto the client. The conservationists were not really bothered about at all about the costs. That was only one small part of the major cost disasters that raised its ugly head on that particular project. I could go on and on about many other similar projects with cost & time over runs. Even EH & Nat Trust run out of time & money, with their almost bottomless funding pit and on-board / in-house experienced professionals.

RESPONSE: We are very well aware of the potential lack of speed and costs in the project. The woodland is our priority. The restrictions on our plans for this are minimal. We know the Martello towers will take time and money and we will make progress at the speed that money is available. If money is not available the towers will stay in much the same condition as they are (albeit with some basic improvements such as the removal of plants from the brickwork which are causing damage).

9. So what about the expensive cost of connections & services for the following: - mains water, electricity, main drainage foul & rainwater, gas main etc up & into the site.

RESPONSE: These will be assessed and paid for at the appropriate time and incorporated into the relevant specifications and contracts.

10. What about perimeter security fencing, lighting & alarms, normal & disabled access, relevant

adequate off road car parking, pram / bike parking, wardens office building, toilets, welfare & offices & storage building for wardens & ground staffs and sundry equipment for maintaining the site.

RESPONSE: adequate fencing is in place at present (although it may be necessary to maintain this from time to time); lighting will be provided as part on contracts when that stage is reached as will alarms. Pedestrian access will be provided although because of the nature of the topography it will not be feasible to provide disabled access. There will be NO car parking as access by cars will be prohibited and there will NOT be a warden or warden's office.

11. Access suitable for police, ambulance & fire engines for emergency services up and into the two towers area. SPC could spend £500,000 on this part alone!

RESPONSE: there will be no specific access for emergency services.

12. Secure ticket office / booking office for events etc.

RESPONSE: there will be no ticket office.

13. Paying for SDC rates & insurance cover for old ancient & new buildings, woodland property & third party liability together with costs of other services. Employment costs of staff to run it.

RESPONSE: no rates are payable at present. Depending on the extent of any future use it is possible that National Non-Domestic Rate could be applied. An assessment of that would be incorporated into any future business plan – ie if the rates were prohibitive then the entrepreneurial options would not be implemented and the Martello towers would be maintained as visual monuments only.

14. Paying out for fees on services of Architects, Engineers Surveyors, Geotechnical ground engineers, CDM regulations for H&S, Specialist conservation Architects, Archaeological dig costs and the time delays very often happens. Have you considered if any UXB & old munitions are buried on the site that needs a very specialised professional team to investigate & remove – I doubt it. Do you know if there are any contaminated areas of land that need cleansing, before work begins?

RESPONSE: these matters will be pursued as initiatives develop.

15. What if they find an unknown (in that area) rare bat or toad or flower or other finds that needs to be protected and kills the whole project stone dead or costs even more money.

RESPONSE: The Parish Council would wish to retain and improve the biodiversity of the location.

16. I do not think that SPC has investigated deeply enough into the whole enormous complex costs involved - it may be a nice philanthropic idea to do this - but it is not your hard earned money to play with, but ours.

RESPONSE: that is exactly why we are consulting. We genuinely want to know what Sandgate Residents want.

17. You could think about spending our existing money more wisely - and getting more value for the community usefulness. Perhaps painting more white lines along the sea promenade to protect people from falling off it or bumping into railings, or more mixed waste rubbish bins on the sea front to ease the mess left every weekend, by visitors & local seagulls.

RESPONSE: the Parish Council are always investigating environmental improvements of the type you list. They could not, of course, be funded from a 50 year loan.

18. If you cannot afford to do it - the normal maxim is don't do it.
Therefore do not borrow money.
Therefore do not get into debt.
Live within your means, very simple, very obvious.

RESPONSE: again, this is why we are consulting. We believe that people can afford between 13p and 38p per week but if they cannot, or believe the investment to be unwise, then the Parish Council will not pursue it.

19. The next greatest maxim is BUYER BEWARE, BUYER BEWARE & again BUYER BEWARE. IT IS A HERD OF WHITE ELEPHANTS PROJECT waiting to happen.

RESPONSE: we have been very careful in coming to this position. We are aware of the problems but on balance believe that the project is worth pursuing on behalf of the people of Sandgate. It is a positive way of demonstrating a commitment to retaining and improving this important site.

20. Existing councillors who are keen on this project, and there must be a fair few, to get the project this far, may not be around after a few elections, so the momentum and enthusiasm will die with their departure, but we the unelected will have to finance their foolish ways for evermore.

RESPONSE: we will consult with our lawyers and the PWLB as to what measures we can put in place on restrictions for future representatives.

21. **SPC** have a perfectly good recreation ground nearby with no toilets & changing rooms etc facilities which they could greatly improve. SO if it is a such an important thing to buying two towers site, why are SPC not doing this on a site they already own at a fraction of the cost? It really beggars belief. You have totally overlooked this asset you already have.

RESPONSE: we have far from neglected this site. We have improved the facilities and have plans to do the following:

- Provide toilets
- Provide a small car park
- Replace lost play equipment

There are revenue consequences to all of these which the Parish Council have been working through, but in the meantime have provided a high standard of grounds maintenance. In addition the Parish Council provide services elsewhere including the library, free toilets, the boat house café and extensive flower planting. Generally this level of service appears to be highly enjoyed by local residents

22. The only good work SPC have done is to refuse planning permission on the site.

RESPONSE: no comment

23. Who professionally has been advising you & how much has that cost.

RESPONSE: we have not incurred any costs. We have extensive experience and knowledge between us.

24. Is the referendum being independently overseen from beginning to end, by an outside body?

RESPONSE: we welcome scrutiny of all stages of the referendum. It is being managed by ourselves but anyone is welcome to sit and watch the voting and the count which will be undertaken at the close of the poll at 9pm.

25. This list could be longer, so perhaps I should stop it there.

RESPONSE: no comment

26. I expect you have guessed that I will not be voting for this project.

RESPONSE: noted.

You stated that the land etc is valued at about £78,000 within the proposed purchase price, so the remaining £277,00 is the developers costs he has incurred – ie his losses. Why should we be paying for his enormous loss! It just goes to highlight the disasters ahead of you.

RESPONSE: as I understand it the site was bought in two transactions to 2004-5 for £28,000 and £31,800, ie a total of £59,800. That was for the site without any planning permission. The current valuation includes the enabling planning permission. As indicated in the leaflet getting a reliable and valid current valuation is impossible. The Parish Council believes that it is worth £355,000 to the community because of the community benefits. If the residents support this view then the purchase will go ahead. If they do not then it will not. At the meeting I was simply explaining why the current owner was not prepared to sell for less than £355,000.

Your leaflet also states that an extra £800,000 is needed to bring towers back into full use – who is going to pay for this without income, borrowed again. This was not highlighted last night.

RESPONSE: I did answer that on the night and have again in this response. Those works will be financed by future grants.

I believe David Cowell said that the developer only paid about £49,000 plus some more for buildings, from the MOD, which could equate to the £78,000 that you mentioned. Which means that the site is greatly over valued.

RESPONSE: David Cowell gave the £59,000 figure. I didn't give any figure at all. That was 14 years ago and in very different circumstances.

You also mentioned that you had approached Roger De Haan foundation for some finance support but his staff suggested he would not get involved – as I believe he has past bad experience of Martello towers – which says a lot.

RESPONSE: I also said that I believed that the De Haan Foundation were very sympathetic to Sandgate and that I was confident that he could be persuaded to invest in the overall project.

Last night you also told us that SPC had considered 4 options and had chosen the one you wanted. Now asking us to back your choice. Surely that is what a referendum is for us to choose which option we would like to see proceed forward.

RESPONSE: I explained, and Councillor Tim Prater reinforced the point, that the options to develop were not supported in any shape or form by the Parish Council. Therefore the option to do nothing is represented by a "NO" vote and the option to pursue the Parish Council proposal is represented by a "YES" vote.

Transparency from SPC is totally lacking on this project, you should rethink this project, get a detailed public survey carried out. Provide us with much more detailed costing & information. It is a nice idea to protect the site BUT NOT at that vast amount of money.

RESPONSE: We are being totally transparent on this matter. Nothing is being withheld.

The Section 106, which I have since found on the SDC web site, is very detailed & onerous, have you & all your councillors read it from cover to cover, word for word and fully understood it in every way? I very much doubt it. Do you all fully realise what you are getting involved with.

RESPONSE: I have answered this question above. It does not apply to our proposal as we are not intending to develop the site, but to protect it.

SPC is a small Parish council, it is NOT a well established, well organised or well funded developer with full time staff experienced in this type of project. Most housing developers would be giving this project a wide berth, not touching it with a barge pole.

RESPONSE: we are not a developer.

SPC has limited resources to devote to this as you have the parish to run. You do not have the expertise to carry this through, that is obvious to me & many others. You will need to employ expensive consultants for almost all your involvement. Which is very expensive. As G Forge Ltd have found out, to their cost.

RESPONSE: unfortunately it is very expensive. I wish it wasn't. We will pursue steps as we raise the money from grants.

Your term of time in office at SPC is very short & limited in time you can spare, with your home, work & interests. You will not be able to devote enough time to keep project going smoothly & financially sound. Once you are no longer in office the projects continuity falls apart – disaster starts or continues.

RESPONSE: We will try to put measures in place to ensure the project is protected, as indicated above.

The conservationists will run rings around SPC because they are dealing with these projects all the time, swamping you with paperwork, detailed specifications to comply with, samples to see & do, reports to do, replies required to excess queries. I have seen it many times before.

RESPONSE: That is possible. However we are prepared to put the time and effort into the project if the residents support it. It will progress at the pace dictated by a number of issues.

Once again BUYER BEWARE!

RESPONSE: Noted.

Yours,