

Civic Hall Debate for Surrey Advertiser. 12th May 2006 Albert Jack

I am writing in response to last weeks letters from Council Chief Executive David Williams and the councillors he seems to have encouraged to support him with back up letters. Firstly, to Cllr Jennifer Powell who writes 'Time and time again the situation with reference to the Civic Hall has been explained....'

Well I sat on the Music Forum Panel a few weeks ago and saw for myself that nothing has been explained, at least not adequately, and nor are there any coherent ideas for progress. This issue has not been thought through, or explained, properly and worse than that, some of what I heard I now know is simply untrue. I find it incredible you can loftily reveal tourism brings £255million to this town and not expect us to then wonder how much more it would be if the Civic Hall was open. Because then we could work out how much you are costing all of us by keeping it closed.

CLLR Nigel Manning, who sums up by complaining to the Surrey Advertiser that they failed to mention the 'losses in excess of £400,000 per year while running the Civic Hall', himself fails to reveal how or why such a loss was apparent and who was responsible for running the Civic Hall so badly when everybody else in Guildford seems to be making a profit.

And as for the Chief Executive, who once again points his finger directly at a member of our public as responsible for all his problems I have a message. On behalf of the people of Guildford I would like you and your executive to start working for this town properly and stop this playground politic of finger pointing. I have seen plenty of it first hand and I would like it to stop and for all of you to set about your work.

If you need help why don't we set up a civic panel of respected and professional businessmen to assist? I am sure we could find some professional local businessmen who know what they are doing, to advise the council who clearly don't, and the sooner the better. Stop talking of blame and begin the process for opening the doors on our Civic Hall again. And do so transparently this time so we can all see what's going on.

Civic Hall Debate for Surrey Advertiser. 6th July 2006 Albert Jack

Since becoming involved in the great Civic Hall debate I have watched, listened and spoken publicly, learning one important thing in the process. That being; I don't believe anything this Guildford Council Executive have to say on this or any other matter. Because I have seen for myself that much of what they have told us in the past has turned out to be untrue.

So, instead of confusing myself with their empty rhetoric, I have turned my attention to the future and wondered who will run the Civic Hall properly when we do finally get it back? Step forward Tony Scott and his Guilfest team. He is the only man with the experience, ability and desire to bring diverse and international acts to our town. Let's hope we can persuade him to do it for us on a regular basis.

Civic Hall Debate for Surrey Advertiser. 17th July 2006 Albert Jack

The only interesting aspect to this latest statement from our Council Executive is that a £20 million refurbishment option has replaced the previous one of £8.8 million, in turn replacing the original estimate of a mere £80,000 raising the first obvious question; How does that happen? Secondly, a complete rebuild option will also cost £20million, raising the next obvious question; why would we consider overhauling when we can have a brand new facility at the same cost?

And yet a refurb must still be a possibility otherwise the Millmead Mafia would have sent their bulldozers in by now. So, yet again, our leaders have told us nothing at all. And what's more, none of these new suggestions were discussed at Peter Gordon's Music Forum in April, indicating they have been thrown together in the weeks since. Finally, if they haven't even gone out to tender yet then how do they know it will cost £20 million?

Because I am prepared to predict that figure will be very different in the end. Whilst some people's hopes of a solution may very well be high, mine remain down at the same level as my confidence in the people presently running this town.