

At the beginning of last year I was approached by a local businessman who wanted to rent Reynard's Garage to run an indoor market. "I'll even re-roof it," he said. I contacted Council Officers about this, but was told it wouldn't be a go-er due to the proximity to Newgate Market, and anyway... plans were fairly well-advanced for an air museum on the site.

I was heartened by this as I do agree with ... **Council Leader James Alexander, in his report to Full Council on 10 October 2013**, and I quote...

"Following progress on plans for Castle Piccadilly the council is putting the Reynard Garage site on the market. This is a key site in reinvigorating Piccadilly as one of the key access points to the city centre. For too long it has not been befitting of its position in the city so I'm pleased that things are beginning to move on this front."

My colleague Councillor D'Agorne then asked James at Full Council if he was aware of the proposal for an Air Museum on the Piccadilly site, but he claimed that he was not.

I was a little disturbed at this, but thought that if Northminster could buy the site then the Airspeed Factory Museum could finally become a reality.

What has followed has been very murky and it has been difficult to obtain any information about what the process for the tender has been.

The Leader's comment in The Press that "this site would most likely become a four star hotel" worried me greatly, as it seemed that the process was being undermined.

It also puzzled me as the hotel industry has been saying for over a year that there is over-capacity in the market and with outstanding hotel permissions on the Barbican site, St Leonard's Place, and Walmgate, to name a few, I can understand that might be the case.

I wrote to the Director on 8 December to ask what the process was, what were the criteria for analysing the bids, and what were the weightings. I had no reply. I wrote again on 18 December and had a reply on Xmas Eve which answered none of my questions. Only today has he told me that the criteria and weightings will be published.

This is not satisfactory. If the weightings for the provision of housing, for preserving the city's heritage, for the creation of a new visitor attraction are not before you today, then how can you make an informed decision? Were these even considered, or was it just which bidder had the deepest pockets?

Without the criteria and seeing how they were applied to the bids then people will just think the worst as another piece of York's heritage is bulldozed. Heritage assets have a value in economic and educational terms as well as their intrinsic value, and I don't know if this has even been considered.

Do you even know what you would be destroying? The importance of the Airspeed Factory in employment after The Great War, the involvement of Nevil Shute as an engineer, before he became a famous novelist, and the investment of Amy Johnson in the factory – a famous aviator by that time. Do you want to write these people out of York's history by destroying the most tangible evidence of their involvement in the York economy?

For the sake of transparency, the public need to see the criteria used in the assessment process and know how these were conveyed to the applicants.

I must inform you that Alison Sinclair is approaching English Heritage to have the building listed for its historical associations.

Councillor Dave Taylor
Former Heritage Champion for the city of York