

York Green Party Chair, Denise Craghill, speaking at City of York Council Cabinet meeting, 7 Jan 2014

I'm speaking today on behalf of York Green Party to ask you to re-start the decision making process for the disposal of Reynard's Garage on Piccadilly (item 12). This is an issue which many local residents are clearly concerned about. It also raises broader questions about decision-making in the Council on the disposal of publicly owned assets and the complete lack of transparency or consideration for wider public benefit and public opinion which appears to have been shown in the decision-making process.

Along with other people we have put in various requests for information on the criteria and scoring system used to produce the current short-list of four out of the original 9 bids. Our understanding is that the scoring system and the scoring itself were both approved by an officer group in December which publishes no record of its meetings, although we have asked for copies of them under FOI. The scoring system used allocated 40% to price, 30% to benefit to the economy, 15% to deliverability and only 15% to community value. No specific scoring was allocated to heritage value.

Without more information it is of course difficult to comment on the precise details of the bids – all we have been told is that each shortlisted bid is basically a hotel. Yet it is clear that there is a lot of support in the city for the Airspeed bid to develop the site with a combination of housing and a museum to tell the story of an important part of York's recent history. This is a fascinating and relatively little known part of York's employment and manufacturing story, which for some people is still within living memory and which would surely provide a more interesting 'draw' for residents and tourists alike to visit a re-vitalised Piccadilly than yet another soulless hotel.

We are of course very glad that there is actually a plan to move forward with tackling the dereliction on Piccadilly, which we have pushing for for a long time. However, the Green Party believes that the Council holds public assets in trust for the people of York and that the priority in each case when disposal is considered should be to provide the greatest benefit for York residents, not simply the highest capital receipt to the authority. The Airspeed proposal is an imaginative plan for a key site in York that resonates with many local residents and we would have expected the Council to do it's utmost to work with such a proposal in the context of the cultural industries which it claims to wish to promote, perhaps to draw in additional funding if necessary. To exclude the bid from the shortlist following delegation to an officer desk exercise seems to show lack of imagination and a complete disregard for York's more recent heritage. I urge you to reconsider the whole process.