

Full Council 22 January 2014

Decision 13.1 Urgent Motion – Investigation into Old Poplar Town Hall

Proposed by Cllr Peter Golds

Seconded by Cllr Tim Archer

This council notes:

- The former Poplar Town Hall on the corner of Poplar High Street and Woodstock Terrace, E14 is an iconic building dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was the administrative home of Poplar Borough Council 1900-1938, and as such is a listed building.
- That in 2008 the former Poplar Town Hall was put up for disposal and the Cabinet stipulated that “it should be advertised locally to allow local groups to make an offer”
- That subsequently on 12 January 2011 officers were given authority to dispose of the property in the open market.
- That according to answers provided by the council, the property was “openly and widely” marketed by external agents on 9 May 2011; and a wide range of bids was received on 8 July 2011.
- The property was, according to officers, sold to the highest bidder. The transaction was completed on 11 November 2011. The sum paid by the highest bidder was £876,000
- That this price was not much more than the price of a family home nearby, for example on 6 May 2011 a three bedroom semi-detached house close by in Woodstock Terrace was sold for £585,000
- That the former Poplar Town Hall contains offices, a full size council chamber, and even a self contained flat, and is obviously substantially larger than a three bedroom semi detached house.

This council further notes:

- That the owners of the successful bidder and ultimate purchaser, Dreamstar, are well known to the Mayor and members of his administration.
- That planning permission and Listed Building Consent were granted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2013 for a change of use from office (B1) to hotel (C1) under Officers’ delegated authority.
- That the change of use from office to hotel use will result in an increase in value of the building by several million pounds.

This council believes:

- That it is entirely inappropriate to grant this change of use using delegated power, considering the public interest in the sale of the building and the effect such a change of use would have on local residents.
- That there remain unanswered questions as to the relationship between the current owner/occupier, and the administration.

- That no answer has been given as to whether in the initial marketing documents bidders were informed that the council would entertain a change of use of this type.

This council resolves:

- To instruct the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer, in conjunction with the District Auditor, to undertake an immediate investigation into the marketing and sale of the former Poplar Town Hall
- That this investigation should include details of all meetings and correspondence between officers of the council, councillors, the Mayor, bidders, and those responsible for publicising the sale; and that these details should be published.
- The investigation should pay particular attention to any potential conflicts of interest, etc not properly disclosed.
- That the investigation should appoint an independent property valuer to establish the 2011 valuation of the building with B1 office use and C1 Hotel use, and the 2014 valuation of the building with C1 Hotel use.
- That the investigation should, in view of the seriousness of this situation, produce a report to be considered by O&S on March 4<sup>th</sup> and the full council at their meeting on March 26<sup>th</sup>.