

For planning committee 8-9-11

I'm Brian Light, chairman of Balkerne Tower Trust.

These applications sweep aside local and national planning policies, strip Jumbo of everything of historic interest, and cram this unique 2 star listed building full of things that Colchester has plenty of anyway. The only public access is to the restaurant, which is at mid level so the views would be nothing special. The cupola with its magnificent views is not even used.

The alternative Balkerne Tower Trust proposals are judged 'unrealistic'. Is this a carefully considered judgement based on the evidence? No. It's not based on anything. No mention is made of our letters to potential funders, or the encouraging responses. Our professionally produced Options Appraisal, with its carefully calculated costs, is simply ignored.

Of course, it is perfectly justified to ask if BTT could fund its proposals. We think the evidence shows that the prospects are encouraging. But the Officer's Report demands of us an impossible degree of certainty. In startling contrast, the sycophantic acceptance of every unlikely claim on the applicant's side is almost embarrassing.

On the subject of being 'unrealistic', the Report says 'bringing the site back into active use' is a public benefit (It might have said, the only public benefit). But the same was said in 2001, and what happened? Nothing, because that scheme wasn't viable either. So here we are again, ten years later, going round in circles. Do we really want to see Jumbo remain neglected and perhaps sold on yet again, so repeating the whole pointless cycle of the last 24 years?

For two thirds of the £1.8 million projected loss of the plans before you, Balkerne Tower Trust could carry out its most ambitious restoration and public access scheme, including a display space in the tank, a lift, a tour waiting area, toilets, and a modest office and retail space. Jumbo would then take its rightful place as a major heritage attraction alongside the others which define Colchester more than anything else – attracting visitors to the town, a beacon of culture instead of a nondescript, fatally compromised heritage asset.

We ask you to agree with the Victorian Society, the Council for British Archaeology, The Ancient Monuments Society, SAVE Britain's Heritage, The Conservation Officer, the Highways Agency, local residents and ourselves and refuse these applications, or alternatively defer them along the lines suggested by English Heritage.

Thank you.