



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Mark Hunter
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Paul Athans
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5th February 2024

Dear Paul,

Romiley Forum

Thank you for your letter dated 31st January, posted on social media on 1st February, regarding Romiley Forum.

Welcome to Stockport and congratulations on your selection as the Prospective Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Hazel Grove constituency. I am sure I shall be hearing from you regularly between now and the General Election, which we all hope will come very soon.

I have to say that I am disappointed by the tone of your letter, accusing the Liberal Democrats of “putting party politics before the community”, when we have been working hard with NK Theatre Arts to find a solution to this situation for some time.

You raise three specific questions in your letter:

1. Why did SMBC not create a contingency plan when RAAC was first identified in 2017?

As I am sure your research into Stockport has shown you, the Liberal Democrats did not form the council administration in 2017. The council at that time was a Conservative-backed, Labour-led administration, with the current Labour Leader the Cabinet Member with responsibility for this area.

You will also be aware that there was no need for a contingency plan relating to RAAC back in 2017 – the risks associated with this widely used construction material only came to the fore over the past year and culminated in a change in Government guidance and the closure of schools in September 2023. Indeed, the Conservative Government opened new, pre-fabricated schools using RAAC as a ceiling material as recently as October 2020.

2. Why has SMBC not provided a cost assessment for full, or even remedial works to take place to allow the Forum Theatre to reopen as soon as possible?

The Council has been in a continuous, confidential dialogue with NK Theatre Arts to find a clear way forward. The local ward members (Liberal Democrat councillors Angie Clark, Mark Roberts and Lisa Smart) have made frequent representations and been kept closely informed about this issue, and as recently as last week the latest technical discussions

were held with NK Theatre Arts. It is not considered helpful to provide a running commentary on such a live issue.

3. What representations has SMBC made to Peterborough City Council to discuss how they resolved the issue within three months?

Council officers have indeed been in touch with their local government colleagues in Peterborough Council. I understand they have installed a temporary, propping solution involving a secondary, internal roof structure that will eventually require a complete roof replacement. This is a well-understood approach and has been part of the Council's technical consideration all along. The key issue is ensuring the safety of the public and of the theatre staff as well as ensuring any temporary solution is financially viable. Work is ongoing with NK Theatre Arts on these fronts.

My colleague Cllr Lisa Smart, the Liberal Democrat Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Hazel Grove, has sent a letter jointly with Cllr Frankie Singleton, the Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Sport, calling on the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Conservative government to provide funding for repairs in affected local cultural venues, along the lines provided by the Department for Education to schools. To date there has been no response.

Thank you for the advice contained at the end of your letter. Council Officers continue to work at pace with NK Theatre Arts towards a solution.

Yours sincerely



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