

**SOUTHWARK COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY MEETING)**

**WEDNESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2014**

**URGENT QUESTION**

**1. URGENT QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI**

Will the leader update us on the future of the Coronet at the Elephant & Castle in light of the Mayor of London's recent comments?

**RESPONSE**

It is not clear which comments are being referred to in this question. However, I am aware that the Mayor was asked about music venues across London at the Mayor's Public Question Time event on 11 November where the questioner used the Coronet as an example. The Mayor responded about the music scene across London but did not make any specific comments about the Coronet.

The council is currently awaiting a decision on an application to list the building. There are no other recent developments to update council assembly on.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI**

Thank you Mr Mayor, and thank you to the leader for his answer. I am sorry if it was not entirely clear why this was urgent. Clearly your answer about why I had asked about the Coronet expressed some confusion. So if I could just clarify before asking my supplemental.

Very recently the Mayor's cultural advisors actually said there is a case for protecting the Coronet at the Elephant. The management of the Coronet have produced a vision statement in the last week and the online petition has gone up to 4 200 signatures. This is clearly an important and topical issue. As the leader knows I have had real concerns about what is happening at the Elephant in terms of pricing out the people who have grown up there and lived there all their lives. This move to get rid of heritage and take away things for local people and redevelop - there is a danger there - particularly given the Coronet currently employs 100 jobs and is clearly part of the local and cultural heritage of the area, including my own social life as a teenager. So it's got a part to play in the history of the borough, its got a part to play in the regeneration and I just wondered if the leader could be very clear about what his view is for the future of the Coronet Cinema?

**RESPONSE**

I thank Councillor Al Samerai for her supplemental question. I accept what she says about topicality. I am not sure that I accept what she says about urgency. There seems to be some confusion in the GLA on this issue. The Mayor, as she might well know, has written to English Heritage - who determines listing applications - making clear his

view that there is no case for the Coronet to be listed and he encourages the rejection of the application by English Heritage.

So it may be that there is a divergence of views at the GLA. I have seen the business case which the Coronet put forward. A couple of observations on this; the cultural provision that comes at the Coronet has to be provided in any event – I think that has always been clear - and I think what has been less clear is whether it would be within the Coronet building itself.

I can see there is potentially a heritage argument here, albeit I think some of the original elements of this Victorian music hall have long ago been stripped out and removed from the venue, but I can see that there might be some cultural merits in some part of the building. It's disappointing, I think, that really neither the Coronet nor anyone else chose to make the case until fairly recently on this. I hope it's not just the owners of the Coronet using this as a case to get greater compensation from Delancey - I hope that isn't the case. So I am fairly ambivalent about things. I can see the Coronet has some potential merits. I can see that it creates difficulty though if you are going to redevelop the site as a whole where the shopping centre sits if the Coronet remains, but what I am absolutely clear on is that I think there should be a significant cultural offer at the regenerated Elephant and Castle.

We have had conversations with theatre producers about creating potentially a new West End, a rival to the West End at the Elephant and Castle which will really be quite exciting - bringing twenty-first century theatres and productions which cannot be accommodated in the West End where you have got traditional nineteenth century theatres. I don't know where that is going, whether we have got any further with those conversations but I am absolutely keen on seeing that. This is not just regeneration about homes or just about shops - I would like to see a cultural offer there. Whether the Coronet forms part of that is for others to determine but I am absolutely clear that our aspiration is to see a significant cultural offer there.

So I don't think I have given her an absolutely direct answer that she wanted and she is not going to get one from me because of the ambivalence that I have - I have not been around the building, I would have to go and have a look at it and be convinced myself that this is something where there is architectural merit. I don't think you can just hold on to the shell of a building, which is not a particularly attractive shell at that, if for no other reason than there is some old shell there. I think what we would need to see is a cultural offer and I am interested to see how that cultural offer will be delivered at Elephant and Castle.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI**

Thank you to the leader for that rather vague view; 4 200 people have signed a petition - why don't you say that you would hear from some of those people at the next full council about the history of the cinema? I know we have a rule about the numbers of people who sign petitions but why not let us hear from some of them? Clearly there are people who feel like they are being pushed out of an area. It is all very well to want to impose new cultural things on people but actually, what about hearing from the people who clearly support what's already there?

#### **RESPONSE**

Thanks very much Mr Mayor, and thanks for that extra supplemental question. I have been in contact with Richard Littman at the Coronet and said I will go along and visit.

Anyone can bring a deputation along to council assembly; we have made it easier for deputations to be brought and hear what they have to say. I think trying to hear from 4,200 people would be difficult. We can hear from them and we can have that argument. You can invite them - I don't control council assembly. If you want me to and you can't write the letter, I will get in touch. Sorry Mr Mayor, I am surprised Simon (Hughes) has not saved the Coronet already. I daresay it's only a matter of time before 7 May when he will claim to have saved it.

It is a serious issue, I agree and I have already given her a direct answer about our commitment to culture at Elephant and Castle. Her administration was in charge for eight years - don't forget, not so long ago - where was their application to list the Coronet. Where were they standing up for the people then? Nowhere, never ever, ever.