

11/12/98

LETTERS Fax

Arts in Guildford needs business sponsorship

Sir, With reference to the letter last week "Council must formulate its own arts strategy," I would like to endorse the unidentified writer's view that a new and ambitious arts policy for Guildford could reasonably be supported by the town's immensely prosperous commercial sector.

New, improved and regionally important arts facilities will attract even more interest in our town and will put it on the national map in an emphatic way.

It is true to say that all but a tiny percentage of the council's £1.3 million arts budget is spent on the provision of the town's museum, Guildford House, orchestra and Civic Hall.

Recent additions have been the creation of the Electric Theatre for amateur productions and rescue funding for the professional Yvonne Arnaud Theatre.

The current arts programme is a legacy of many years, which the present elected council have been attempting to rationalise. It is difficult to have an innovative arts strategy if all but a minute fraction of the budget is bespoken for hardy annuals.

Traditionally, our council has been a provider, not an enabler of the arts.

Gradually, an improvement is coming as they develop partnerships with the arts community. So much more can be achieved, working with groups with energy and access to sponsorship, than within the council's own traditional and restricted budget.

Guildford Arts hopes to work in partnership with the council to introduce ways of improving arts facilities — indeed our vision has always been the creation in Guildford of a multi media arts centre of regional importance.

Rodboro would have been great, and the council thought so too, but consultants felt that access was bad. It is close to rail, bus and parking; had they not heard of an integrated transport approach?

I am sure that the wine bar there will not suffer too much.

The Civic Hall site would be an excellent alternative. With that in mind, we invited a

London architect living locally to give an illustrated talk at our forum.

We asked him to bring illustrations of what had been achieved in arts centres across Europe, to inspire our town with the vision of what might be created here in Guildford.

After the vision comes the architectural plan and a viable financial strategy. Guildford Arts sees its role as ensuring the previous support offered by South East Arts, the British Film Institute and similar bodies and also helping to attract the commercial partnership which will assist capital and revenue funding.

Fundamental to the big plan is council backing to guarantee a town site and some core funding.

We hope that their planners will look beyond a mere refurbishment and modification of the Civic Hall.

An architecturally

exciting new building alongside, would transform the whole site.

It would be the focus of a whole new arts strategy, to provide the quality and breadth of arts events and modern facilities which Guildford's community deserves.

Guildford has been chosen as the home of the Regional Development Agency for South East England. Arts provision is a core element in enhancing the lives of the citizens of Guildford and the whole region.

If you believe this, why not express your views through our citizens' survey forms available in the Civic, library, Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Electric Theatre and Guildford House.

CAROL LEIGHTON
(Chairman,
Guildford Arts)

The Mill House,
Shalford,
Guildford.

Council does allocate its budgets wisely

Sir, May I take this opportunity to correct several erroneous conclusions drawn by your correspondent in last week's edition.

1. I did not say that nothing could be done in terms of improving the Civic building; I simply said that Arts Board lottery funding was not an available source of funds for at least the next two years. I stated that the council would look to undertake improvements to the Civic itself, with commercial involvement if this was thought appropriate. Architectural advice would be sought externally.

2. We do allocate our budgets wisely and your correspondent's assertion that £1.3 million is spent annually in deals with outside organisations is totally wrong. This sum is spent running the council's own facilities with only a relatively small percentage used for grant aid to outside bodies in the borough.

3. I note your correspondent's observation that "Guildford seems flush with commercial money". Indeed, my

department secures well in excess of £100,000 per year in sponsorship deals. Money is nevertheless tight for commercial companies, too; such deals are hard won and companies, quite rightly, must justify expenditure to their boards and shareholders. They are not queuing up to drop largesse into the council's coffers.

4. Of course the council operates to strategies and business plans. Your correspondent only needed to ask about this rather than making incorrect statements behind a shield of anonymity.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss our services with genuinely concerned members of the public and should your correspondent wish to contact me on 01483 444700 I would be happy to explain any points he may have in need of clarification.

JIM MILES
(Director of Leisure
Services, Guildford
Borough Council)

Millmead House,
Millmead,
Guildford.