

1. Councillor Cleet asked Councillor Hamilton-Cox

Last year budget savings of £2.3 million had to be made to balance the books, at this budget meeting held on 22nd February 2023 councillors believed at the time that it was only the Tourist Information Centre which would be mothballed - which would make a saving of £150,000 - but actually it was the whole venue what was proposed to be mothballed. One of the biggest questions asked by voters in Heysham North during the local elections in May '23 was the massive 231.6% Frontierland Tax Levy imposed by Morecambe Town Council which apparently Lancaster City Council can do nothing about and the closure of the Platform as an entertainment venue. It now comes to light that the part of the building where the Tourist Information Centre was located isn't owned by Lancaster City Council

Could you tell me what proportion of the £150,000 is attributed towards the rent of the area where the Tourist Information Centre was located?

Councillor Hamilton-Cox responded:

Councillor Hamilton-Cox was unsure where the figure of £150k came from and it was not the intention to 'mothball' The Platform, it was to find an alternative provider by the end of September however funding had been secured until April 2024 now to allow more time to find an alternative operator. As part of the savings proposal to close Morecambe VIC the rent of £26,800pa (base) plus inflation was stripped out of the budget as the Council assumed it would either surrender the lease or transfer to a third party as part of a new operating model for the Platform.

Councillor Cleet asked the following supplementary question:

Could you tell me who owns that part of the building?

Councillor Hamilton-Cox replied:

A company called Polystar.

2. Councillor Cleet asked Councillor Hamilton-Cox

When was the lease negotiated?

Councillor Hamilton-Cox answered:

The lease was originally agreed in 1997 on a 25 year basis.

3. Councillor Cleet asked Councillor Hamilton-Cox

Are there any other third parties who have a stake in the Platform?

Councillor Hamilton-Cox responded:

There are no other third parties who have a legal stake in the Platform.

Councillor Cleet asked the following supplementary question which Councillor Hamilton-Cox passed to Councillor Potter to respond to as the appropriate portfolio holder:

As the Platform is due to be mothballed at the end of March, with the last concert on March 27th could you tell me what Lancaster City Council propose to do with operating this entertainment venue in the light that the Eden Project has had a set back on its opening - which could potentially be used as an alternative entertainment venue?

Councillor Potter replied:

The mothballing of the Platform is not an option the Council wishes to see. All efforts are currently being focused on a new operating model for the Platform and Officers are progressing detailed work on a number of options. One such option is seeking a third party who would lease the building and operate it and to this end we have already been out to expressions of interest. Three have been received and one is more attractive than the other two. We are also speaking to staff.

Whilst the budget savings must be met the intention is that the Platform will continue to be an entertainment, cultural and community venue for many years to come.