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Hotel vision for Shire Hall as county council plots move

EXCLUSIVE
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Could Shire Hall, the home of the county council, be better used as a top-quality hotel in the centre of Cambridge?

Council leader Steve Count thinks so, and it is part of a vision that could see hundreds of the authority's staff vacate the city by 2020.

Cllr Count told the *Cambridge Independent*: "We're occupying some of the costliest real estate there is in the county for people that basically need a desk and a computer."

"Most of our business is not done day to day in face-to-face contact,

“We're occupying some of the costliest real estate there is in the county for people that basically need a desk and a computer

Cllr Steve Count
Cambridgeshire County Council leader

unlike the city council, so we don't have the same requirements.

"Shire Hall could be anything – it would be a case of liaising with the market to see what they want.

"The most likely scenario would see it promoted as a top-quality hotel. Other options would be

accommodation or offices, but I'm sure that we could run our operations much more effectively and cheaper for the public if it was elsewhere in the county."

The Tory leader said a switch to a hotel could also benefit the city.

"One of our biggest concerns is congestion in Cambridge and this relieves that as well.

"If it changed to a hotel, people would arrive but they would be completely different hours of time for their coming and going, so there could be benefits to that," he said.

Tourism is seen as a key economic driver for the city. In 2015, it brought £764million to Cambridge, according to tourism body Visit Cambridge and Beyond.

"What we need to do is come out of Shire Hall, although probably not sell it," Cllr Count continued.

"My intention would probably be a long-term lease so that we're not selling the asset, and our grandchildren will have the same choices that we have."

He said that as the county workforce adapts, and it is generally shrinking, the authority needs to make sure that its buildings are full.

Castle Court, backing on to Shire Hall, was used as office space by the county some years ago but has now become 'boutique' student accommodation.

"As we've shrunk our workforce

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Health



Dr Anoop Kuttikat

Get your fix of Vitamin D

If you live in the UK, the chances are that you are not getting enough vitamin D naturally. This is because sunshine (specifically ultraviolet B rays) is essential for your skin to produce this vitamin.

The risk of vitamin D deficiency is higher in pregnant women, children under three, people over 65, people with darker skin and those who have low or no exposure to the sun (such as those who are housebound or who cover their skin for religious reasons).

Vitamin D helps our body absorb calcium and phosphate from our diet and these minerals are essential for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. Lack of vitamin D can cause weak and soft bones and bone deformities (for example, rickets in children and osteomalacia in adults). Some research studies also suggest (although it's not proven) that vitamin D may have a role in preventing heart disease and improving immune function.

From April to September, most people get adequate vitamin D with sun exposure. The amount of time that is required in the sun depends on many factors including skin colour and how much skin is exposed. Short periods of daily exposure, especially between 11am and 3pm, are thought to be sufficient. However, people with dark skin will need to spend longer in the sun to produce the same amount of vitamin D as someone with lighter skin. Care should be taken not to burn the skin, so cover up or protect your skin with sun creams before your skin starts to turn red or burn.

Dietary sources of vitamin D are limited, but oily fish – for example, salmon, mackerel and sardines – can provide some vitamin D. Fortified food such as breakfast cereals and dairy products are another source. Daily vitamin D supplements should be taken if you are at higher risk of deficiency. In general population, daily supplements (10 micrograms or 400 international units) of vitamin D should be considered especially in the winter months.

Your GP will consider testing for vitamin D levels if you have symptoms to suggest deficiency or you are at high risk of deficiency. Treatment with much higher doses of vitamin D will be required if found deficient.

■ Dr Anoop Kuttikat is a consultant rheumatologist at Mulberry Clinic, Hinchbrook Hospital & Kettering General. Visit cambridge-kettering-rheumatologist.com.

Tree surgeon turns artist to create High Street giraffe

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Standing behind a wall and looking out over passing traffic on Sawston High Street is an as-yet-unnamed giraffe.

This is no escapee from a zoo, but a beautifully carved wooden sculpture – the work of Ben Hayford, a tree surgeon from Stowmarket.

Ben has been looking after trees for nine years and only turned his hand to wood carving on a more frequent scale earlier this year.

He told the *Cambridge Independent*: “The tree was dead and one of my friends in the local area got paid to take it down. Halfway through taking it down they said it would be a shame to raze it to the ground and that it would be nice to make something out of it.”

The discovery of an artistic talent isn't something that's happened to Ben overnight, though using tools and chainsaws to express himself is a fairly recent development. He said: “I've always done a little bit of cartoon drawing, but I've only turned to the artistic side of things, carving and stuff like that, in the last three months.

“I've made mushrooms and chairs for about five years, but when it comes to animals I haven't been doing it long at all – I've just got an eye for it.”

The giraffe took five days to carve. “The reason for that was the tree had a lot of nails in it, metal poles,

stuff like that,” explained Ben. “When we come to take old trees down we usually find that we come across that quite a bit.”

Ben, who admits that he would love to carve animals out of wood on a more regular basis, has already displayed his impressive abilities elsewhere. “We did a wolf in Colchester zoo just over a month ago,” he revealed. “We've done carvings over in Sudbury, Ipswich and Battsford, which is close to where I live.”

“I'm just waiting for somebody to ring me and say, ‘Can you come and carve a big dragon out of my fallen beech tree?’”

Ben Hayford
Tree surgeon / carver

In around two weeks' time – although there is no exact date yet – the giraffe will officially be christened at a ceremony in the village, though the small matter of its name has still to be decided.

Suggestions should be placed in a designated box in Boswell's bakery and in the Mica Hardware store, both of which are on the High Street in Sawston, before Monday, September 11.

“A lot of people are saying it should be called ‘Ben’, after me,” noted the



Ben Hayford on his impressive giraffe carving

Picture: Keith Heppell

artist, “but I'd like to see what names they come up with.

“I think the schoolchildren are putting some names into the hat as well. It's good that local people are picking one.”

Having created a number of masterpieces involving different

animals, there is one in particular that Ben is hoping to carve at some point in the future. “I really, really want to do a dragon,” he said.

“I'm just waiting for somebody to ring me and say, ‘Can you come and carve a big dragon out of my fallen beech tree?’”

Labour leader questions rise in Tory allowances amid cuts

As the county council considers cuts to services, such as children's centres and libraries, county Labour leader Joan Whitehead has hit out at the Tories' decision to increase the amount some councillors are remunerated.

She said that as there is no money available in the current budget to pay for the increase, 74 per cent of which goes to Tory councillors, it can only be achieved by taking money from frontline services.

Cllr Whitehead said: “The Conservatives are going to cost us over £150,000 more and it's going in their own pockets.

“They ignored the independent review that was set

up to give advice, the council staff have an imposed one per cent pay rise cap so the Tories should not be giving themselves far more than that, and they are also making cuts to services.”

Council leader Cllr Steve Count said that county councillors in Cambridgeshire had for a number of years been the lowest paid in the country and even now give just under a third of their time up for free.

His allowances increased to £42,060, which is £6,000 more than the independent panel recommended. Cllr Whitehead, as Labour lead, had her remuneration cut from £7,212 to £3,750.

He said: “When we decided

that everything was flawed with the recommendation we had to decide how to get something that was fair.

“If we had picked my remuneration and Joan's individually and come up with numbers a lot of people would have said that that was gerrymandering and it was not a fair to do it. What we did was we took the UK average for counties.

“This is where Cllr Whitehead's figure came from, just like mine did.

“Cambridgeshire has had the lowest paid county councillors for a number of years now and I think there were so many times when people said we can't afford

it, now isn't the time, and we kept turning down these increases, even though they were recommended. Eventually we just said it got so out of hand that we can't expect people to do this council work and give up the time necessary.

“There's an expectation that you don't become a councillor to do it as a job, that is where this element comes in.

“For me personally I do about 40-60 hours per week total. I also have a light role as a district councillor but 95 per cent of everything I do is county council work. I wouldn't do it if I didn't love it, I really enjoy it. I think that I have good value for money and I'm doing a good job.”