

Abbot's Mill Canterbury Members Panel 20th November

Thank you Chair and members for the opportunity to speak. I should like to note that I was surprised but happy to be asked. Surprised because I am not directly involved with it from the inside. But happy because I believe the Abbot's Mill Project is an excellent idea, being skilfully and efficiently developed. As a local person I have had experience of its events, I have contributed as a musical performer and my 2 young children, have joined me there. It is also just a place for 'time out' for all of us we know we can go. It has what economists call a high 'option demand' value. Even if you don't go there every day, just knowing it is there and part of the tapestry of the town is something cherished. Especially as city life becomes more driven by the hussle and bussle of business activity, it becomes increasingly important to protect and nurture the enclaves of tranquillity we have, like this, which are not part of the for-profit economy.

With that in mind, let me pass on two types of observation. First, let me start by relaying my **children's own thoughts to you**, as they are from the next generation, and its important we understand and respect how they see the world around them. (I didn't ask them to distinguish between the Arrowhead and other parts. But what they said to endorse the work overall to my mind is self evidently enhanced by the extra space afforded by the project being able to spread its wings across the site as a whole.)

They told me at the weekend what they really like about it are two things. First, a chance to *be close and feel close to nature*. Here what is especially important is that its positioning makes it convenient to access. So spending time here can be threaded into an everyday trip in the centre of the city which would otherwise be dominated by the rhythms and pace of commercial urban life.

Second, and they actually used this phrase, a sense of the *meaning of a “sustainable environment.”* I would say the children of this city often seem to have an environmental sensibility which would put many of us adults to shame. What they experience at our schools now already equips them *academically* in a *formal educational setting*. What this site and project do is do reinforce that, building upon the school-based groundwork in an *informal, light touch* way.

My second observation come from my **working life**. As an academic, for some 25 years I have been researching voluntary organisations and nonprofits, in this country and beyond. Something I have learned from this work is that independent civic initiatives are *often at their most productive and innovative when working in partnership with supportive and forward looking governments* – and especially local government bodies.

But this does *not happen automatically*. *Indeed the empirical record shows, that statutory bodies can actually often make joined up, integrated work harder rather than easier*, including on issues of financial and land resource management.

To get the ‘best of both worlds’ from each sector, the ideas, energies, and first mover experiences of non-profits need to be met with rhetorical recognition by statutory authorities. But also crucially, to be *manifested through real, practical action* geared towards integrated and joined up working.

It seems to me that a decision by Members tonight to facilitate the Abbot’s Mill Project’s *realising its potential on this site as a whole* would be an important step forward in this spirit of practical action in relation to land management. By putting in place arrangements to ensure the Arrowhead land’s management is *carefully calibrated in a well planned, stable and joined up way with the organisation of the rest of the site*, as is being sought here, much would be gained. This would be a win-win for the Council in terms of its reputation for social justice – by being seen to take open access and environmental issues seriously; and in terms of efficiency, by showing it understands the economic advantages of working with trusted partner organisations in civil society.