

URGENT DECISION

of Councillor Peak and Councillor Canniford, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Policy and Finance Committee, in consultation with the Town Clerk.

Town Quarry

The Council has long expressed an interest in taking over the Town Quarry as an arts and cultural community facility and, after various surveys and discussion at several committee meetings, took the decision in March 2021 to acquire a long lease of the Town Quarry on terms to be agreed. In addition authority was given for negotiation and completion of a sub-lease of Building 7 to The Stable.

Further report was brought in June 2021 where surveys had revealed building 1 was in a dangerous condition and needed to be demolished as it was completely unsafe. As a result the blacksmith currently sited in that building would have to leave and relocate his business. In addition it was reported that one of the business occupiers (the builder) had built an unsafe, unauthorized and illegal 2 storey structure.

Accordingly it was resolved to defer the completion of the headlease of the Quarry from North Somerset Council, originally for three months, and authority was given for necessary works to buildings 1 and 6 to enable the safety and financial issues to be resolved.

The council agreed that it could not afford the demolition costs on top of the considerable investment required in the site (for which funding had been identified) and after some discussion North Somerset Council who are the freeholder agreed to fund and organise the demolition. This itself required planning permission and various surveys of trees and wildlife were required resulting in a considerable delay. However the process has now proceeded and demolition of the unsafe building is now scheduled for September/October 2022.

While the Quarry is a lovely community facility and offers huge opportunities for increased use and further development a long lease for 35 years is a significant commitment. I cannot recommend the town council complete the lease and take over the site while the issue of the unauthorised 2 storey builder's structure is unresolved. In addition the issue of the safety of buildings 1 and 6 and the issue of the other two business occupiers namely the blacksmith and tree surgeon need to be finally resolved as these various items could incur significant financial liabilities.

Once these matters have been resolved the aim will be to complete the surrender of the site by the civic society and the head lease which will then in turn enable a sub-lease of building 7 to The Stable CIC as previously reported to be finalised.

North Somerset Council have now helpfully agreed a way forward, which involves 'forfeiture' of the Civic Society's lease which means responsibility for the Quarry reverts to them, provided the Town Council is prepared to issue a Comfort Letter stating its intention to take over the site as soon as the above issues have been resolved. It is therefore recommended that I be authorised to issue a Comfort Letter accordingly.

The Comfort Letter while not legally enforceable in a court of law will confirm that it is the intention of the town council to finalise and take on a long lease of the quarry to provide an artistic and community facility provided that:

- The demolition of 'building 1' is satisfactorily completed and the site left in a safe condition
- The site is emptied of storage and three business occupiers namely the builder, the blacksmith and the tree surgeon have been removed from the site.

Also to further confirm that it is the intention of the town council working with the Stable as sub lessee of the main building to welcome back to the quarry all the artists and craftspeople to the site and to grant them new licenses (which may be on new terms and rentals).

This matter is urgent because North Somerset Council have requested a Comfort Letter as soon as possible and this week if possible. This is in turn because forfeiture normally takes 3 months and because there is unrest among the artists and other occupiers of the Quarry.

DECISION

Under the Town Council's Scheme of Delegation paragraph 2 "Chairman's Action" we as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Policy and Finance Committee in consultation with the Town Clerk **AGREE** that a Comfort Letter be sent to North Somerset Council confirming the intention of the town council to take over the site subject as reported above subject to the conditions reported.

SignedA Peak..... (Chairman)

SignedM Canniford.....(Vice-Chairman)

SignedM L Nicholson.....(Town Clerk)

Date.....8th June 2022.....