

## **MARKET CAR PARK – RAYLEIGH OPERATIC & DRAMATIC SOCIETY (RODS) SCENERY STORE**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report apprises Members of progress to date on the above issue

### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. RODS has, for many years, leased an area of land from the Council situated within the Market Car Park. The shed occupying the land is used as a scenery store and workshop. It is unclear as to the age of the shed, or, indeed, which organisation originally built it. The lease requires RODS to maintain the shed.
- 2.2. The shed appears to be in a dilapidated state and has asbestos cladding.
- 2.3. At a meeting of this Sub Committee held on 19 June, it was recommended that, in view of the condition of the shed “authority be given to officers to negotiate relocation of the scenery store and demolition of that building”. The recommendation was ratified by Finance & General Purposes Committee held on 12 July 2001 (Minute 253/01 refers).

### **PROGRESS**

- 3.1 The Head of Legal Services informed RODS of the need to vacate the building in August, with a suggested target date of the Council taking possession by the end of December 2001. The letter also pointed out the commitment to assist in the identification of alternative accommodation.
- 3.2 It has been ascertained that the requirement of RODS for the scenery store needs to meet the following specification:-
- Area 595 sq. ft.
  - Height Minimum 10ft.
  - Doors 7ft x 7ft.
  - Access for truck for transportation
  - Lighting
  - Water desirable
  - Facility to be able to work outside
  - Level of usage 30 weekends per annum.

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- 3.3 RODS have been unable to identify any suitable accommodation. The Council does not have any accommodation which meets the above specification.
  - 3.4 An approach has been made to The Warehouse Project on the Brook Road Industrial estate, but they are looking to develop all of their available space.
  - 3.5 During discussions, RODS have maintained that the building is structurally sound and poses no threat to health and safety. They are of this view following a structural survey which they had carried out.
  - 3.6 RODS were asked for a copy of the survey report. In a letter of 2 January, RODS stated they were unable to supply a report as the surveyor was a friend of the group who had carried out the survey on an unofficial basis.
  - 3.7 Officers have now arranged to visit the building in order to carry out an assessment. The results of this will be given verbally at the meeting. There has already been an asbestos survey carried out which has categorised the building as low risk.

#### **4 OPTIONS**

- 4.1 Essentially, if the building is to be demolished, the only options are new build or renting of a small industrial unit.
- 4.2 RODS have £2,000 set aside for roof repairs to the existing building. They currently pay the Council £50 per annum for ground rent. Either of the above two options would therefore require a large element of external finance.

#### **5 LOTTERY FUNDING**

- 5.1 Officers have made preliminary enquiries in respect of lottery funding and it does appear some options may be available.
- 5.2 There would be a good chance of securing finance from the Awards for All scheme. RODS would need to supply estimates of building costs, their contribution, bank accounts, etc. Bidding takes place on a two-monthly cycle. Unfortunately, the maximum amount of grant is £5,000. This would be insufficient for a new build of the store.
- 5.3 The Regional Arts Lottery Programme gives capital grants of between £2,000 and £100,000, but there is a requirement for matched funding. More detailed investigation is needed in order to ascertain the levels of such funding and whether it includes benefit in kind.
- 5.4 The Foundation for Sports and Arts gives financial assistance to enable groups to obtain premises on long leases. RODS are investigating the availability of any small vacant units on industrial estates. If any can be

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identified, further work will be carried out to investigate the feasibility of obtaining grant from this source.

**6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 At present there is officer time required in order to assist RODS with identifying premises and grant opportunities.

**7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 RODS are on notice to vacate the site, but have been advised of the desire to assist them to relocate prior to the tenancy being terminated.
- 7.2 There is a duty to ensure the structure is maintained in a safe condition. With regard to asbestos, the building is regarded as low risk.

**8 CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 Should Members be minded to ensure that RODS are provided with alternative accommodation prior to being asked to vacate the site, there could be a significant time factor involved.
- 8.2 It is therefore suggested that investigations continue in partnership with RODS and that regular reports on progress be made to the Finance & Procedures Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

**9 RECOMMENDATION**

It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

That the report be noted and an update on progress be reported to the March cycle of meetings.

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