

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	COUNCIL		
DATE:	17 OCTOBER 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	4A
TITLE:	PETITION - SAVE READING CENTRAL CLUB MURAL/ DO NOT SELL THE CENTRAL CLUB (A COMMUNITY ASSET) TO COMMERCIAL DEVELOPERS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	JO LOVELOCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP
SERVICE:	LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	CHRIS BROOKS	TEL:	0118-9372602
JOB TITLE:	HEAD OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES	E-MAIL:	Chris.brooks@reading.gov.uk

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To report on the process for considering a petition, which was submitted to the Council on 25 September 2017, following an earlier decision of the Policy Committee on 17 July 2017 (Minute 11 refers) to market the Central Club building as widely as possible, to include both the private and third sector. The Policy Committee agreed that all bids received through this process would be considered at a future Policy Committee and would be evaluated on the basis of money offered together with community benefit.
- 1.2 As the petition has collected approximately 4,000 signatories it has exceeded the 1,500 threshold and at the request of the Lead Petitioner, it has therefore triggered a debate by full Council of the issue, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8(6)(e).

**2. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- 2.1 To note the report and debate the issues raised in the petition about the Save Reading Central Club Mural/ Do Not Sell The Central Club (A Community Asset) to Commercial Developers, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8(6)(e).

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council sets out how it will deal with petitions from people living, working or studying in Reading in its Petition Scheme, which is included in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution and under Contract Procedure Rule 8 of the Council's Standing Orders.

### 4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 On 25 September a petition was presented to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

**"Do Not Sell The Central Club (A Community Asset) to Commercial Developers**

We the undersigned, petition Reading Borough Council (RBC) to think again and give proper consideration to the Aspire (Reading) CIC compelling, compliant, fully funded £10 Million Bid to acquire the spiritual home of the Black diaspora of Reading, the Central Club site and buildings.

We feel the black community of Reading should not be scapegoated and made to suffer disproportionately for RBC's financial budgeting failure. We believe Aspire's bid provides strategic services to the diaspora that RBC are retreating from which makes Aspire a long term partner to the solution as their bid is 100% consistent with RBC's strategic priorities."

- 4.2 The petition was accompanied by a letter in the following terms:

**"Petition - Save Reading Central Club Mural**

I enclose a petition signed by more than 1,500 persons to save the Reading Central Club Mural from damage or destruction, howsoever caused.

In July 2016, Reading Borough Council invited third sector and community groups to submit Bids to acquire the Central Club building and site. The Caribbean Associations Group, an umbrella organisation for the main African Caribbean groups in Reading, created Aspire (Reading) CIC to bid for the premises. Aspire submitted a compliant, compelling and fully funded bid to acquire and develop the site for use as a community hub where the Diaspora can educate, celebrate and entertain. Aspire made it clear in their bid submission that they would protect the Mural because of its significant historical value to, and recognition of, the African Caribbean Diaspora in Reading.

On 17 July 2017, Reading Borough Council's Policy Committee met in closed session to determine the applications. They decided to abandon the bidding process and start a new process by offering the premises for sale on the open market.

The Council has claimed that the Mural is damaged and that they propose to commission an expert to clean and stabilise it. The Council further stated that

during such cleaning the Mural could be damaged. The artist who painted the Mural has visited the site recently and could not find any damage to the Mural. The presence of the Mural is depressing the value of the site. The community believe that the Council's decision to sell the site with the Mural on the open market and claiming that the Mural is damaged is a prelude to a commercial developer 'accidentally' damaging or destroying the Mural to make it a more commercially attractive and viable site for development.

The community is outraged by such a prospect and want a cast iron guarantee from the Council that the Mural will be preserved.

I would like the petition debated at the meeting of the Council on 17 October 2017 and I would like to address the meeting."

- 4.3 The Council is invited to debate the issues raised in the above petition, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8(6)(e).

## **5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

## **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Council's Procedure Rule 8(6)(e) states that where a petition is submitted to the Council signed by 1,500 or more people who live work or study in the local authority's area, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, at the request of the Lead Petitioner, will ensure that the topic of the petition is included on the next available agenda to allow a full Council debate on the matter. This item has been included on the Council's agenda in accordance with this local provision within the Council's Standing Orders.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no direct financial consequences arising from this report as it deals purely with the process of considering a petition with over 1,500 signatories.

## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 8.1 None

