

Monday 26 February, 2024

Council seeks State support for remediation

Tamworth Region Council is seeking financial assistance from the NSW Government as it weighs up options for the future of Ray Walsh House which was vacated by staff in 2022 after it was found to contain asbestos.

Tamworth Region Mayor Russell Webb and General Manager Paul Bennett met with the Minister for Lands and Property, Stephen Kamper to discuss the issue.

NSW Public Works recommended a staged approach to the rehabilitation of the building and last year Council spent about \$1 million on the first stage. This included removing all materials from below ceiling height so that asbestos in the ceiling cavity remained intact, ensuring that during stage 2 there will be less contaminated waste.

Stage two will involve removing the ceiling, stripping out of the asbestos-containing vermiculite insulation and then reinsulating the building. The preliminary estimate from NSW Public Works for this work is \$10 million.

The Mayor today explained that Council has taken the position that because the Ray Walsh House was bought from the State Government in the 1990s with no disclosure of the asbestos issue, the State should assist with funding to complete the second stage of works.

“I spoke with Premier Chris Minns about this when he was in Tamworth for the Bush Summit last year and he told Council to write to the Government with our request,” he said. “We had the opportunity to meet with Minister Kamper on Wednesday last week and we will now be providing him with additional information to progress our request for financial assistance.”

The Mayor said the Minister clearly understood Council was facing a multi-million dollar cost of completing the necessary remediation works.

“When asbestos was discovered in the building we knew it would not be a quick fix,” Cr Webb said. “Both Council and our community would like to see this resolved sooner rather than later but we also know we need do it right.”

The Mayor said a response from the Minister was not expected for “a couple of months” but Council will not be sitting on its hands in the meantime. “While we await a decision, Council will continue to investigate a number of options for the future of the site once the asbestos has been removed,” he said.

“These options include everything from demolishing the building and rebuilding on the current site to retaining and refurbishing the existing building or selling the building and relocating the Council into new offices at some point in the future.

“I would like to make it clear that the Council has not made any formal decision about the future of the building and has certainly not resolved to sell the building to any other entity.

“All of the options being considered will come at a considerable cost and will be fully disclosed in an open Council report once these costs are more accurately determined.”

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