

Friday, 31 May, 2024  
12:30 PM  
Our Ref: PG:DL

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **MAYOR RESPONDS TO PUBLISHED LETTER REGARDING THE SONS OF THE SOIL SITE**

In response to a letter published in *The Coonamble Times* last week, Coonamble Shire Mayor, Cr Tim Horan, has submitted the following to that newspaper's editor for publication:

To the Editor

In response to Mr Garret Barry's letter in the *Coonamble Times* of 29 May 2024 and other letters and social media circulating regarding the *Sons of the Soil Hotel* (SOTS) site, I write to dispel some of the myths and conspiracy theories being shared and, at the same time, correct the facts about the future of the site.

Council has always been open and transparent with information about SOTS. Council meetings and reports on proceedings posted on Council's website make it crystal clear what has and has not happened. I would encourage all your readers to use this online information as the source of facts and truth.

Information that is available has been and will continue to be made available to the public when the Council has received and considered it. However, due to privacy legislation and as part of Council's due diligence, there is always information that must be treated confidentially. However, all information in relation to the SOTS is publicly available. What is alleged not to be public—such as designs, options and costings—does not exist and, as such, is not available to Council, let alone the public.

Firstly, it is true that Council is in the process of seeking quotations for demolition options, whether this be full or partial demolition. These are being sourced to give Council and any potential developer of the site an indicative price for whatever development might go ahead on the site. Sourcing quotations is not a decision to demolish the site.

Council is moving through a logical and staged process to consider various options to make best use of the site.

Essential site maintenance and investigative work is underway. This includes structural assessments, geotechnical, asbestos, cultural heritage and a Review of Environmental Factors.

Council is required to follow diligently all legislated and regulated processes. For example, should it be decided to do any works, a Development Application would be required, and the process steps adhered to, including public exhibition. Another untruth and source of fear mongering spread in the public domain is that a Development Application has already been lodged and is being assessed. This is untrue.

Council agrees that the potential heritage value of the current building is important and one factor to be taken into account. That is why the demolition options include the scenario of retaining the frontage.

Following a heritage study in 2010, only eight sites were listed as heritage items in the Local Environmental Plan 2011. The *Sons of the Soil Hotel* was not one of these items, and since 2011, no other party has come forward to have the SOTS listed.

The bottom line is that the SOTS is a large, valuable business site in the heart of the CBD precinct. It has been vacant and unused for many years and been delivering little benefit to the community and the local economy. The site is unique in size and location and, if developed in some form, would create significant foot traffic and subsequent spending in the CBD. While the idea of accommodation and a number of smaller shops is welcomed, it does not guarantee the impact the CBD needs to make a difference, and Council does not want to create more empty shops.

Coonamble Shire needs to be prepared for the future and ensure the CBD is a viable and attractive place for current and future business and that it does not continue on the decline that has been observed in recent years. Council does not intend to be the developer nor the financier of the entire project.

While the SOTS does have a great history in our community, our communities and local economy cannot survive on history: we need to adapt and embrace the future and weigh up the needs of today and, more importantly, those that will take us into the future.

There are many perspectives on the future of the SOTS. It is Council's responsibility to consider how it can improve the CBD and build the local economy by ensuring optimal use of this site and develop it to the benefit of everyone in the community; this is not always easy decision-making nor will it be possible to suit everyone.

Your faithfully,

Councillor Tim Horan  
Mayor

Media outlets are free to publicise the content of this letter and to contact the Mayor for further comment.

Paul Gallagher  
**GENERAL MANAGER**