

The Fishergate Premises owned by Sandwich Town Council had been vacant and the Sandwich Town Council had just gained possession from tenants who had defaulted. These are premises which are in the Conservation area and are listed and STC have found it difficult over the years to let to appropriate tenants. Letting commercial premises had become extremely difficult following the demise of Pfizer and the inception of Discovery Park which offered office space at very keen subsidized rates.

At this stage in 2014 there were proposals made by Robert Hill and Robert Martin who had formed a loose relationship with intention of setting up a Trust to enable a structure to be erected on the Quay which was owned by DDC.

This was a project which excited the Community in general as there was a prospect of Boat building and Apprenticeship Schemes which would of course fit ideally into the aspirations of the Town in general. At this stage there was no Boatyard Trust properly constituted as this was the suggestion that this would be the appropriate vehicle to take matters forward.

It had been decided by the two partners Hill and Martin that in addition to the prospective Boatyard project that a lease should be sought on the STC owned Fishergate premises which be the administration centre for the prospective Trusts operations.

Planning Applications were prepared for the project in the name of Hill & Martin and in the euphoria that surrounded the project arrangements were made through Williamson & Barnes who represented STC (Through Jonathan Griffiths) to have the prospective Lease signed on the Fishergate premises.

For expediency and due to the perceived urgency of the matter Robert Hill was persuaded not to use his own Solicitor but to use Williamson and Barnes and his representative on an Ad Hoc basis Michael Griffiths. The appointment was made by Robert Martin who is Mr Griffith's next door neighbour and acted on a pro bono basis and had been involved in discussions regarding the project and is still today a member of the committee of the subsequently formed Sandwich Boatyard Trust.

There was urgency at this stage so, in the absence of a properly constituted and registered Trust the Lease was granted to a Limited Company.

Since the lease has been granted all terms and conditions have been complied with and it is the Councils view that whilst the original intention was to vest the Lease in the Boatyard Trust there can be no suggestion that that council acted incorrectly or negligently and that there has been no disadvantage to the subsequently constituted Trust.

We believe that the Town Council have acted in the best interests of the residents of Sandwich and any suggestion otherwise is entirely misplaced.

As a footnote the premises are, with the permission of Sandwich town Council, sublet to the Sandwich Quay Harbourmaster and also to Sandwich Port & Haven Commission.

Sandwich Town Council will be taking steps to ensure that the Lease of Fishergate is returned to Public Ownership. Mr Nicholas Gray will be offered the opportunity to view our file. The costs for facilitating this FOI act request is £1,000 in staffing hours and in the region of £150 plus vat in solicitor's fees. To comply with FOI rules, we are making this available to Mr Nicholas Gray free of charge.