

**Statutory Consultation with the Local Community under Part 8 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 for Disposal of Common Good Land – For demolition and subsequent sale of the Municipal Buildings and Town Hall, West Bridge Street, Falkirk FK1 5RS (“the Buildings”) by Falkirk Council (the “Council”)**

**Consultation dates:** commences 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 closing 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

## **Introduction and Background**

In 1946 Falkirk Town Council acquired the site on which the Municipal Buildings and Falkirk Town Hall are erected. At that time a large house, Westbank House, was erected on the site along with stables. The Town Chamberlain’s office moved into Westbank House in 1947 from the Burgh Buildings followed by the House Manager’s office in 1948, followed by the Burgh Architect and engineers and other departments. The Town Council demolished Westbank House in 1962 and constructed the current purpose-built Town Hall and Municipal Buildings with car parking which were completed in 1965. The Municipal Buildings are the Council’s present headquarters and house the Council’s Committee suite and Councillors’ offices. Approximately 350 staff are located there. The Town Hall is used for civic events and entertainment purposes.

Due to the age of the Buildings, they are reaching the end of their economic life and are no longer fit for purpose or economical to refurbish. On 30 September 2020, the Council took the decision to close the Municipal Buildings, relocate all staff elsewhere, to carry out the administrative and business functions of the Council and to build a new headquarters and arts facility in Falkirk town centre. At that time, it was agreed to decommission the Municipal Buildings. On 23 June 2021 the Council decided either to build the entire new facility on a site at Cockburn Street/High Street Falkirk or to split it with the arts facility part at the Cockburn Street/High Street site and the headquarters element on part of the existing Municipal Buildings site. The final decision will be made at a later date. These decisions did not require consultation under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

The larger part of the Municipal Buildings (shown coloured blue on the plan attached) is currently being emptied of contents and will continue to be so of over the next few months. Staff will be relocated to various other buildings already within the Council’s control. Council meetings and

business will be temporarily conducted from other suitable locations within Falkirk such as the Town Hall, Falkirk and Abbotsford House, Davids Loan, Bainsford, Falkirk.

It is anticipated that the part of the Municipal Buildings shown coloured blue on the plan will lie empty and unused as from the end of September 2021. The Falkirk Town Hall and the remainder of the Municipal Buildings will remain in use until any new replacement facility is constructed and operational, estimated to be around 2024/25. At that time, it is intended that these buildings will be vacated and potentially demolished and operations transferred to the new facility.

### **What land is being consulted on?**

The site shown coloured pink and blue on the plan including the Municipal Buildings and Falkirk Town Hall, Falkirk (“the consultation site”).

### **What is being proposed?**

It is proposed that, for reasons of public safety and to reduce ongoing liabilities and costs, the part of the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk shown coloured blue on the plan be demolished during 2021/22 with this portion of the site being reprofiled and temporarily grassed. It is proposed that, if the new HQ and arts facility is built wholly on the Cockburn Street/High Street site, the entire consultation site, when vacant, will be sold for development either with or without prior demolition of the remaining part of the Buildings. Alternatively, if the final decision is to build the arts facility at the Cockburn Street/High Street site with the HQ on part of the existing Municipal Buildings site, it is proposed that the balance of the consultation site, when vacant, will be sold for development, with or without prior demolition of the remaining part of the Buildings. It is most likely that any sale would be for residential development or any other purpose as approved by the Planning Authority.

### **Why are we consulting?**

The Buildings and the site on which they are built form part of the common good of the former Burgh of Falkirk.

When considering disposal of common good land (including demolition or sale), certain legal requirements must be followed. These are:

- Carry out a statutory consultation with the local community under Part 8 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015; and
- If required, seek approval from the Court under s.75 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

This consultation is being carried out to satisfy the first legal requirement and further guidance on the process can be found here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-common-good-propertyguidance-local-authorities>.

The Council is following the above Guidance.

Court approval will be sought if, following this consultation, the Council decides to proceed to demolish the Municipal Buildings shown coloured blue on the plan and to sell all or any part of the consultation site when vacant and if it is necessary to do so. The Council, in terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, must take account of the consultation responses when making a decision on whether or not to proceed with the disposal.

#### **What are the benefits of the proposal?**

Leaving the vacant part of the Municipal Buildings standing would result in safety concerns and a further deterioration that would create an adverse visual impact on the town centre. The Council would also be liable for substantial holding costs including rates, insurance, security etc. Demolition of the buildings in the interim and grassing over of the site would mitigate against the adverse visual impact and would avoid any continuing costs.

The Council intends to invest £45M on a project to create a new HQ and arts facility, in the town centre, to replace existing facilities with modern, state of the arts facilities which will assist with the regeneration of the town. The demolition, clearance and sale proceeds from all or part of the existing site could contribute to the replacement facilities.

#### **Are there any drawbacks to this proposal?**

The costs of demolition are likely to be in the region of £1,000,000 including the cost of decanting, asbestos removal and demolition. This is already included within the Council's business plan for the HQ and arts facility project.

#### **Please answer the following questions:**

1. Do you agree that Falkirk Council should demolish the part of the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk shown coloured blue on the plan with the site on which they are erected being grassed over?

2. Do you agree that the whole of the consultation site, or the balance should part be required for the building of the new HQ and associated facilities, be sold (with the remaining Buildings potentially having first been demolished)?

Responses to and comments on the proposal are invited. They must be made in writing and state that they relate to the Municipal Buildings Consultation proposals. Responses and comments must be received by the closing date of **27<sup>th</sup> August 2021**.

#### **Methods of Response:**

**1. On-line:** Please open FC consultation link [www.falkirk.gov.uk/commongood](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/commongood) and directly submit your completed response.

**2. E-mail:** A PDF consultation response form is available for downloading and printing on the website of Falkirk Council at [www.falkirk.gov.uk/commongood](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/commongood) . Alternatively, to request a consultation response form, please e-mail [property@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:property@falkirk.gov.uk) and ask for a “Municipal Buildings, Falkirk Consultation Response Form”, returning completed forms to the same e-mail address [property@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:property@falkirk.gov.uk) or,

**3. Post:** Please either download and print a response form at the link above or phone **01324 – 506070** to request a paper copy of the consultation response form. Copies are also available from Falkirk Library, Hope Street, Falkirk FK1 5AU. Responses do not, however, require to be on the consultation response form and can be by letter. Please post completed response with contact details to:

“The Municipal Buildings Falkirk Public Consultation Response”,  
The Manager (Asset Management),  
Falkirk Council - Place Services,  
Abbotsford House,  
David’s Loan,  
Bainsford,  
Falkirk  
FK2 7YZ

#### **What happens next?**

The Council’s decision will be published on the Falkirk Council website [www.falkirk.gov.uk](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk) along with details of all representations to this consultation (excluding address, postcode and email of respondent). The Council’s decision will have regard to the responses to this Consultation as to whether to proceed with the proposed disposal.

**Please return forms by 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021**