

## Public letter: Willsbridge Mill (May 2014)

Dear All,

Since becoming Chief Executive of Avon Wildlife Trust (AWT) in January 2013 I devoted considerable time to understanding and exploring the use of the Willsbridge Mill buildings. I appreciate the depth and level of community interest in the Mill's future, and the time individuals and different groups have already given to the building.

The Trust has previously made considerable effort to explore a financially sustainable use for the buildings that would enable them to be brought back into full use. However, the range of activities that the Trust can directly deliver or be involved in are limited by the scope of our charitable objectives. It is clear that the buildings could have wider uses than those AWT can currently use the site for.

AWT are not averse to an alternative lease arrangement from October 2014 when the current lease expires and the concept of the buildings being leased by a community company that makes the buildings available for a range of uses, perhaps renting the buildings on occasion to AWT for our educational work.

Therefore, in September 2013 AWT made the decision to renew the lease on the nature reserve but not to renew the lease on the buildings. AWT remain committed to creating a successful future for Willsbridge Mill and have continued to work in partnership with South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) and other stakeholders to explore that future. Following a number of meetings between stakeholders, those interested in adopting the lease for the buildings were asked to submit expressions of interest and business plans to South Gloucestershire Council.

These will be assessed by the Council in June with a decision expected by July as to who will adopt the buildings in the future. In the meantime, AWT continues to manage the nature reserve and coordinate a weekly volunteer group who undertake approved works on the reserve on our behalf. The barn buildings continue to be used by a number of groups, including our own. AWT will also be carrying out essential repair works to the buildings in the coming months before the lease expires.

We remain very committed to our local volunteer group, some of whom have worked with AWT for 25 years and are grateful for their support and that of others who appreciate the complex challenges we face in identifying a sustainable future for the buildings.

In the future, South Gloucestershire Council have agreed to allow AWT continued use of sections of the buildings for the storage of tools and use by the reserve volunteer group. In addition to the buildings AWT will relinquish the southern part of the reserve as the Council have plans to develop this area. AWT will however extend the nature reserve and start to manage additional areas to the north of the site, incorporating land either side of the river from the incline bridge to the church.

AWT hope to work closely with the new tenants of the Willsbridge Mill buildings and develop a relationship that is beneficial to both parties and the community groups that continue to enjoy the site.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Bevis Watts  
Chief Executive



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