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From: The Abbotsford Convent Foundation

ABBOTSFORD CONVENT BOARD OFFERS TO HELP LENTILS SEEK LEASE EXTENSION

The Board of the Abbotsford Convent Foundation today offered to help Lentil as Anything seek an extension of its lease at the Convent.

The Chairman of the Board, Mr Hayden Raysmith, said representatives of Lentil as Anything would be invited to meet Board members to discuss the potential renewal of its lease. The restaurant would have an opportunity to present a proposal for lease renewal.

Mr Raysmith said recent media reports had given the impression that the Foundation was evicting Lentil as Anything. This was incorrect, Mr Raysmith said. The lease does not expire until January 2011 and no such decision had been made.

Mr Raysmith said a Board discussion last night had also decided to establish a Board sub-committee to open lines of communication with all tenants at Board level. "If there has been a breakdown in communication, the Board wishes to take steps to correct that as soon as possible."

The Lentil as Anything lease will be the first major lease to expire on the site and the Board recognised the need for increased and regular dialogue with tenants now that the initial leases are approaching expiry. There was a need to balance continuity with the opportunity for new tenants to bring new ideas and a fresh approach to the precinct.

Mr Raysmith said the Board acknowledged the positive aspects of Lentil as Anything's presence on the site and the contribution it had made in the early years. He added: "There are also issues that need to be addressed by Lentils. The Board is looking forward to those discussions and offering any assistance it can to help the restaurant and its community take steps to ensure a beneficial partnership with the Convent."

Mr Raysmith said some incorrect reports had caused internet commentary that the Foundation's Board had somehow lost its commitment to community values. Mr Raysmith said: "This commentary is ill-informed and unfair. The Convent is all about community and always will be."

When the Foundation accepted taxpayers' money in 2005 to create a community arts, education and cultural precinct at the Convent, it did so on condition that the Convent became self-sustaining and would not rely on ongoing Government support. This pact was pivotal to saving the Convent site for the community.

The Board believes it has demonstrated that this obligation to financial prudence is compatible with creating an outstanding community-based facility. It is a delicate and challenging balance, but a balance that has been achieved, Mr Raysmith said.