

18 July 2008

Dear Friend,

Update on Blackhorse Road Cemetery and Chapel

It is getting on for 9 months since I last updated you on the old Wesleyan Methodist cemetery on Blackhorse Road, Kingswood. Although nothing appears to be happening on the surface some real progress is being made behind the scenes.

Before I update you on the cemetery, I will briefly mention what is happening with the buildings on the site, which, as you may remember, are owned by different people.

You may recollect that the owner of the burnt-out Chapel submitted a formal planning application to South Gloucestershire Council seeking permission to turn the chapel (whose current permission is for use as a Ballet School) into 14 apartments "with parking landscaping and associated works". Unfortunately the owner withdrew this planning application late last year. It would appear that Council officials who deal with Listed Buildings had concerns about a proposed canopy along the front of the building and the introduction of 2 new entrances. Personally I find this sort of attitude to be crazy - to my mind providing any redevelopment is done sensitively, re-use of the Chapel has to be better than its current state as a burnt-out shell. Since early this year when Council officials wrote to the owner's architect, there does not appear to have been any further progress.

Some slightly better news though with the adjacent former Sunday School (Snooker Club that was). Building work has now commenced there to convert it into 6 flats.

Now, as to the large cemetery on Waters Road and the small section of cemetery by the vets.

The last time I wrote, I told you that the Council had finally engaged a Private Investigator to track down the owner of the cemetery and that officials in the Council were preparing legal paperwork to serve on the owner (forcing him to tidy the site) once he was found.

I am pleased to say that the PI did finally find the owner and the legal paperwork was served on him in January. The legal paperwork, known as section 215 notices, was effective from mid February and required the owner to a) Repair the section of the collapsing wall along the boundary at Waters Road (within 1 month); b) Remove all items of fly-tipped material from the land (within 1 month); and c) Carry out clearance of scrub vegetation including brambles and seedling trees, remove all cut vegetation from the land and restore all pathways to provide pedestrian access through the site (within 3 months).

If you have passed the site recently, you will have noticed that the owner has failed completely to comply with any of these notices.

From the middle of May (when the last of the three s215 notices expired), Council officials began collecting evidence of non-compliance with the s215 notices and began putting together a case for prosecuting the owner. (It is worth mentioning here that whilst the Council was collecting evidence of non-compliance, other sections of the Council were not able to remove large fly-tipped items from the cemetery. At present, being the middle of summer, the undergrowth tends to hide fly-tipped material. Once this dies back in the autumn, I will ask the Council to remove what it can so that it does not attract further fly-tipping.)

On the 6th June the Council served a notice on the owner to the effect that he had not complied with the s215 notices. The Council's case for prosecuting is now with the Council's lawyers.

So, although on the surface there still does not appear to be any progress with the site, behind the scenes there has been some real progress. Although it has been frustratingly slow, the signs are good that the Council will proceed with prosecution in the not too distant future.

With best wishes,

Andy Perkins (Councillor for Woodstock)

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PS. I am more than happy for you for copy or forward this letter to anyone you wish.