

3rd December 2015

Dear Friend,

Update on Blackhorse Road Cemetery and Chapel

It is more than several years since I wrote with an update on the sorry state of the former Wesleyan Methodist burial ground on Blackhorse Road, Kingswood.

In the past few weeks there have been some developments regarding the chapel so I thought I would write again. Sadly we are no further forward with regards to the majority of the burial ground as the owner has disappeared again. Despite South Gloucestershire Council taking him to Court twice and him being fined (albeit trivial amounts of money), he has refused to engage whatsoever with the Council and without his co-operation every avenue we have explored as a means of getting access to the burial ground once again will not work. Until such a time as he does engage with the Council, then I am afraid there seems little if any prospect of improvement at the site.

The purpose, however, of this letter is to advise you that in the past few weeks a planning application has been submitted to South Gloucestershire Council to renovate and convert the burnt-out chapel into 15 flats. The chapel was sold at auction earlier this year and the new owners are evidently keen to redevelop it. As part of the site is within the boundaries of Bristol City Council, the developers have also submitted a planning application to Bristol CC – and this is to build two houses on the old entrance lane off of Two Mile Hill.

Now, as I said above the vast majority of the burial ground is owned by someone else – so consequently it has nothing to do with this new planning application. However, a small section of burial ground is owned by the same people who now own the chapel. This section of burial ground is alongside the eastern side of the chapel between the chapel and Blackhorse Road. This does not include the square patch of burial ground next to the vets – that is owned by the same person who owns the majority of the burial ground.

If you have access to the Internet, the paperwork for the planning application is on the Council's website and I have created a shortcut link to it – <http://tinyurl.com/ChapelApp>. If you don't have access to the Internet you will need to visit the council's offices in Kingswood Civic Centre to view the plans.

The plans show that the developers want to 'redevelop' the small section of burial ground they own between the chapel and Blackhorse Road so that it becomes parking for 11 vehicles plus a storage area for bins. As part of their application they are proposing to create a memorial garden to the south of the chapel (itself which would also be 'on top' of some graves – although their plans do not show this) and relocate most (but not all) of the memorial stones which are within the section of burial ground that they wish to 'redevelop'.

Part of the paperwork the developers have submitted to the Council includes two documents relating to a graveyard survey. One is a plan, the other is a description of all of the memorial stones and whether the intention is to preserve (relocate) the memorial stones or not. The majority of the graves in this section are many many decades old but there are some which are well within living memory. I have contacted the company to ask them some questions about their intentions with regards to the actual graves as it is not clear whether they intend to re-inter those buried elsewhere or whether they intend to leave the bodies *in situ* and basically tarmac over them.

Redevelopment of the chapel is, in my opinion, a welcomed step forward given its very sorry state. However, the proposal to create a car parking area and bin storage area on top of part of the burial ground is clearly not going to meet with everyone's approval and I am concerned that a few of the graves, even if not currently accessible, could well contain the bodies of people immediately related to residents still alive today. I will be contacting the local media to see if they will run a story to try and alert as many people as possible to this particular issue.

If you wish to comment on the planning application submitted to South Gloucestershire Council you can do so online via the link I provided above or by email to planningapplications@southglos.gov.uk. You can also write to the Council at: Trudy Gallagher, Planning Officer, South Gloucestershire Council, Department for Environment and Community Services, PO Box 299, Civic Centre, High Street, Kingswood, Bristol, BS15 0DR. The closing date for comments is 1st January 2016 but you should aim to get your comments in ASAP. **In all correspondence, you should quote the reference number for the application which is PK15/4995/F.**

If you are objecting to the application, it is always a good idea to make this clear in your emails/letters because the Council differentiates between objections and general comments and it can influence how the Council deals with applications at a later stage in the process. If you have access to email it would be helpful to me if you could email me a copy of any comments you make to the Council so that I have a better idea of how people feel about this application.

I hope this is a helpful update on the chapel at least. I'm sorry we have made no further progress with regards to the majority of the burial ground. Please feel free to pass on this letter to anyone whom you think might be interested in the site.

With best wishes,

Andy Perkins (Councillor for Woodstock)

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