

21 March 2005

Dear Friend,

Update on Blackhorse Road Cemetery

As a couple of months have gone by since the press coverage on the state of the old Wesleyan Methodist cemetery on Blackhorse Road, Kingswood and a couple of you have been asking after an update, I thought it time to put together some bits and pieces. So, here goes...

1. In response to the press coverage that we achieved, the Director of Community Services at South Gloucestershire Council (Steve Evans) has asked a senior officer (a chap called Paul Trew) to try to find a way forward. Paul has been given carte blanche to explore all possible avenues. He has been asked to draw together a group of senior officers from every department necessary (such as legal, planning enforcement and land valuers) to work together to find a solution. I met up with Paul three weeks ago when he was in the final stages of drawing the group together. I brought him up-to-date with bits of information that I had gleaned. He asked to be given a bit of time to get things going which is only fair given the speed with which the issue was handed to him and the complexity of it. However, I will be asking for regular updates from him in the near future and will, of course, keep you all updated.
2. Trying to locate the owner of the cemetery has drawn a blank so far. The last time that the cemetery changed hands was in 1998 when someone called Simon Thomas bought it. At the time, Mr Thomas was living in Staple Hill. Alas he is no longer at this address and a possible address in Iron Acton has drawn a blank. At my meeting with Paul Trew, I asked what the Council does in such situations and the response was that they would send Council officials door-knocking at last known addresses to see if anyone knows his whereabouts. Should the Council decide to compulsory purchase the cemetery, the whereabouts of the owner is not important. All that the Council have to do is post notices on the site.
3. Around the beginning of March, part of the boundary wall of the cemetery (on Waters Road) collapsed. This will come as no surprise to those of you who have walked around the perimeter as it is bulging out in a number of places. Fortunately, no bones were protruding, but as soon as I found out I got onto the Council and repairs were made within two weeks.
4. Aside from the cemetery itself, the owner of the boarded-up Sunday School (what was Crackers Snooker Club) has re-submitted a planning application to convert it

into 5 maisonettes. The tarmac car park next to it would be retained – about two-fifths of it to the rear would be fenced off and the front three-thirds would be for 4 cars. I know that this car park was very controversial when first laid down as it was over the top of some graves. The current application does not appear to affect any further graves. However, if you would like to comment on this application, it can be seen at Kingswood Civic Centre. You have until April 1st to make comments. The reference numbers are PK05/0612/F (for the main application) and PK05/0625/LB (for the listed building consent). If you have access to the Internet, you can see the application on-line. The web-site addresses (part of South Gloucestershire Council's internet site) are <http://www.southglos.gov.uk:8080/servlet/UKPfolder?council=0&status=1&applicationnumber=PK05/0612/F> and <http://www.southglos.gov.uk:8080/servlet/UKPfolder?council=0&status=1&applicationnumber=PK05/0625/LB>. All Council libraries have Internet access. You can also comment on the application through the website.

Well, I hope that has brought things up-to-date. I would like to thank you all for responding to the press coverage. So far I have had 34 responses (41 individuals as some were joint responses) which given that the cemetery has been closed for burials for 27 years is an excellent response. I would like to say an extra thank-you for those who responded at such short notice to the Bristol Observer's call for the photograph with your gardening tools. I have been told in no uncertain terms that it was this publicity that jolted the Council into appointing Paul Trew to take the lead.

I keep promising to keep people informed of developments and I will do this. There may be periods of time when things go quiet but the issue with the cemetery has gone on for around 20 years now and it won't be solved overnight. But I will keep plugging away at the Council and will let you know when things happen.

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.