

16 October 2007

Dear Friend,

Update on Blackhorse Road Cemetery and Chapel

It is a little over 2 years 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 [very slow] progress is being made behind the scenes. There is also some important news on the Chapel which is why I am writing.

Earlier this Summer, the owner of the chapel had a brief open afternoon to display some plans to renovate the chapel and convert it into apartments. This open afternoon was a public event and seemed to attract quite a bit of attention from local residents. I don't know how widely it was advertised, but the turn out seemed to be good.

After an interval of a few months, the owner has now submitted a formal planning application to South Gloucestershire Council. The owner is 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". The owner is also seeking to add a canopy to the eastern elevation (the side of the chapel that runs parallel to Blackhorse Road) using supporting pillars that came from within the chapel. Probably the most controversial part of the application is that the owner wishes to turn the small part of the graveyard that he owns (the bit that is between the eastern elevation of the chapel and Blackhorse Road) into a car parking area. The memorial stones from this area would be moved to a memorial garden that would be situated along the length of the original entrance pathway from Two Mile Hill Road. The owner of the chapel does not own the large part of the graveyard behind the chapel (on Waters Road) nor does he own the small bit next to the vets. These bits of graveyard are owned by someone else (see below).

The planning application (number PK07/2951/F) can be inspected at Kingswood Civic Centre. It is also available on-line at;

[http://planning.southglos.gov.uk/WAM/showCaseFile.do?
action=show&appType=Planning&appNumber=PK07/2951/F](http://planning.southglos.gov.uk/WAM/showCaseFile.do?action=show&appType=Planning&appNumber=PK07/2951/F)

Now, as to the large cemetery on Waters Road and the small section of cemetery by the vets. As I mentioned above, this is owned by someone else. The chap's name is known, but his whereabouts is not known. For several years now, we (as local councillors) have been trying to persuade South Gloucestershire Council to find him. Periodically, we put down questions at Full Council meetings to ensure that this issue is not forgotten and to remind Council officers that we are not going to go away.

At our last Council meeting (12th Sep) we were told that the Council has finally engaged a Private Investigator to track down the cemetery owner. We have been told that the PI has leads and these are being followed up. Whilst the Private Investigator is following-up on leads, the Council is preparing legal paperwork to serve on the owner (forcing him to tidy the site) once he is found.

The speed at which this problem is moving is painfully slow. Every time I pass the cemetery, my heart sinks because of the state of it and the knowledge that there are many residents who can't visit their relatives' graves. However, please be assured that we are doing our best to keep this issue moving forwards – even if I don't write that often.

With best wishes,

Andy Perkins (Councillor for Woodstock)

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