

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Area Planning Committee (South and West)** held in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Spennymoor on **Thursday 23 June 2016 at 2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor H Nicholson (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Armstrong, D Bell, D Boyes, J Clare, K Davidson, J Gray, A Patterson, G Richardson, L Taylor, C Wilson and S Zair

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Dixon and S Morrison.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor J Gray substituted for Councillor M Dixon.

3 Declarations of Interest (if any)

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 Applications to be determined

a DM/15/03642/FPA - Former St Anne's School, Kingways, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, DL14 7ER

Consideration was given to the report of the Senior Planning Officer regarding an application for the demolition of buildings and erection of 18 no dwellings at the former St Anne's School, Kingsway, Bishop Auckland (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Planning Officer gave a detailed presentation on the application which included photographs of the site.

A representative on behalf of the applicant addressed the Committee outlining the reasons for demolition as oppose to refurbishment of the building. The building had originally been purchased following an arson attack, with the intention of converting the existing building into flats. The applicant had secured the building by bricking up doorways and erecting fencing, however it was under constant threat of

vandalism. The applicant had consulted two Architects who had both confirmed that a substantial financial loss would be suffered if the existing building was converted. Considering the information from experts, the applicant had put forward a scheme which was sympathetic to the existing buildings. Although they would be demolished, stone would be reclaimed and used for the front of the proposed dwellings and therefore some of the character of the former buildings would be retained.

With reference to the response received from Bishop Auckland Civic Society, he refuted the claim that the condition of the buildings was a convenient excuse for demolition. He confirmed that there was no alternative viable option but to demolish the building. The buildings were a haven for vandals, there was an additional risk that there would be another arson attack and the building would end up beyond salvation.

Councillor Zair described the proposals as bittersweet. A historical building had reached a point of decay which was not as a result of the current owners, but due to vandalism, arson and lack of investment. The proposal to demolish and use the existing materials in building the new dwellings was a sensible approach and every effort had been made by the applicant to adhere to planning policies. He referred to the nearby Bishop Auckland Grammar School which had almost been destroyed by fire and confirmed that local residents had been living with the eyesore for many years. It was regrettable that the only way forward was to demolish the buildings, however it was the only sensible approach. He supported the plans and moved that the application be approved.

Councillor Davidson confirmed that upon seeing the drawings which were not included in the report, it was obvious that the applicant had taken every step to salvage the existing character. The plans submitted were similar to the existing building and a significant amount of material would be recycled for the new dwellings, he seconded that the application be approved.

Councillor Boyes referred to a former grade II listed school in Easington Colliery which had been derelict for twenty years, which was beyond restoration. Although this building was not listed, it was a similar situation in terms of dereliction and the opportunity for the site to be developed should not be missed. He supported the application for approval.

Councillor Clare considered that the building in its current state was beyond preservation and it would not be feasible to either repair or preserve it, regardless of the sentiment attached.

Upon a vote being taken it was **Resolved:**

That the application be approved on the grounds as outlined in the report.