

EMPTY & NEGLECTED
HISTORIC PROPERTIES

WARWICK

SEPT 2008

WDC PLANNING FORUM 22 SEPTEMBER 2008

It is now six months since I presented Empty & Neglected Historic Buildings in Warwick Town Centre in February. As the head of Planning & Engineering, John Archer intimated times change and change has, indeed, happened.

The Leper Hospital & Master's House

Land at the rear of the Master's House has been on the market now for some months with P/P for an office block but there have been no enquiries. The owner alleges he needs the £285,000 (asking price) in order to refurbish the Master's House. No comment.

1822 Gas Works

Work is going ahead to convert this iconic building to apartments.

Victorian Post Office

Marketed at £1.4M with no enquiries. Builders' rubble in the Church side entrance prevents rough sleepers and more fly tipping, though it still happens from time to time.

Old Dispensary

Sold for a private dwelling and P/P passed for interior alterations and WCC have newly painted "Doctor" in front of it! The surgery has moved to purpose built premises in Chase Meadow.

Blackfriars House

This large building remains empty but could easily be converted into a hotel; both the Racecourse and the Town need more hotel accommodation. This huge building is now being marketed as: To Let, Refurbished Offices. Someone is caring for this well-loved building as broken windows are quickly boarded up. However, two down pipes (in this monsoon season) are leaking badly and the fabric of the stone is being destroyed. Is Council Tax being levied on this House?

Castle Lane garages and penthouse

These remain empty and are not marketed.

West End Garage, West Street

This utilitarian building remains empty. The owner/tenant/leaseholder has painted out the graffiti which really irritated constituents in Tanners' Courtyard and Charter Approach. There is land behind it, with two locked sheds/garages and a pedestrian right of way to 66 West Street. Again, is Council tax being levied on this building?

Conclusion

With the foreseeable future grimmer than ever now that the UK is 13 months into a "credit crunch", 2-22 Northgate Street really has little value. The photo of the hideous apartments in the Courier at the rear of this valuable site (historically) was superimposed on a photo from the gardens of The Butts' residents. They are really angry about that ill-thought out proposal. The west side of the finest William and Mary Street in England is further at risk with the move of the H M Crown Courts to Leamington's Justice Centre.

The Coffee Tavern (1888) next to the Victorian Post Office will shortly be vacated by the WCC. I have put it on the Victorian Society's Buildings at Risk website.

Sensibly, WDC planners threw out Northgate House's plans and WCC is going to think more carefully about how to convert that 1698 house into a 21st C Conference Centre now they have lost Manor Hall. Removing a 17th C fireplace on the first floor was vandalism in the extreme. Once that is removed it will NEVER be reinstated.

Talking about the issue of empty and neglected historic buildings in Warwick to people interested in interesting stories of patches of Leamington Spa – both Conservation Area and not – where houses lie empty for years.

Again, I urge WDC and its efficient Planning Department to put pressure on owners/leaseholders to do something with their buildings. What price history?

We MUST retain as much as possible of history Warwick for future generations.

Cllr Mrs Elizabeth Higgins
Warwick West Town & District Councillor
09/09/2008

