

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

19 October 2021

Item 13 – Members’ Questions

From Cllr Bridget Wayman, Nadder Valley

To Councillor Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health & Wellbeing

Question (21-05)

Buildings at Risk

I have previously asked the question of the Leader that support and resources are allocated to ensure that officers have the appropriate ability to go to Court to gain access to a property that is designated as a Building at Risk, in this case, Zeals House, the home of the Chafyn Grove family who have made significant philanthropic gifts in the past to Mere, the City of Salisbury and Salisbury Cathedral). Zeals House is in a very poor condition and is a Grade 1 listed building owned by an offshore company with absentee owners. I am also aware of another important Building At Risk (BAR) at Roche Court in Winterslow, in desperate need of repair although the ownership problems are somewhat different.

I have not received any response from the Leader to my request that officers are allocated the resources to pursue these type of cases and I am sure there are other examples across the county. It would appear that we have no strategy for Buildings at Risk which may explain why there is such an ad hoc approach to these matters. It is vitally important that we have a strategy in place in order for the Council to protect our important heritage. It may not be a statutory responsibility for the Council to tackle Buildings At Risk, but we should not be ignoring them when they are an important part of our heritage.

Would the Leader commit to preparing a strategy and ensuring resources are available for officers to protect our heritage?

Would the Leader also call English Heritage (champions of our heritage and developers of the Buildings at Risk approach) to account for their lack of action?

Response

The Council does seek to assist in securing a positive outcome for Buildings at Risk. However, each building has unique problems that may require bespoke solutions and a co-ordinated approach between the Council, Historic England and the landowner. Where landowners are less co-operative, the difficulties and costs increase, and the Council’s Planning Enforcement and Legal Teams may have to be involved, adding to their already busy workload. The impact of covid, which has

restricted out of office travel by Historic England Officers has created additional difficulties in progressing matters. There have been a number of cases where we are awaiting confirmation from Historic England on their position, and in the absence of this it is proving difficult to progress these complex cases using a multi-agency approach in a timely manner. Like the Council, Historic England has its own budgetary constraints and priorities and is involved with many other buildings at risk outside of Wiltshire and may not be able to respond as quickly as local authorities would like.

The Council will continue to do its best to help find a way forward for such buildings, but where landowner co-operation is not forthcoming, experience indicates that solutions are not straightforward and can often only be achieved after prolonged engagement. Officers will continue to engage with Historic England to highlight the importance of reducing delays to achieve timely solutions.