

SWILLINGTON EDUCATIONAL CHARITY

The old school and school masters house on Church Lane, Swillington has been sold subject to contract.

In 2011 the then Trustees resigned, the management committee folded and the user groups left. This left the buildings unused and vulnerable to vandalism.

It was due to the determination of a group of ladies from St. Mary's Parish Church that the present Trustees were assembled. According to the Governance document there must be three nominated Trustees, one from Swillington Parish Council, one from Great and Little Preston Parish Council and one from Leeds City Council, an ex Officio Trustee namely the Rector of Swillington and two co - opted Trustees who must have significant connections with either Parish. No residents came forward for co option.

The first informal meeting was held in July 2012 with the first properly constituted meeting held in October with two Parish Trustees and the Rector. The first job for the Trustees was to try to get insurance cover for the buildings which proved impossible due to the condition and being unoccupied. This meant the Trustees were personally responsible and liable which, for obvious reasons, meant a quick solution was required.

After paying off the outstanding bills and removal of services for safety reasons, the Charity was left with little funds. Bearing in mind legal and other statutory requirements that would have to be met, the Trustees were left with few alternatives.

The Trustees looked into the options available, refurbish, demolish and retain the land or sell for development. Due to the condition of the buildings and the fact they were not insured the Trustees had neither the time or the funds to finance an advertising campaign. Quotes obtained for refurbishing were way beyond the means available.

It was decided demolition was the only option left open.

Before any action could be taken an Asbestos Survey by law must be carried out by an accredited company.

As a requirement of the Charity Commission, the buildings were also surveyed by a Chartered Surveyor.

Full demolition was only weeks away until a response from an article in the Rothwell Advertiser prompted several builders to come forward. Despite extending the time scales and the personal risk, the Trustees decided to hear the offers.

Two of the developers submitted written offers, one was to demolish and build up to six two bedroomed cottages subject to planning permission the other was to retain the structures and refurbish into two family homes.

After meetings with both developers, sealed final and best bids were submitted. The Trustees met in July 2013 and after discussion it was decided to accept the offer to retain the buildings.

The Trustees instructed a firm of solicitors to proceed with the sale.

The history of the buildings date back to 1748 although the present structure was built in 1865 both the original and the present were built by members of the Lowther family. Apart from references in the Church and Little Preston Hall there is very little left in the area to appreciate the benevolence of the most powerful families in the country. Many residents will remember the old school as the place where they spent their early years and many will remember their parents talking about their time there. The Alms houses on Church Lane were the last part of the Lowther legacy to disappear under the sledge hammer.

The Trustees hope that they have succeeded in saving the buildings for generations to come but this all depends on a successful completion of sale.

The land has never been registered and our solicitor is in the process of applying for first registration through the Land Registry

The developer, who is local, intends refurbishing the house and making this the family home. As this is already classed as a residential there should be no planning issues. The plan then is to apply for change of use from school to home and refurbish the main building into a second home, keeping the main structure and features.

This is only a brief account of the work carried out over the past year by the Trustees, a lot more has been done. It is a very time consuming job but there are still two vacancies for Trustees if any one is interested.

All the meeting minutes from July 2012 to present can be found on Great and Little Preston web site www.greatandlittlepreston-pc.org and links on the news and events pages to this on Swillington PC web site www.swillingtonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Cllr Ian Wallace

Nominated Trustee of Great and Little Preston Parish Council
on behalf of the Trustees of SEC