

**Question and Statement from Members of the Public**

**Question**

Question from Mark White, Resident of Gillingham to the Cabinet Member for Community and Resources and Natural and Built Environment in relation to proposed demolition of St Martins House in Gillingham

Question:

This Council wishes to demolish St Martins House in Gillingham. The building is locally listed with the District Council as a heritage asset and is given the same level of importance in the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan, supported by Gillingham Town Council reflects the wishes of the people of Gillingham with regard to future development. It was ratified by the District Council in July 2018 after a 91% approval from a local referendum. Given the level of opposition to the loss of St Martins, will this Council rescind the Demolition Notice and commence a full public consultation?

Answer:

Officers and Cabinet Members have continued to discuss the future of St Martins in Gillingham, and the application for a new build on that site. It has been agreed that the County Council and Magna Housing will pause the demolition of St Martins House and the planning application for a new build on that site in order to allow further consideration of all the different factors and views that need to be taken into account as we move forward in the local area. It will also allow us to make sure from a health and care perspective the opportunity of the site is maximised. It has been agreed that the County Council and Magna Housing will pause the demolition of St Martins House and the planning application for a new build on that site while this review takes place.

Improving Health and Well Being is a priority for Dorset County Council and the residents that live in Dorset. Our partnership working with the NHS to deliver care closer to home and support people and people and communities to remain healthy and independent is also all about how we use the resources we have including our workforce in the best way possible as our population changes. The adult social care programme Building Better Lives is all about making sure we help people and families continue to live in their local communities including those who have disabilities. To do this having the right accommodation is important but we also want to make sure that the key workers who provide health and care, can also live locally. This proposed Extra Care development is one of a number across the county, with similar schemes in Bridport and Wareham and will help deliver sustainable health and social care in local communities. I know that for many local people having choice about where they live in their local community, near family and friends is important as they get older and this development will help make that happen.

Magna Housing are our partner in Gillingham, and we have entered into a contract that has sold the land to them, Homes England funding has been secured to support the development and the scheme must be completed by March 2021. We must progress this scheme within these timescales as even now we have people unable to live locally and as independently as they would want and receive the care they need because of a lack of suitable accommodation. Our health and care providers also report the issues that the workforce is having finding affordable housing in the area.

The County Council is aware of the local listing of St Martins Home in the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan, and it has consulted with the planners on this specific point. It has been advised by the local planning authority that this listing does not carry any legal status and does not prevent the demolition of St Martins Home. Furthermore, the County Council has been informed that an application to Historic England for listed building status, which would carry legal status, has been turned down by Historic England.

The principal reasons given by Historic England are as follows:

**Lack of architectural interest:**

- although neatly made, with some attention to detail, as a house of the last decade of the C19, its style is typical, rather than exceptional, and the design does not demonstrate the high degree of quality in architectural style which would be needed to set it apart from its many peers;
- while the materials were made locally, in style and substance they are all very typical of their period, and houses using similar materials, mass produced, can be found in large numbers across the country, with little regional variation;
- little information is available about the interior, but photographs indicate that there have been significant alterations, and in any case, even the survival of a complete and high-quality decorative scheme would be unlikely to outweigh the lack of exterior interest.

**Lack of historic interest:**

- the association with a long-lived local building firm, and the use of the house as a showcase for its work, is clearly of local interest, but Thomas Hudson is not a significant figure nationally.

**Conclusion:**

The County Council considers that the assessment by Historic England on the merits of preserving St. Martins House should be the definitive judgement given that it has been made by experts who have considered all the facts available.

The County Council did not consult prior to the service of a demolition notice because there is no requirement to undertake consultation as part of the prior approval process. Furthermore, it is not able to undertake a full public consultation exercise, as requested, since it is unable to act on any outcome which entails the retention of the building as it has exchanged contracts with Magna Housing for the sale of the land. Magna Housing is contractually committed to providing an extra care scheme on the site.

Therefore, the County Council is pausing the progression to ensure, from an adult social care and health perspective, that the plans maximise all of the opportunity the site provides to meet local need.

## **Statement**

### **Statement from Peter Sibthorp, Chairman of the Ridge Moors Action Group in relation to the Moors at Arne**

I am here to alert you to some of the potential risks.

Ridge Moors Action Group represents around 200 people from Ridge.

#### **TRAFFIC**

The single track roads will be overwhelmed by construction and visitor traffic.

#### **FLOOD RISK**

This will be made worse as the sponge like capacity of The Moors to absorb rainwater will be much reduced and there will be insufficient room for water.

#### **SILTING**

The planned River Frome breach at Turners Cove will cause silting to occur which will reduce depths of water thus limiting navigation to Wareham.