

Item 4 (a) – Petition for the Regeneration of New Ash Green Village Centre

A petition was presented to Council on 21 July 2015, relevant minute extract below:

Council – 21 July 2015 (Minute 64 (a))

Councillor Cameron Clark and the Lead Petitioner, Victoria Barnard, had submitted a petition with 1,550 signatures in the following terms:

“We, the undersigned, call upon Sevenoaks District Council to take a more active role in ensuring the current landowners (Piperton Finance, Gable Holt Ltd and the Co-operative Society Ltd) bring New Ash Green Village Centre up to an acceptable standard (details of major issues listed below):

- Upper Street South: semi derelict appearance of the walkways/paving slabs/empty units. Rat traps left for 2+ years without being changed/removed, rats living in empty units with pest control not carried out regularly. Trees/plants growing where they shouldn't be. Bridge over Link in very poor condition, stairs and railings covered in pigeon droppings.
- Upper Street North: derelict, evident damage caused by water, damaged windows, walkways/paving slabs in a bad state, pigeons living/breeding inside the empty units (with many dead pigeons inside empty units and the floors thick with pigeon droppings), empty units not boarded up properly (being constantly ripped down by vandals), broken cladding, barbed wire hanging down, unsightly boarding, woodwork rotting, inside of the units in a derelict state.
- The Row: Many empty units which cannot be filled due to the derelict state of the interiors. Landowners will not spend money to bring them up to standard for tenants to move in. Security shutters dirty and unsightly. Rats have been seen. Pigeons roosting above shops, anti-pigeon spikes do nothing to deter them. Pigeons now laying eggs and breeding above shops. Canopies either filthy or missing, clock tower flaking paint. Bus stop in centre inhabited by rats. Boarded up toilets and doors near the bus stop. Overall appearance of the centre downstairs (most of upstairs is not accessible) is neglected and derelict/borderline derelict.

The neglect and lack of care and maintenance over a number of years in the village centre has reached its limit and cannot be allowed to deteriorate any longer.

The residents of Upper Street South, the village shop owners and the residents of New Ash Green are not prepared to tolerate the neglect and derelict appearance of the centre. It is affecting home owners and shop owners alike.

We urge the council to ensure the landowners make the necessary improvements and regenerate the village centre as a matter of urgency.

We urge the council to take urgent steps towards making sure the landowners achieve this so the village centre is brought back to an acceptable standard so it can thrive for the local community.”

The lead petitioner, Victoria Barnard, addressed the council in support of the petition.

The Leader responded expressing shared frustration with the situation and difficulties dealing with the three different landlords of the site. There were multiple ongoing responses and it did need to be more coordinated and better communicated.

Local and neighbouring Councillors spoke in support of the issues raised and the need for improvements, with all interested parties working together as a coordinated team to renew the vision for New Ash Green.

Resolved: That the petition be referred to the Cabinet, where the Council's approach could be coordinated across the Council and communicated to residents, with a report back in six months.