FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
PRESS RELEASE
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Council agrees action to bring derelict High Street buildings back into use

Its dilapidated frontage is a blot on Wisbech High Street. But its rear reveals the true extent of its disrepair, with no roof and crumbling bricks which could legally fall on taxpayers to keep safe if left to continue to rot.

Now Fenland District Council and a local developer have moved to acquire and redevelop the site of 11-12 High Street from its London-based private owner to regenerate the decaying site once and for all.

Subject to contract, a deal has been agreed for the council to purchase the buildings from the owner, who bought the site 23 years ago. The buildings would then be transferred to the developer to redevelop them into new shops and flats using lottery grant funding awarded to the council to revive the heart of the town centre.

Councillors have also agreed to use a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to acquire the Grade II-listed buildings as a back-up should the acquisition deal fall through.

Cabinet meetings held earlier this month warned that action to resolve the matter needed to be taken quickly otherwise the lottery funding could be in jeopardy.

A significant part of the £1.9 million awarded to the Wisbech High Street Project from the Heritage Lottery Fund has been allocated to 11-12 High Street, but unless the work is completed by January 2021, the funding could be lost.

Members were also warned that if no action was taken and the buildings deteriorated further, it is likely the council would have to step in to keep the property safe, as required under the Building Act 1984, at the taxpayers’ expense.

Councillor David Oliver, the council’s Cabinet member responsible for heritage, said: “The regeneration of 11-12 High Street is one of the most complex and challenging matters the council has had to consider in many years.

“The owner was unable to fund urgent repairs in the past when the council had no choice but to intervene, and sadly the owner has also been unable to bring the site forward with the lottery funding. The only option is to acquire the site so as not to risk funding options, and to prevent it falling into further disrepair.”

“This is a once in a generation opportunity,” he added. “Bringing these derelict properties back into use will make a significant contribution to the regeneration of the whole of Wisbech High Street, providing fit for purpose shops and modern town centre flats which will encourage people to use and enjoy the town centre.”

The news comes amid ongoing and exciting developments on the High Street, with the council progressing its plans for an ambitious community space at No 24 (The Gap) and work on Nos 13-17 being developed in partnership with its private owners.
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For more information contact Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226