

Anger Over Demolition Of Former School Building That Could Not Be Saved

By David Rose

The controversial demolition of a historical former school building in Slyfield is now under way. The redevelopment of the site, on the corner of Woking and Old Farm Roads, to allow the construction of nine flats is being criticised.



The Old School House being demolished, December 2020. Pictures by Cllr Angela Gunning.

Guildford Borough Councillor Angela Gunning (Lab, Stoke) took these pictures this week and said on Wednesday, December 9: "It was built around 1870 as one of the first schools for universal education of children in this country."

"It was built when it was the only building in Old Farm Road – and surrounded by fields. Prior to consideration of the planning application in February this year I did everything I could to see whether the building could be listed but disappointingly it was not possible. An intriguing and historic building is now a vanished landmark; gone for ever."



Posts about it being

pulled down on the [Guildford Town Past & Present Facebook group](#) brought a flurry of comments from people angered at the news the building was being demolished and calls for it to be stopped, many not realising it was a done deal.

One wrote: “it is very sad, it was an attractive building and what they are putting up is another eyesore, why the developers couldn’t have worked [with] what was already there I do not know, it comes down again to money not history, so sad...”

Other comments included: “It is criminal. 145 years apparently it’s stood there. The building they’re replacing it with is so ugly. I have no idea why they couldn’t convert it. I feel so sad about it. I also thought it was listed. It really should have been. It will completely change the landscape of the road.”

“Bloody disgusting! GBC have no respect for anything! I despair.”

“There was a move to get it saved but sadly that didn’t happen and the conservation officer at GBC wasn’t interested in preserving it. Plans were put forward to incorporate it into the new build. It’s all so so sad and makes me very angry.”

“I contacted the ‘Guildford Society’ to express a concern at this destruction of another part of Guildford’s historic character and never even got the courtesy of a reply. Guildford is being systematically ruined for what....to become another Woking look alike. The new Weyside Urban Village and other high-density housing developments, all being crammed into an area with infrastructure that cannot cope.... just what will Guildford be like in 10 years time?”



The chairman of the Guildford Labour Party, Brian Creese, said: "Residents in Stoke are both sad and angry to see The Old School House on the corner of Old Farm Road being demolished; it is another piece of historic Bellfields gone."

"The building had a strong connection with the Paynter family of Stoke Hill House and the Revd Francis and Julia Paynter's son-in-law, Henry Treeby, who lived in Willow Grange, [off Woking Road near Jacobs Well and currently the residence of the Bishop of Guildford]."

"It is being replaced by an ugly block of apartments, no doubt not very affordable and completely out of keeping with its surroundings."

"Bellfields was the showpiece social housing estate in the South East but is rapidly becoming ruined by inappropriate development."

"As it seems that Guildford's planning laws have been unable to save this historic part of our borough, Guildford Labour feel the time has come to form a new conservation area around Bellfields to help protect its unique heritage."



Children from the original Bellfields School (the building now being demolished) pictured in the 1920s. David Rose collection.

“Anne Rouse, Guildford Labour’s prospective candidate for the area in next year’s Surrey County Council elections, said: “So sad to learn of the depressing news that the wrecking ball has started work on one of the oldest buildings in the Stoke area of Guildford: The Old School House on Woking Road.

“A beautiful building that has graced the area for nearly 150 years, which despite herculean efforts by Labour councillor Angela Gunning, could not be saved at the planning meeting at GBC earlier this year.

“Such a shame that support could not be found from others. Where were the Guildford Society, and why did they not launch a campaign to save this fine building?

“Unfortunately, another part of Guildford’s history is being lost before our very eyes. We must look to the future now and ensure that safeguards are put in place so that any more historic buildings are not lost to the town.”

In February 2020, planning permission was given to demolish The Old School House, and to build nine one- and two-bedroom apartments. For many years it had been used as commercial premises.