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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

1<sup>st</sup> June 2021

## Audit and Scrutiny Committee

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<b>Title:</b>	<b>Economic Development and Regeneration Services Update re: Former Seafield School, Eglinton Road, Ardrossan</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	To provide an update on the actions being taken in respect of the Former Seafield School as requested
<b>Recommendation:</b>	That the Committee note Economic Development and Regeneration's update

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### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Committee considered a petition in relation to Seafield House, Ardrossan at its meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019. The Committee agreed a number of actions and requested that updates on progress be provided. Subsequently, updates were provided to the Committee in August 2020 and again January 2021.
- 1.2 The Planning Committee granted authority for the issue of a Notice (an Amenity Notice) under Section 179 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. The Notice required: (i) the removal of all litter and refuse from the site; (ii) the movement of all demolition rubble to the north of the Seafield Stables building, the rubble to be stored so that it is not above the height of the boundary wall with Witches Lynn; and (iii) the boarding of all window and door openings with exterior grade plywood or similar in Seafield House and Seafield Stables, with the exception of those opening on the first floor of the eastern wing of the House (the fire damaged area.)
- 1.3 The Notice was issued 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The Notice took effect on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019 as no appeal against the Notice was made. The compliance period for the Notice expired on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019. The requirements of the Notice were met in September 2020. Litter and refuse were removed from the site. The rubble has been moved as required. The openings were boarded, although the boards, particularly on the ground floor, were vandalised within days. The Amenity Notice no longer has any effect.
- 1.4 The matter was also considered by Building Standards in terms of their powers to ensure public safety associated with buildings and sought the bricking up of windows and door openings. The ground floor windows and doors were bricked up in the weeks leading up to 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

1.5 Officers from Economic Development and Regeneration Services have also met with the owners of the site. There has been a resolution from the owner to produce a Feasibility Study for the redevelopment of the site. This will be supported by the Council's Economic Development & Regeneration Service and discussions are ongoing.

## **2. Background**

2.1 The property was last used as a residential school. It has been vacant since at least June 2015. The property was subject of a fire in October 2017 which damaged the eastern wing of the property. The property and the former stable block have been the subject of vandalism. Windows on both properties have been smashed.

2.2 A Planning Authority cannot compel a landowner to develop a site. The powers available to a Council, as Planning Authority, were set out in the report to the Committee of 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019. It was in this context that the Committee agreed the actions including that Planning Services seek authority from the Planning Committee for the issue of notices available under the powers available to the Planning Authority, as considered necessary and including Section 179 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act.

2.3 The Planning Committee authorised the issue of such a Notice at its meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The Notice required: (i) the removal of all litter and refuse from the site; (ii) the movement of all demolition rubble to the north of the Seafield Stables building, the rubble to be stored so that it is not above the height of the boundary wall with Witches Lynn; and (iii) the boarding of all window and door openings with exterior grade plywood or similar in Seafield House and Seafield Stables, with the exception of those opening on the first floor of the eastern wing of the House (the fire damaged area.)

2.4 Planning Services sought quotes for the work and also informed the landowner of impending direct action. In the week leading to the 9th September 2020, the landowner carried out the works. The refuse was cleared, and the rubble stockpiled to the north of the stable building, as per the requirements of the Notice. It is also understood the windows were boarded. However, these were almost immediately vandalised. Local reports suggest the boards had been broken by the 12th September 2020. There have been further reports of vandalism and unauthorised entry since that date. Planning Services have made the owner aware of this and asked them to take steps to secure the property.

2.5 Given that the Notice was complied with, should the condition of the land be considered to harm amenity a further Notice would be required. It is not considered that such action is required at present. The owner has been requested to review and repaint/repair the boundary railings which they have undertaken to do. These, along with the boundary wall and gate piers, are a Listed Building in their own right.

2.6 The Council, as Planning Authority, also has powers under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 to compulsory purchase a listed building in urgent need of repair. The Committee asked for this to be explored and considered such action and the issue of a 'Repairs Notice' as a precursor at its meeting of 10th September 2019. The Committee decided that no further action should be taken at that time in respect of the service of a Repairs Notice.

- 2.7 The bricking up of ground floor openings, as requested by Building Standards, has improved the security of the site. However, reports of unauthorised access continue to be passed to the owner when the council are made aware of this and the Police and Fire Service continue to respond when issues are reported to them by members of the public.
- 2.8 It is understood the Ardrossan Community Sports Hub have taken a lease of the gymnasium within the school grounds. They have carried out some works, including the erection of a fence in front of the main building. These works are ongoing, but the fence should help separate users of the gymnasium from the empty buildings. An occupant of the gymnasium should also provide additional surveillance of the listed buildings.
- 2.9 In terms of future use of the site, discussions have been held between Council Officers from Economic Development and Regeneration Services and the owner. There has been an undertaking by the owner to produce Feasibility Study as to the type of development which could utilise the site. The site is allocated in the Local Development Plan as part of the settlement of Ardrossan, meaning residential development is acceptable in principle. The Feasibility Study should consider the potential ways such a development could be realised given the Listed Building status of the main building, the former stables and the boundary.
- 2.10 The recently approved Regeneration Delivery Plan sets out the Council's priorities for the delivery of physical regeneration. It sets out a plan to regenerate strategic regeneration sites and places by working together with businesses and communities. A review of third party assets is identified as an action in the Plan. This will review identified sites to address a recognised problem or facilitate positive re-development. The Council's Economic Development & Regeneration Service has agreed to support the development of such a study for the Seafield site in line with this action.

### **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 That the Committee note Economic Development and Regeneration's actions to date in respect of the property and the ongoing work to support redevelopment of the site.

### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1 None from the proposals in this report.

#### **Human Resources**

- 4.2 Ongoing staffing implications for Planning Services and Building Standards in dealing with complaints related to the site and the follow up actions.

#### **Legal**

- 4.3 The proposed action would be in accordance with the relevant Acts.

### **Equality/Socio-economic**

4.4 There are no impacts from actions detailed but re-development of the site would realise positive socio-economic benefits.

### **Environmental and Sustainability**

4.5 There are no impacts from actions detailed but re-development of the site could realise positive environmental and sustainability benefits

### **Key Priorities**

4.6 Protecting and enhancing the environment for future generations.

### **Community Wealth Building**

4.7 There is potential for the vacant site to be brought back into use informed by a new Feasibility Study and for its development to support the local economy.

## **5. Consultation**

5.1 None.

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For further information please contact **Iain Davies, Senior Development Management Officer**, on **01294 324 320**.

### **Background Papers**

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