


Agenda Item No:	4	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	18th July 2019	
Report Title:	Dilapidated Structure at rear of 24 High Street, Wisbech	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

To provide Cabinet with an update on progress of demolition application for dilapidated structure at rear of 24 High St, Wisbech and to seek approval to progress with demolition with associated costs.

2 Key issues

- Dilapidated structure at rear of 24 High Street Wisbech is owned by Fenland District Council
- FDC currently has a financial commitment to on-going maintenance and inspection costs
- The front section of the site known as “The Gap” has planning consent for community space and viewing platform (F/YR17/1198/FDC), partly funded by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)
- The rear building is not part of the above application for redevelopment and works to it would not qualify for NLHF grant
- Following members approval in March 2019 officers have progressed with an application for demolition of this structure (F/YR19/0257/F). A decision is expected 17th July 2019.
- The current condition of this structure prohibits development of The Gap and as per the planning application the space would be used for WC and storage facilities to enhance The Gap project.
- The rear building is not listed but is within a Conservation Area. It is not visible from High St or Nene Quay
- The impact of potential alternative costs to demolition have been detailed in the presented figures

3 Cabinet is requested to approve the following recommendations:

Agree to demolish the rear building to no 24 and approve the expenditure of the predicted costs contained in this report.

Wards Affected	
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Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Chris Boden – Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance Cllr Chris Seaton– Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage
Report Originator(s)	Taleyna Fletcher - Townscape Heritage Officer Gary Garford - Corporate Director
Contact Officer(s)	Taleyna Fletcher - Townscape Heritage Officer Gary Garford - Corporate Director Neil Krajewski – Deputy Chief Accountant
Background Paper(s)	

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Report : 24 High St, Wisbech

1 Background / introduction

1.1 Background to the building

Fenland District Council owns a dilapidated property located at the rear of 24 High St, Wisbech (Appendix A). This rear section is all that remains of No 24 High St, a late C18th Grade II listed building which collapsed in 1988 as the result of inappropriate structural works undertaken by a contractor. At this time FDC did not own the building, however FDC stepped in to insert the supporting props and bracing into the gap to offer structural stability to the adjoining properties in 2008. The total cost of these repairs was £71,621. A charge for these works was registered on the property.

The owner was declared bankrupt around the same time (2008) and following a High Court decision ownership passed to FDC with certain legal constraints, which currently remain on the property.

Following the collapse the site was de-listed on the 25th January 1993 but still falls within the Wisbech Conservation Area.

It is believed that the rear building has not been occupied since the collapse of the front section and no longer has any known service connections. The only access is via a small alleyway off of Nene Quay which is entered through a temporary door with padlock entry. The Freehold of this access and alleyway is owned by FDC.

1.2 "The Gap" and rear building

Having collapsed 30 years ago, No. 24 has become a familiar sight on the High Street and an opportunity presented itself to bring this site back to life with the National Lottery Heritage Funds Townscape Heritage programme which awarded FDC £1.9m and permission to start in 2016.

With a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Funds Townscape Heritage programme, as part of a wider scheme of improvements to the High Street, FDC is redeveloping the derelict site fronting onto High Street to create an exciting piece of public realm. The plans for "The Gap", which received planning consent in February 2018, will include an innovative and unique space at ground floor for community use and a viewing platform at roof level offering visitors the chance to look across the historic roofscape and along North Brink and the River Nene. (F/YR17/1198/FDC).

As investigation and detailed design works have progressed for The Gap, it has become clear that the dilapidated building at the rear will require a significant investment to ensure longer term structural stability.

It should be noted that works to the rear building are not eligible for funding from the Wisbech High Street Project from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. A sum was included in the project bid for "remedial works to the rear building" – this was intended to repair and make the building watertight and repair the walls at the interface between The Gap and the rear building.

It is hoped that works will commence on The Gap project later this year. If consent for demolition of this rear building is granted then there would be a window of opportunity in the preceding months to demolish and take all materials out through the front of the site, through the gap site, into skips/lorries on the High St. Otherwise, all materials would need to go out through the narrow alleyway and onto

Nene Quay which is a busy main road and costs would significantly increase. Taking this action now would them not impact on the programme for the Gap works.

2 Building Condition and Safety

The original proposal was to make the rear building safe, weathertight, and to board up pending a longer term decision on its future use. However it was only with full accessibility in late 2018 that inspection of the building was possible and a better understanding of its condition achieved. (See photos in Appendix B).

Significant cracking has been noted following internal access, including a vertical crack which opens up at roof level, and cracking to party wall with 2 Nene Quay. The roof is collapsing as it succumbs to the effects of rain through openings where tiling is missing, and the weight of pigeon guano. This has caused ceilings to collapse. The visible roof structure is also decayed and parts are missing, undermining the integrity and strength of the structure. The inspection undertaken by a structural engineer from The Morton Partnership who visited in December 2018 concluded that that the building could be saved and renovated but the council needs to consider the cost against the long-term use and potential returns.

CNC Building Inspector visited the site on 15th January 2019 and did not consider the building to be a dangerous structure under the Building Act 1984 definition. This means that it is not considered to be at imminent risk of collapse, however he did recognise a need for a full structural assessment given there is an obvious “lean” and significant cracking on the external wall (facing into yard).

There are also safety considerations as the occupants and users of 22 and 23 High Street have right of access close to the courtyard to 24 High Street; there would also be concerns for the impact on Nos. 25 High Street and 2 Nene Quay, to which the rear building is attached, if the rear building were to collapse.

3 Background and Work undertaken so far

3.1 Surveys and Investigations

Since planning consent was granted in February 2018 for The Gap, there have been a series of site investigations and surveys undertaken to the building at the rear, all of which have been necessary to progress the scheme. These include:

- Asbestos surveys and removal in accordance with legislation (restricted to accessible areas)
- Programme of contaminated waste removal including pigeon guano, food and refuse waste (contaminated by rat urine) and asbestos. All undertaken by licenced contractor in December 2018. The completion of these works provided the first opportunity in several years to safely enter the property and assess its condition and structural stability and has since allowed for a better understanding of the costs and procedures involved remediate the building and the implications on The Gap.
- Structural Assessment by Morton Partnership (Appendix C).
- Party Wall communications, surveys and negotiations (on going)
- Drainage and service searches

3.2 Planning Application for Demolition

Following member approval in March 2019, an application for demolition has been submitted (F/YR19/0257/F).

The application was submitted by the project architects for The Gap for “Demolition of existing building in Wisbech Conservation Area and erection of 3 No. temporary storage/toilet buildings and provision of decking for site storage and visitors welfare facilities”.

As part of wider consultation, additional survey works have been required and the following reports submitted:

- Primary Ecological Survey undertaken by Greenwillows Ecology (at the request of Wildlife Officer)
- Archaeological Building Survey undertaken by Taleyra Fletcher (at the request of CCC Historic Environment Team)
- Fully costed appraisal for options for building undertaken by John Bucher (at the request of FDC Conservation Officer)

A decision on the application is expected 17th July 2019.

4 Options and Costs

4.1 Option 1: Demolish

Although a decision on the planning application has yet to be reached (pending July 17th), there have been no known objections to the demolition up to the point of preparing this report. Initial discussions with a conservation officer during by a site visit in January 2019 suggested that there would be no strong objection from conservation based on the fact that although a building of some charm, it lacks character or any noteworthy features or details.

If there is no viable future-use option for the building then the opportunity to remove this building should be taken now, before steelwork construction works begin on the front building and whilst there is a suitable route for the removal of demolished materials.

As the owner of the building FDC has the continuing liability for its maintenance/structural integrity. Demolition would remove this commitment.

The removal would also benefit the town project by creating additional open and tidy space rather than creating a view of a dilapidated structure from the redeveloped Gap site.

The building would need to be dismantled by hand and arising’s would be removed from the site to skips located on the High Street via temporary access scaffolding across the basement (2.2m deep) of the Gap site. The cost of demolition is estimated to be in the region of £34k + VAT with an additional c.£6k for remediating the exposed party walls. This would represent significant reduction in cost over the remediation option. There is also likely to be further unidentified asbestos within the building which would need to be removed by licenced contractors. There is also likely to be additional fees associated with the removal of pigeon guano which has built up within the structure since the last programme of removal in late 2018.

4.2 Option 2 : Remediate

Works to remediate and board up 24 High Street rear building could proceed as originally planned however structural issues have been identified now internal access has been possible. With the fully costed recommended schedule of works prepared by a structural engineer from The Morton Partnership who visited in December 2018, the council would need to spend approximately £138,000 (plus

VAT and add-ons). In addition to this the council would need to continue to bear the costs of annual inspection at an estimated cost of around £1000 per year.

This would only address the structural concerns (predominately the roof and the cracking issues) which were not apparent until the recent internal clearance of the building. It would not include any renovation works to facilitate a future use which would be significant.

4.3 Option 3: Do nothing

There is always the option to do nothing which would leave the rear building in its current condition. The council would retain its liability to maintain the rear building which will continue to deteriorate and provide a home for pigeons which are a constant nuisance to neighbours and to the town.

Whilst the building remains empty and unsecured there is also the on-going risk of rough-sleepers becoming aware of its presence and inhabiting the building which would pose a significant risk to their health and safety.

In addition to not take the demolition option at this stage would inhibit the most cost effective solution as once the Gap site is completed all arisings would be required to be removed by hand via the alleyway to Nene Quay.

4.4 Cost Comparison

In order to help inform Cabinet in making their decision, independent QS costings have been prepared showing the following financial implications for each option.

If the recommended option is chosen then the costs can be funded from within the estimates contained in the current capital programme. A report based on the latest QS information setting out the additional amount of capital funding (net of grant due from the HLF and other funding partners) which the Council would need to be allocate to complete construction works on site will be considered at a subsequent meeting of Cabinet taking account of which of the options Cabinet approve at this meeting.

Option for Rear Building, 24 High St, Wisbech	Cost excluding VAT and add-ons (costs correct as of May 2019)	Additional Costs to consider
Option 1: Demolition	£34000 for demolition £6000 for Remediation of exposed party walls £2000 for Asbestos survey and identification £10000 for licensed removal of remaining asbestos and pigeon guano TOTAL £52,000	
Option 2: Remediation (not including annual inspection and on-going maintenance)	£138,000	Annual inspection and maintenance c. £1000 per year.
Option 3: Do Nothing		Cost of annual maintenance and inspection @ £1000 p.a Financial and non-financial cost of dealing with consequences of rough-sleepers or other unauthorised access to the building. Additional costs for future removal of building via Nene Quay access.

5 Summary and recommendations

Officers recommendation is that Option 1 is approved which will allow the building to be demolished and removed thus removing any future liability for the building and taking advantage of the fact that the materials can be removed through the Gap site to the High Street. This is a much more cost effective approach in advance of the front site work.

6 Next Steps and Timing

If officer recommendations are followed it would be necessary to begin demolition as soon as consent is granted (TBC). If left any longer the structure will become a structural as well as environmental hazard as the number of pigeons continue to re-inhabit the building. The council has an ongoing commitment to inspect and maintain the property – immediate removal would reduce this cost. Removal at this time would also create a clear site ready for construction work at the front to commence, as well as providing a larger and more suitable working space for contractors.

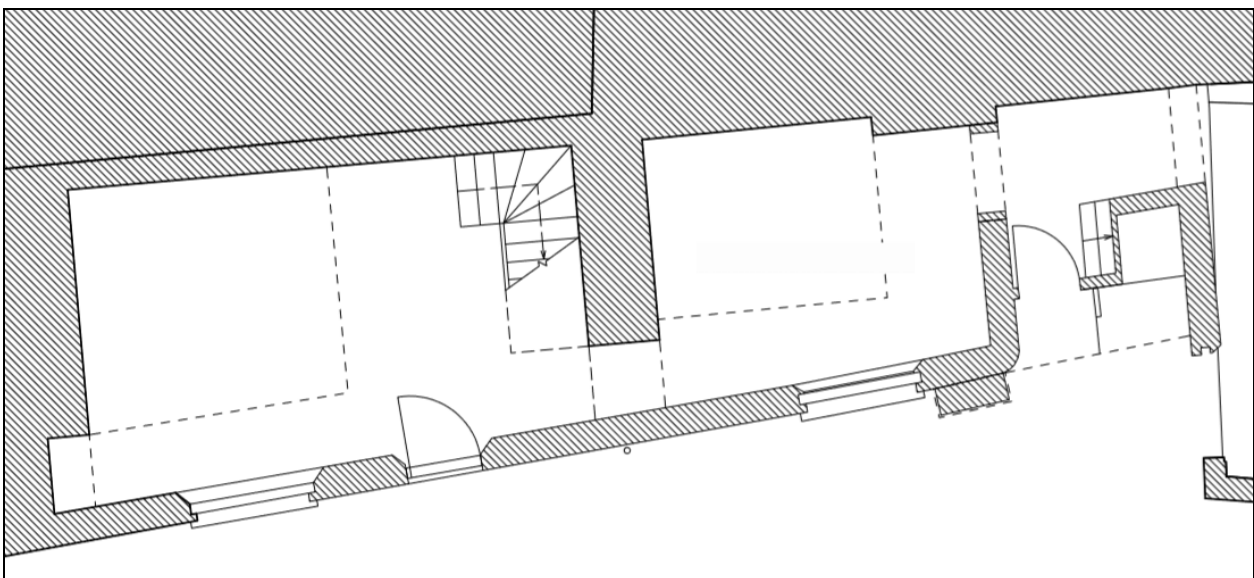
Appendix A : Site Location: Building at rear of 24 High Street, Wisbech



Appendix B : Plans and Photos of Rear Building



South-west facing elevation



Plan of ground floor showing ground building layout

Photos taken in January 2019 immediately after the removal of c.300 pigeons. The building has since been repopulated



Elevation as viewed from the courtyard



Elevation as viewed from the courtyard



Ground Floor entrance and access to stairs



Ground floor area with modern "chiller room"



Modern chiller room of breezeblock construction



Ground floor room with base of recently removed second chiller



Rear staircase



First floor room



Looking down the stairs from first floor



Second floor window



Damage to ceiling caused by missing roof covering



Damage to ceiling caused by 2nd gap in roof covering



Second floor room where significant cracking is evident on party wall with 2 Nene Quay



Bricked up chimney in 2nd floor room



Detail of cracking in 2nd floor room