

**To: Planning and Property Policy Board**

**On: 24 January 2017**

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**Report by: Director of Development and Housing Services**

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**Heading: Building Repair Task Group Update**

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**1. Summary**

- 1.1 At the Council meeting on 29 September 2016, a motion was raised seeking a comprehensive report on the activities and actions of the Building Repair Task Group focusing on the effectiveness of the group and its use of legal powers.
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**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board:
- (i) Notes the positive work undertaken through a range of Council initiatives to improve the condition of Listed Buildings and those in Conservation Areas which had fallen into disrepair as a means of improving the condition of Renfrewshire's built heritage and as a driver for economic recovery.
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**3. Background**

- 3.1 The protection and enhancement of Renfrewshire's built environment is a priority for the Council and in recent years this has been successfully delivered through a positive and co-ordinated approach to delivering capital projects, raising awareness of the built heritage, offering support to property owners and the appropriate use of the Council's regulatory powers.

- 3.2 Within this context, the Building Repair Task Group (BRTG), a cross-service group of officers, was established in January 2013. This was in recognition of the impact that the built environment can have on communities and the economy.
- 3.3 The remit of the BRTG was to encourage better maintenance of many run down and often privately owned buildings. By improving the condition of Renfrewshire's built environment, the aim was to affect a positive change on the local environment and economy.
- 3.4 A review was carried out of Council services and legislative powers available having regard to Council resource and budgetary limitations. Priority areas were identified - Paisley town centre, Paisley West End and those buildings included in the Buildings at Risk register which is reported annually to Members.
- 3.5 An early action of the Officers was to engage with the Scottish Government and Historic Environment Scotland, with a view to identifying a bespoke funding initiative to tackle the specific issues that faces the protection of the Built Heritage in Renfrewshire, but in this context funding was not available.
- 3.6 Thereafter, Owners and Occupiers of buildings within the priority areas requiring attention were contacted, and, in some cases served with Repairs Notices. In this way, through both informal negotiation and formal notices, owners undertook improvements. In addition a Contractor was appointed by the Council to remove vegetation from a number of town centre properties.
- 3.7 It should be stressed that the use of legislative powers is not always the best approach, often leaving a situation unresolved and the Council financially disadvantaged. The preferred approach as advocated in the guidance available from Historic Environment Scotland is therefore one of:
- raising awareness,
  - providing opportunities for training and
  - offering support to property owners to encourage them to take responsibility for their property.
- 3.8 Many successful initiatives have been delivered in Conservation Areas and a number of buildings have been restored. These include:
- The ongoing restoration of the Russell Institute;
  - The restoration of the Grand Fountain, Fountain Gardens;
  - The restoration of the former Arnott's store in Gauze Street;
  - The successful delivery of the £3.5m Paisley Townscape Heritage Initiative and Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme;

- A further £4m secured to deliver the Paisley TH/CARS2 project;
- The successful implementation of the Retail Improvement Scheme (RIS) improving over 100 properties throughout Renfrewshire;
- Conversion of 14 Moss Street to four flats by private developer;
- Conversion of 5 High Street to offices by Renfrewshire Council, to be opened in 2017
- The commitment to utilise a vacant unit at 22 High Street as a cultural and learning hub by Renfrewshire Council;
- The approval of Town Centre Strategies as a means of highlighting the potential uses of vacant buildings across the areas Centres;
- The conversion of the former Coats Girls Club in Ferguslie to flats by private developer;
- The conversion of part of Castlehead Church Hall to house by private developer;
- The ongoing redevelopment of the Hawkhead Hospital site to residential use by private developer removing a number of properties from the Building at Risk Register;
- The use of Regulatory Powers under the relevant acts to protect the safety of nearby residents and the integrity of the vacant buildings at the site of the former RAI, Paisley
- The conversion of Johnstone Castle to a dwelling house by private developer;

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#### 4. **Next steps**

- 4.1 The Council will continue to address the issue of poorly maintained buildings using the resources available to it and will continue to encourage and support private owners to do the same.
- 4.2 In this context though it is recognised that in some instances there will be occasions when it is no longer viable to retain property as a result of its age, condition or the limitations on its potential for re-use.
- 4.3 In these circumstances, it is noted that Officers will liaise with land owners, Historic Environment Scotland and other relevant bodies to ensure that due process is followed and that in the circumstances where a property is no longer viable then a suitable use shall be promoted for the site to ensure that it provides an ongoing benefit to the community and area within it is located.

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### **Implications of the Report**

1. **Financial** - None
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None
3. **Community Planning** – None
4. **Legal** - None
5. **Property/Assets** - None
6. **Information Technology** – None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** -
  - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** - None
9. **Procurement** - None
10. **Risk** - None
11. **Privacy Impact** - None

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### **List of Background Papers**

- (a) Planning and Property Policy Board – 12 November 2013 – Building Repair Task Group Update
- (b) Planning and Property Policy Board – 29 January 2013 – Building Repair Task Group

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Development and Housing Services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting.

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