

GREAT BARR Observer



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Future of historic house under threat

EXCLUSIVE

by Adam Smith

District Chief Reporter

Great Barr's historic Red House is falling apart and is in danger of being lost forever; it was claimed this week.

Conservationists are desperate to avoid a repeat of the fiasco that let Great Barr Hall become a burnt out shell and a haven for vandals.

The Friends of Red House Park are mobilising for a fight and have demanded Sandwell Council secure the future of the Victorian country house.

"Our worst nightmare is that the Red House Park will be sold off for

property," secretary Jenny Hale lamented.

"The house is already falling into disrepair with windows being smashed all the time and burglars breaking in, something has to be done unless we will have another Great Barr Hall on our hands."

The Red House was built in the 1840s as a country house within the 27 acre estate of the sitting Walsall MP

Robert Wellbeloved Scott.

Over the past 160 years, the house has had several owners and has had stints as an army centre and a convalescent home.

It is currently owned by Sandwell Council and is leased by the British Trust For Volunteers.

However, the BTCV can not afford the upkeep of the listed building.

Sandwell Council's cabinet member for culture and leisure, Councillor Linda Horton, admitted the long term future of the house was 'under discussion' and civil servants are currently drawing up options for the cabinet to decide what to do with the property.

"It is a grade two listed building dating from 1841 and obviously we are all keen to protect its historic integrity," she said.

"The house is on a long term lease to a trust and therefore the council's powers over repairs are limited.

"We are working closely with the leaseholders and we are satisfied they are keeping to the terms of the lease.

"We are also working with the police to stop a recent spate of vandalism that has resulted in toughened glass being fitted throughout the house," she said.

Police have made several arrests concerning the vandalism to the house and park.

Sarah Carter, chairman of the Friends of Red House Park, outlined a positive vision which she wants the council to follow.

"This beautiful house should be the focal point of our community and restored to its former glory along with the rest of the park," she said.

"We will work with anyone who leases the house and will be happy to

rent rooms so we can apply for conservation funding.

"We could even run a cafe to help cover our costs but whatever happens, the people of Great Barr should not be deprived of the Red House," she added.

On Sunday, July 3, a fun day has been organised and the Friends are hoping to get thousands of signatures on their petition to save the Red House.

For more information visit www.redhouse-park.org.uk or call 0121 357 2482.



Friends of Red House Park Sarah Carter and Jenny Hale are prepared to make enemies in their fight to save the house (right). (GW165-252/GC)

