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**FORMER ROTHESAY ACADEMY, ISLE OF BUTE – PRE- APPLICATION FOR  
PROPOSED DEMOLITION AND REDEVELOPMENT**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The former Rothesay Academy was closed in 2007 following the development of the new school. The upper academy buildings were acquired by Fyne Homes and demolished in 2021 and there are plans to redevelop this part of the site for new homes.
- 1.2 The lower academy buildings are owned by the council and are B listed so have statutory protection. Accordingly the council has marketed the property for redevelopment for over 10 years but unfortunately no viable proposals have been received. Recent studies instructed by the council have identified a deficit of around £10.9m for the conversion of the building to mixed residential / commercial use.
- 1.3 Given the lack of viable redevelopment options for the B listed buildings (along with the other factors outlined in the report) it is intended that a pre-application submission is to be made to consider the potential demolition and redevelopment of the site. Fyne Homes have also confirmed that they would be keen to participate in the redevelopment of this wider site as part of a masterplan for the area.
- 1.4 The vacant buildings are also causing concerns with break-ins and anti-social behaviour leading to regular police and fire service attendance along with significant maintenance costs. There are also health & safety concerns despite the security precautions taken and the council's insurer has raised additional issues.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Bute & Cowal Area Committee:
  - 2.1.1 Note the lack of a viable redevelopment option for the former Rothesay Academy despite the property being marketed and available for over a decade.
  - 2.1.2 Note the interest from Fyne Homes to create a masterplan for the redevelopment of the site along with their adjacent site to create new homes for the area.
  - 2.1.3 Endorse officers to submit a pre-application to consider the potential demolition and redevelopment of the site and confirm this approach reflects the views of the area committee and the wider community for the future of this site.

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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### 3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The former Rothesay Academy was closed in 2007 following the development of the new school. The upper academy buildings were acquired by Fyne Homes and demolished in 2021 and there are plans to redevelop this part of the site for new homes. The lower academy buildings are owned by the council and are B listed so have statutory protection. Both sites are shown on the plan attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The council has marketed the B listed lower academy buildings as a redevelopment opportunity for over a decade with no viable proposal being received. In 2006, when it was known the school was to close, Fyne Homes instructed a feasibility study to be undertaken to consider redevelopment options in more detail. The options were costed and a preferred scheme identified, but unfortunately none were considered to be viable.
- 3.3 The former Rothesay Academy is a category B listed building and is therefore considered to be of cultural significance. The property was designated in 1997 and the statement of special interest prepared by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) states:
- “The former Rothesay Academy is an important example of secondary school architecture of the 1950s in Scotland. Prominently located on high ground facing the sea with commanding views over the town, the aspirational design breaks away from the Art Deco influences of the inter-war period. It uses overtly Modernist devices such as narrow supporting columns (pilotis), sheer glazed curtain-wall classroom blocks and angular projections to emphasise its balanced, asymmetrical composition. It is one of a small number of post-war school buildings of this quality in the west of Scotland.”*
- 3.4 The building has been included on the Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland since May 2010 and further details of the important features of the building can be found on Historic Environment Scotland’s website. [HES website link.](#)
- 3.5 Within both local and national heritage planning policy there is a presumption in favour of the conservation of heritage assets. However, it is acknowledged that that in some instances there may be exceptions where the loss of heritage assets is acceptable, where there is clear and convincing justification. Historic Environment Scotland’s guidance ‘Managing Change: Demolition of Listed Buildings’ (MCDLB) provides specific conditions that should be met to the satisfaction of the local planning authority when proposing demolition of listed buildings. The guidance makes it clear that demolition should only be considered in exceptional circumstances, where their loss has been fully considered and justified.
- 3.6 The Managing Change document acknowledges that there may be some instances where demolition of a listed building can be justified. The document sets out four situations where such an approach may be acceptable:
- Where the building is no longer of special interest, or
  - Where the building is incapable of meaningful repair, or
  - Demolition is essential to delivering significant economic or community benefits, or
  - It is not economically viable to retain the building.

- 3.7 During initial meetings with officers from Historic Environment Scotland (HES) it was advised that any justification should focus on the economic viability of retaining the building. In this regard the council appointed Stantec to lead on the update of the previous feasibility reports and studies. Accordingly a Condition Study was completed by Etive Consulting and a Feasibility Estimate by Gardiner & Theobald during summer 2023.
- 3.8 The condition survey identified a number of defects including:

Building Element	Condition
External Fabric	Evidence of significant spalling and exposed reinforcement to the main entrance canopy and SW elevation.
	Corrosion of cast-iron rainwater goods throughout SW elevation
	Skylights at roof, broken or missing allowing significant water ingress.
	Steel canopy structures – showing signs of corrosion and slab soffits show significance spalling.
	Single storey structure to SE, evidence of structural movement within the façade with cracking visible.
Internal Fabric	Significant moisture ingress below roof slab.
	Significant moisture ingress within structure as evidenced by extent of vegetative growth, mould, and peeling wall coverings.
	Poor compaction in concrete and insufficient cover to reinforcement due to defects in original construction.
	Vegetation present within building structure, primarily as a result of moisture ingress.
External Landscaping	Lower retaining walls are showing evidence of spalling and leaning suggesting ongoing failure.
	Barrier to north partially removed / failed.

The report concluded that the overall condition of the building is “poor,” stating that:

*“...the overall condition of the primary structure is poor. Ongoing moisture ingress, combined with poor workmanship in the original construction, have resulted in accelerated deterioration that has caused significant reinforcement corrosion and concrete spalling.”*

*“...there is significant spalling and reinforcement corrosion to the pilotis and members of the SW elevation. At the single storey building to the SW, works would be required to arrest the ongoing movement and to repair the masonry façade...It is recommended that the external elements and roof slab be monitored...should the corrosion and spalling continue to spread it will begin to affect the stability of the structure and temporary propping may become necessary”.*

- 3.9 An updated Feasibility Cost Estimate has been prepared by Gardiner & Theobald in September 2023. The Cost Estimate is based on the preferred scheme as set out in the 2006 report (commissioned by Fyne Homes) updated to reflect the recent Condition Survey prepared by Etive Consulting. The report provides a cost estimate for the redevelopment of the former academy from educational use to a mixed residential and commercial use.
- 3.10 The total construction cost estimate for the conversion and extension of the former academy building, based on the 2006 preferred scheme, is £13,871,470 (excluding VAT). Based on current market conditions and property values, this scheme would deliver an approximate resale value of £2.9m. When compared with the cost estimate, this would result in a conservation deficit of around £10.9m.
- 3.11 The anticipated cost of demolishing the former Rothesay Academy buildings is estimated to be around £950,000. There may be a capital receipt from any future sale of the site (potentially to Fyne Homes) however this will depend on the site conditions after demolition. In addition the costs of maintaining / securing the building will be removed. In recent years this has been variable but on average around £30,000 per year.
- 3.12 It is important to note that the council is not simply seeking to remove the building but is seeking to regenerate the area in conjunction with Fyne Homes. As part of the Strategic Housing Investment Programme (SHIP) Fyne Homes have already secured funding for the redevelopment of the upper academy site. However if this is done in isolation it risks land locking the council's site and also is not considered appropriate to develop new homes next to the decaying academy buildings with their ongoing anti-social behaviour issues. Therefore both parties are keen to develop a masterplan for the wider site to create a new development to compliment the wider community and Fyne Homes have engaged architects to develop this masterplan.
- 3.13 While not particularly a consideration for HES there are also a number of other factors which are of significance to the council and the local community:
- Anti-social behaviour – The former academy buildings have sadly become a magnet for vandalism, fire raising and anti-social behaviour. Both the Police and Fire services have regularly been involved and are keen for the council to address the issues.
  - Adjacent homeowners and occupiers have similarly raised concerns and have noted the poor condition of the property.

- Health and Safety and the council's insurers have raised concerns that there may be a significant risk of injury or even loss of life from parties entering the building illegally.
- Security has been a key concern in light of the above and the council has spent significant sums securing the building with steel plates and appropriate signage. However even this has not proven to be 100% effective with reports of vandals using power tools to remove these panels to obtain access.

#### **4.0. CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1 The decision to request consideration of the proposed demolition of a B listed building is not something that is done lightly. To have received a B listing means the building has significance historically and aesthetically.
- 4.2 However there are situations where the future viable use of a listed building is so limited that consideration has to be given as to whether to retain it as a vacant monument or to consider demolition and for the site to be brought back into beneficial use.
- 4.3 Based on the information contained within this report and the studies undertaken by the consultants it is considered that a pre-application submission for the demolition and redevelopment of the site is the appropriate course of action in this case.

#### **5.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Policy – None.
- 5.2 Financial – The demolition cost of the former Rothesay Academy is estimated to be around £950,000. There may be a capital receipt for the sale of the cleared site depending on the site condition. The demolition will reduce ongoing maintenance / security costs averaging around £30,000 per year which may increase.
- 5.3 Legal – The terms of any agreements will be progressed in consultation with the Executive Director of Customer Services.
- 5.4 HR – None
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty
- 5.5.1 Equalities – Protected characteristics – None.
- 5.5.2 Socio economic Duty – None.
- 5.5.3 Islands – The redevelopment of the site has the potential to provide new housing to support local communities. The loss of a listed building is a negative outcome.
- 5.6 Climate change – The potential to develop new energy efficient housing will provide a benefit as compared with the cost of redeveloping an inefficient building or retaining the structure vacant.

5.7 Risk – If the pre-application is refused the risk of the property continuing to deteriorate with the consequent issues around safety, insurance and anti-social behaviour will increase.

5.8 Customer Service – None

Douglas Hendry, Executive Director with responsibility for Commercial Services.  
Councillor Gary Mulvaney – Policy Lead, Finance and Commercial Services

30<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**For further information contact:**

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# APPENDIX 1 – ROTHESAY ACADEMY SITE

Argyll & Bute Council site (lower academy) – Purple

Fyne Homes site (demolished upper academy) – Red

