

Supporters of Ashton Gardens - Press Release

Timing:

- For immediate publication

Subject:

- **Fight to Keep Ashton Gardens Intact Fails**

Summary:

- SOAG recognises that part of Ashton Gardens is to be sold for another apartment block to be built.
-

After years of vigorous campaigning, SOAG say the Government's recent decision not give listed building status to the Ashton Institute, the Empire Cinema or the unique Akeds garage building probably marked the end of trying to keep the boundary of Ashton Gardens intact.

Fylde Council had already agreed to sell part of the Gardens for an apartment development, but any developer would be nervous about buying if there was a chance of the buildings being listed. That threat is now removed, and SOAG expects to see the developer's bulldozers moving in shortly to start on one of the two plans the Council has already passed.

The Council has said it will try to preserve the Institute, and move it to a new location, but the move alone will cost in the order of £150,000. This is expenditure that SOAG regards as both wasteful - because restoration in its present location would cost £150,000 less - and premature in view of the fact that the Council does not yet know whether it will be granted the lottery funding to undertake the restoration work.

SOAG's Chairman, Fred Moor said, "It was not altogether unexpected. The direction was set when Fylde Council's ruling group went back on its plan not to sell any of the gardens. It became more likely when they disregard the referendum result where 94% of people opposed the sale, and it hardened further when they disregarded the views of 8,000 people who formally objected to the land disposal. A local administration that disregards public opinion, and ignores its own planning rules for thirty pieces of silver, demonstrates how cheaply integrity can be bought."

SOAG's aim is "To protect preserve and enhance Ashton Gardens" and we expect to continue in this role, maintaining a watchful eye over developments, acting as an advocate for the gardens, and effecting further improvements. The gardens already benefit from £6,000 worth of practical work our members have undertaken.

Has it not been for SOAG, a quarter of the gardens would now quite probably be a car park. We believe our legal action also forced Fylde Council to register the gardens with the Charity Commission - something that will prevent the Council siphoning money off for other purposes as they originally planned, and we may yet see the footpaths through the gardens formally designated as the rights of way they have always been.

SOAG believes the Council has opened a Pandora's box by selling part of Ashton Gardens and trying to treat gardens as development land. Our barrister's advice highlighted the constraints attached to charitable gifts of land which are just beginning to take effect. The land must be managed as a charitable trust, having regard only for the interests of the beneficiaries. It is not, and must not be treated as, the corporate property of the Council as was shown recently at Lowther Gardens. We now know that Lowther Gardens can no longer be used for political meetings, and it's parking must be kept free, Lytham Green is under consideration at present, and there may be more surprises yet to come for other areas.

Mr Moor concluded, "We are happy to be judged by the hand of history in this matter. We heard heritage experts say none of the land should be sold. We asked the people of St Annes for their view, they said "No" to the sale, and we articulated their view strongly, without fear or favour. We have had the honour to lead a campaign that the people of St Annes have supported generously with letters, phone calls and their time. We have left no stone unturned on their behalf. Sadly, the outcome proves to be another instance where the good people of this town, and its founding principles, have been betrayed by those whose vision is limited by politics and avarice."

Release ends

Information for editors

SOAG is a not-for-profit membership organisation that exists to protect, preserve and enhance Ashton Gardens, St Annes.

Our surveys have consistently shown that both residents and visitors oppose the sale of any of the gardens, and keeping the gardens intact is more important than selling part of them to fund a lottery scheme.

Contacts:

Chairman of SOAG, Fred Moor, ☎ 01253 728047.

email: chairman@ashtongardens.org.uk

18 Sandhurst Avenue, Lytham St Annes, Lancashire. FY8 2DA

Secretary of SOAG, Jon Harrison, ☎ 01253 724298.

email: secretary@ashtongardens.org.uk

6 Nateby Close, Lytham St Annes, Lancashire, FY8 3PW

President of SOAG, Arnold Sumner ☎ 01253 721608

10 Dorset Road, St Annes FY8 2ED