

Glassingall Residents
c/o Old Glassingall
Dunblane,
FK15 0JG

14 June 2020

Glassingall Estates Limited
56 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 2LR

Dear Mr McCabe,

Glassingall Estates Limited (Anne Gloag)
The demolition and burning of Glassingall House between 11th and 13th June, 2020

I am writing on behalf of the residents of the Glassingall Estate.

We wish to formally raise our concerns surrounding your demolition of Glassingall House, its squash courts, stables, kennels and other outbuildings and the subsequent burning of the debris which occurred between 11 – 13 June 2020.

We are extremely disappointed that the demolition was undertaken in such a thoroughly unprofessional and unsafe manner with no regard to the local community, livestock or the environment.

Disturbance of European protected species (roosting bats, their pups and nesting birds)

First, it is important to note that the property should not have been demolished during the breeding season, when there were roosting bats, their pups and nesting birds present. During the demolition, bats were seen flying from the property by an ecologist. It is illegal to harass or disturb bats or damage their roosting place, whether this is deliberate, reckless or unintentional.

On 12 June, the local Wildlife Crime Liaison Officer, came to the Glassingall Estate to rescue the one surviving fledgling bird, which was subsequently taken to the SSPCA National Wildlife Rescue Centre in Alloa. We have no way of knowing how many other birds or bats died as a result of the demolition and subsequent fire.

We are deeply saddened by the complete disregard to wildlife, in particular the bats, which are a European protected species and receive full protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994. Accordingly, the demolition of the Glassingall House and the subsequent fire have been reported to the appropriate authorities as a wildlife crime.

Burning of hazardous waste (public health and environmental risk from dark smoke)

On the morning of 12 June, the unsegregated demolition debris was set on fire.

We are aware that the house and outbuildings contained asbestos, cables and their insulation, propane gas bottles, pipe lagging, insulation, plastics, polystyrene, glass and other materials not suitable for uncontrolled burning. No sorting of this material was carried out and all of it was set on fire, resulting in a number of small explosions. The prominence of the fire combined with the strong winds meant that the smoke could be seen from Dunblane 3 miles away (photographs attached).

The smoke from the fire, covered most of the estate and some of the surrounding area for most of the day. It was acrid dark smoke, so heavy in pollutants that it led to some residents having to evacuate their homes.

Residents are particularly upset that the fire was likely to have contained asbestos, cable insulation and plastic guttering as a minimum. Not to put too fine a point on it, this type of action goes well-beyond being a 'nuisance' and could endanger life. Burning asbestos is regarded as extremely dangerous as the fibres in the smoke are incredibly harmful to health. In addition, the burning of insulation from cables results in dioxins, heavy metals, and other forms of toxic pollutants. Burning plastics releases hydrogen cyanide. Irresponsible burning in this manner during the Covid19 pandemic represented a threat to the health of some of the residents who are currently shielding.

We are concerned that the burning of the debris was done with a complete disregard to the health and wellbeing of the local community, wildlife and the environment.

You will be aware, as duty holder, that the buildings contained asbestos and that an asbestos survey should have been undertaken prior to the demolition. You have an obligation to ensure that it is handled in accordance with the appropriate environmental and Health and Safety regulations and disposed of by a suitably licenced contractor. It seems evident that none of this was done.

These actions may constitute a number of strict liability offences having been committed by you as developer.

Uncontrolled fire requiring firefighting services

The fire was so intense that it required five firefighting appliances and a water bowser working at any one time to contain it. This tied up essential resources from Doune, Dunblane, Bridge of Allan, Alloa, Larbert and both units from Stirling; this constitutes most of the firefighting resources serving Central Scotland. This could have put lives at risk in other communities across Central Scotland.

To cope with the extremely narrow access and egress roads, the fire service appliances had to form a water relay system entering at North Glassingall Lodge and exiting at South Lodge leading to significant traffic disruption both ways on the B8033.

The fire service spent 11 hours firefighting on 12 June, with a couple of units returning on the morning of 13 June to 'dampen down' the embers. In total it took around 50,000 litres of water to put out the fire.

Burning hazardous waste - whilst still connected to the mains electricity

When a few of us met with you on site on Friday 5 June, we mentioned that the mains electricity was still connected. Despite this, demolition took place with the electricity supply still live, further endangering the safety of the firefighters. The fire service had to request the attendance of SSE Power Distribution to disconnect the electricity supply, when firefighters discovered that the electrical system was sparking as they tried to extinguish the fire. This also put employees of SSE Power Distribution at unnecessary risk.

Securing the site after the fire

In the evening of 12 June and morning of 13 June, Stirling Council lorries ferried Heras fencing to the Glassingall Estate to cordon-off and secure the site due to the ongoing danger and the presence of unstable hazardous substances.

We find it absolutely galling that taxpayers, many of whom as we enter into a deep recession are likely to be struggling financially, are paying the bill for a private developer, to fight a fire that should never have happened and make safe a site the developer was unwilling to properly manage. The injustice of this seems fairly obvious.

Ongoing risks associated with hazardous substances contained in the fire debris

The hazardous waste burnt in the fire will have released toxic materials and contaminants into the land, air and water. These contaminants will continue to be released uncontrolled into the environment and the risk to the community and natural landscape is ongoing.

We urge that you immediately arrange for the remaining broken and now unstable asbestos to be removed in accordance with Health and Safety regulations. The remaining debris (which includes other hazardous contaminants) should also be removed from site.

The matter has been reported to SEPA as an ongoing pollution risk.

Prior notice of the demolition and fire

The last point we wish to make is that the Glassingall residents were not given any advance notice of the demolition and subsequent fire. This would have allowed us to evacuate the estate (within the confines of Scottish Government lockdown guidance). We find this lack of prior notice very surprising given our conversation with you earlier this week and the cordial nature of our professional relationship thus far.

We were assured by Glassingall Estates that action would be taken to secure the property, with no mention of demolition or fire. Subsequently, one of your representatives even admitted to being deliberately 'evasive'.

The residents of the Glassingall Estate have been greatly inconvenienced for the entire weekend, through having to keep all the site roads clear of vehicles, to allow fire appliances,

police and other traffic unobstructed access. They have also had to keep away from a large area of the estate (including for some residents their own properties) to avoid inhaling the plumes of smoke.

We consider this lack of forewarning and the disruption a breach of trust. As a community we are now beginning to question what we are being told by representatives of Anne Gloag and Glassingall Estates Limited.

We can only assume that this uncaring, unsafe, irresponsible, and thoroughly unprofessional approach has given us an insight into what we can expect during any future development on the estate, were it to be approved by Stirling Council Planning.

All existing residents, without exception, moved to Glassingall Estate because of the peaceful tranquil setting with its long history, Ancient Woodland, protected species and biodiversity. We wish you to respect this.

We find it utterly disheartening that you should have such a disregard for us as a community and the environment at large.

Regards,

Ailsa Gray

Old Glassingall

cc

Brian Roberts, COO Infrastructure & Environment, Stirling Council robertsb@stirling.gov.uk

Ian Buchanan - Chief Officer Compliance and Beyond, SEPA; www.sepa.org.uk

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