

Item 6 - Public Question to the Leader

'Following an article in the Sussex Express on Friday 14 February about an arson attack we should like to ask a question about the St Anne's site in Lewes that lies adjacent to County Hall.

This site was put out to tender several years ago by ESCC; it had previously been the site of an excellent ESCC special needs school. It is my belief that the manse and surrounding land were originally bequeathed. Tenders were submitted for social housing but ESCC awarded the tender to the organisation Subud - they planned to build their national headquarters on the land. Subud's low market bid was £500,000 which subsequently fell through, and the then current independent valuation of the land was £2.7 million with planning permission.

This publicly owned land has been sitting unused since 2005 with consequent deterioration of the manse and the grounds. It is part of the Lewes neighbourhood plan and SDNP quotes proposals for 47 homes.

My question is this:

Is it feasible for ESCC to come to some arrangement financial or otherwise in order to pass the site over to LDC for social housing development? How can it be right for publicly owned land to be treated in such a cavalier manner by ESCC when even so called 'affordable' housing is way out of reach of many local families in the district? How can it not be right to use these 4.5 acres of prime land at the St Anne's site for the provision of council houses as an investment in the district community?

Does this Council think that it has a duty to press to ensure that social housing is built on this site given that it has lain derelict for many years and ESCC has not secured for it a future for it that will be of wider community benefit?'

Lin Heyworth and Rita Ellis