

Friends of Graves Park  
139 Mount View Road  
SHEFFIELD  
S8 8PJ

5<sup>th</sup> July 2014

Dear Friends of Graves Park Supporter

It has been brought to our attention that Sheffield City Council is proposing to sell, freehold, Cobnar Cottage, a property within the Graves Park Charity in Sheffield. The FOGP Committee is strongly against this sale.

In their proposal, the Council uses the phrase "Surplus to requirements", which is the very same used regarding the Norton Nurseries Site some sixteen years ago, when the Council last tried to sell off charitable land gifted to the people of Sheffield by J G Graves. Moreover, at around the same time, as you are probably aware, the Council, as trustees of the Graves Park Charity, illegally sold Chantrey Cottage (which had the same charitable status as Cobnar Cottage), causing a bitter wrangle which resulted in a judgement by the Charity Commission that the Council at the time had no right to sell the cottage, which was on charitable land and had no right to allocate the funds to the park in the way it did, cutting its financial funding for the park at the same time.

The Hands Off Graves Park group and later the Friends of Graves Park have been through this same argument for the past sixteen years. The status of charitable land within the park is already well established. As far as we understand it, the Council, as trustee of the Graves Park Charity, has a responsibility to uphold the covenants on the land and the properties within Graves Park, which state that the land and properties should not be sold.

After years of fighting to protect the park and the land given to the people of Sheffield by J G Graves and after finally resolving the situation regarding Chantrey Cottage and the Nurseries site, we find it difficult to understand the cynical way in which the Council is now considering re-opening old wounds.

We informed the Council that we hope that they will consider how much damage this proposal will do to its reputation, which only recently was enhanced by agreeing to put the entire park under one charitable status. Despite this, the Council has voted to go ahead with the sale.

We understand that Sheffield City Council has approached the Charity Commission regarding the sale of Cobnar Cottage. Our opinion is that this cottage has been allowed negligently to fall into a state of disrepair and that the trustees of the Graves Park Charity have failed in their responsibilities to maintain and obtain an income from Cobnar Cottage. The Committee has contacted the Charity Commission, who have told us to seek our own legal advice.

Most significantly, if this sale were to go ahead, it would set a precedent which could put any part or all of the park at risk of sale or disposal. We therefore have to stand firm and oppose this sale.

It is the opinion of the Committee that the cottage should not be sold. Cobnar Cottage is not a listed building and the covenants of the Graves Park Charity state that any buildings no longer needed should be demolished. The committee, however, are of the opinion that if the funds can be found, the cottage should be refurbished and rented, earning a revenue for the

charity. It is a small 2 bedroomed property and in these times of downsizing would suit anyone wanting or needing to live in a smaller dwelling.

The committee is concerned that the Council has not consulted with us regarding this sale, not informing us of their plans until days before the meeting where they voted in favour of sale. Moreover, the response received from the Council asserts that we are wrong regarding our claims that they have no right to sell the property. Once again they are confusing council with trustees of the Graves Park Charity.

The FOGP committee were not asked to discuss this issue or to look at ways forward before a decision was taken to sell the cottage. If the Council were serious about working collaboratively with one of the largest friends groups in Sheffield, then why has it not consulted us or invited us to go and look at Cobnar Cottage?

**How you can help:**

Let us know your views about the sale of the cottage. We will collate these and pass them on to the Council.

Write a letter to the Council expressing your views regarding the sale. Address it to Julie Dore as Leader of SCC, or Isobel Bowler as Cabinet member for Culture Sport and Leisure. Address your letter to the Councillor of your choice at:

Sheffield City Council  
Town Hall  
Pinstone Street  
Sheffield  
S1 2HH

We look forward to your continued support.

Yours faithfully



Caroline Dewar  
Chairman, Friends of Graves Park  
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