

Wrangle over summerhouse sparks a row

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by Andy Read

A BIZARRE wrangle over the fate of a 200-year-old summerhouse in Stroud is again set to spark a row between local historians and district planners.

An application has just been made to demolish the infamous gazebo – almost four years after it first disappeared from the wall of a property in Acre Street.

The Nationwide Housing Trust – an arm of the massive Nationwide Building Society – admits the retrospective application will confine the gazebo to the history books forever.

But for local historians the whole episode is a scandal in which Stroud District Council should have taken action years ago to get the building restored.

Dating back to at least 1820 the summer house once enjoyed panoramic views across to Rodborough Common.

It was rediscovered five years ago by local historian Ian Mackintosh after being hidden away in a derelict garden.

Considered the oldest summerhouse in the town it was immediately spotlighted by English Heritage in a bid to preserve it.

However, despite its new found fame the building was taken down by builders working on a nearby housing scheme and despite repeated assurances that the gazebo would be restored, only a few rotting timbers have since been seen.

Members of the town's Civic Society were incensed by this injustice – they even put in an application to demolish the building themselves in a bid to highlight the case.

The application was turned down but the gazebo has yet to reappear. Ironically the gazebo recently appeared towards the top of Stroud District Council's listed buildings at risk survey.

"It's all totally absurd," said Mr Julian Usbourne, a strong critic of the council's handling of the matter.



■ A picture of what the Gazebo looked like before it was taken down

"Summer houses are an interesting historical detail," said Mr Mackintosh. "I will be very sad to see it go – especially as it was only just discovered."

A spokeswoman for Nationwide, which has become involved because the building has been repossessed,

claimed that only a few bits of the gazebo now remained.

"It is not a free standing property and needs to be attached to a brick wall," she said. "We have worked with the council to try to find an alternative site but there is nowhere else in the town it can go."