

Cottage Industry

Sessions Cottage - an update

A TV star and property guru made an appeal to businesses yesterday to help save one of the county's "best loved" historic cottages. DIY expert Sylvia Marshall is at the centre of a £1 million crusade to save Sessions Cottage, a 17th-Century farmhouse left gutted by fire. The Grade II-listed building was razed to the ground in 2006 after the reported "unforgivable carelessness" of a neighbour. It prompted fears that the house, described as Selsey's 'Jewel in the Crown', would be demolished and replaced with a supermarket or car park.



Sessions Cottage - after the fire

But thanks to Sylvia - and an 11th-hour reprieve by English Heritage - the once-picturesque cottage could be restored to its former glory. Sylvia bought its burnt-out shell for £300,000, and is now in the "long, laborious and painfully expensive" process of re-building it from the "foundations up". She is now appealing to the county's business community to back her restoration project by investing a total of £700,000 into the build. In return, corporate sponsors will be plugged on Sylvia's online DIY show at www.cosyhomesonline.com, at high-profile celebrity and press events, and on a variety of planned TV shows.

Speaking recently, Sylvia, who will appear on our screens later this year on a major new property show, said: "This is a labour of love in every sense. "Sessions is a wonderful old property that deserves to be restored to its former glory. It is the jewel in the crown of Selsey, and has played a significant and historical part of the village since the 17th-Century.

"With the help and assistance of the county's business community, my dream and desire is to rebuild the property and reinstate this stunning building as the centre-piece of Selsey."

Sessions Cottage dates back to the 17th-Century and the brick doorway bears the inscription '1728'. It was christened The Old Farmhouse, but takes its current name

from the original Lord of the Manor who held his court sessions there. Until 2006 the stone-walled, thatched-roof property, took pride of place on Selsey's High Street. But on August 1 that year, a fire ripped through the building - leaving nothing but rubble and charred embers in its wake. Sylvia bought the building from previous owners Ken and Jean Chapman after reading about the blaze - and the loss of Sessions - in a local newspaper.

The sale and subsequent plan for restoration was not, however, straightforward. Legal wranglings and further dealings with the local council and English Heritage ensued, and it took more than three years before the project was good to go. She is now hoping to restore the building, and convert it into two semi-detached family homes as it once was.

Sylvia, who lives in Surrey, said: "The problem is, of course, that restoring a property of this size comes at a price. "I've done everything I can to help, but I need assistance. I've invested everything I own and more to make this happen. Now I need others to get behind me to make this vision a reality."

She is now appealing for businesses of all sizes to get involved. A variety of sponsorship packages are available, which include offering tools or supplies for the build. Sylvia, who plans to live in one of the properties, added: "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to safeguard one of the county's best-loved homes, and I implore the business community to recognise that fact and get involved."

All enquiries: Sylvia Marshall on 07885 319066.



Sessions Cottage - before the fire