

Exclusive: Prince Andrew's £15million former royal residence could be seized and used for the homeless

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Susie Boniface

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Prince Andrew's former royal residence could be seized by council officials because it has been left derelict and unoccupied.



Sunninghill Park (Pic:Steve Shephard/SM)

Prince Andrew's former royal residence could be seized by council officials because it has been left derelict and unoccupied.

Sunninghill Park - the home given to the couple as a wedding present by the Queen in 1986 - has gone to rack and ruin since the Duke of York sold it two years ago to a mysterious Kazakh billionaire for £15million.

Housing officers at Bracknell Forest Borough Council want to talk to the owner, who has never moved in, before the mansion crumbles any further.

The council confirmed it is considering using its powers to seize the 12-bedroom home - set in 665 acres of Berkshire countryside - and use it for the homeless.

There have already been several attempted break-ins and neighbours fear squatters might claim the sprawling property for themselves.

This week a security team was due at the 30room property to repair broken doors and windows. But there were still no plans for anyone to live there. A neighbour said: "Nobody's been there for a very long time.

"At first we thought the new owners might do it up or even knock it down and build something new but nothing has happened. It's shocking when you think it's supposed to be worth £15m."

A spokesman for the council confirmed it had powers under the Housing Act to seize unoccupied homes and was "investigating".



Sunninghill Park (Pic:Steve Shephard/SM)

Bev Hindle, of the planning department, said: "We are assessing Sunninghill Park to see whether any action might be required to improve the situation."

This week the gates to the house - dubbed South York after the ranch in TV soap Dallas - were left unlocked and its poor state was plain to see. The house used to play host to guests including Elton John... and the Duchess's lovers, Texan Steve Wyatt and financial adviser Johnny Bryan.

It has six reception rooms, 12 bedrooms and 12 bathrooms.

The once-manicured five-acre walled garden is now overgrown, with weeds 3ft high.

The cover of its swimming pool is now a mass of weeds and moss and Virginia creeper covers most of the mansion's brickwork and windows. Its flaking gutters leak and plants have started to push through the roof tiles.

Several broken windows have been boarded up overlooking the patio, where York stone slabs have been ripped up and dead animals left to rot.

Inside, a tarpaulin covers an expensive living room carpet - apparently to cope with a leak upstairs. The marble fireplace is thick with dust, while in the kitchen, drawers and cupboards remain open from when they were last hurriedly emptied.

In the staff quarters, carpets in most of the 20 rooms have been lifted.

Visitors to the property are greeted by two Kazakh men who say they work for the owner, although they will not reveal his name. They said: "We come here for the day, now and again, to check on it. We are not security.

"There have been some attempts to break in - the door to the room containing the electricity supply and fuse box has been broken - and we are getting people in to fix it. There may be some security here next week but they will not live here. We just need to make it secure in case of squatters.

"The owner has no plans to move in and we cannot tell you who he is but he has a solicitor in London."

The Duke and Duchess of York moved in to Sunninghill, which is next to Windsor Great Park, in 1990 after four years of building work. They continued to live there together even after their divorce in 1996.

It went on the market in 2002 to help the Prince pay the £7.5million cost of renovating nearby Royal Lodge, the Queen Mum's former home, and it has sold in 2007 for £15m - well above the asking price. The deal was negotiated by a Kazakh tycoon and friend of the Prince. It is thought to have been bought on behalf of Timur Kulibayev, the billionaire son-in-law of the Kazakh president.

Prince Andrew now lives at Royal Lodge in Windsor Great Park, Fergie's UK base when she is not in America.