

HISTORIC STREETS FACE BULLDOZER - PLANNING APPLICATION INITIATED TO DEMOLISH 450 HOUSES IN LIVERPOOL 19th February 2013

Housing Association Plus Dane presses ahead with government-funded plans to bulldoze 450 terraced houses in Liverpool's historic Welsh Streets, the birthplace of Beatle Ringo Starr.

The move, by subsidised social landlord 'Plus Dane Group', is embarrassing for Tory Chair Grant Shapps, who visited the area last summer as Housing Minister, and publicly promised an end to large scale demolitions that "destroy swathes of housing indiscriminately". **It also undermines the Prime Minister, who visited the Welsh Streets in Toxteth with Lord Heseltine in 2006, and pronounced himself 'baffled' by plans for their clearance.**

Although Ringo's house at 9 Madryn Street and 15 others adjacent will be spared after campaigners mounted fierce opposition, **ten entire terraced streets will be cleared** if the plan proceeds, including many that remain occupied, including SAVE's house at 21 Madryn Street. **The Plus Dane Group want to replace the 450 Victorian terraces, named after Welsh villages and valleys, with 225 smaller bungalows and semis at lower density.** The Welsh Streets, in the leafy Prince's Park area of Liverpool, are so named because they once housed the Welsh workers who built much of the city.

In November 2012 a legal challenge showed funding for the scheme had been signed off unlawfully. Pickles is now under pressure from campaign group SAVE to redirect a £70m 'Transition Fund' away from demolition and towards housing renovation, or face having the cash quashed and clawed back by the High Court. The government has placed reuse of empty homes at the centre of its housing strategy.

Liverpool Council backs Plus Dane's proposals, while housing and heritage campaigners accuse them of creating 'managed decline', ie running properties down, to pave the way for development deals. SAVE and other charities say renovation is still possible and would deliver more houses, to a higher standard, for less public money, and in less time. **There is independent market evidence showing strong demand for the houses, and an engineer's report saying they are structurally viable to refurbish. A local residents group, the Welsh Streets Home Group last year produced innovative alternative designs that retain the houses and provide choice of size and layout.**

David Ireland, Chief Executive of housing charity 'Empty Homes', said Liverpool council's approach was about control of land, and that evidence in a recent report by consultants DTZ supporting the plans appeared 'biased against refurbishment'.

"It appears the report has been crafted to achieve a pre-determined recommendation of clearance and rebuild," said Ireland.

Demolition of the Welsh Streets is a hangover from John Prescott's widely discredited £2.2 billion Housing Market Renewal (HMR) 'Pathfinder' programme, which knocked down 30,000

homes across northern England, often under threat of compulsory purchase, before being scrapped by Shapps in 2011. **As the Housing Minister Shapps told Parliament, Pathfinder was “a failure” that “increased deprivation, divided communities, and left vulnerable families trapped in ghost streets”.**

The £35m Transitional Fund, to be matched by local councils, was intended as a way out of the mess left by HMR Pathfinder, but Freedom of Information Requests by SAVE and Empty Homes revealed it would be used to clear 5,125 more homes, half of them on Merseyside, and renovate just 113 nationwide. SAVE mounted a legal challenge to prevent what they called ‘Pathfinder Mk 2’.

The continuation of Pathfinder policies in the Welsh Streets shows that Pickles, and new Housing Ministers Mark Prisk and Don Foster, are being undermined by civil servants within their own departmental Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The HCA directly funds housing associations including Plus Dane Group, and approve proposals for any such large-scale demolition and rebuilding by social landlords. The HCA co-wrote the Transitional Fund bids that Shapps inadvertently signed off.

SAVE President Marcus Binney said: “Some £20m of public money has been spent on the Welsh Streets to remove an established neighbourhood of almost 500 homes and 1,000 people. Their land and properties will be passed with HCA approval to the same housing association, Plus Dane Group, that boarded up streets and ran the area down in the first place.”

Clem Cecil, SAVE Director said: “Here we are, in 2013, in the teeth of a financial and housing crisis, with a top down, government funded scheme that continues clearance of hundreds of homes, using unlawfully allocated money, instead of allowing local firms and families the chance to step in and do them up. After SAVE’s High Court victory, ministers cannot simply wash their hands of this case. Pathfinder-style demolitions have to stop.”



Residents before homes were boarded up



David Cameron and Lord Heseltine visit the Welsh Streets in 2006

Notes for Editors:

Grant Shapp's statement to Parliament on 24th Nov 2011. He condemned HMR in strong terms as 'managed decline', that 'increased deprivation, ran-down neighbourhoods, divided communities, damaged heritage and left families trapped in abandoned streets'. He was especially critical of Social Landlords (such as Plus Dane Group) for abetting the process of decline by 'voiding' properties. The Transitional Fund was supposed to draw a line, but the government's Homes and Communities Agency seem to have written it as a continuation of Pathfinder:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm111124/wmstext/111124m0001.htm> (From Hansard, Ministerial Statement by Hon. Grant Shapps MP, Nov 24th, 2011)

SAVE Pathfinder Post-Mortem, quoted in the above Ministerial Statement:

<http://www.savebritainsheritage.org/news/campaign.php?id=191>

A recent Civic Voice Briefing note for Junior Housing Minister Don Foster MP

http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/uploads/files/Merseyside_Civic_Society_Briefing_HMRI.pdf

Website for the Welsh Street Homes Group

http://www.welshstreets.co.uk/?page_id=101

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NOTES TO EDITORS: SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

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