



PRESS RELEASE 25th JULY

SAVE welcomes Eric Pickles move to consider Public Inquiry on Planning Decision for Welsh Streets, Liverpool

SAVE Britain's Heritage welcomes Eric Pickles' rapid decision to suspend demolition of 440 homes in Liverpool's Welsh Streets area. Pickles' intervention provides a much needed chance to establish a fair solution for an historic neighbourhood left boarded up by a failed regeneration programme. SAVE is calling for a public inquiry into this clear continuation of 'Pathfinder', described at the committee meeting by Liverpool planning expert Jonathan Brown as, 'the triumph of managed decline.'

On 23rd July Liverpool Council's planning committee approved Housing Association Plus Dane Group's hugely controversial proposal to clear a dozen of Toxteth's tree-lined streets of Victorian terraced housing, the majority emptied of their inhabitants by the council under the now discredited 'Pathfinder' demolition scheme.

Since 2003, some £20m has been spent by Liverpool Council and Plus Dane Housing Association on buying and boarding up hundreds of Welsh Streets properties, with a view to building between 150 and 220 low density semis on the cleared site. The Pathfinder programme displaced some 1,200 residents from the Welsh Streets. Before this, houses there were acknowledged to be in better condition than Liverpool's city average, with few empty, and house prices rising.

Within hours of Tuesday's planning decision, Eric Pickles slapped a 'stop notice' on Liverpool council, using his powers under Article 25 of the town and county planning act. This gives him 21 days to make a decision on whether to 'call-in' the case for a full public inquiry.

In 2011 the then housing minister Grant Shapps scrapped the Pathfinder scheme. This followed seven years of the policy, during which time £2.2bn

had been spent demolishing 30,000 homes across the North and the Midlands. Shapps announced to Parliament that the programme had failed, and 'increased deprivation, divided communities and destroyed heritage'. It appeared that areas like the Welsh Streets in Liverpool, central Stoke-on-Trent and Saltwell in Gateshead had escaped the bulldozer.

But large-scale demolitions were revived in late 2011 when civil servants from the Government's Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) found a further £70m for a so called 'transition fund'. Signed by Shapps in apparent ignorance, it was earmarked to pay for the demolition of 5,000 homes.

SAVE successfully proved the transition fund unlawful in the High Court, winning a formal quashing order from Mr Pickles in June this year. Liverpool council had successfully bid for £9 million of the transition fund – the highest amount of any bidder.

Pickles' decision on a call-in will be a test of his commitment to truly bring an end to Pathfinder, to support inner city growth and bring empty homes back into use. Equally, it is a test of the government's will to stand up to an entrenched bureaucratic culture of 'managed decline' and land-banking by the HCA and some of its largely unaccountable housing providers.

SAVE has written to Liverpool council and Ministers endorsing a resident-led compromise drawn up by Liverpool architects Constructive Thinking. The designs offer a different approach – they save a higher number of terraced houses and allow for the Plus Dane Group to build the 150 new homes they have promised. The Welsh Streets Home Group who have tabled the designs, say that they are a discussion point rather than finished designs.

SAVE says that the Constructive Thinking proposal, while still far short of an ideal solution, represents a potential way forward that could give all parties most of what they want.

SAVE Director Clem Cecil said: 'We hope that Eric Pickles will do what it takes to stop scarce public money being spent removing even scarcer public housing.

The prospect of a call-in should focus minds - further delay helps no-one, least of all local people. This is not localism, it is holding people at ransom.

The Housing Association Plus Dane should be ashamed of themselves for the waste they have wrought and for playing with the expectations of their tenants - their proposals not only contravene national policy on many levels, they detract from the culture and heritage of Liverpool.'

David Ireland, Director of Empty Homes Charity said: 'Old terraces may be unfashionable but they provide good homes for people on modest incomes. Without them more people, unable to buy homes, become reliant on social housing.'

Please see this link for further comment from David Ireland:

<http://www.liverpooldailypost.co.uk/liverpool-news/regional-news/2013/07/25/localism-vs-centralism-what-fascination-do-liverpool-s-welsh-streets-hold-for-the-government-99623-33651648/>

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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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