



Press Release 25 September 2013

Pickles calls Public Inquiry into Welsh Streets Application – but does not call in similar application in Gateshead.

SAVE Britain's Heritage welcomes yesterday's government announcement of a Public Inquiry into controversial housing demolitions in Liverpool's famous 'Welsh Streets', birthplace of Beatles drummer Ringo Starr. SAVE regrets that the government has chosen not to call in a similar application in Gateshead.

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Eric Pickles has responded to hundreds of objections to the housing clearance, which would see 440 Victorian terraces bulldozed, with just 40 renovated. His planning Minister Nick Boles says the government is concerned that the £40m scheme, approved by Liverpool council and social landlord Housing Association 'Plus Dane Group', flouts national planning policy that favours sustainable growth and the renovation of empty homes.

The government's 'call-in' letter also raises its concern about 'about architecture and design issues, and the extent to which proposals meet planning policy on conserving and enhancing the historic environment.'

The Welsh Streets proposals, if they are not withdrawn, will now be subject to a full public inquiry.

Since 2003, some £20m has been spent by Liverpool Council and Plus Dane Group on buying and boarding up hundreds of Welsh Streets properties, displacing around 1,200 residents, with a view to building between 150 and 220 low density semi detached houses on the cleared site.

The project was part of former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott's discredited 'Pathfinder' demolition programme, which spent some £2.2bn on knocking down 30,000 terraced houses across the north and midlands, until it was scrapped by the coalition government in 2011. Liverpool council's own figures show that, before residents began to be evicted, houses on the Welsh Streets were in better condition than the city average, with fewer empty, and house prices rising.

After scrapping Pathfinder, the then housing minister Grant Shapps visited the birthplace of Ringo Starr on Madryn Street in June 2012 to announce "a ground-breaking experiment (in which) Liverpool City Council have agreed to give the local community the opportunity

to take over and refurbish 16 of the properties on the street, and in doing so gauge the demand for such properties in the wider area.”

However, the renovations have still not begun.

The Welsh Streets Home Group had called for an amended application, to retain fifty more houses.

SAVE bought a house on Madryn Street, doors away from Ringo Starr’s childhood home, in 2011, to show that the houses can be refurbished at a low cost and lived in. The house is tenanted by two guardians through the Camelot housing scheme.

SAVE has been in negotiations with the Government and Liverpool Council for over a year. These negotiations have recently become constructive and we aim to continue them. The negotiations concern a compromise between demolition and refurbishment on the site.

SAVE campaigner Jonathan Brown says: “The planning application by Liverpool City Council represents the triumph of managed decline. A public inquiry would expose mass demolition as an outdated and wasteful approach, unfit for a growing city and country, where demand for housing increasingly outstrips supply.”

SAVE Director Clem Cecil says: “The Welsh Streets has become a major national planning dispute over the last nine years. We are deeply concerned that the expectations of the remaining inhabitants of the Welsh Streets have been toyed with: Plus Dane’s proposal that was approved by the council in July this year blatantly flouts national planning policy.”

SAVE President Marcus Binney says: “SAVE has been fighting these large scale demolitions of traditional terrace housing for over a decade. We and many others are ready and able to renovate them. Finance is available. If the City Council modifies its plans major renovation and new build can proceed side by side in the near future.”

Gateshead

An application to demolish over 400 homes in Saltwell and Bensham, Gateshead was also considered by ministers. However, they decided not to call it in, saying: “after carefully considering the facts, circumstances and representations, it was decided that the planning decision for this application is best taken at the local level by the council. This proposal does not raise concerns about heritage and design, does not give rise to national controversy and is widely supported.”

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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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