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PRESS RELEASE IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gateshead Council ignores judicial review proceedings and commences demolitions in Bensham and Saltwell, Gateshead. SAVE seeks an injunction.

Yesterday evening the demolition of terraced housing on Westminster Street near Saltwell Park, Newcastle began. At stake are 290 houses in the wider area whose demolition was given permission this summer by Gateshead Council.

Local campaigners brought the demolition to our attention. Solicitor Susan Ring of Richard Buxton Environmental and Public Law applied to the High Court today for an injunction.

Gateshead Council had told SAVE's solicitors that demolition was not imminent but then proceeded to demolish without warning.

At least ten of the 290 homes in the demolition zone are inhabited, by people who do not wish to give up their homes.

The demolition is part of the HMR Pathfinder policy that focused on demolishing what are erroneously referred to as 'obsolete homes', and replacing them with new builds in an attempt to boost the housing market. In the last 10 years £2.2 billion has been spent on demolition and new build, all on government subsidy.

This subsidized scheme has broken communities and wasted perfectly good homes. It has encouraged a spiral of managed decline as councils purposefully run down areas.

One of the aims of Pathfinder was to improve problem areas, however a 2007 report from the National Audit Office said: 'there is no guarantee that intervening in the housing market in this way will address causes rather than symptoms of the problems experienced in these neighbourhoods.'

In addition the area in question is stable and safe, only a few minutes from Newcastle city centre.

The government officially ended Pathfinder in November 2011. Despite this, large-scale demolitions continue, indicating that the Government is unable to implement its own policy for bringing empty homes back into use.

Local resident and campaigner Nancy Bone said today: “These are good solid homes built to a high standard, and eco-friendly. They do not need much work to bring them back into use. We want repair, renovation and reassurance from the Council, and what we are getting is the opposite.

Empty Homes Advisor to the Government and TV architect George Clarke says of today’s news: “it's a scandalous and shocking waste of what were decent homes before they were actively wrecked by the council.”

SAVE President Marcus Binney says: “It’s the bigger disgrace because the council has successfully refurbished so many houses like these. They are sturdily built and have been shown to make very pleasant homes when refurbished.”

Gateshead council chose not to give a comment.



Demolitions commence on Westminster Street, Bensham and Saltwell



Westminster Street, Bensham and Saltwell

For more information please contact the office on office@savebritainsheritage.org / 0207 253 3500 or Clem Cecil on 07968 003595

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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