

# news

## Housing renewal could require more demolition

**The new Labour leadership of Liverpool City Council is examining the legal implications of agreements between the authority and housing developers that can no longer afford to build because of the recession.**

Many of the stalled developments are on land cleared or due to be cleared under the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) programme.

In Liverpool, thousands of terraced homes were earmarked for demolition under the controversial initiative, also known as Pathfinder, and the land beneath them promised to private developers. In some areas battles continue to rage

between residents who do not want to move and the authorities.

### Legal minefield

In opposition, new leader Cllr Joe Anderson criticised the policy, which has left 13,000 homes boarded up and rotting.

Following May's local elections he announced an urgent review of the programme.

His team is still picking its way through the legal quagmire to see if there is room for manoeuvre.

Far from halting demolitions, Anderson now believes some clearance should be speeded up – including in Toxteth's contentious Welsh Streets.



Anderson (inset) says speeding up the demolition of areas such as Welsh Street may b

He said: "We have to deal with the situation we have been left with, and we are facing a legal minefield. In some cases developers have been given priority but are unable to deliver new houses. We are interested in working with the private sector and housing associations

so are looking at all the options available to us.

### Appalling conditions

"We have still got 23,000 people on the housing waiting list in Liverpool. If we can retrofit some of those houses I would like to do it. But in some areas

## Weldon: Booker Prize judges 'only trust t



**Controversial author Fay Weldon has made a fierce attack on complacency, accusing Man Booker Prize judges of equating "dullness with literary merit" and calling on feminists to "stop navel-gazing" and worry more about their Islamic sisters.**

Asked why she had never won the literary award, whose 2010 shortlist was announced last week, the 79-year-old internationally acclaimed writer said it was because she injected her novels with humour and the judges panel had come to only ever "trust the dull".

Weldon, whose writing career

**Weldon: New Labour dirty tricks**

began in advertising – she developed the slogan "Go to work on an egg" – and television (the pilot episode of *Upstairs Downstairs*), and progressed to journalism and fiction, said her frank remarks after making her casting vote as chair of the 1983 award ended her chances of ever winning it.

### Agent hit

The author, who is promoting her latest novel *Kehua!*, said she had made an after-dinner speech accusing certain publishers of "ripping off their writers".

She said that it so enraged a leading publisher that he came over to the top table and hit her agent. "But I was only telling

the truth," she added. "So for a long while my relationship with the Booker wasn't that good. It may be OK now. But these days I make far too many jokes to be considered eligible."

The writer of books including *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, *Affliction*, *The Stepmother's Diary*, *The Cloning of Joanna May* and *Chalcot Crescent* would not name the assailant. The late Giles Gordon was the agent.

Weldon also hit out at the feminist movement and accused Tony Blair's government of dirty tricks. She has had a rocky relationship with both since some newspapers reported she said rape was OK.

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## News in brief



It may be the only option. Photo: Ciara Leeming

we are so far down the line that the most sensible thing is to bring the scheme forward. We've got to carry out the promises made to these communities, some of which have been living in appalling conditions for far too long."

Government budget cuts have

hit HMR hard. In May, just over £5 million was cut from Liverpool's HMR budget and in June the ring fence was removed from the £236 million national budget. No funding is in place beyond March although nationally land for 40,000 new homes has been acquired.

### Bullying by bulldozer

Together the country's 10 HMR bodies say they have cleared 23,000 houses and completed 12,000 new builds. This number is disputed by lobby group SAVE, which claims the partnerships have only built 4,000 homes nationwide, at huge financial and social cost.

Where possible, Anderson's team is looking into alternatives to demolition. There are plans to save 80 homes on the Boot estate in Toxteth and to renovate some condemned homes in Anfield. But the issue is far from simple and many residents want clearance to go ahead.

Anderson said: "In places like Anfield and the Welsh Streets people have been balloted about the demolition process and the programme is running in stages. We have members of the community who have expressed

their opinions and have waited in awful conditions for many years. I'm accountable to all these people.

"The difficulty is that the last council bit off more than it could chew. They went for the money rather than really considering the whole picture.

"If people think any other new council leader would simply come in and bring a halt to demolition then they are mistaken. My job is to lead the city in a way that is fair, gets the best out of our assets and supports the communities which want that development."

Jonathan Brown of Merseyside Civic Society said: "Joe Anderson is sincere in his desire to sort the city's appalling housing crisis. But he won't end the scandal by accelerating it and bullying people out by the bulldozer.

"He needs to force his officers and housing associations into a total change of direction. A move from eviction and demolition to

environmental retrofit and street greening will actually save money and stop the rot infecting Liverpool's inner city."

CIARA LEEMING

### LAW CENTRE THREAT

The future of South Manchester Law Centre, one of the first in the country, is under threat as immigration and asylum cases dry up and funding cuts come in. Founded in 1976, the centre is acknowledged nationally for its immigration and asylum expertise but has been given only a fraction of its capacity in casework. Manchester City Council and Legal Services Commission funding for employment, housing and welfare work is also set to end next month.

### BIG YEAR, BIG PRIZE

A year-long, all expenses paid trip around the world is up for grabs in a competition that will benefit charities. Your Big Year is a free competition, open to everyone, which involves applicants taking up online challenges to raise money and boost the profile of their chosen charities. Deadline for the competition, organised by Liverpool travel firm Smaller Earth, is 10 October.

### REPAIR REASSURANCE

Leeds City Council has sought to reassure residents that repairs and maintenance for schools and houses will go ahead despite the financial difficulties facing Connaught, one of its major contractors, last week. Shares in Connaught were suspended as losses and debts mounted up but the council, one of many across the country to use the company, insisted it had contingency plans in place to ensure work went ahead.

### PEACE FESTIVAL

Punk and folk concerts, photographic exhibitions and theatre workshops are part of Manchester Peace Festival at venues across the city on 18-26 September. The festival is described as "a non-partisan celebration of peace and justice and awareness-raising about threats to peace locally and globally" and benefits the likes of Manchester and District CND. Tony Benn will speak at the closing concert. See <http://manchesterpeacefestival.wordpress.com>.

JEAN WEST

## t the dull'

She said that the "rape affair" blew up in 1998 but people had not forgotten it. "It was possibly a New Labour ploy to warn me off," she said. "They thought I had mocked Blair.

### Rape controversy

"I had written an article for a US journal, *Harpers*, on the feminisation of politics in Britain, which got picked up by the Daily Mirror over here, and simplified by them into the headline 'Writer Weldon says Tony Blair is a big girl's blouse' or something similar. Thirty-six hours later, seven in the morning, the media is at the door and I am public enemy number one."

Weldon added that weeks earlier she had been quoted in a *Radio Times* interview as saying "worse things can happen to a woman than rape".

She said: "I'd been comparing an attempted rape in a taxi by a drunk with spending the night in a hospital with a child very ill from meningitis and had remarked that, as female horrors went, the former seemed preferable.

### Feminist navel gazing

"Somehow, mysteriously, the abbreviated quote had turned up on the wire services and even got banner tabloid headlines saying 'Weldon says rape OK'. Alastair Campbell was then quoted as saying I should 'stick to fiction writing'. When VS Naipaul attacked Blair sometime later, Campbell dismissed him with the same words. Am I being paranoid? You decide."

Adding further fuel to the feminism debate, she said: "The price of liberation is eternal vigilance. In the West the revolution succeeded, but the world is big. The sisterhood needs to stop examining its own navel and attend to some Islamic attitudes."

As judges decide between Peter Carey, Emma Donoghue, Damon Galgut, Howard Jacobson, Andrea Levy and Tom McCarthy for the Booker Prize next month, Weldon added cheerfully: "Of course I'm not even shortlisted." *Kehua!* is a novel which claims on the jacket to deal with 'murder, adultery, incest, remorse, redemption and ghosts'. Far too much plot. Far too many jokes."

Weldon was shortlisted for the award in 1979 for *Praxis* but has not been nominated since.