

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Campaigners have learned thousands of empty homes will be bulldozed and replaced with grass, despite government criticism of the policy.

Up to 40,000 mainly terraced properties are standing empty in urban areas across the north following the now-disbanded Pathfinder regeneration scheme.

The controversial programme, introduced in 2003 to bring “transformational change” to deprived inner-city neighbourhoods and also known as Housing Market Renewal, was ditched amid the coalition’s budget cuts in 2010.

During that time £2.3 billion was spent clearing 30,000 homes and building 15,000 new ones.

The credit crunch wounded Pathfinder, with developers struggling to fund projects and sell their new builds, and the change of government marked its death knell.

Although many remaining residents objected to the clearance plans, they are now stranded in semi-derelict streets and – in some places – vacant plots.

Housing minister Grant Shapps has been critical of the scheme’s over-reliance on compulsory purchase and demolition of vintage housing stock. So when transition money was made available to help the worst hit areas, campaigners hoped refurbishment would be on the cards.

East Lancashire, Hull, Merseyside, Stoke and Teesside were selected to share £35 million – to be matched by the councils – on the basis of proposals approved by the government.

Announcing the fund, Shapps said: “Under the previous controversial scheme, local communities in some

“It looks as if we were misled again by promises.”

of the most deprived areas of the country were told they would see a transformation of their areas. But in reality, this amounted to bulldozing buildings and knocking down neighbourhoods, pitting neighbour against neighbour, demolishing our Victorian heritage and leaving families trapped in abandoned streets. This programme was a failure and an abject lesson to policy makers.”

However, it has now emerged that the previous policy will largely continue. Merseyside councils will

Knockdown prices

Far from saving thousands of homes left empty after a failed regeneration scheme, new money is actually going to ensure their demolition. **Ciara Leeming** reports on the latest twist in the long-running Pathfinder housing debacle



Welsh Streets in Liverpool, one of the blighted Pathfinder areas. Photo: Ciara Leeming

clear almost 2,500 homes over the next six years, bringing total demolitions to almost 7,000, and there are no plans for refurbishment. In Bootle, a fund aimed at building affordable housing will be put towards the demolitions. Under Teesside’s exit strategy, cleared land will be grassed over until the housing market improves.

In an open letter to Shapps, Nina Edge, who lives in one of the homes scheduled for clearance in Liverpool’s Welsh Streets, wrote: “When you announced in November that the demolition-heavy activities of HMR would no longer receive government support we were delighted. We had funders and experts in place to renovate our street and neighbourhood. We had buyers and renters lined up waiting to come and live here.

“It is with horror and dismay that I have learned that the bulldozers have not been stopped at all. Merely repackaged. Is there really nothing we can do to have some alternatives properly encouraged and funded

though the budget streams you described previously in the media? Empty land will follow empty homes then – it looks as if we were misled by empty promises again.”

David Ireland, chief executive of the campaigning charity Empty Homes Agency, said: “The decision to end Pathfinder was one we supported. Although public investment in some of the poorest communities in England should be welcome, the use much of it got put to was in our view counter-productive. The programme that was originally intended to regenerate communities ended up demolishing them. It was also ineffective in reducing the levels of empty homes, despite that being one its major aims.

“Given the language and the tone that surrounded this [transition] fund, you might very well expect that it would be made available for reversing the Pathfinder policy. But to most people’s astonishment the government’s funds are to pay for more of the same.”

VENDOR CODE OF CONDUCT

All vendors selling **The Big Issue in the North** must abide by the Code of Conduct, the set of rules governing how they work. Outreach teams from **The Big Issue in the North** patrol the streets daily to check vendors’ behaviour and to encourage and support them while working. Here are some of the key rules:

1. Vendors can only sell on designated pitches organised by **The Big Issue in the North**.
2. Vendors cannot sell between 8.00pm and 7.00am (6.00pm in Liverpool city centre). Police officers have the authority to confiscate magazines and badges if they witness vendors selling during these hours.
3. Vendors must always wear their own badge when buying or selling the magazine and only sell magazines with their number on.
4. Vendors can only buy magazines for themselves.
5. Vendors must not use physical or verbal aggression towards the public or other vendors.
6. Vendors are not allowed to sell if staff feel they are unfit to do so.
7. Vendors must stand when selling; sitting down is an obstruction to the public highway and is illegal.
8. Vendors must not beg for money using the magazine. Asking for spare change or other items is considered to be begging.
9. Vendors can only charge £2.00 for each magazine and must always give the customer the magazine once paid for. Failing to do so is fraudulent and may result in police involvement.

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