

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS NEWS

## Homes from the pound shop

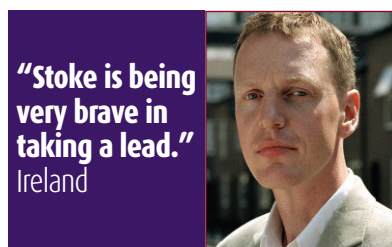
**Homes vacated under an abandoned demolition scheme will be sold off for £1 each in an attempt to build a new and sustainable community.**

Around 100 condemned and boarded-up houses in Stoke-on-Trent will be brought into an innovative "homesteading" scheme, which aims to demonstrate that the country's many ghost streets could become viable neighbourhoods once again.

The project has come about through a partnership between the city council and the campaigning charity Empty Homes. Buyers would have to renovate the property to a decent standard themselves, using a low interest loan of up to £30,000, and would have to stay for at least five years – or forfeit the profit.

The idea is to cut out speculators and buy-to-let landlords, instead handing assets to people who will become part of the community.

Empty Homes chief executive David Ireland said: "It's a novel scheme. This is about normalising an area that has been subjected to a lot of problems over the last five years,



**"Stoke is being very brave in taking a lead."**  
Ireland

and building a stable population of people for whom this is their home."

There are up to 900,000 empty houses in the UK, a third of which have been vacant for more than six months. Thousands across the north were emptied of residents during the ill-fated Housing Market Renewal scheme, which was axed by the coalition government last year.

The question of how to deal with these neighbourhoods has become a headache for councils from Liverpool to Oldham, Middlesbrough and Hull. The piecemeal acquisition process – plus resistance from many homeowners – has resulted in semi-occupied and blighted streets, where antisocial behaviour and flytipping are rife.

Stoke is pioneering a scheme to sell abandoned homes for £1 in a bid to provide affordable housing and rebuild communities, reports **Ciara Leeming**



**Semi-occupied and blighted streets are a headache for many northern councils**

Residents live among the empties in many areas, while the recession means developers are no longer interested in the sites that can be cleared. Where demolition occurs, land is likely to sit empty and grassed-over for years.

Homesteading has been used in previous recessions to make properties available to those who otherwise could not afford to buy. Newcastle City Council sold flats for 50p each in the 1990s, and other towns and cities have run similar small schemes, usually with loans, training and strict conditions applied.

Ireland hopes to demonstrate the effectiveness of the model and to persuade other councils to consider the approach. Ownership will be transferred from the council to a housing association, which will keep ownership of 50 per cent, selling the other – heavily discounted – 50 per cent to the selected homesteaders.

Buyers – who must live or work in Stoke – must use the property as their sole home and be able to support a mortgage. The loans will be repaid on a monthly basis, and reinvested into the scheme.

"This is as much about regeneration of that area as providing affordable housing," said Ireland. "The idea of flattening all the houses and rebuilding is the old idea.

"Some errors were made but that's the past, and now we have to move forward. Homesteading will take an area which looks pretty much dead to somewhere where quite a lot is happening. This could work in Liverpool, in Hull and other places where the market is not very strong.

"We don't need developers – we should give homes back to the community and they will help bring areas back to life. I think Stoke is being very brave in taking a lead."

The council is match-funding £1.5 million from the government's empty homes fund with £1.5 million from its own capital allowance to get the scheme up and running. The plan is due to be approved by cabinet members later this year and launched in 2013.

Councillor Janine Bridges, cabinet member for housing, neighbourhoods and community safety, said: "Bringing empty properties back into use to improve the living standards of homes in Stoke is a key goal."

## 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.
- To comment on vendor behaviour, please call: Manchester: 0161 831 5570 Liverpool: 0151 702 6931 Leeds: 0113 243 9027
- The Big Issue in the North** Trust raises funds to provide services for homeless vendors of this magazine.