

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS NEWS

War chest to peace initiative

Merseyside residents fighting the demolition of their homes have put their campaign on to a new and imaginative footing, reports **Ciara Leeming**

Communities blighted by failed regeneration schemes are working to take control of their environments.

Residents in two Merseyside areas earmarked for clearance under the Housing Market Renewal programme are looking for innovative ways to bring housing back into use.

Thousands of households have lived in the shadow of the bulldozer for a decade now – either at risk of demolition under the now defunct £2.2 billion HMR scheme, or surrounded by properties vacated in its name. But attention is now turning to what happens next.

HMR – also known as Pathfinder – ended early and developers are not building on the sites without the financial incentives of the scheme, leaving many areas with even greater problems than at the start.

In Bootle's Klondyke neighbourhood, where almost 500 homes were due for clearance, residents hope to create a community land trust – a voluntary entity that owns and manages assets for local benefit. Should this go ahead, it would prevent individuals from profiting from the houses.

A few miles away, on Toxteth's Welsh Streets, residents have launched their own consultation so that when the next round of design discussions takes place they can be more representative of their community, which was split by the clearance plans.

The process follows an announcement that 32 condemned houses would be spared – a move



In Welsh Streets, residents continue to fight against demolition. Photo: Ciara Leeming

welcomed by campaigners, who still hope the final number could be greater.

The Little Klondyke group, working with Bootle charity Maritime Community Development Agency, hopes to persuade Sefton Council to release 120 empty homes that the trust could refurbish and return to community use.

Their new approach follows an unsuccessful bid for £5.2 million of government funding earlier this year, which would have allowed MCDA to turn the 120 properties into 90 homes plus community facilities. That application failed in part because the council would not give its

“Our project would create a new and vibrant community.”

support, despite the backing of Adactus Housing Association. MCDA community worker Juliet Edgar said: “Our project would help solve a number of problems for residents of Bootle and would also ensure a piece of the heritage of Klondyke is preserved for future generations, creating a new and vibrant community.”

“Sefton Council has no immediate plans for these homes – there is no planning application, no compulsory purchase order. Indeed, the council does not have the resources to do anything with these 480 homes which are remaining except constantly re-secure them and try to ensure the remaining six or so families are kept safe, while they wait for their homes to be built, expected in 2014.”

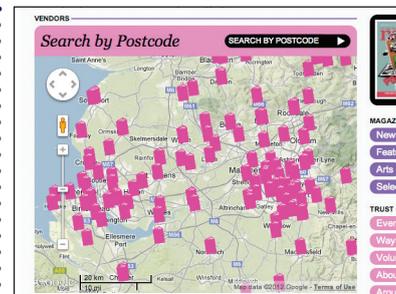
In Toxteth, the Welsh Streets Homes Group, which has consistently argued against demolition, agreed to move its funds

from a “war chest” – a legal fees fund – to a “peace initiative”. Its *Design Diplomacy* report features drawings, ideas and costs from Liverpool architects Constructive Thinking, to help people consider all possibilities for the site – including more refurbishment.

These proposals are now being shared with residents via presentations, online and in local shops, and will be looked at by council officers during a forthcoming neighbourhood renewal assessment.

Meanwhile, the campaign group Save Britain's Heritage – which has worked with residents in both the Welsh Streets and Klondyke – has won a judicial review of the government's £35.5 million transitional fund for HMR areas.

The money was intended as an exit strategy but Save Britain's Heritage persuaded a high court judge that the money – match funded by councils – was actually being put towards 5,000 demolitions, in contravention of former housing minister Grant Shapps's promises to parliament.



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