

The Welsh Streets Public Inquiry

**A report from SAVE Britain's Heritage on the public inquiry held in
June 2014 into an application to demolish 440 houses on
Liverpool's Welsh Streets.**



SAVE
BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

Text by Clem Cecil and Jonathan Brown

Compiled by Mike Fox

Produced January 2015

Copyright SAVE Britain's Heritage

70 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6EJ

office@savebritainsheritage.org

0207 253 3500

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible due to the generous donations made to SAVE's first online crowd funding campaign hosted by DigVentures. Our thanks to Orlando Gili for producing our crowd funding film, and everyone who provided gifts and rewards.

Thank you to everyone who donated. In particular, as per the benefits offered to those who pledged, those who gave £50 and above are noted here:

Susan Andrew| **Nancy** Arbuckle| The **Bodfach** Trust| **Dorothy** Brown| **Roger** Brown| **Jonathan** Brown| **Luke** Browne| **Timothy** Cantell| **Rebecca** Child| **David** Clarke| **Martin** Colman| **Stephen** Conrad| **Evelyn** and **John** Cook| **Charlotte** Crow| **Helen** Dorey| **Alfred** Ebeling| **John** Feltcher| **Christopher** Foley| **Christopher** Garrand| **Roger** Gow| **James** Hall| **Anthony** Hanson| **Peter** Heald| **George** Hesse| **Peter** Hirschmann| **David** Holberton| **Alison** Homewood| **Laura** Hornak| **Charlotte** Kempin| **Richard** Latto| **Andrea** Le Boutillier| **Oliver** Leigh-Wood| **Jean** Marston| **Craig** McHugh| **Selma** Montford| **Kathleen** Murrell| **David** Osman| **John** Peverley| **Basil** Postan| **Charlie** Radclyffe| **Graham** Reddish| **Donald** Rice| **Pam** Roberts| **Herbert** Robinson| **Martin** Rowley| **Kate** Russell| **Lisa** Shell| **Iain** Smith| **Robin** Stainer| **Phillip** Thwaites| **Richard** Upton| **Ian** Watmore|

Our especial thanks go to SAVE's team at the public inquiry:

Dave Bedford| **Jonathan** Brown| **Gareth** Carr| **Fiona** Deaton| **Alec** Forshaw| **David** Ireland| **Ed** Morton| **Wilf** Jones| **James** Potts| **Trevor** Skempton| **Paul** Sutton|

In addition we would like to thank the following for helping with the refurbishment of 21 Madryn Street:

Tilly and **Wayne** Hemingway of HemingwayDesign| British Ceramic Tiles| Dulux| Howdens Kitchens| Plumber **Michael** Barrett| **Hot Pots** and **Planters**| local paint and building suppliers **Palace** Chemicals| **Emma** Bridgewater Pottery| And to Project Manager **Lesley** Mullally for making it happen|

CONTENTS

1. ABOUT SAVE	6
2. PATHFINDER	8
3. THE WELSH STREETS, LIVERPOOL 8	17
4. THE PRESENT INQUIRY	23
5. QUOTES FROM EVIDENCE	32

1. ABOUT SAVE

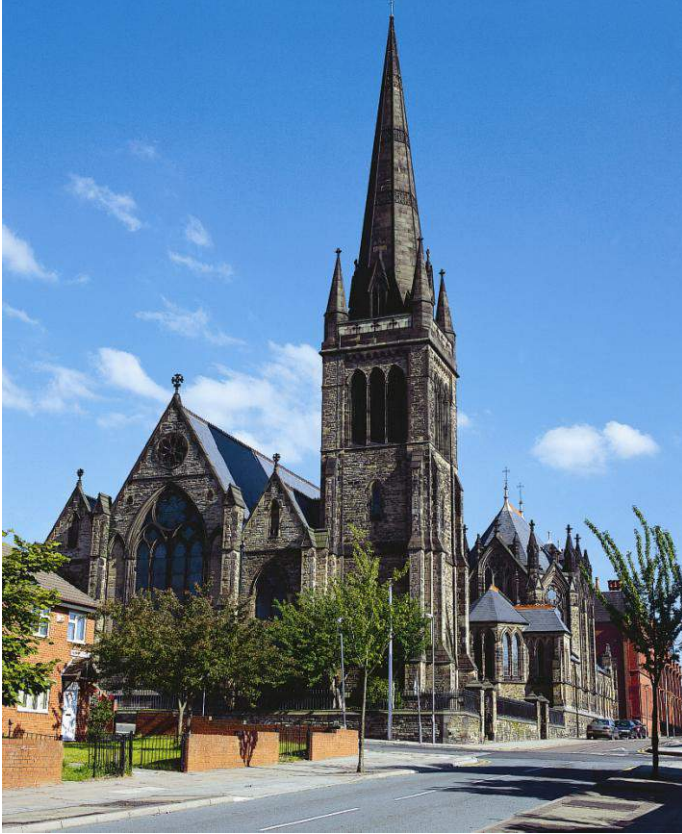
SAVE has been described as the most influential conservation group to have been established since William Morris founded the Society for the Protection Ancient Buildings over a century ago. It was created in 1975 - European Architectural Heritage Year - by a group of journalists, historians, architects, and planners to campaign publicly for endangered historic buildings.

Through press releases, lightning leaflets, reports, books and exhibitions, SAVE has championed the cause of decaying country houses, redundant churches and chapels, disused mills and warehouses, blighted streets and neighbourhoods, cottages and town halls, railway stations, hospitals, military buildings and asylums.

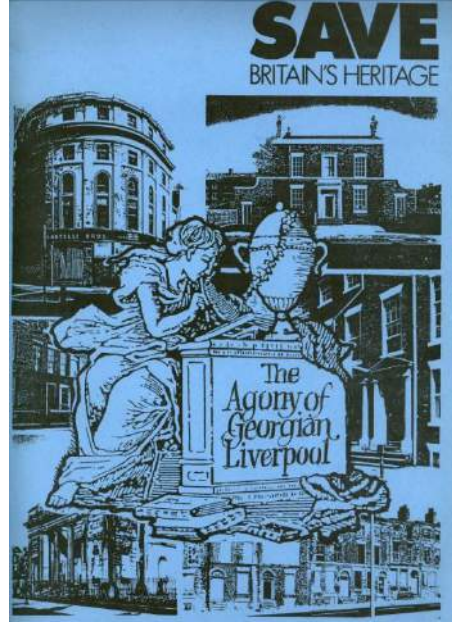
From the start, SAVE has always placed a special emphasis on the possibilities of alternative uses for historic buildings and, in a number of cases, it has prepared its own schemes for re-use of threatened buildings. On repeated occasions SAVE proposals have been instrumental in giving threatened buildings a renewed lease of life. SAVE is also very active on the broader issues of preservation policy.

SAVE and Liverpool

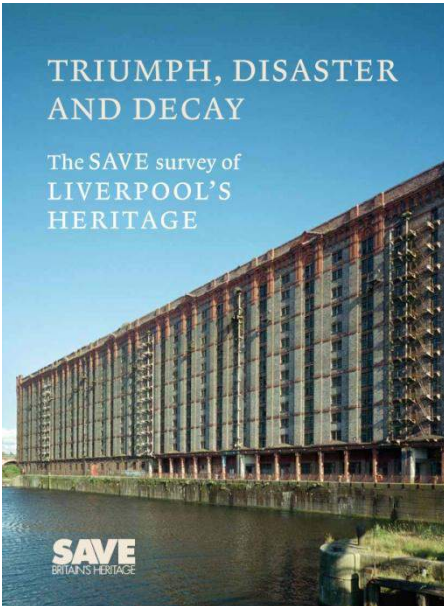
SAVE's campaigns in Liverpool date back to the charity's founding in 1975. It has been instrumental in saving many of Liverpool's most loved buildings. They include Albert Dock, the Georgian Lyceum on Bold Street, St Francis Xavier's Church in Everton, and the Art Deco Littlewoods Pools Building on Edge Lane. Looking back, it is difficult to believe that many of these buildings were once threatened with demolition. Fortunately - and through the tireless efforts of local and national supporters - they have been saved for future generations to enjoy.



St Francis Xavier, Everton



The Agony of Georgian Liverpool (1984)



Triumph, Disaster and Decay (2009)



St Peter & St Paul, New Brighton

2. PATHFINDER

Background

Pathfinder, otherwise known as Housing Market Renewal (HMR), was introduced by John Prescott in 2002. It claimed to address alleged housing market failure in certain parts of some Northern cities, and placed 400,000 terraced houses under direct threat of demolition. The housing targeted has been predominantly Victorian and Edwardian terraced housing. The issue is not one of vacancy or of uninhabitable homes – prior to the announcement of the scheme occupation levels were normal, homes were perfectly habitable and the cost of repairs and updating would have been modest. The claim of market failure was essentially that house prices were lower than elsewhere. Some 30,000 houses have been demolished.

The policy failed to consider the human element - the effect it would have on entire communities that were uprooted and rehoused, often against their will.

There was an illuminating feature Trevor MacDonald in 2005 that can be watched here: <http://vimeo.com/25227502>

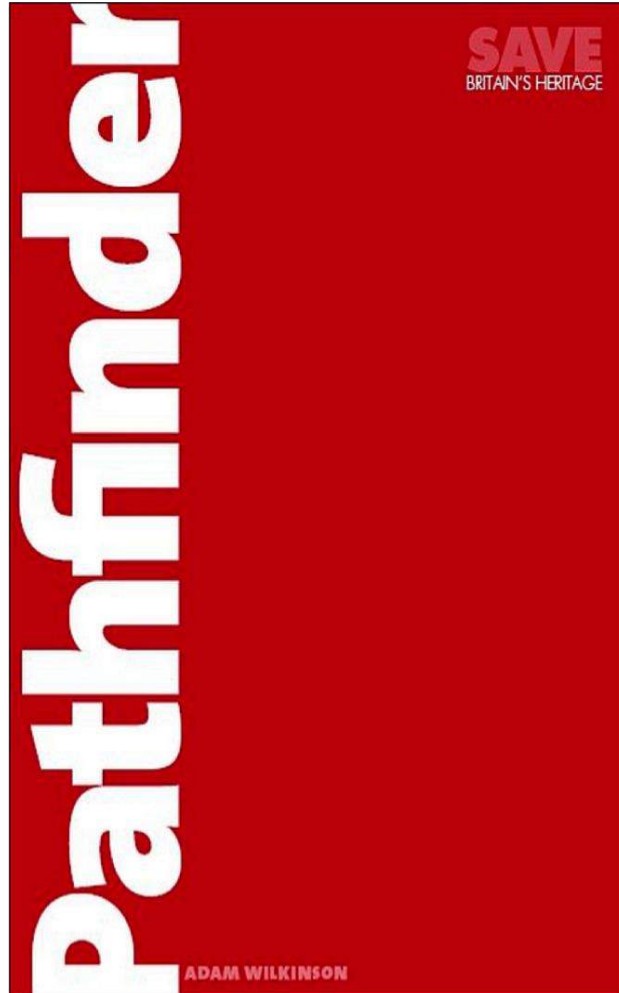
Liverpool-based SAVE Campaigner Jonathan Brown writes:

'Since 2002, £2.2 billion of public money has been squandered to buy-up, board-up and bulldoze tens of thousands of perfectly good terraced houses across England's north and midlands. Thousands of households have been driven out of historic streets under threat of compulsory purchase, and their homes - or rather the land they occupied - 'harvested' to benefit private developers and complicit social landlords. Although a limited number of replacement homes have been built, entire neighbourhoods now lie derelict and blighted.

Like junkies in deep denial, councils proffered social wounds caused by their own addiction to demolition, to beg government funds for more of the same.'

In March 2011 the controversial policy was scrapped by the present government, and resources switched from housing demolition to renovation, following a seven year campaign by SAVE and many local community groups. As a result of these

efforts, public policy is now directed towards the re-use and refurbishment of empty and historic housing, with demolition only as a last resort.



SAVE's 2006 Pathfinder Report was sent to every member of Parliament and helped trigger a critical investigation by the National Audit Office

The Rt Hon Don Foster MP gave the following critique of the HMR programme:

"The obsession with demolition was environmentally, economically, and socially wasteful and these centrally-driven schemes were often resented by local communities and created as many problems as they solved. This top-down

approach has not worked, often resulting in blighted areas where large scale demolition and clearance projects have been stopped in their tracks, leaving some families isolated in abandoned streets.”

HMRI has been unequivocally revoked by the present government, as set out in a written Ministerial Statement by Mr Grant Shapps MP on 24 November 2011:

“The last Government’s housing market renewal pathfinder programme imposed large scale Whitehall targets for demolition and clearance across the midlands and the north of England.

“There was widespread public controversy over an obsession with demolition over refurbishment, the lack of transparency of the pathfinder quangos, large profits by developers, the demolition of our nation’s Victorian heritage and perverse incentives being given to run down neighbourhoods.

“The designation of areas for demolition effectively increased deprivation in those areas; many social landlords prepared the ground by “voiding” and boarding up properties. In turn, this undermined the housing market as mortgage lenders were unwilling to lend in such areas. Areas were effectively managed into decline—to make the notional benefits of wholesale demolition more attractive, ensuring a larger windfall gain for the state.

“Local communities in some of the most deprived areas of the country were told they would see a transformation of their areas, which in reality amounted to bulldozing buildings and knocking down neighbourhoods, pitting neighbour against neighbour and leaving families trapped in abandoned streets. This was wrong.

“As campaigning group Save Britain’s Heritage has remarked:

“From the start, pathfinder showed an appetite for destruction... The classic English terraced house was demonised as “obsolete”. Whole neighbourhoods were declared surplus at the keystroke of a consultant’s laptop. Bureaucratic arrogance reduced communities to inmates of a

“Zoo”— Zone of Opportunity — for house builders. Statisticians assumed compulsory purchase and eviction for demolition were acceptable measures for householders in a property-owning democracy. Quite predictably, the cure turned out worse than the disease’.”



Above: Vienna Street, Anfield, 2007. Demolished 2014.

Condemnation was cross-party. In the Committee of Public Accounts, 35th Report, 2008, Rt. Hon Don Touhig MP, (Labour), said:

‘You have put at risk some of Britain’s housing heritage. You have ignored the views of local people. You have provided a bonanza for property speculators and left the people you are supposed to help unable to buy houses because of rising prices. Did your department deliberately plan a cock-up on this scale, or are you just incompetent?’



The Pathfinder legacy in Venmore Street, Anfield (above) and Tunstall Street, Toxteth/Edgehill (below)





Above: An aerial view of Tunstall Street, L7, showing the scale of Pathfinder clearances.

Post-Pathfinder

Pathfinder funding ceased in March 2011, but killing off a bureaucratic mindset used to government billions has proved problematic. The argument was made that the Pathfinder tap had been turned off prematurely. Nine years was said to be insufficient time over which to judge a 15-year programme. Proponents blamed its failure on the new government's cuts, rather than fundamental flaws in the policy itself. After years of overriding people on the ground whose lives were being wrecked by the scheme, authorities suddenly displayed a conscience - arguing that people left stranded in streets emptied by Pathfinder were reason for continuing clearance.

A Review Team was set up the government and TV presenter and architect George Clarke was appointed as Empty Homes Adviser. The following recommendations came out of the review process that give strong and sound guidance on how to

approach empty homes, with an emphasis on bringing them back into use.

<http://www.emptyhomes.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/George-Clarkes-12-Recommendations.doc>

In November 2011 Housing Minister Grant Shapps unveiled a £70m ‘Transition Fund’ to help rescue those left behind in Pathfinder’s ‘ghost streets’. He told Parliament that Pathfinder had been an abject failure, and this new funding would not be used for large-scale demolition.

However, our subsequent scrutiny of the funding applications revealed a different story. The Homes and Communities Agency, the government quango bidding for and distributing the money, had ignored Ministerial statements and embarked on a new phase of housing acquisition and mass demolition. Freedom of Information Act requests show Pathfinder areas requested and received ‘transition’ funds to demolish another 5,125 homes, and renovate just 113. This did not square with unequivocal government promises to draw the line. Almost half the planned clearance was on Merseyside, where councils want to demolish another 2,369 homes by 2018 (on top of 4,489 already destroyed there under Pathfinder).

Despite the clear change in government policy, Liverpool council now had the money to re-start compulsory purchase and demolition across neighbourhoods in Anfield, Edge Hill and Picton – and of course in Toxteth, the home of the Welsh Streets.

Our lawyers advised that this appeared to be an unlawful use of public funds, and SAVE decided to challenge it. We launched Judicial Review proceedings against the Government early in 2012.

At the High Court in London that September, barrister James Eadie QC, acting for the Government, accepted that former housing minister Mr Shapps had signed off the fund unlawfully, having “not been informed” that it provided for large scale demolition against his own stated policy. But he argued the decision should not be legally quashed, claiming the Secretary of State has no power to claw back funds

from councils, or retrospectively impose conditions on use of the funding.

Nevertheless, following permission for Judicial Review, Secretary of State Eric Pickles conceded and formally quashed the decision. Despite SAVE's best efforts, we were unable to secure any remedy from the Government to rectify this monumental mistake. This is all the more galling because Judge Justice Lang granted permission partly because QC Richard Harwood acting for SAVE, made it clear that remedy was possible. The Government instead arranged some meetings between SAVE and Liverpool Council to discuss possible ways forward for the Welsh Streets. We argued that this was not sufficient remedy for a mistake of this magnitude.

These meetings were inconclusive and Liverpool Council went ahead with their planning application to demolish over 400 houses, refurbishing only 40.

Sixteen of the 40 are on Madryn Street, following a visit from Mr Shapps to the site in summer 2012 when together with Mayor Joe Anderson he made a public pledge:

"Now, in a ground breaking experiment Liverpool City Council have agreed to give the local community the opportunity to take over and refurbish 16 of the properties on the street, and in doing so gauge the demand for such properties in the wider area."

Despite this claim in a government press release, the 16 Madryn Street properties were not in fact handed to the community but remain empty and in the control of the council and Plus Dane. SAVE did not support this approach, labeling it 'tokenistic' in our own press release.



Above: Prime Minister David Cameron and Lord Heseltine visiting the Welsh Streets in 2006

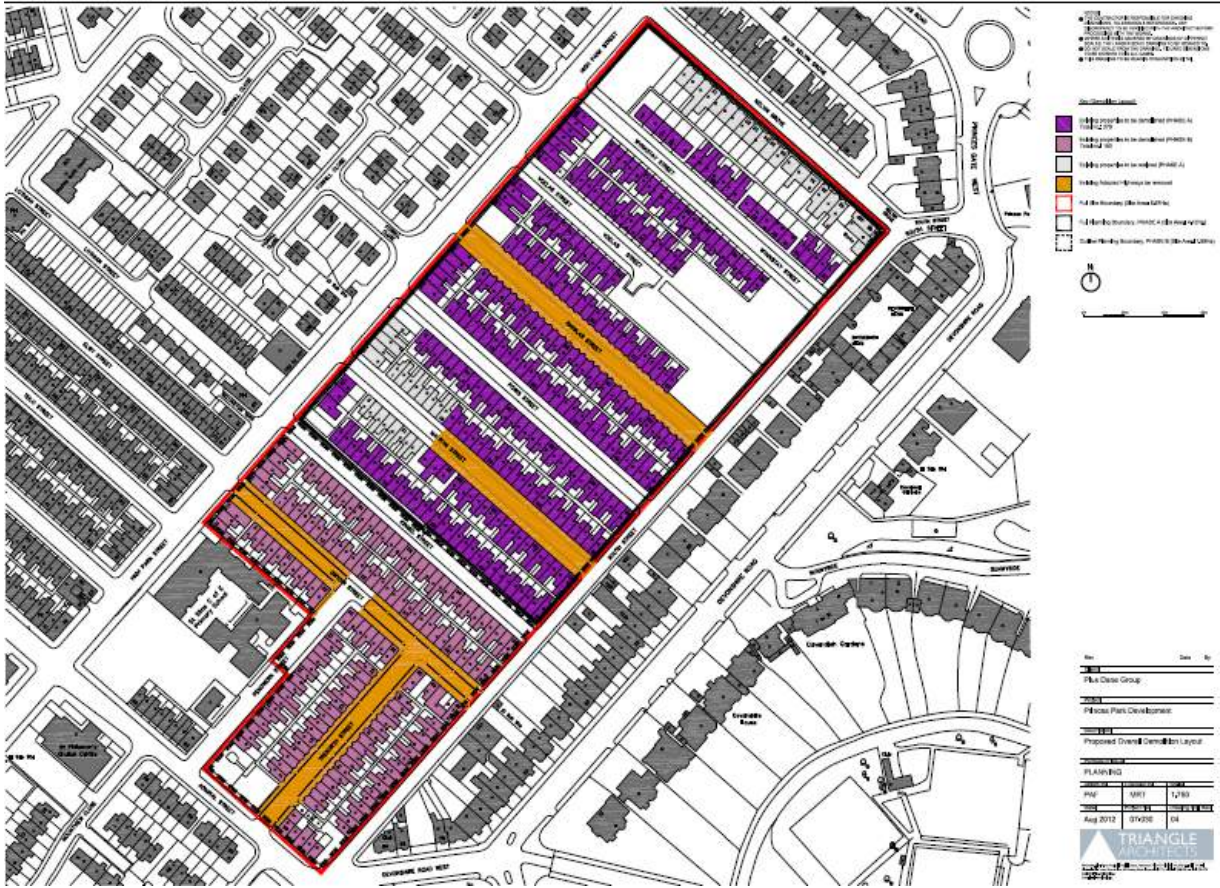
3. THE WELSH STREETS, LIVERPOOL 8

The Site

The Welsh Streets comprise a rectangular area of 8.45 hectares less than a mile from the commercial centre of Liverpool, bounded by Kelvin Grove, South Street, Admiral Street and High Park Street. It consists of a grid-plan of streets built in the 1870s as bye-law housing very close to Princes Park which had been laid out by Paxton in 1840. The estate layout and the terraced houses were designed by the Welsh-born architect Richard Owens and constructed by Welsh builders. They were intended to house Welsh families, among others, seeking work in the growing economy of Liverpool. Most of the streets were given Welsh names. The majority of this housing survives, although there has been some demolition and there are vacant sites in Voelas and Rhiwlas Streets. The area is predominantly residential although there are commercial activities on High Park Street and Admiral Street, including over a dozen small shop units and independent businesses, none of which would be replaced within the area in the council's proposals. Many of the properties in the southern part of the area (Phase B) are still occupied. The majority in Phase A to the north have been vacated, boarded up and allowed to fall into disrepair.



The Welsh Streets from above



Above: A map showing Welsh Street properties scheduled for demolition. Both purple and pink denote demolition. The purple is phase A, and the pink phase B.

The Welsh Streets lie to the south of the City Centre and are only 15 minutes walk from the University campus and from the Anglican cathedral, which is clearly visible from several of the Welsh Streets. The area is well connected by bus routes to the City Centre.

Background

The majority of the Welsh Streets were still inhabited until at least 2007, with high levels of resident satisfaction and low levels of property unfitness. (Our evidence for the inquiry included significant data supporting this, taken from Neighbourhood Renewal Assessments conducted by the Council.)

The 400-or-so homes in the wide tree-lined, Welsh Streets were selected under Pathfinder for demolition, apparently on the basis of the attractive development site they would make when cleared. Sandwiched between two conservation areas, with 27 listed buildings in the immediate vicinity, Joseph Paxton's grade II* listed Princes Park, and the city centre Georgian district, the location is certainly excellent. Site assembly and 'voiding' was made relatively easy, with over half of the property under social landlord control when demolition plans were drawn up in 2002/3.



The north end of Joseph Paxton's GII* listed Princes Park, showing the proximity and intimate relationship of the 1870s Welsh Streets terraces to the listed villas of the conservation area round the park.



Above: The Welsh Streets, with the Cathedral in the background, showing the close proximity of the site to the city centre and huge potential for regeneration.

When finally consulted in 2005, Madryn Street residents voted 33-1 against demolition. Unfortunately their wishes were ignored. The Council's preferred developer, Housing Association Plus Dane (under Chief Executive Ken Perry and Chair Cllr Richard Kemp, who had resigned as Council Executive Member for Housing) obligingly helped empty out tenants and board up properties, putting pressure on owners to sell or face the Compulsory Purchase Order powers Liverpool city council resolved to use the same year.

In a clever accounting move, homes acquired with some £20m of public funds were written down in value by 20% each year, meaning the site is now officially valued at only £1m. This excessive write-down allows the site to be transferred the council's preferred development partners (in this case Housing Association Plus Dane) for a nominal sum, while still staying within the council's legal obligations to obtain fair market value.

SAVE's Freedom of Information requests have revealed the absurdity of such financial trickery, with the birthplace of Beatle Ringo Starr now officially valued at less than £600, and a four storey townhouse on Kelvin Grove, bought as recently as 2011 for £110,000 now formally valued at just £1,100..

Responding to SAVE's lawyers, Secretary of State Eric Pickles stalled Liverpool council's bid to demolish the area in 2011, by ordering it to undertake a full Environmental Impact Assessment.

Meanwhile, also in 2011, SAVE purchased 21 Madryn Street, a few doors from Ringo Starr's birthplace at Number 9, and helped a local couple bring it back into happy occupation for an initial £3,000.

SAVE bought 21 Madryn Street to prove demand and to show just how easily and cheaply these homes can be reoccupied, preventing devaluation.

In addition, SAVE wants 21 Madryn Street to act as a seed from which further investment in the Welsh Streets and inner-city Liverpool can grow, by demonstrating the desirability and value for money of 'retro-fit' refurbishments.



Above: 21 Madryn Street, with property Guardian Chris and SAVE's northern caseworker Jonathan Brown



Above: Voelas Street in 2004

4. The Present Inquiry

In July 2013, Liverpool Council gave approval to a planning application from preferred developer Housing Association Plus Dane, to demolish 440 houses, including the so called 'Phase B' area, which is still largely inhabited, and which has benefited from some renovation over the last few years. The application would result in a net loss of 210 houses and a 45% reduction in density.

The refurbishment of 16 houses on Madryn Street, which includes Ringo Starr's house, and 24 other houses, was tied in with the permission to demolish the rest of the site. This made it difficult for those living in the houses that were going to be saved and refurbished to object to the planning permission, including local group the Welsh Streets Home Group - a vital and powerful force for the campaign over the last 10 years. Instead they called for improvements to the proposed new designs and presented innovative solutions.

SAVE objected to the planning application and called for a public inquiry. This was granted by the Secretary of State in September 2013 and was held at the end of June 2014 over 3 weeks in the Cunard Building, Liverpool. Our objection letter was supported by a petition of over 1,000 signatures. The inquiry also considered a Compulsory Purchase Order of 21 Madryn Street.

The Proposals

The proposed development would involve the demolition of nearly all the properties within the area. Four hundred and forty properties would be demolished and 40 retained; 16 on Madryn Street, 18 on Kelvin Grove and 6 on High Park Street. For part of the area, Phase A, there are detailed proposals for new residential development, mainly semi-detached or short terraces of two-storey houses, partly using the existing street plan but also removing Rhiwlas Street and inserting a new wide 'green street' cutting across the existing layout from Voelas Street to Kinmel Street. For the other part of the area, Phase B, between Kinmel Street and Admiral

Street, comprehensive demolition is proposed and there are outline proposals for 70 new residential units, removing Gwydir Street and Treborth Street from the street plan.



Above: The proposals showing the new build houses and fractured streetscape

Below: The proposed housing on Wynnstay Street and Voelas Street

