

14 December 2015

**PRESS RELEASE: LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL AND PLUS DANE WITHDRAW THEIR LEGAL CHALLENGE TO THE WELSH STREETS PUBLIC INQUIRY DECISION; IN THE SAME WEEK THE TURNER PRIZE IS AWARDED FOR THE RESCUE AND RENOVATION OF 190 HOUSES IN THE NEARBY GRANBY FOUR STREETS**

SAVE is very pleased to announce that Liverpool City Council and housing association Plus Dane have withdrawn their legal challenge to the Secretary of State's decision on the Welsh Streets Public Inquiry. This decision prevents the demolition of some 440 terraced houses surrounding the birthplace of Ringo Starr.



**Above left: The Welsh Streets from the air.**



**Above right: Assemble's design for a winter garden in a terraced house**

The Welsh Streets are an area of Victorian terraced housing slated for demolition as part of the now discredited Pathfinder initiative (see notes below). In their place fewer homes would have been built, reducing the population density of inner city Liverpool, and obliterating its townscape and community.

SAVE has been campaigning on Pathfinder for 12 years. In 2011 SAVE acquired one of the Welsh Streets houses, the former home of Ringo Starr's aunt, to demonstrate that they make comfortable and desirable homes. It has been inhabited since we bought the

property. The house was under a Compulsory Purchase Order from Liverpool City Council, but this was also refused in the Secretary of State's decision.

At the Public Inquiry in June 2014 SAVE was the only Rule 6 party, where, with expert witnesses, we argued that the Welsh Streets should be restored and reoccupied, citing the importance of their heritage and townscape value and the wastefulness of demolition. The demolition approach would have been in conflict with government guidance on empty homes, which promotes re-use and refurbishment.

In January 2015 it was announced that the Secretary of State had agreed with our arguments and refused planning permission, calling for market testing and refurbishment of the houses. However Liverpool City Council and Plus Dane sought to challenge this in the courts.

Now, almost 12 months on from the Secretary of State's decision, the challenge has been withdrawn, hopefully paving the way for this area to be revived and the community restored.

SAVE's legal team were solicitor Susan Ring and trainee Harry Campbell of Richard Buxton Environmental & Public Law, and barristers Richard Harwood QC and James Potts of 39 Essex Chambers

### **Assemble Architects & the Turner Prize**

In the same week as Liverpool and Plus Dane withdrew their challenge it was announced that Assemble had deservedly won the Turner Prize for their work in the city's Granby Streets. The Assemble scheme was commissioned by Xanthe Hamilton who, encouraged by SAVE, brought together the necessary finance and community support to demonstrate that typical Victorian Liverpool terraced houses could be brought back from dereliction and decay to make attractive homes.

The Granby Streets are a short distance from the Welsh Streets, and were designed by the same architect, Richard Owens. SAVE congratulates all involved – Assemble, Steinbeck Studios and the Granby Community – for this prestigious achievement.

The award recognises that terraced homes can be true works of art, and that regeneration from the ground up, in opposition to corporate gentrification, is a far better way to revive communities and historic townscapes. SAVE has long advocated such an approach, supporting schemes such as the 'homes for £1' which are reviving parts of Stoke-on-Trent amongst other places.

Recognition by the Turner Prize is a very positive message for the many terraced houses across the country that continue to suffer blight from Pathfinder.

Like the Welsh Streets, Granby also suffered serious harm and decline as a result of Pathfinder, with residents forced out and homes left to fall into disrepair.

SAVE introduced the community to social investors Steinbeck Studio, who in turn invited the innovative young architectural practice Assemble, based in London's East

End, to the area. Assemble produced innovative designs for the empty houses, including creating winter gardens in the shells of some houses, whilst embracing the double height where ceilings have been removed.

**SAVE's Director Clem Cecil** said: "We are delighted that the appeal has been withdrawn. It would have been better for the houses, that have been standing empty all year, if this decision had been taken more expediently. However, we now look forward to working with all stakeholders and assisting in finding a working solution for the site. A central aspect of our evidence, held up by the Secretary of State at the inquiry, was that several conservation minded developers have come forward with a development plan to revitalise the Welsh Streets. We continue to work with them and it is important that LCC loosens its stranglehold on the site and allows all options to be considered.

"The fact that Assemble won the Turner Prize this week with their workshop for Granby is a clear indication of the nation's enduring love of, and interest in, terraced housing. It is a tragedy that the community was forced out of the Welsh Streets - now it is time to repopulate them and let them live as a community once more."

**SAVE's Executive President Marcus Binney** said: "We pay particular tribute to all the brave people in Liverpool who have supported our long campaign against the blight and the clearances. We now call on the mayor to offer tinned up houses in the Welsh Street for a £1 to local people to restore as their homes, as has been done so successfully in the Granby Streets."

## **Pathfinder**

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 was 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.

Condemnation has been cross party, and in 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.

The Welsh Streets, we argued, were a final attempt by Liverpool Council to implement a Pathfinder approach to housing, despite the policy having been scrapped.

For more information and images please contact the SAVE office on 0207 253 3500 or [office@savebritainsheritage.org](mailto:office@savebritainsheritage.org)

### **Notes to Editors**

**SAVE Britain's Heritage** has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

**SAVE Britain's Heritage**, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ

Registered Charity 269129

Tel. 020 7253 3500 Email [office@savebritainsheritage.org](mailto:office@savebritainsheritage.org)

[www.savebritainsheritage.org](http://www.savebritainsheritage.org)

Follow SAVE on Twitter: [@SAVEBrit](https://twitter.com/SAVEBrit)

Donate to SAVE via [Justgiving](https://www.justgiving.com/SaveBritain)