

Sentinel


March 27, 2005

SUNDAY

50p

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England's respects

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Clothes for kids
Alternative school sports




£2.3bn renewal scheme leaves land derelict

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PARTS of North Staffordshire are at risk of going to wrack and ruin because they fall outside a £2.3 billion pound scheme to transform the region's housing.

Schemes to turn disused pubs, potbanks and churches into homes for first-time buyers are being rejected by planners because they are not within five areas being targeted by the first stages of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder programme.

Renew North Staffordshire, which is in charge of the project, says this is to ensure its regeneration work is not affected by competing developments in nearby areas.

The unofficial moratorium affects all land in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle outside of Cross Heath, Hanley South, Knutton, Meir and Middleport.

Property experts warn the situation could continue for up to two years while the housing in the first phase is renovated or demolished and rebuilt — leaving many properties facing decay and dereliction.

Richard Day, senior partner at Hanley commercial property agents Daniel & Hulme, said: "The problem is that there are factory sites outside these areas in the process of closing or shutting down.

"Housing is the most viable option for many of these sites because they are in built-up areas, and they do not have either the road infrastructure or buildings for commercial use.

"In the past, companies could sell the sites to developers for housing, but now that option has been restricted then developers are not interested.

"Unless the owner can afford to demolish the existing buildings, then they can be left with the risk of it deteriorating.

By Deputy Business Editor David Elks

"That could then attract the problems of anti-social behaviour, vandalism and kids coming in and ripping up the building."

Renew North Staffordshire admits the strategy is affecting existing planning policy guidelines across Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle. It stressed this was to ensure the success of restoring the region's ageing housing stock contained in the five areas.

The unelected agency says that the delays will be in the "short term", but will not specify the expected duration.

Eventually Renew North Staffordshire is planning to demolish 14,500 homes as part of the £2.3 billion Pathfinder housing renewal scheme.

Work will be concentrated first in the "early intervention areas" of Meir, Middleport, Hanley South and Cross Heath, Knutton and linked estates.

This has meant a series of other planning applications to Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Newcastle Borough Council have been delayed or refused because the plans fall outside these areas.

Philip Gratton, planning partner at Festival Park architects Hulme Upright Manning, says the consequence was that although there was a demand for low cost housing, developers wanting to build on brownfield sites are having permission refused.

Landowners and developers are left with sites which are unsuitable for other commercial use.

Mr Gratton said: "It is a problem for a developer because they are left asking the question, 'what can we build?'"

Arrested development page 5

Is this the way to calm and mellow?



● This is the life: until two weeks ago, businessman Alex Baker was content to live in his four-bedroom luxury home on a third of an acre in Stafford, then on the spur of the moment, he decided to give it all up. This week he bought a barge to live in and took to the canal for the first time. He said: "The boat does feel a bit cramped, compared to living in a house. But it'll be nice to be out in the sun."

Pushing the boat out: page 6 Picture by Clare Lewis

Speed cameras target boy racers

FOUR new speed cameras are set to be installed along one of the region's main roads to put the brakes on speedsters.

Motorists using Potteries Way, the ring road around Hanley's shopping heart, will be monitored by the controversial roadside traps within the next 12 months.

The announcement comes after six cameras were installed on the A53 between Basford roundabout and Cobridge traffic lights.

Planners received Government permission for the fixed Gatsos in 2001, based on accident statistics for the previous three years, but the plans were delayed until the speed limit for the dual carriageway section was increased from 30 to 40mph.

The new cameras on Potteries Way will be positioned at pedestrian crossings near Unity House and Hanley Fire Station, near to traffic lights at Bucknall New Road, and at the road's junction with Upper Huntbach Street.

The move is expected to receive final approval from Stoke-on-Trent City Council on Tuesday. Officials hope it will deter boy racers, who they say use the 30mph-limit circuit as an extension to Festival Park, where scores of young drivers regularly gather to show off their cars.

Mr Roberts said: "This will be a scheme for the coming financial year. During the daytime it is all right because the traffic makes it pretty chock-a-block.

"It's not the shoppers we are trying to catch, but people in the evening when the boy racers do this lap around Potteries Way, coming off Festival Park and going back round again. There hasn't been a death on Potteries Way, but there have been very serious accidents and the route more than fulfils the accident statistics because of people who get knocked down on pelican crossings.

"I have personally seen a lad knocked off his motorbike right in front of me."

In the last three years, there have been seven serious accidents at Potteries Way and 42 slight injuries. Although no one has been killed, the statistics justify the use of Gatsos.

In order to introduce cameras,

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£1 million cost of propping up social services

THE bill for agency staff to fill social services jobs has almost doubled to more than £1 million a year as bosses struggle to ensure vulnerable children, adults and the mentally ill are protected.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council admits spending the cash is the only way to maintain front-line

By Chief News Writer Richard Bramwell

services — even though using temporary workers can harm the quality of people's care.

Now health campaigners and unions are warning more per-

manent recruits must be found after figures revealed 26 out of 180 social work jobs in Stoke-on-Trent are empty — an almost 15 per cent vacancy rate.

Social services director Chris Brabbs says a national shortage of social workers and higher salaries luring staff to other areas has left him with no

option but to rely on agencies.

"The stark choice is that we either make sure people get a service and are allocated a social worker, or they are not," he said.

"I've taken a view that we must maintain as near to full staffing as possible in this way because there's a high demand

on social services. We have a high number of vulnerable people in the city and we need to safeguard their interests."

Agency costs have risen by 95 per cent from £596,000 during 2003/4 to £1.167 million in 2004/5.

Most of the money has gone on filling social worker posts

and vacancies are almost evenly split between children and adult teams.

Mr Brabbs says the bill has risen so dramatically because jobs had been left unfilled when he took charge of the

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