

Low cost starter homes delayed as council planners await instructions from redevelopment officials

Joined-up thinking leads to arrested development



● Thwarted plans: John Littleton at the former St Chad's Church site, Tunstall, where development is in limbo

Picture by Dave Randle

DEVELOPERS in North Staffordshire are being thwarted over plans to build homes on brownfield sites because they might compete with the region's housing strategy.

One such developer is J Littleton & Company, of Tunstall, which says it has come into direct conflict with the £2.3 billion Housing Market Renewal programme being undertaken by Renew North Staffordshire.

This is aimed at renewing the region's ageing housing stocks, but has led to a moratorium on housing plans outside of its initial area of operation.

Littleton, partner John Littleton said he submitted a planning application for flats on the former site of a church in Tunstall in June last year.

Although Government guidelines say applications should be dealt with within eight weeks, he says he was only told his plans had been rejected four weeks ago.

Mr Littleton, whose company paid £250,000 for the former St Chad's Church, accused planners of failing to issue clear guidelines.

He said: "This is all a lot of money for a developer to have turned up in land which we can't develop for an undetermined period of time."

By Deputy Business Editor David Elks

Q. How important is the housing market renewal pathfinder and what should it achieve?

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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.

Andy Tharp, communication manager at Renew North Staffordshire, said developments immediately outside the Pathfinder region were assessed in the light of their impact on the residential areas included in the programme.

He said: "As you can imagine, the agenda is pretty much focused around getting to grips with delivering urban change in these areas.

"It is fundamental that even when there is development outside these areas, we have to have a clear view in terms of housing and industry so that it does not affect the overall strategy.

"For example, if someone wanted to build a house in Tunstall, then it would have a negative impact on market renewal taking place in Middleport."

All local authorities affected by housing market renewal confirmed they are now reviewing planning policies to take account of the Pathfinder programme.

Mr Tharp conceded that the

programme for housing market renewal might affect the wider planning process outside the defined area in the "short-term".

He said: "It's about joining up the thinking within and outside the area. Each of the local authorities will be involved in the process.

"It's inevitable that there will be a hiatus where the policies that have started have run in different directions to existing policies. It may take a short time for them to synchronise.

"It's in the process of being planned.

"Our boss has put some options to the city council in terms of enabling it to change its planning policy. That is something that is on-going now."

However, property experts have warned that the switchover has led to "stagnation" in the redevelopment of commercial properties.

One pottery company in the city admits it is facing difficulties in trying to sell existing Victorian-era premises which have become unsuitable for modern manufacturing.

A senior figure at the company, who has asked not to be named for fear of affecting sale negotiations, said: "It is frustrating that the city council is putting limitations on develop-

ment of sites like this, which would be best suited towards housing.

"It's a difficulty because the site is like most pottery buildings. It is Victorian and is constrained for a modern manufacturing process, and therefore cannot be reused."

A spokesman for Stoke-on-Trent City Council confirmed it is operating under the guidance offered by Renew North Staffordshire.

A spokesman said: "In 2004 we were awaiting planning guidance from Renew North Staffordshire.

"This delayed a number of planning applications more than we would have liked, but the situation is now resolved as the guidance has been received."

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"Every planning application is treated individually on its own merits. Clearly the Renew area is an important one but that is not at all an exclusive area for development within the borough."

Stoke-on-Trent North MP

Joan Walley said she had already spoken to Renew North Staffordshire to ensure it struck a balance between the delivering a framework for regeneration, and small in-fill projects.

Ms Walley said: "There are billions of pounds which will be coming into the region through housing renewal and it is important that we get the right framework for sustainable communities. It's right that there should be controls to ensure that major residential schemes are not allowed to divert or undermine Renew's work."

"But there also needs to be measures to ensure that sites such as St Chad's, where the community around is keen to see it developed after being left unchecked, are also addressed.

"I have already asked Renew to assess this when they are looking at small infill sites which are subject to anti-social behaviour, or low level environmental crime, or other elements which bring down the quality of the neighbourhood.

"I've asked that they should send someone to look over what can be done in terms of maintenance or upgrade."

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Clearing a path to a new era of exciting opportunities

Q&A

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What other ideas are included in the Pathfinder?

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and creation of jobs and wealth. This includes the creation of a vibrant centre for business and enough housing to support shops, community facilities and transport networks.

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