

HULME

PUBLIC INFORMATION GAZETTE



News IN Brief

H.I.P. IN HULME

THE City Council has just found out that the government is allowing them £20 million more on its Housing Investment Program (HIP). Before you fall out of your armchair this is to make up for legal changes that have prevented local authorities from getting extra income through sale of land and houses and from leasing arrangements. But as a result more money is going to get spent in Hulme this year. Many repairs packages that have been fought for for a while will now go ahead. Although, surprise, surprise none will be spent on the Crescents.

MAN FALLS FROM LINGBECK

EARLY in the afternoon of Friday 9th February a man was discovered on the second floor walkway of Lingbeck Crescent with horrific leg and arm injuries.

He appeared to have fallen, or have jumped from one of the top floor flats in the block, and he was rushed to hospital where he still is, nearly a month later, miraculously in a "comfortable and stable" condition.

THE 'GAS' IS OFF

FOLLOWING the reports in the last issue about plans to move the Gaythorn gas farm to Hulme, angry words were exchanged between the Council and Aquarius Tenants Association and it would now appear that the idea has been dropped. "We understand that Central Manchester Urban Development Corporation is not proceeding with this proposal," was all the Chief Executives Department of the Council had to say on the matter. It seems that they will either look for an alternative site or simply squeeze up the existing installation on its present site.

MORE VERMIN

THE Moss Side Housing Office smelt a rat last week when an unknown woman presented them with two dead ones in her bag, demanding that something be done about this problem. This enigmatic visitor has been like a cat among the doves of the Housing and Environmental Health Departments, as they try apparently in vain to find out who she was and where the creatures came from.

Hulme in Arrears



SENIOR Housing Officer, Steve Mycio, confirmed recently what many people suspected for some time: that the City Council is going to be giving priority to the chasing up of rent arrears on council properties.

Hulme has the highest proportion of rent arrears in the city so is likely to be the main target for this policy which can only lead to evictions. One motive for this is 'ringfencing', new government legislation to prevent local authorities subsidising council housing.

People who are a long way behind in paying the rent, or people on benefit who have not been paying the few pounds a week that they are supposed to pay from their dole are going to suffer.

Mr Mycio, speaking at the Direct Works open day on 17th February, said that estate management officers had instructions to make it a priority to chase up rent arrears and to take legal proceedings in some cases.

Now although we cannot advise people not to pay

their rent, it is understandable that many people on benefit or low incomes see no point in paying rent when their flats are barely habitable and repairs never get done.

Is it reasonable for the council, having let arrears build up in the first place, to start threatening people with eviction now?

If you do end up with a summons, the advice from our own housing law advisor, is "don't give in." It isn't as easy as people often think to take someone to court, and the council won't be that eager to get involved in lengthy court cases, especially if the tenant looks willing to fight.

So how can you fight? The law says that if the council has taken an unreasonable length of time to do repairs to your flat, you may be able to claim compensation from them.

Now if the council sues you for rent arrears, you can issue what is called a "counter-claim" against them for compensation. If the court finds that you have

a good case, it will deduct the amount of compensation owed to you from any arrears.

If you are entitled to more compensation than you have in arrears, then you might make a profit!

Even if you don't have any complaint about repairs, you should still get advice from the CAB or a solicitor or advice agency, because they may be able to negotiate a deal to pay off your arrears over a period of time which is better than you could get yourself.

One last thought. The council's legal department is very, very overworked. If a case isn't fought, the legal department doesn't have very much to do. But if everybody who has ever had a repairs problem in Hulme fought any case taken against them over their rent arrears, the council's legal department would never be able to handle it. Result? they'd have to drop the policy - perhaps even switch their priorities to getting repairs done!

Ringfencing

THE government, those enthusiastic champions of council housing have come up with a new idea, its called 'ringfencing'.

This changes the way the council is allowed to use the money collected as poll tax. At the moment council housing is subsidised from the rates to keep the rents down, the new law will make this illegal.

The "Housing Revenue Account" - where all the rent money goes and where all the money for repairs and management comes from - will have to become self-sufficient.

Central government funds will partially replace the current subsidy from the rates and then be slowly withdrawn tightening the stranglehold on council housing, taking yet more control away from local bodies and giving it to civil servants in London.

This new legislation is inevitably going to make life more difficult for council tenants in inner city areas. To make its books balance the council is either going to have to put up the rents or make more cuts, further reducing what is seen by many as an already unsatisfactory service provided by the Housing Department. Their are suggestions of a £6/week rent rise on the horizon.

The council will have to subsidise 'problem areas' like Hulme out of the rents from the more profitable estates of the city. This last point when taken with the effects of the poll tax as outlined in the last issue of PIG is going to increase pressure on local authorities to take radical steps to solve this problem, selling off is one possibility.



HERE it is, issue 2 of your ever vigilant community newspaper, after a few gallons of midnight oil.

Plenty of news and features but it seems like we're almost out of money, so we'd like to start taking a few advertisements for services, entertainments and jobs in Hulme. Any budding advertising organisers out there come on over to the Friday 3pm newspaper meetings in the library and show us how.

Since everyone in Hulme has such close emotional links with them we thought we'd feature a regular "Direct Works article of the month" slot.

But articles on anything else will do. If you want to do something but don't know what to do it about or how to go about it then come to our Friday afternoon meetings (3pm) in Hulme Library for a chat and a coffee. We meet on the first 3 Fridays of the month. We want ANYTHING that's not unreasonably offensive to anyone and expresses something about life in Hulme. ANYTHING that can reasonably be turned into newsprint - photos, articles, cartoons, reviews, letters, poems. Any way that you feel happiest making your voice heard.

We were very grateful for the letters, phone calls and other reactions to the last edition. Sorry that not everyone in Hulme got a copy through their door but halfway through his delivery one of our distributors had a close encounter of the rottweiler kind.

Persuading three obsessively hungry Gretney Walk canines that lunch was something other than both his legs distracted him from his duties, and Lingbeck Crescent residents had to find other reading matter to get them through February.

Something we have had a fairly strong reaction to is our NAME - it was a convenient short form for Public Information Gazette, and a try at seeing the funny side a little but we do agree that it could easily be taken the wrong way so we've dropped it from the title.

If you've already written, drawn or photographed something (and don't particularly want to meet any of us anyway) then send it in as soon as possible to:

HULME Public Information Gazette,
c/o HULME COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES CENTRE,
1 CLOPTON WALK,
HULME,
MANCHESTER M15 5BY
or, if you'd rather phone, it's (061) 226 9815

The Return of... aaben. son of aaben. aaben IV?

THE Aaben Cinema - Hulme's answer to the Cornerhouse - has just reopened again. After being on the market for 18 months it has now been bought by a Mr Robin King of Burnley.

According to Mr King, the Aaben will continue to show "up-market" films which, he suggests will be targeting the local student population. Does this mean that only students can watch this type of film?

However they are still willing to take up customers' suggestions for new films, especially if they fit in

with the Aaben's stated policy of showing films generally unavailable in more popular cinemas.

Recent visitors who have experienced somewhat chilly conditions in the cinema will be relieved to hear that the Aaben has solved its heating problem. Other improvements include a new projector and in the future they hope to refurbish the auditoriums and install a bar for pre-film drinks.

The Aaben now opens seven days a week, and gives cut price admission to people on benefit, though at

the moment there is no reduction for Hulme rent book holders. They are now on the look-out for volunteers to do ushering and ticket collection in return for complementary tickets.

In the past the Aaben has had an uphill struggle to stay open as a local cinema. If it is going to succeed this time, and stay open, it needs the goodwill and support of the local community.

As a fellow struggling venture in Hulme, we the wish the Aaben all the best.

