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PARTNERS' BRIEFING



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North Staffordshire

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LAST ORDERS CALLED ON MEIR PUB AS REGENERATION GETS UNDERWAY

Demolition experts can expect a huge cheer from residents when they start knocking down a local eyesore this week.

Work to demolish a semi-derelict pub in Meir that has been a magnet for vandals over the past year started on Monday, as part of the first phase of a multi-million pound regeneration programme that will transform the estate into a more attractive residential area.

RENEW North Staffordshire and its strategic housing partner in the area, Great Places Housing Group, have acquired the Thorley pub and once the building has been demolished, the cleared site will form part of Phase 1 of the Meir Area Regeneration Framework (ARF) - a comprehensive programme of improvements that will provide better housing and amenities in Meir. Feedback after a series of consultation events last summer indicated that 90% of residents supported the regeneration plans for Meir.

Cllr Adrian Knapper, the city council's portfolio holder for regeneration and spokesman for RENEW, said: "Demolishing the pub demonstrates that the city council and RENEW are working with local residents in Meir to improve the neighbourhood and housing for local people."

The Thorley has been empty for more than a year. During that time, the building has been a hot spot for anti-social behaviour and a cause for concern for local residents.

Fred Rushton, a member of Meir Steering Group and a life-long Meir resident, said: "There will undoubtedly be a big cheer from local people when it starts to come down – most will be very happy to see it go. We have been waiting for this regeneration scheme to happen for a long time, and it is nice to see that it is finally on its way."

Matthew Harrison, deputy chief executive and director of development at Great Places Housing Group, said: "This is an important step and a real sign that things are starting to change for the better at Meir. We're entering exciting times for the area. Contractor Seddon will carry out the demolition."

MP for Stoke South, Rob Flello, will be on site in Stansmore Road on Monday to watch as demolition of The Thorley gets underway. Mr Flello said: "While it's sad to see the loss of pubs across our city, I am delighted that this local eyesore is at last being bulldozed. This will make way for the ongoing renewal of the Meir. It is vital that local residents of fully involved with regeneration of their community and I will continue to fight on their behalf."



RENEW COMMISSIONS 'CREDIT CRUNCH' RESEARCH

RENEW North Staffordshire, working with partners in the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership, has recently commissioned detailed research into the likely impacts of the global 'credit crunch'.

So that we can respond effectively to the economic downturn, our research will focus on local businesses, estate agents and developers to explore issues such as confidence in the housing market and the likelihood of future investment.

There will also be in-depth research with our stakeholders, to find out how key funders will react to the changing economic climate, and a series of workshops with internal and external partners to capture the local perspective on international and national events.

It will explore the links between local housing and economic market change - as reduced wages and rising unemployment link back into repossessions, falling housing demand/prices and tenure shifts.

Potential scenarios will be modelled to assess the likely impact, and the research will then make specific recommendations on the responses needed to enable RENEW and our partners to meet the challenges identified - and to continue to fulfil our shared regeneration ambitions.

There will be a report on the research findings in the spring.

GO AHEAD FOR NEW 'EXTRA CARE' VILLAGE FOR STOKE

Staffordshire Housing Association (SHA) - RENEW North Staffordshire's RSL partner in the Stoke AMI area and Normacot General Renewal Area area - has won planning permission for two new developments for people aged 55 and over.

Plans to transform a derelict pottery site into a £13.5 million retirement village have been approved by Stoke-on-Trent councillors. SHA has been given permission to develop the former Bilton Works in London Road, Stoke.

The West End Village development will provide 100 two-bed apartments with extra care facilities for older people. The apartments will be for both rent and sale.

The village will create more than 20 posts for carers and security staff, and at a new café-bar. The state-of-the-art complex will also house a gym, cafe, restaurant, library and hairdressers which will be available to the wider community and office employees on a controlled basis.

SHA is also to build a three and four-storey block with 30 apartments, along with two town houses and six semi-detached bungalows on a former vicarage site in Upper Belgrave Road, Normacot. The housing association plans to sell the houses and two of the bungalows, but plan to let the apartments to people aged 55 and over.

LIVING ART GALLERY FRONTS REGENERATION

Residents of the City Waterside area have used their memories of the past to help turn a regeneration area into an art gallery.

Instead of being boarded-up as they await demolition, old buildings are being clad in images and mementos from the past as part of a community arts project. The Living Gallery is being created by young people from the area, who have worked with an arts organisation to produce a series of images that form a public artwork on the doors and windows of five terraced houses. The houses are expected to be cleared shortly.

Commissioned by RENEW North Staffordshire, in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Cultural Development Team, the Living Gallery project welcomes a wide variety of contributions relating to the history and regeneration of the Bucknall New Road area. The project is being funded by RENEW, the Homes and Communities Agency and Beth Johnson Housing Association.

After a successful pilot project last year - where three empty properties had artwork placed over the boarded up doors and windows - a steering group consisting of local residents, schools, the city council and partners was set up to continue the project. The success of similar schemes in Liverpool and Manchester suggested that the addition of locally relevant artwork could help to improve security during clearance, and give the local community a platform to discuss the important changes taking place in their area.

The aim is to deliver high quality art works that will positively change a street of empty boarded up properties into a 'gallery' that will have high visual impact and is relevant to the local community.

Glassball has produced a website to tell residents about the project and its developments so that people can have their say, contribute to and feedback on the proposed designs for the Living Gallery - www.living-gallery.org

So far feedback from the local community has been very positive. A subtle approach has been applied at the project's first five houses, because other homes near by are still occupied - so it decided to make the empty properties look 'lived in'. Work on another seven empty houses at the opposite end of the street could be more adventurous and challenging in their designs.

Glassball has worked with the two schools in the area, Hanley St. Lukes and Waterside primary, to contribute to the designs, using photography, collage and drawing.

Local resident, Debbie Haynes, said: "The artwork is better than the black railings and grills there before. It's great to see children's work displayed like this. These houses are going to come down eventually, but until then this is probably the best thing they can do."





BURSLEM STREET IS CREATIVE HUB FOR TALENTED TENANTS

The successful transformation of a Burslem street into a creative hub for Staffordshire's young artists and entrepreneurs has been celebrated with an exhibition.

A talented tenant of one of the live/work apartments in Queen Street, Burslem put on an exhibition of his work entitled 'The Hired Brush'.

The £1.6 million live/work development is owned and run by Midland Heart, RENEW North Staffordshire's housing partner in the Middleport and Burslem area, and is a focal point for artistic young people looking to start out in business.

In total, 17 new properties have been created, offering budding entrepreneurs the opportunity to start out in business in an environment in which they can live, work and socialise alongside like-minded people.

The scheme has transformed Victorian terraced properties into hi-tech units, and is the first housing association live/work developments in the Stoke-on-Trent region. The scheme is next to Burslem School of Art, where tenant Rob Pointon exhibited his commissioned work throughout January.

- **Midland Heart's new office has opened its doors to customers. Now based in Duncalf Street, Burslem, the Midland Heart team moved from their former office in Middleport in December.**



MILL RISE ON SCHEDULE FOR COMPLETION IN THE SPRING

The New Year saw the first exchange of contracts at Mill Rise - Newcastle-under-Lyme's first extra-care 'village for people aged over 55.

One of the 60 exclusive apartments at the development in Cross Heath has been secured by a purchaser who has bought a 50% share in a two-bed apartment. Mill Rise is being built by Aspire Housing, RENEW North Staffordshire's housing association partner in the Knutton and Cross Heath area.

The shared ownership scheme offers people the best possible chance to remain in home ownership as their care and support needs change.

Mill Rise is currently under construction on the former Collins and Aikman factory site near Morrison's supermarket. The development is on schedule for completion in spring 2009.

The village enables residents to continue living independently in their own apartment, with the reassurance of care and support services available on site. Among the communal facilities available will be a lounge, hobby room, hairdresser, hot meals service, allotments and landscaped gardens, which will give residents a range of opportunities to meet with like-minded neighbours.

The village will host a state-of-the-art health centre, operated by NHS North Staffordshire, with three local GP practices, a pharmacy and community nursing service available to residents in the surrounding area.

BOOST FOR COALVILLE REGENERATION PLANS

A scheme that will allow unimproved homes in the Coalville regeneration area to be refurbished has been approved by the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership's Development Group.

The recent confirmation of the compulsory purchase order (CPO) and the refurbishment of the few unimproved homes means the comprehensive regeneration plans for Coalville that were developed with the local community can progress.

Under the current Masterplan for the area, there are a number of properties that remain unimproved because they are outside the main clearance area. RENEW North Staffordshire recognised the potential negative impact that the unimproved properties could have on the overall plans to make Coalville a better place to live for its residents, and devised a scheme that will offer assistance to provide the external improvements - new brick 'skins', new windows and doors - and any internal improvements to bring the homes up to the Government's Decent Home Standard.

The scheme involves equity loans to bridge the gap between the value before improvements and the value after improvement, and non-means tested grants for the difference between the increase in value and the works costs. The works would be carried out by an approved contractor.

As the assistance would be covered under the council's Housing Renewal Assistance Policy, it can only be made available to owner occupied properties that meet the assistance policy criteria. However, there is the potential to improve any of the remaining properties if they are acquired by the RSL partner, or became owner-occupied.

Initial estimate of the cost to cover the grant element for eight properties would be £300,000, with any loan amount covered by the City Council's home improvement loan scheme, which is funded via the Regional Housing Board.

ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN REGENERATION EXPLORED

RENEW North Staffordshire sponsored a very successful national conference recently that looked closely at what actually makes a city a good place to be.

Around 90 delegates from all over the country attended the 'Flourishing City', a multi-faith symposium being held at Staffordshire University. Organiser Professor Peter Gilbert said: "The event examined the role of spirituality in regeneration. Various issues around regeneration were explored, focusing on the role of spirituality and the contribution of faith communities to city life. I think we learned that in any multi-cultural society, it's important that people listen to each other."

The event was the third national multi-faith symposium to be hosted by Staffordshire University and supported by the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) Spirituality Project and the National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum.



SUMMIT SET TO HELP BUILD COMMUNITY PRIDE

An event that hopes to encourage community pride in neighbourhoods across the city takes place this month (February).

RENEW North Staffordshire is working with the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (NSRP) to promote community cohesion through regeneration. Both organisations are keen to ensure that the social impacts of regeneration are robustly and routinely considered, and a 'summit' hosted by RENEW will explore the social issues around the wider regeneration programme.

To find out more about the event, contact Andy Tharp at Andrew.tharp@stoke.gov.uk

VOLUNTEERS PITCH UP FOR NATIONAL TREE WEEK

More than 140 volunteers of all ages made their mark on the landscape by planting a total of 752 trees in Knutton as part of National Tree Week in December.

With the help of the Newcastle Countryside Project, local residents, workers, and school children planted the trees on land between Lymedale Business Park and Cotswold Estate.

The original Masterplan for the area suggested increasing tree cover in the area to help reinforce local identity. Aspire Housing's RENEW Project Officer, Laurence Reardon, has been working with the new Knutton Residents' Association to increase community ownership of the countryside.

Residents feel that the current lack of mature trees in the area means there is a need to expand existing woodlands and increase wildlife value to the area.

Darren Green, Senior Regeneration Manager, at Aspire Housing said: "We are always looking at ways of working with local communities to assist them in improving their living environment. A large planting scheme, such as this, gives the opportunity for people to come together to benefit future generations."



HAVE YOUR SAY

Please contact the RENEW North Staffordshire team on 01782 232024 if you have any comments or questions, or see www.renewnorthstaffs.gov.uk



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