

Llanblethian home owner faces £20,000 planning fine

THE owner of a Cowbridge house in a Vale of Glamorgan conservation area has been fined £20,000 – after the Vale Council took action in Barry Magistrates' Court.

The owner of the property, John Bower, of Nicholas Street Mews, Chester, was fined for the second time in just over two years, for failing to comply with a planning enforcement notice.

Mr Bower, who did not appear at the hearing, received the maximum fine of £20,000 for failing to comply with the Vale Council's Town and Country Planning Act (1990) notice requiring the tidying up and improvement of 'Greenfield', Castle Hill, Llanblethian.

The court, which heard that Mr Bower had been fined £350, with £926.80 costs, for a similar offence in October, 2006, ordered that the new fine and council costs of £832.17 should be paid within 14 days.

Prosecuting for the council, Richard Price said: "It is felt that the council has acted more than reasonably in offering the owner a substantial period of time to improve the condition of the site."

Mr Price said the notice was first served in June, 2005, after the authority received complaints about the state of the unoccupied property, which has a significant impact on the appearance and character of the conservation area.

It had become dilapidated and some demolition work had been undertaken.

The notice required a range

of work to be undertaken within three months. The work included major repairs and repainting, replacement of smashed window panes, removal of rubble, and the replacement of an existing fence with a close boarded timber fence.

Mr Price said that, despite a number of meetings with Mr Bower and his agent to discuss a future improvement scheme, no progress was made to resolve this matter, resulting in the first court case.

Despite the submission of a new application for planning permission to extend the property in July, 2007, the property remained in a state of disrepair.

Mr Bower was again advised of the need to fully comply with the notice but a site inspection by council officers in January, 2008, revealed that, although a close-boarded timber fence has been erected around the site, the previous metal wire fencing had been placed within the site with other rubble and waste which were subject of the notice.

Mr Price said no further progress was made despite repeated requests to the owner, and the current case had been adjourned on three previous occasions on the submission of a doctor's note by Mr Bower.

Following the hearing, Planning Committee chairman Coun Jeffrey James said:

"I am extremely pleased that, having gone through the process of taking formal legal action and subsequently bringing the matter to court, the magistrates have viewed the matter as sufficiently serious to impose the maximum fine.

"The owner of the property will be made aware that, if no

REPORT by PHILIP IRWIN



ABOVE: The back of the house.

progress is made in improving the appearance of the property, we will not hesitate in bringing the matter back before the court.

"I hope that this goes some way to demonstrating that the council is always determined to progress serious breaches of planning control and that we will not be diverted from seeing such matters through to a conclusion."

One local organisation that is pleased legal action has been taken is the Cowbridge and District Local History Society.

The society has an extensive file on the property, and the correspondence shows the frustration felt locally as the building fell into disrepair.

One member told *The GEM*: "There is no sign of any repairs being undertaken in the last 10 years."

"The only work done was in 2003, when the owner received planning permission to construct a 'granny flat'. The original limestone walls were knocked down, and a wooden

fence now stands there.

"Also, a pit was dug in the garden, but no granny flat has been built."

In June of last year, the society's frustration led to it applying to the then Assembly Minister for heritage, Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM, seeking that the Assembly issue a directive to the Vale Council demanding that the council take stronger legal action.

There are, says the society, legal powers available that would enable the council to do the necessary repairs, and then send the bill to the owner.

The society included in its submission to the Assembly, Minister a letter from a local GP, saying that, apart from the obvious dangers of falling masonry, the condition of the house posed a health hazard.

• *When The GEM spoke to Mr Bower, he said that he had not had any notification of the decision, and could make no comment.*

NEWS

No end in sight as row over derelict house rages on

A LONG-RUNNING dispute over a derelict house in one of Wales' most affluent areas shows no signs of being resolved.

Greenfield House near Castle Hill, in Llanblethian, Cowbridge, has been at the centre of a row between its owner and conservationists for the past decade.

Conservationists want the property, built in the 1840s, returned to its former glory.

But its owner, businessman John Forwood Bower remains keen to develop the property and says he is not concerned about "locals" kicking up a fuss.

George Haynes, of the Cowbridge and District Local History Society, said: "The house is important because although it's not listed it has been considered for listing because of its contribution to the local conservation of the area."

Mr Forwood Bower, who lives in Nantwich, has previously been served repair enforcement notices by the Vale of Glamorgan Council but has failed to turn up at Cardiff Magistrates' Court to answer them, subsequently being prosecuted and fined £350 with £926 costs on October 30, 2006.

Another notice to improve the property was served on Mr Forwood Bower and he was to attend court on July 29, but the case was

adjourned due to his illness.

Rob Thomas, head of planning and transportation at the Vale of Glamorgan council, said: "Regrettably, the owner has failed to respond to continuing reminders of the necessity to comply with a live enforcement notice, and the council has been left with no alternative but to pursue a further prosecution."

Former Welsh rugby captain Onllwyn Brace lives close to the property and wants the deadlock broken.

He said: "It really is a blight on the neighbourhood. Some people have got houses up for sale and it inhibits their chances of selling."

But Mr Forwood Bower, 63, said the council had "bedammed" him.

He said: "I'm sick and tired of making planning applications to get permission to deal with this property."

"Any time anything happens, the locals jump around and wonder what's going to happen next.

"I've been thwarted at every turn in returning this house to its former glory and that's my main aim. I've got other Georgian properties and it's my intention to develop Greenfield House. It is, potentially, worth an awful lot of money. I will either develop and rent it, or I will sell it."



HISTORY HOUSE: Greenfield House, Llanblethian, which conservationists want returned to its former glory

PICTURE: Liz Pearce ©