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News in brief

A half century and out

A soldier who drove bulldozers in World War Two is being forced from his home of 56 years under a regeneration scheme – despite building being put on hold.

Widower Elijah Debnam turns 90 this week but is not in the mood to celebrate. He is under pressure to leave the house in which he had hoped to end his days, and which contains half a century of memories.

The great-grandfather – who lost his only son in 2007 – is one of a handful of residents remaining in Derker, Oldham, after their properties passed into council ownership following a compulsory purchase order (CPO). His is among 470 terraced houses that will be flattened to make way for 148 new properties, to be built by developer Bellway Homes.

While demolitions continue, rebuilding has been put on ice – and plots are being planted with cherry trees until market conditions improve.

Tory-Lib Dem cuts to the fund underwriting the national regeneration programme may also set progress back.

Debnam – who served with the Royal Engineers in wartime Gibraltar, Normandy and Germany – bought the house with his late wife Alice for £750 in 1954 and paid it off eight years later.

He dug his heels in when demolition plans were announced about six years ago and refused to leave as the streets emptied and blight set in.

When the remaining owners were slapped with CPOs and given a public inquiry, he did battle with a £500-an-hour QC representing Oldham Council. The community was defeated and lost its final appeal in the High Court at the end of last year.

Debnam said: “There’s nothing physically wrong with my house – it’s in pristine condition and could easily last



Debnam is to lose the home he has lived in for 56 years. Photo: Ciara Leeming

another 50 years. There’s no real logic at all – they just want the land beneath it.

“I love my house. It used to be a family home and this is where my memories are.

“I’ve lost my son and I’ve lost

“There’s nothing physically wrong with my house.”

my wife here. I wanted to soldier on here, finish my time out. I’m almost 90 but they keep sending me letters like anyone else.

“I don’t want to be buying homes at this stage of life and I certainly don’t want to be going in a nursing home. That’s something that really frightens me.”

Debnam turned down the council’s most recent offer of £85,000 for the property and plans to stay put for as long as he can.

“Nothing will compensate me for losing this house. I’d sooner them keep the money and leave me here,” he said.

“It’s heartbreaking to me that they are trying to force me out at my age. I fought to defend democracy in the war but for it to come to this is very sad.”

Derker is being cleared under Oldham’s £90 million, taxpayer-funded Housing Market Renewal (HMR) programme. The council hopes the site will be cleared before the end of the year.

An Oldham Council spokesman added: “The neighbourhood team in Derker are in touch with Mr Debnam and will be helping him to find suitable alternative accommodation as well as assisting him with all aspects of his move.

“Time and care will be taken to ensure that everything goes as smoothly as possible during what is inevitably a very stressful time.”

In Liverpool last month, the incoming Labour council launched a review of its demolitions policy amid fears that HMR had decimated parts of the city.

CIARA LEEMING

TOWARDS ZERO

Britain could cut greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2030, creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs and regaining energy security, according to a new report by the Centre for Alternative Technology. “Zerocarbonbritain2030 shows how with the right mix of wind power, hydro, solar, biomass plus an intelligent grid to manage demand we can supply the energy the country needs, with major win-wins across the economy,” said Paul Allen of CAT.

KNOWSLEY HEALTH

A Merseyside health service that provides care for vulnerable groups including homeless people has registered over 300 new hard-to-reach patients in its first year. Knowsley Health & Wellbeing’s Options Service treats ex-offenders, domestic violence victims and nursing and residential home residents, as well as homeless people. It has also seen more than 6,000 Knowsley residents who have used the service due to the convenience of its out-of-hours surgeries.

BIN THERE, DONE THAT

Liverpool City Council has launched a new text messaging service to tell residents when to put their bins out. They can text BINS, their house number and postcode to 62233 and get a message letting them know what day their bin collection is and what bins are to be put out. From then on, a text will be sent every week on the day before the collection as a continuous reminder, unless cancelled by the resident.

NOT NAKED

Passengers going through the full-body scanners at Manchester Airport will not need to have their naked image seen by airport staff if new software under development is successful. An IT company claims to be developing software that will automatically scan body images for explosives and weapons, meaning staff will only see the most suspicious scans, according to the Manchester Evening News.