

2 Transcript of Interview broadcast October 2005 BBC2 7.30 "How to Rescue an Empty House", Episode 1.

Presented by Max Hutchison RIBA, former president of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Protagonist Judy X, a Liverpool citizen who wishes to buy and refurbish a family home in Liverpool 8.

MH has identified a number of empty homes in Toxteth, which he assesses to be architecturally and economically viable to repair. He meets David Bebb (DB), Chief Executive of Liverpool Housing Trust, a major RSL which last year made a £16.7m surplus on a £32m turnover, to seek purchase of a large double fronted villa at Fern Grove, Liverpool 8.

It is known that there had been written and verbal offers from people of good local repute and character to buy this same property, which LHT had refused. It seems that it took the intervention of the BBC to expose the irrationality of holding good houses empty when demand exists.

Judy and Max Hutchison (MH) walk with Mr DB the CE of Liverpool Housing Trust into a large, boarded up Victorian house on Fern Grove L8.

Judy "Gosh are empty properties always made this secure?"

MH "Don't worry about it being so gloomy Judy, we see this all the time".

DB points out that RSLs such as LHT converted fine large houses into multiple flats (5 bedsits in this case) in the '70's.

They find part of the plaster on a ceiling has collapsed where a roof has been left leaking, but the architect is unconcerned, noting a strong steel beam has been added at some point in the past. The original staircase is good, and like the rest of the house, should easily be restored to former Victorian glory, according to the architect.

DB "I have to tell you that, considering it has been empty for 4 years, it is in a pretty good state".

MH "Why has it been left empty when it has such great potential?"

DB "Yes it does, **it really should have had money spent on it 4 or 5 years ago, but the uncertainty about what is going to happen to the area is what's left it empty for the last four years**".

HM "Oh, so you kept it empty because you weren't sure of what the future of the area was?"

DB "That is exactly right".

MH "It's not good though really is it?" (to do that).

DB "No, but it's a deal we did with the Local Authority which was that we would hold onto it until we knew what was going to happen to the area"

MH "But why couldn't you put people in here in the meantime, for example the homeless people living in Bed and Breakfast accommodation?"

DB "Well I'd have had to spend a pretty large sum of money on doing it up, and then....." (what – MH interrupts)

MH "It doesn't need doing up though, it's in pretty good condition"

DB "Well..."

MH "It needs tidying up, cleaning up, maybe a slap of paint, a bit of plasterboard"

DB "Yes...it needs money spending on it.... I'd be happy to spend money on it if we had confidence it would last more than another 5 or 10 years "

MH "Don't you think it is a national disgrace that properties like these are held empty when we are putting people up in B and B?"

DB (hesitates) "... er...yes... except there are, there is, more property than people on Merseyside".

MH "So no-one wants to live in Liverpool?" (incredulously).

DB "No, not at all, people do, and in fact the population is going up again, so the property market has picked up, as a result everything is transforming... but there has been a need to knock down loads of properties which are sub-standard and nobody wants to live in".

MH "But people *do* want to live in houses like this - they're desperate for big old family homes".

Judy says "**I know for a fact there have been so many people after very large properties** they go to some of these new properties and they're TINY, there isn't room to swing a cat round - not that you'd want to swing a cat round! It's so small, and this is - there is so much you can do with this kind of property"

DB "We are now confident that this property will not come down... some of the terraces further down which are structurally unsound and long since abandoned

will be acquired under CPO and there will be new development... so the whole area will undergo a facelift"

MH "I'm really concerned about this facelift and half the street coming down - it sounds like the same old Toxteth - piecemeal redevelopment that we've seen in the past"