

Council Take Owners of Arson-hit Derelict Potbank to Court

The owners of an arson-hit former pottery are being taken to court after failing to carry out work to improve the derelict building. Stoke-on-Trent City Council says the owners of Falcon Works, off Sturgess Street, in Stoke, have failed to comply with a planning enforcement 'section 215' notice.

The authority has now issued a summons for them to appear at North Staffordshire Justice Centre on November 7. Section 215 notices are issued when a council believes the poor condition of a site or building is having a negative impact on the local area.

Failing to comply with a section 215 notice is a prosecutable offence, and local authorities have the power to enter a property carry out remedial works themselves and then recover costs from the owner.

The notice issued by the city council requires the owners of the Grade II listed Falcon Works to:

- secure window openings by boarding up;
- carefully remove foliage growth on the main building and bottle oven;
- repoint brickwork on the bottle ovens;
- repoint deteriorated joints on the main building; and reinstate the missing rainwater goods.

The council has not named the owners, but according to the Land Registry, the site is currently owned by London-based Diwan Property Development Ltd. Diwan, which purchased the site for £400,000 last year, has submitted redevelopment plans for 87 flats, which would see the conversion of the existing factory building and the construction of three new blocks.

The Falcon Works dates back to 1870 and was originally operated by renowned potter William Henry Goss. But the site, which features two warehouses and two bottle kilns, has been out of use for more than 30 years and has fallen into disrepair, becoming a magnet for anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

Last month, fire crews spent more than four hours tackling a blaze at the site which is believed to have been started deliberately.



Falcon Works in Sturgess Street, Stoke

Council leader Abi Brown said: "Owners of historic buildings in our city who think they can let them go to rack and ruin can think again. We are proud of our city's heritage, and buildings like historic pottery sites and bottle ovens are a rich part of Stoke-on-Trent's history.

"In this instance, Falcon Works has been vacant for more than 35 years. We had served an enforcement notice on the owners to make improvements necessary to protect and preserve the buildings, but they have failed to do the works that were required. We take a very dim view of irresponsible people who disregard the rules. We are taking firm action in this instance."



**Firefighters tackling the blaze at the former Falcon Works in Stoke
(Image: Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service)**

Mrs Brown also said the council is working with Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to share information about incidents, such as fires, at historic buildings.

She added: "The message is simple: we will not stand-by while historic buildings suffer neglect. If you are a building owner who won't maintain your building, we will use our planning enforcement powers to prosecute you. If you think you can get away with anti-social or criminal behaviour, we are watching you and will work with partners to take action against you."