

PRESS RELEASE

10th March 2005

Prison for reluctant gardener

NOTE: THIS RELEASE MUST BE READ WITH THE UPDATE PRESS ALERT

ISSUED 14th MARCH 2005



Photographs available on application

|It's such an eyesore, you can't fail to notice – but one tenant's failure to take notice lands her in jail this week.

Helen Abbott of Elms Road in Stalybridge persistently ignored attempts to get her to clean up her garden. Housing staff had tried every way, but turned to the Courts after Abbott failed to remove vehicles, shipping containers, trailers and building refuse.

Abbott was given a suspended Committal Order on 6th January 2005. But she still failed to take any action and failed to turn up at Oldham County Court today (Thursday).



business for neighbourhoods

Judge Mr. Recorder Hinchliffe QC considered the evidence presented by New Charter, and found Abbott in breach of the terms of the Committal Order. She was committed to prison for 14 days.

As Abbott did not attend Court, a warrant for her immediate arrest and transportation to HMP Styal has been drawn, and the Court Bailiff will now execute the warrant.

But the matter does not end with the prison sentence. Director of Tenancy Services at New Charter, Tony Powell said: “Anti-social behaviour isn’t just about young people misbehaving; it’s about any disrespect in the neighbourhood. Abbot has ignored all our attempts to get her to clear the mountain of rubbish from her garden. Although she now has time to reflect, our neighbourhood is still blighted by the mess of her garden. We will be looking to take further action which will resolve this once and for all”.

On release, Abbott will still have to clear the rubbish from the garden. Failure to do so will result in further committal or possession proceedings being issued by New Charter.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. New Charter formed in 1999 as the new landlords to own and manage homes transferred from Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council in Greater Manchester. With a turnover of almost £60million a year and a workforce of 800, New Charter is one of the country’s largest Registered Social Landlords, and is regulated by The Housing Corporation, a Government watchdog. It owns just under 14,900 homes.
2. Helen Joan Abbott (d.o.b 20.8.58), 8 Elms Road, Stalybridge.

3. Mrs Abbott has a large quantity of junk in her garden and repeatedly failed to do anything about it despite informal and written requests and warnings, a Consent Order, an Injunction and a suspended Committal Order.
4. An injunction was granted to New Charter on 30th July 2004. Specific terms required Abbott to:
 - dismantle and remove the large grey container from the curtilage of the property by 4:00pm on 13th August 2004.
 - clear the gardens of the property of all debris, rubble, timber and other such items by 4:00pm on 27th August 2004.
 - reinstate the garden areas to a garden and maintain as such to the satisfaction of the Claimant.
5. An application for committal was made on 6th January 2005 which was heard before Judge Armitage QC at Oldham County Court. Mrs Abbott failed to attend the hearing. In her absence, it was ordered that she be committed for contempt to prison for 14 days. This order was suspended until 4:00pm on 7th February 2005 and was not to be put in force if before that time, Abbott complied with the following terms:
 - Dismantle and remove the large grey container from the curtilage of the property
 - Clear the gardens of the property of all debris, rubble, timber and other such items
6. The Courts also ordered that Abbott pays New Charter cumulative costs of £2593.
7. **iN business for neighbourhoods** is a long-term project to improve housing associations' performance, and challenge negative perceptions of the sector and its customers. The project was launched at the National Housing Federation's annual conference in 2003. To date, 75 per cent of the sector's stock – over 1.4 million homes – is managed by associations who have joined the initiative and made fresh commitments to neighbourhoods, customers and excellence.

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