

# The Bury Society

The Newsletter of the Bury St. Edmunds Society

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## NEWSLETTER ~ SUMMER 2003



### Historic West Front

By Susan Sollohub

Planning applications for a ground-breaking refurbishment of houses in the West Front of the Abbey Ruins have been lodged and look set to end at least 50 years of debate and decline.

Developer Mike Spenser-Morris recently delivered the weighty documents to St Edmundsbury Borough Council staff. (See photo). After clearing many major hurdles, he believes councillors will back the historic proposals to reinstate the 'houses in the ruins'.

"Everyone would like to see the work carried out and as quickly as possible," said Mr Spenser-Morris, managing director of NHP Developments Ltd, based at Newmarket.

**Bury Society representatives who inspected the applications, were full of enthusiasm and believe they will create a fitting finale to the saga.**

**"Interest very much focuses on the later houses built into the medieval abbey core - they are absolutely unique," said Mr Spenser-Morris.**

He has reached the submission stage after lengthy delays during which some people urged him to give up the battle to rescue the decaying Grade 1 building, placed on the Buildings at Risk Register.

As well as rigorous and lengthy photogrammetric interpretive surveys, detailing every stone, there were structural engineers' reports, and detailed surveyors' reports showing serious dry and wet rot and other problems.

Subject to planning approval, builders should be on site later this summer or in September to begin the ambitious task of turning the existing derelict homes into exceptional des.res with exceptional period features. Your very own remnant of the ruins! The finishing

date is estimated at from nine to 15 months after the start.

The project will create four homes complete with en-suite bathrooms in the atmospheric setting. The properties are the existing nos 3,4 and 5 plus Samsons Tower. They are designed for four bedrooms (houses 3 and 4) while house 5 will feature two/three. The converted Samsons Tower will boast a master bedroom.

Where possible remnants of the abbey core will be exposed and, of course, there will be views to remind owners of their surroundings, the famous Benedictine Abbey, a victim of the Reformation.

Workmen have attacked the rot and pulled down overgrown foliage and self-sown trees choking the fabric. The owner of the fascinating dwellings is the borough council and previous occupants were actually council tenants!

Under the current arrangement, NHP takes on long leases from the local authority and undertakes the venture under licence at no cost to the council.

NHP will sell on the highly individual properties. Interest is already being show.

Mr. Spenser-Morris is clearly very attached to his very special 'baby.' He has a very hands on approach to the once -in- a lifetime project and has designed the rear gardens himself. He says the costly enterprise - details not available at the time of writing - will house 'happy people,' and because of their unique background, the public will have a chance to look round on certain occasions.

