

Help at hand to tackle 'phantom scaffolding'

Housing campaigner aims to make his point

by Jon Dean

jon.dean@archant.co.uk

A helpline has been set up for people whose homes have been blighted by long-term, unused scaffolding.

The Idle Scaffolding helpline is a tongue-in-cheek service set up by a housing campaigner in response to what he says is a serious problem in the borough.

He says the structures are put up to make people think work is being done, then taken down weeks or even months later, regardless of how long any work takes. This, he says, conveniently gives Partners for Improvement in Islington (PFI) who manage the borough's street properties, a free place to store the scaffold.

Staggered

Thomas Cooper, who set up the helpline, said: "I set it up because I was just staggered by the amount of scaffolding up all over the borough with little or no work being done. I wanted to find the extent of it, and it's street after street."

"They put up 120 scaffolds across the borough but only have enough workers for maybe 20, so four out of five are idle day in day out."

"Then they move the scaffold to the next lot of housing

CALLS TO THE HELPLINE

"The scaffolding has been up since February 3 but it is the wrong address. We don't know when they're going to take it down" N7

"The scaffolding has been up for three months but there is no work being done. We've not seen any

workmen at all – its sitting idle." N1

"We are supposed to have external work done and the scaffold has been up since mid-April. The painting has been finished for three weeks and we've not seen one person since." N7

for six months. Never mind the inconvenience, that we have to live shrouded in darkness, watching for things falling on our heads every time we come out of the house and our bins not being emptied because the binmen can't get to them.

"By the time they take it down, people are so relieved they just say thank god, they don't care if work is shoddy or not even done."

Stuart Hodgkinson, who is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to investigate PFI, said: "During my investigations I have heard lots of Islington residents complaining. They call it phantom scaffolding – it goes up, no work gets done and then it gets taken down."

"It makes you wonder if they are storing it there

because it kills two birds with one stone – firstly it's somewhere to put it and secondly it makes them look as though they're doing work."

Brian Potter, chairman of Islington Leaseholders Association (ILA), said: "I have had scaffolding outside my house for about 10 days even though the job was done in two. It's a huge problem in the borough. I think they do it because they save a fortune on storage."

A spokesman for Partners for Improvement in Islington said: "Partners' ongoing programme of work to improve and maintain homes in Islington can often require scaffolding to be used, sometimes for extended periods of time."

The helpline can be contacted on 0203 2392070, or call Partners on 0800 587 3595.



■ Thomas Cooper

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