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STREET FIGHTERS

**Glenn Fowler, Hole in the Wall Oakcakes
Hanley, Stoke on Trent**

“We’ve been here for 27...28 years now. We took over from an old couple who’d had it passed down through the family. We have the family in it now – the lad’s in it and the wife still works here. It’s basically oakcakes are a family tradition that’s been from this premises for a good many years now. There were umpteen around the streets...this is the last one that operates through the window now.

It was a nice place. It was very neighbourly, everyone knew each other...you know...there was no trouble. There’s not a lot of trouble now but obviously as time goes by life revolves around the old drugs, doesn’t it. So we got the drug pushers in where we never used to get them and when there was talk of demolition, this is when the problems started. People sold up their houses and rented them out. People sold to anybody that wanted to buy the houses. Of course then you get people buying them...I mean, one chap who lived in New Zealand owned a property around here they reckon because he wasn’t bothered what the area was, was he? It’s just an investment to him.

As far as ourselves go here, we had a campaign to save the Hole in the Wall but all we did, we had 18 months of meetings – one a month – with them to establish building a property for us, to carry on the business. And eventually the credit crunch came and they turned around and said they can’t afford it.

It used to be movement all the time..people used to be coming and going, coming and going. But come 2 o’clock in the afternoon now there’s no footfall. There’s nobody living here. I’d be still selling oatcakes now to people on the street, you know, I could be open until 2, 3 o’clock. But it’s dead. It goes dead. After one, half past one I might as well shut the shop up then.

There’s a possibility of one being structured into the new masterplan for the area. They’ve even said they’d put a hole in the wall of that. They’d design it in the same way, so yeah they’re prepared to do that. But obviously it won’t be onto a pavement like this is because it would have to open onto our own property if you understand what I mean. We’d be set back inside the boundary. They say they will do a Hole in the Wall again. I don’t intend to object [to the Compulsory Purchase Order] – I don’t see the point in it. We know where we’re going. What they tell me is that they’ll take me out of the compulsory purchases until something has been established that has been designed for us and built for us. So they say.”