

# Collapse alert at danger site

14/10/99

ONE of Stroud's most prominent landmarks was suddenly cordoned off from the public yesterday after a council building officer noticed dangerous masonry.

Barriers were put in place by Stroud District Council around the six-storey Hill Paul building to divert shoppers following the discovery of the defect.

The dangerous building facade, discovered by Phil Williams, head of building control at the council, faces the front of Cheapside car park, which is popular with shoppers and workers and is near the town's station.

The loose stonework is estimated to be 150kgs in weight and about 15 metres from the ground, and so could be extremely dangerous, said Mr Williams.

Yesterday council staff worked with police to remove several vehicles which are at risk from large pieces of loose stonework at the front of the building.

"Public safety is paramount," said Coun Chris Brine, chairman of the council's planning

by Donna Findlay

committee. "We will now be holding urgent talks to ensure that the building is made safe."

Mr Williams said he found the loose stonework by chance while looking at the building for another purpose. He said the council had erected a hoarding 1.8 metres from the front of the building so that pedestrians and parked cars would be out of danger. This would stay in place until the repairs were carried out.

"The council can only do what is necessary to remove danger and, even if the stonework does fall, it will be contained within the fencing," Mr Williams added.

The Hill Paul building is owned by Harper Homes, of Caterham, Surrey, which will be arriving shortly to carry out the repair work. A former clothing factory, the building was bought two years ago by residential developers Harper Homes, which was looking to convert it into 30 flats. Hill Paul took over at Cheapside after former wholesale clothiers Williamson, Tratt and Co, which built the property, went into liquidation in 1902.

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