

DANGER FEAR AS ROAD IS CLOSED

5/1/01

by Jo Barber

CHEAPSIDE in Stroud has been closed because the Hill Paul building is in "imminent danger" of collapse – but campaigners are continuing their fight to save it.

The road was closed indefinitely after structural engineers assessed the risk posed by the building's northern parapet which overlooks the road.

"You can see the top of the building overhanging the road – it is quite frightening," said David Marshall, a Stroud District Council spokesman.

Hill Paul is at the centre of a battle between its owner Harper Homes, which has permission to demolish the decaying former factory, and residents who want it preserved.

The future of the building could depend on the outcome of a meeting due to be held at lunchtime today between members of the Hill Paul Regeneration Group, Stroud mayor councillor John Marjoram and Harper Homes boss Malcolm Bushell.

The group was planning to offer a deposit of £100,000 to secure the £1.3m building.

David Crownshaw, a spokesman for the group, said: "We have a year to raise the rest of the money. As long as the building is still standing it can be saved."

If the offer is refused it is likely that demolition would swiftly follow.

A spokesman said the delay to allow discussions to go ahead prompted the council to review the safety situation and it had no alternative but to close Cheapside in the interests of public safety.

The building suffered further deterioration during last week's frost and was now under threat from heavy rain and high winds forecast for the weekend.

Members of the Hill Paul Regeneration Group were among a small crowd who stood firm in the road in front of the 80 tonnes of demolition equipment when it arrived at the Cheapside site yesterday.

Minutes after one protester wrote 'go' in flour on the tarmac, the huge low loader turned up but

Picture: Paul Nicholls C211060B18



■ **Protest: Caroline Denny, a Hill Paul Regeneration Group member, was restrained by police yesterday while trying to obstruct demolition work.**

was then stopped by the demonstrators.

With police on stand-by, group spokesman Irene Hopwood said the objectors would allow the contractors to pass.

"We are letting you people through because we intend to buy this site and the building," she shouted. "We intend to save this building. Local businessman are behind us."

Mrs Hopwood said the group realised the machine was "impotent" – missing vital parts.

The crowd then stood aside, although a Volvo estate parked perilously close to the Hill Paul entrance gates continued the blockade for a short while as burly demolition workers tried to bump the locked vehicle out of the way.

As that plan was abandoned, demolition contractors Marron managed to slowly manoeuvre the equipment into the site.

"It is a sorry sight," said secretary of the regeneration group Juliet Shipman.

"English Heritage today confirmed the building is safe."

TO PAGE THREE

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TO PAGE THREE