

Bulldozers end feud over illegal building

DEMOLITION of two illegal Gosberton extensions is due to be completed today (Thursday) after a nine-month planning feud ended in a hail of bricks.

South Holland District Council claimed victory in its battle with businessman Alan Garrard over the buildings at 69 High Street when contractors moved in on the site on Tuesday.

But now Mr Garrard claims to have set the ball rolling to take his case to the European Court of Human Rights.

He told the Spalding Guardian: "This has nothing to do with planning.

"People say this country has a democracy but it's a regime.

"I am determined to have my day in court."

A three-hour stand off between enforcement officers and immigrants was brought to an end thanks to the intervention of Methodist minister the Rev Maurice Perry.

He entered the site and persuaded the remaining occupants to surrender to council officials.

Mr Perry became involved with Mr Garrard after putting up several of the workers in South Holland Methodist Church when they arrived in Gosberton late on Thursday.

He said: "My concern is for people and not politics. I had the ear of both sides and I wanted to help.

"These people see Mr Garrard as a benevolent provider and not a dictator.

"They perhaps didn't understand why the authorities came with such force.

"We managed to defuse the situation and I think we now have to look at the long term issues affecting these people."

Twenty seven migrant workers from Greece, Lithuania and Latvia were taken from the house and processed by council staff. None were in the country illegally.

Mr Perry said that conditions at 69 High Street were good, describing the standard

"Mr Garrard has created a Spanish or Greek hacienda in the middle of a Lincolnshire village."

But Steve Williams, district council head of planning and development, said the council was concerned about the living conditions.

He said: "While the facilities themselves were of good quality, our main concern was that there were six different bedrooms and sleeping conditions were extremely overcrowded in each of those rooms.

"As for the building itself, from the bits that have come down I certainly do not think it would have passed any of our building regulations.

"It probably wouldn't have fallen down but it certainly wasn't safe in the long term. Some of the timber at the back was starting to rot."

Council chief executive Terry Huggins said that the council had found alternative work and accommodation for 12 of the immigrants.

He said: "Today seven workers have gone off to different parts of the country where they have work and accommodation. We still have 45 people we are dealing with and we would appeal for anyone who has work and accommodation for these people to contact us."

And Mr Huggins warned others against building without planning permission.

He said: "This is the worst case of deliberate and flagrant breaching of planning rules I have come across.

"By the action we have taken we are sending a clear message that such behaviour will not be tolerated."

The destruction of the illegal extensions was welcomed by many villagers.

One High Street resident, who did not want to be named, told the Spalding Guardian that he had suffered from stress because of the building work.

He also believes that the value of his property has decreased by up to £80,000.

He added: "The situation has become absolutely ridiculous.

"When something like this is allowed to happen there has to be something wrong

Another said: "If this were in Spain or Greece then it would fit in and look very nice but it is in the middle of a conservation area and looks totally out of place.

"I've nothing against the building itself but I am completely against the principle.

"We all have to abide by rules and he shouldn't believe he is any different.

"Had the council allowed this situation to continue then it would have been giving everyone free rein to do as they liked."

The house at the centre of the controversy was originally built as an office block by Norman Moore (79), who has lived in Gosberton all his life.

Mr Moore, who sold the building 13 years ago, said: "This is a great day. Everyone else has to get planning permission and follow building regulations so why should this be any different?

"I'm usually critical of the council but I think they have done all they can here.

"The law needs changing so that this cannot happen again."

● **SURVEYING the site: Terry Huggins, South Holland District Council chief executive, ensures the demolition work is going to plan. (0367a65)**

