# Norwich City Council secures former Van Dal factory site for affordable housing amid fire aftermath



Norwich City Council has acquired the long-vacant former Van Dal shoe factory on Dibden Road for £1.2 million, following its devastating fire in January 2025. The building, which had stood empty since 2018, was purchased using funds from the council's Town Deal revolving fund, a government initiative designed to rejuvenate stalled brownfield sites. Shortly after the acquisition, the council sold the damaged site to Flagship Group for the same amount, under an agreement to develop approximately 48 new affordable homes.

The fire, which ravaged the factory’s remains, resulted in seemingly irreparable damage and triggered an arson investigation led by Norfolk Police. It also prompted the temporary closure of a nearby school due to concerns regarding asbestos contamination, illustrating the fire's extensive repercussions within the local community. Residents were advised to keep windows and doors shut as safety measures were implemented.

Hemingford Group, the previous owner, had initiated plans to redevelop the site prior to the fire, proposing a mixture of affordable housing. Nonetheless, the lack of action since the factory's closure in 2018 had left the site increasingly vulnerable to vandalism, with reports of broken windows and graffiti becoming commonplace. The factory’s dereliction had become a point of contention, raising fears of antisocial behaviour among local residents.

While the Greater Norwich Local Plan earmarks the Dibden Road site for residential development, stipulating proposals should consider the heritage significance of what was once a locally listed building, the ravaged state of the factory renders these discussions largely moot. Local authorities and heritage representatives have expressed concerns about the complete loss of the structure, highlighting the need for a full heritage statement before any new plans are put forward.

Despite the challenges surrounding it, the redevelopment appears necessary, as local councillors have voiced support for turning the site into homes to combat the dereliction and vandalism that have plagued it. However, any new construction cannot commence until the necessary planning permissions are secured, leaving the timeline for potential housing development uncertain.

As Norwich seeks to alleviate housing shortages and reclaim troubled spaces for community use, the fate of the Van Dal site underscores the complexities at the intersection of urban development, heritage conservation, and public safety. The outcome of the Flagship Group's proposals will be closely monitored as the community hopes for a positive transformation of a once-vibrant location into a source of new housing.

### Reference Map

1: Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2: Paragraphs 2, 3, 4
3: Paragraphs 3, 4
4: Paragraphs 2, 3
5: Paragraph 3, 5
6: Paragraphs 3, 4
7: Paragraphs 2, 4

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144661.norwich-city-council-paid-1-2m-dibden-road-factory/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g73n225vyo> - A fire devastated the former Van-Dal shoe factory in Dibden Road, Norwich, on January 20, 2025. The building, which had been derelict since 2018, was severely damaged, leading to the closure of a nearby school due to asbestos concerns. The fire prompted an arson investigation by Norfolk Police. The owner, Hemingford Group, had plans to redevelop the site into 48 homes but faced delays due to the fire and safety concerns. Demolition work began shortly after the incident to secure the site.
* <https://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/news/24170011.concerns-plans-50-homes-dibden-road-norwich/> - Plans to demolish the former Van Dal shoe factory in Dibden Road, Norwich, and construct 48 new affordable homes have raised concerns among local authorities and residents. Norfolk County Council's Historic Environment department questioned the total loss of the building, considering it an undesignated heritage asset. They recommended a full heritage statement be submitted before the plans are discussed. The site has been vacant since 2018 and has suffered from vandalism, including broken windows and graffiti.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g9r8893j4o> - Firefighters responded to a significant blaze at the former Van-Dal shoe factory in Dibden Road, Norwich, on January 20, 2025. The fire caused extensive damage to the derelict building, which had been unoccupied since 2018. Residents were advised to keep windows and doors closed due to the presence of asbestos. The fire led to the closure of a nearby school as a precautionary measure. An arson investigation was initiated by Norfolk Police following the incident.
* <https://www.gnlp.org.uk/adoption-sites/3-norwich-sites> - The Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) allocates the site of the former Van Dal shoe factory in Dibden Road, Norwich, for residential development. The plan specifies that the site should accommodate approximately 25 homes, with at least 33% designated as affordable housing. Development proposals must consider the heritage significance of the existing locally listed building, with options for retention or conversion subject to viability. The plan also outlines requirements for design quality, integration with surrounding housing, and environmental considerations.
* <https://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/news/23956520.nr3-vandalism-issues-dibden-road-shoe-factory-norwich/> - The former Van Dal shoe factory in Dibden Road, Norwich, has been a target for vandalism since its closure in 2018. Incidents include forced entries, broken windows, and graffiti. The site, earmarked for redevelopment into 48 new homes, has been vacant for several years, leading to concerns among local residents and authorities. Plans for the site include a mix of affordable housing, with proposals yet to be submitted to Norwich City Council. Local councillors have expressed support for the redevelopment to address the issues of dereliction and anti-social behavior.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1jg55d8x57o> - An investigation into a large fire at the former Van-Dal shoe factory in Dibden Road, Norwich, has been inconclusive. The fire, which occurred on January 20, 2025, caused significant damage to the derelict building. Norfolk Police are treating the incident as arson. Demolition of the building, which contained asbestos, began shortly after the fire to secure the site. Residents were advised to keep their windows closed due to air quality concerns. The site has been vacant since 2018 and is earmarked for redevelopment into residential housing.