

Riding the rogue wave: booming resort bucks the trend as City surfers flock in

Cheap surfing lodges give way to £1m apartments

Locals struggling to stay put as developers hover

Steven Morris

From the outside, it does not look like much: a rundown backpackers' surfing lodge with a pink pebbledash facade. The wind whistles off the ocean through broken windows and grubby old mattresses have been tossed into the back garden.

But the Cribber Green Rooms in Newquay, the Cornish capital of UK surfing, is at the centre of an unlikely property boom that has bucked the national trend.

The lodge and the small plot it sits on have sold for £2.5m, seven times what it went for just six years ago, making land on this stretch worth £10m an acre.

The lodge on Headland Road is to be knocked down and turned into a block of apartments, the most expensive of which would cost up to £1m. It means that a resort that has long been seen as a haven for beach bums and a destination for stag and hen parties finds itself with some of the most valuable real estate in the UK.

Chris Baxter, a director of the estate agents Bradleys who sold the Cribber Green Rooms, said locations such as Headland Road, where many plots have views of the Atlantic front and back, were still selling. "This is a fantastic plot with views on both sides and close to Fistral beach, one of the best surfing spots in Europe. People are still willing to pay for the best sites here."

The recent history of the Cribber plot echoes what has been happening at the most sought-after seaside locations in Newquay and other resorts.

Just a few years ago the building housed Golf View Hotel, the sort of place where coach parties of pensioners might stay.

In 2002 it was bought by Jonathan Tittle, a businessman and keen surfer, for £350,000. Instead of sprucing it up, he turned it into the Cribber (named after a huge wave that periodically rolls on to Fistral), a backpackers' hostel that could cram in 90 people at £10 a night.

But surfing has now become the sport of choice for many bankers, doctors and lawyers – and they wanted somewhere posher than the Cribber to stay.

The advent of regular flights from London to Newquay Airport hastened the changes. Moneyed surf fans can do a day's work in the City on Friday and jet down to north Cornwall in time to catch a few summer evening waves.

And so, inevitably, the developers have moved into Headland Road. The charge has been led by Acorn Property Group, which previously focused its attention on up-and-coming areas in London such as Bermondsey. Acorn has started work at four sites – almost 100 apartments –



In numbers

1,400

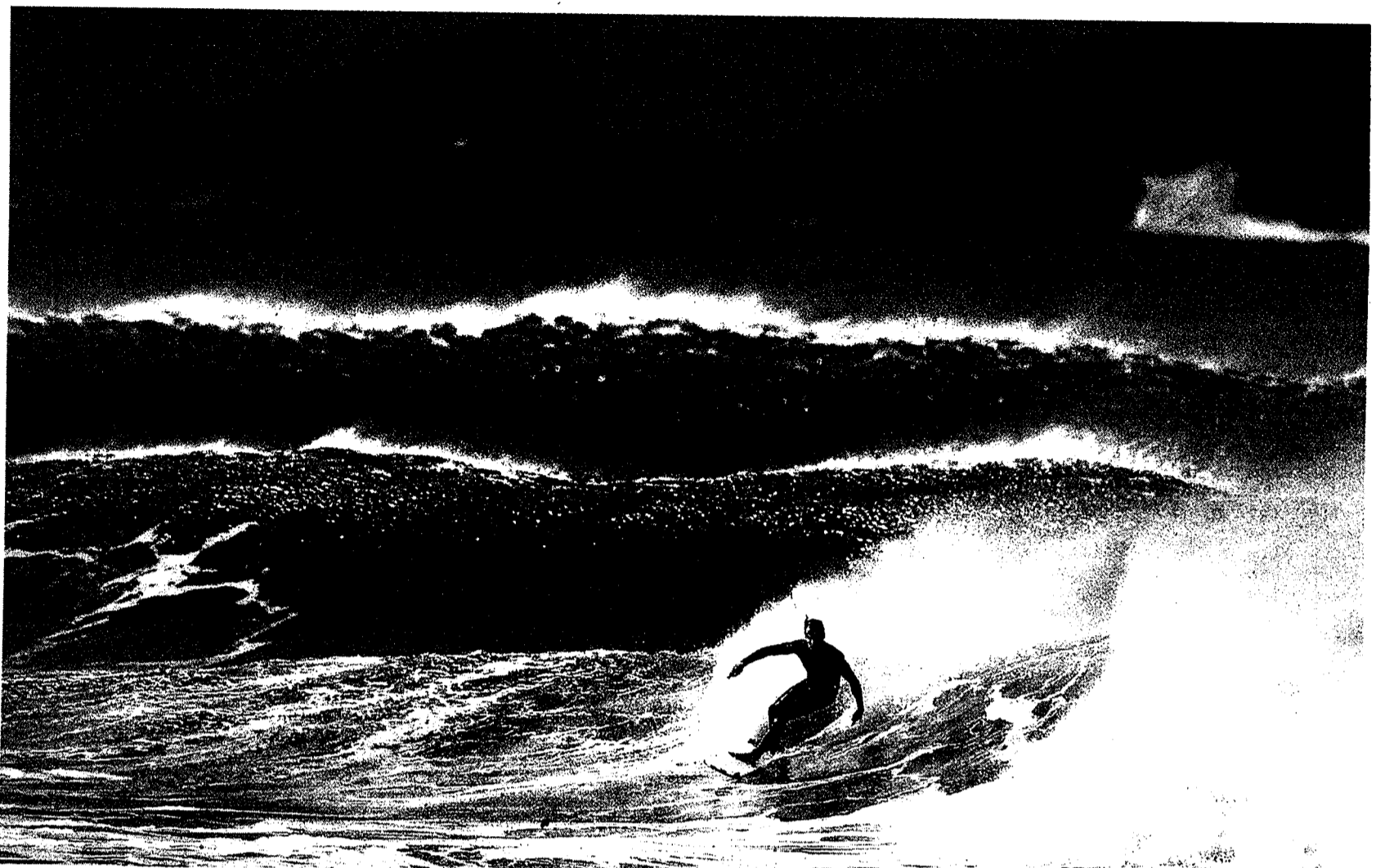
properties are being built or going through the planning process

£42m

year generated by surfing in Cornwall alone. Across the UK it is £200m a year

22,000

is the winter population of Newquay but in summer it can quadruple



A surfer hits the waves off Newquay and, below left, the Cribber Green site, soon to be an apartment block Photographs: Apex

on the road and has two more sites in the pipeline.

Its tactic is to knock down buildings and replace them with glittering new apartment blocks with names like Azure and Zinc. More than half of the 52 two-bed apartments in the Zinc complex, which cost up to £550,000, have been sold. Further down the road, 10 of the 14 units at Pearl, including a £1.2m penthouse David and Victoria Beckham were said to be interested in, have been bought.

The Cribber site is the latest to be acquired. The old hostel will soon be demolished and a block housing 14 units, including two penthouses priced at £895,000, will rise in its place. All that will remain is the name Cribber and the Atlantic views.

The development may complete the transformation of the area – but for many surfers, it won't be for the better.

Earlier this summer, the final surf lodge on the beach end of Headland Road, Fistral Backpackers, closed and the guesthouse next door, where rooms are still £10.50 a person, will wave its final visitors goodbye next month. The buildings, wallpapered with pictures torn from surfing magazines, are being turned into apartments by the local family that owns them.

The poorer surfers are being driven further back from Fistral Beach and many fear Headland Road's old scene will ebb away with them.

Rob Padmore, 23, from Kent, said: "All this development is killing the town. It's the final death of the 60s' hippy scene. This town is all about the kids who come to surf, not bankers in posh apartments."

There is also concern that new developments make it harder for local people to get on the property ladder. Acorn provides some affordable accommodation but local people feel they are being driven out. Graffiti not far from Headland Road sums up the mood of some – "Locals only" is daubed in letters a metre high on the wall of one old hotel being redeveloped.

But it is becoming increasingly hard for the locals to hold out. Only one couple still live in a private house on the beach end of the road, retired hoteliers Ivan and Beryl Chapman. They used to own the Golf View Hotel and, though they do not care to talk about it, would have become millionaires if they had hung on to it for a few years.

There is a glint in the eyes of the developers when you mention their house but the Chapmans say they are staying put. "We built this house for our retirement and we thoroughly enjoy it," said Mrs Chapman. Mr Chapman does not seem so convinced. "The price would have to be right," he said. They should expect the knock on the door soon.

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