

**Written submissions received for the London Assembly's
Housing Committee investigation into Social Housing Estate
Regeneration**

Volume 2 of 4

Ref	Organisation	Position/Title
Sub-006	University of Leicester	<i>Professor Loretta Lees</i>
Sub-006a	University of Leicester	<i>Professor Loretta Lees</i>
Sub-006b	University of Leicester	<i>Professor Loretta Lees</i>

Staying Put



An Anti-Gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London

Who helped work on this handbook

London Tenants Federation

Federation of organisations of tenants of social housing providers at borough level and at London level. LTF provides information and research on London's housing issues through accessible policy briefings and newsletters. It facilitates networking and information exchange at local and regional events, linking tenants and other community and voluntary groups. www.londontenants.org

Loretta Lees

Professor Loretta Lees is a London-based urban geographer. She is an international expert on gentrification and the policies and practices associated with it. She is working to persuade policy makers and communities that there are alternatives.

Just Space

Just Space is a London wide network of voluntary and community groups operating at the regional, borough and neighbourhood levels. It came together to influence the strategic plan for Greater London – the London Plan – and counter the domination of the planning process by developers and public bodies, the latter often heavily influenced by development interests. www.justspace.org.uk

Southwark Notes Archive Group

Local people opposing and writing about the regeneration & gentrification of the North Southwark area that has happened over the last 20 years. www.southwarknotes.wordpress.com

This handbook is the result of a research and action project with input from the London Tenants Federation, Loretta Lees, Just Space and SNAG (Southwark Notes Archive Group). This work was supported by a Scholar-Activist Project Award from the Antipode Foundation www.antipodefoundation.org

A digital copy of this handbook is available online at www.justspace.org.uk and at www.southwarknotes.wordpress.com

Cover photo courtesy of Hilary Barnes from the West Ken and Gibbs Green The People's Estates campaign

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Introduction

This handbook comes directly from the experiences of council estate residents and communities organising against gentrification in London.

It brings together many examples from local and London-wide campaigning groups and networks that are currently working against demolition and gentrification. All those who worked on this handbook have been active on different estates facing the threat of regeneration. Although the examples and experiences are focused on London, most of this handbook will be useful across the country.

The greatest resource for any new campaign is the work done by groups and people: contact them, learn from them and share what you know with them. Together we can stay put!

Firstly, we explain what ‘gentrification’ is and give a very short summary of what are the biggest threats happening to council estates in London at the moment.

Secondly, we write about successful tactics and tools used by groups and networks to challenge councils and developers.

Finally, we discuss alternatives to the demolition of council estates and offer practical examples of how these have been recently campaigned for and brought about.

"Our lived experience of crime on the Estate does not match the myth - and this is borne out by the statistics. We need to counter these pernicious negative stereotypes. By listing and emphasising the many positive features of our homes that we now enjoy, and celebrating our diverse community, we strengthen our bargaining position"

Aylesbury Tenants and
Leaseholders First campaign
Aylesbury Estate

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What's going on?

Council estates under threat

Homes on council estates and the benefits they bring to London's population have been under threat for a long time now. In the 1980s changes in national government policy meant that tenants could buy their homes through the 'Right-to-Buy' scheme. Although this meant people could own their own home, it also meant that tens of thousands of council tenancies were lost for those on waiting lists. At the same time many boroughs almost completely stopped building new council housing. Cuts in local government funding meant existing estates were often poorly maintained.

Today, tenants and leaseholders living on council estates face a more dramatic threat in the form of demolition of the homes they live in, as if there were no alternatives. The Greater London Authority (GLA) and London boroughs are set to sell the largest amount of public land (on which council estates sit) for a generation. To make the case for selling the land, we are told that council estates and their residents are a problem rather than a real asset to the economy, society and culture of London.

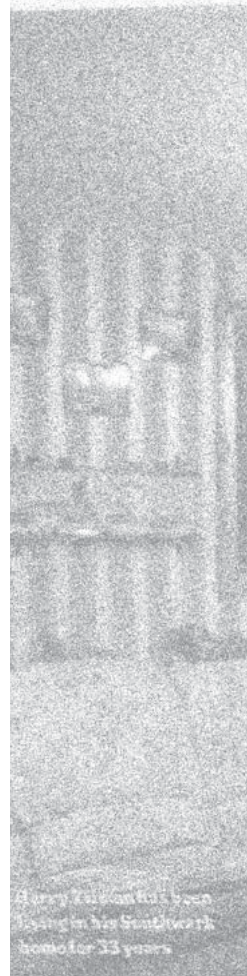
Council estates are home to a large number of Londoners and are truly socially mixed communities in a city that is fast becoming more and more socially segregated. Through council housing, they offer secure and truly affordable homes. Many have decent size flats compared to the much smaller ones found in most new developments. Estates often have good public space, such as green space, play areas, community centres, and other facilities that are used by estate residents and local communities.

What is 'gentrification'?

Although the term 'gentrification' is not an everyday word, it is more and more being used to describe the pressures on London's poorer communities. The word 'gentrification' comes from the old word 'gentry' which means 'the better off'. Mostly the word is used to criticise, but some also see it as inevitable or even as a good thing.

This year, 2014, is the 50th anniversary of the term 'gentrification' which was developed by the London researcher Ruth Glass. She used 'gentrification' to describe how in the 1950s and 1960s traditional working class areas in inner London were seeing middle class people buy up houses for cheap. After doing them up, more wealthy people were attracted to these areas and, quite quickly, more homes were lost to the original poorer population forcing them to move away. The surrounding area changed quickly too: local shops shut and re-opened as more expensive stores or cafes that suited the needs of the new middle class residents. Gentrification was the process by which middle class people moving into an area increased the price of property and made it no longer affordable to those on lower incomes. Council housing acted as a barrier that limited gentrification and ensured that lower income households could live in central areas of London.

In the 1970s and 1980s a different picture of gentrification emerged, with entire working class areas being redeveloped as expensive private homes, luxury office blocks and shops (for instance, Canary Wharf). The difference was that the changes in these areas were not led by individual 'gentrifiers' but by property developers and local governments working together. Today, by demolishing council estates, local councils are able to sell valuable public land to developers, who then build new and more expensive housing targeted at wealthier buyers and renters. This is sometimes called state-led gentrification.



ONE LAST F RESIDENTS

BY SALLY FITZGERALD

Harry Thompson places on Wincoburn Church back on his shelf his Montgomery and Nelson great ones, he says.

Mr Thompson, formerly Queen's Royal Regiment husband and 80 years old here. He may need the Southwark Council Harry to get out of his house because the land for development.

"Who has the right? We want your house, we'll be with you, walking around the house."

When is 'regeneration' gentrification?

Regeneration is sold as bringing benefits to local communities, but, in many cases it is just gentrification under a different name. Since the 1990s Tory and Labour governments have targeted council estates for various 'regeneration' programmes justified through so-called 'mixed communities policy'. This idea was inspired by a programme in the United States, which argued that mixing low income communities with middle income communities would bring everyone 'up to the standard' of the middle classes. By redeveloping council estates into 'mixed communities', national and local governments claimed to tackle 'deprivation' and 'social exclusion'.

Councils and their regeneration partners (who include property developers and housing associations) say that council residents will be able to return and live in those redeveloped areas. However, in the worst cases, replacement homes are delayed or not built at all forcing people to move from their area into other council homes or the private sector. Many examples show that tenants can only return to housing association homes, paying higher rents and services charges. Most leaseholders can't afford to buy locally anymore. Regeneration is gentrification when tenants and leaseholders of council estates have to move out of their homes and local communities to other areas in Greater London and beyond.

Signs to look out for on your estate:

Have you been told your estate is structurally unsound?

Has your local council listed your estate as a potential development site?

What information can you find on the website of your local borough?

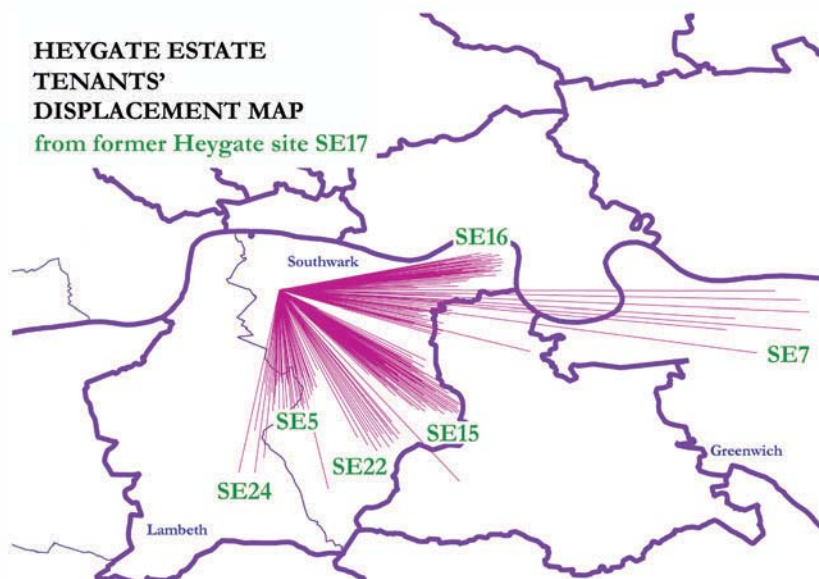
Does your estate sit within a London Plan * 'Opportunity Area'?

* The London Plan is the Greater London Authority's (GLA) development plan containing a set of ideas and rules on how London can change.

The Heygate Estate

Since the ‘regeneration’ programme was announced for the Heygate Estate in the late 1990s, Southwark Council stopped all but minimal maintenance of the estate and began preparations for the ‘decanting’ (moving out) of over 3,000 residents. In January 2001 the council stopped issuing new secure tenancies on the estate and started using some of the now vacant flats as short-term emergency housing on non-secure tenancies.

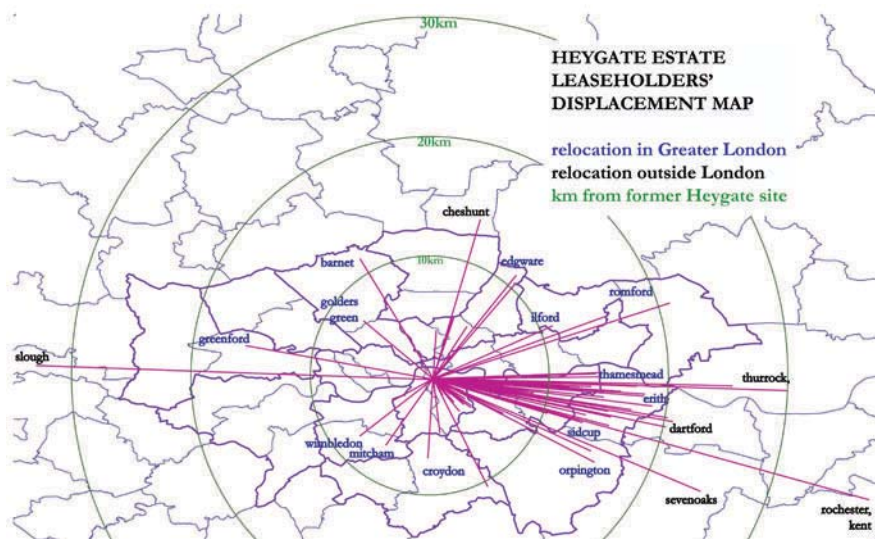
Initially, council tenants and leaseholders were promised that they would be rehoused in new homes built on the site of the estate once it was demolished. However, in 2004 they were told that the replacement new homes were going to be built on nearby land. By 2007, none of the replacement housing had been built, yet the council approved an ‘Action Plan’ that pressured secure tenants to bid for existing council housing and move out. At the same time, the 400 non-secure tenancies were ended; most had no right to re-housing and had to find a new home elsewhere.



The council homes that were offered to Heygate residents were limited in number, of a lower quality and smaller than the spacious ones they had on

the estate. They were also further away from people's place of work or their friends and family. Tenants with disabilities had to wait the longest for lack of suitable existing properties or had to accept unsuitable temporary accommodation.

A total of 198 households on the Heygate were issued with 'Notices to Seek Possession' and many tenants accepted any offer of a replacement home for fear that their right to social housing would be taken away from them or that they would be evicted through the courts. The lack of maintenance and of central heating since 2010 also forced many, among them elderly and long-term ill, to leave.



In the end, the regeneration promise that Heygate tenants would all be rehoused in new homes was watered down to a so-called 'Right to Return'. Tenants were now expected to move twice, the first time to existing council housing elsewhere, and then to 'return' to newly built but more expensive 'affordable' housing in the area. Out of the original 1,000 secure tenants, only 250 signed up to the 'Right to Return'. Many elderly residents and families just could not face the stress of moving home twice. The whole 'decanting' process took the best part of ten years, until the physical eviction of the last leaseholders in November 2013. By then, only 45 tenants had actually used their right to return and moved into new homes in the Elephant.

The ‘consultation con’

Since the late 1990s developers and local councils have been required to involve local communities on any regeneration plans and to allow them to participate in developing those plans. The idea was that local communities have a better idea of their own local problems. By being able to take part in developing an area, people and communities would be able to decide about solutions to those problems. It was said that local people’s knowledge of their area was a necessary and valuable resource for urban regeneration partnerships. With local people on board helping with decisions, regeneration should then be more democratic.

In practice, such ‘consultation’ is rarely a place where communities get to decide. Often, the professionals who run the consultations find ways to turn any disagreement into an agreement in favour of the developer and the local council. Decision-making in ‘urban regeneration’ remains as top-down (the council/developer making decisions for council estate residents) as it was during the ‘slum’ clearances after World War II. Researchers call this ‘the new urban renewal’.

There is more information on this in ‘The consultation game’ section later in the handbook!

CONSULTATION MECHANISM



The 'affordable housing' con

Often residents are told that by demolishing council estates, better new 'affordable housing' will be built for them but this is a con! Why?

- 'Affordable housing' is actually only affordable to few, if any, ex-council tenants;
- The bulk of it is called 'part rent/part buy intermediate housing' that requires on average an income of £33,000 p.a. Or it is what's called 'affordable rent' which means rents up to 80% of the price of private rented homes in the area;
- The 'right to return' to this supposedly 'affordable' housing is limited by the small number of new 'affordable' homes built on the site of the old estate. Also, on moving out, many tenants do not move back because they have found new jobs and schools, and become settled elsewhere.

In 2012 the London Tenants Federation exposed London's 'affordable housing' con. They found that half of all newly built homes that were supposed to be 'affordable' were not affordable for Londoners as a whole, let alone low income, ex-council tenants. They showed that the only type of housing that is truly affordable for the many Londoners who earn an average London wage (or less) are council homes at council rents.

The Affordable Housing Con:

www.londontenants.org/publications/other/theaffordablehousingconf.pdf

What is displacement?

Displacement is when people are forced to move away from their homes and communities by people with greater resources and power, who claim they have a 'better' use for a building, housing estate or neighbourhood. Displacement can happen in different ways. Tenants can feel pressured to leave if the council fails to maintain the estate, including cutting off electric, gas and water services to a block. Residents can be physically evicted by bailiffs, or threatened with this if they do not move. Local businesses are displaced when they can't afford the rent rises caused by gentrification and when they lose their customers as they are moved out of the area.

Displacement always has hidden costs. Breaking up long-term communities can lead to people feeling isolated. It is not uncommon for displaced people to suffer from a variety of mental and physical health issues caused by the stress of leaving an area and the people you know. Sadly, in some cases it has led to premature death of elderly residents. For working adults, it often means a longer commute to work. Children are badly affected as they have to move schools and lose established relationships.

The Pepys Estate

The Pepys Estate in Deptford, Lewisham, was an award-winning riverside social housing estate built in the late 1960s and made of three 24-story tower blocks, ten 8-story blocks and several 4-story blocks. In the late 1990s Lewisham council marketed one of the tower blocks, Aragon Tower, to housing associations without telling the tenants, and quietly began to move them out. In 2002 the tower was eventually sold to the private developer Berkeley Homes Plc for over £10 million and became a gated development called 'Z apartments'. 144 council flats were replaced by 156 luxury apartments, many of them sold to foreign investors, and let out. The sale and demolition of the five adjacent lower-rise blocks by Hyde Housing Association lost a further 250 social housing units.



ONE LAST P
RESIDENTS

BY GALLY FITZRA

Harry Thomas places
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Montgomery and Nelson
great ones, he says

Mr Thomas, formerly
Queen's Royal Regiment
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Southwark Council
Harry to get out of his
years because the land
for development.

"Who has the right
"We want your house,
we" he said, walking
around the building.

Two groups, Tenants Action Group (TAG) and the Pepys Community Forum (PCF, set up in 1999), fought a long campaign trying to protect their 'right to stay put' and also their 'right to return', making significant changes to the redevelopment plans. More recently, PCF challenged the Convoys Wharf redevelopment plan by employing consultants to do a social impact assessment, a transport study and a report on the impact on education and health. The Convoys Wharf application was stopped for 13 years. PCF is now based in a warehouse that they converted themselves into office spaces, where they give support and space to local businesses, charities and community groups.

Tenants Action Group

<http://www.mcad.demon.co.uk/tag1.htm>

Pepys Community Forum

<http://www.mcad.demon.co.uk/pcf.htm>



2014 also marks 30 years since the American urban planner Chester Hartman campaigned for the 'right to stay put' for lower income groups struggling against gentrification in the U.S. He was involved in the San Francisco-based "Anti-Displacement Project", a national campaign to protect affordable housing occupants from displacement pressure in America's inner cities during the 1970s. Their struggle was led by tenants' organisations with the support of non-for-profit organisations under the slogan: "We Won't Move".

"Success is putting the argument forward. Making a difference. We've had lots of small wins along the way and we made significant changes to what has happened in terms of what's got built after it got demolished. It's still not very good, but if we'd had not intervened to make some changes, it would have been really appalling"

Malcom Cadman
Pepys Community Forum
Pepys Estate

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3: Alternatives to fight for



Gentrification

What can you do about it?

There are many different ways of getting active locally if your estate is at risk from demolition or gentrification. In this part we share how community groups in London have challenged plans that developers and councils wanted to impose. These tactics have been successful in bringing people together, exposing plans, delaying and opposing the destruction of council homes. Opposing gentrification is not easy but communities can learn from each other to prepare themselves for their own battles.


Finding out what's going on!

The best way to start to find out what's going on in your estate or in your neighbourhood is simple: ask people! Talk to your neighbours, to friends who live locally, ask your local shops or pubs and get in touch with your estate's Tenants and Residents Association. It's also really helpful to look for changes in your area:

- Have you noticed more 'for sale' and 'for rent' signs than there used to be?
- Are newspapers and estate agents saying that your area is 'up and coming'?
- Are local shops being replaced with more expensive ones?
- Are local community spaces (parks, community centres, health and service facilities) being closed down, sold off and redeveloped as private homes?

None of these changes come from outer space! A lot of them are subject to planning permissions from the local council, and are published on their website and the local paper. This is incredibly useful to see which addresses, streets and areas are undergoing changes.

Public libraries have local newspapers and newsletters from different local groups such as Friends of Parks groups,



community associations, housing groups, and so on. Most boroughs have a local history library that's also good for information. Try asking the librarian there for info and news. There is also a lot of information on the Internet. Look for local online forums, local newspapers' sites, personal blogs and websites. Try searching for your local area or estate and the word 'regeneration' or 'development'. Twitter has a search function that shows who is writing about your area.

Public resources and Freedom of Information

Council officers are often hesitant to answer difficult questions. The Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) are legal ways to get answers on sensitive issues because councils are required by law to respond. People on the Heygate Estate were successful in using FOI requests to expose broken promises about the 'decant' process. With that information, they challenged the council showing that only a handful of residents moved back to the area since 2008 when most people were moved off the estate.

On the Heygate Estate and in the Earls Court redevelopment scheme, residents' groups also made successful FOI/EIR requests for confidential information about the finances of the development schemes (known as 'viability assessments'). In both cases, they went to and gained the support of the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who declared that it was in the public interest for residents to have access to the information that was considered crucial for deciding the future of their homes. In the Heygate case, residents took part in an Information Tribunal hearing, challenged Southwark Council's refusal to disclose and won! This has set a good precedent for other estates to follow.

Simplest way to make an F.O.I is www.whatdotheyknow.com

More than just you!

Any campaign starts small. It's more important to build good relationships with other people who share your concerns rather than worrying about getting large numbers on board straight away. Public meetings can be a useful way to meet more people on your estate who are interested or concerned, but there are other ways of getting together. People have different time commitments and may find it easier to pop by a community picnic or BBQ on a weekend. Sometimes people need time to make up their own mind before being involved in a group. It's always useful to have lots going on (even if only small events) to keep the arguments in people's mind. In some cases local communities made 'permanent exhibitions' in public spaces with laminated newspaper cuttings and facts and figures and organised 'gentrification walks' for anyone interested in looking at and chatting together about local changes.

Your estate's Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) can be a useful way to meet others on your estate. Find out if it is active and when and where they meet. Have they already been involved in negotiations or consultation with the local council and/or developers? What was the outcome? All TRAs are different. While some can feel like a 'closed shop', many are dynamic and open to new people getting involved.

If a TRA is unsympathetic or unresponsive, you can form your own group. People who had bought flats on the Aylesbury estate felt unrepresented by their TRAs and formed the Wolverton Leaseholders group to challenge the Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) that were issued to evict them. Councils often make separate negotiations with tenants and leaseholders, but in the end they are all in the same boat when it comes to regeneration and so it's important that groups work together and keep open communication between all tenants, including those in short-term or sheltered housing.



Organising a local group

Besides leafleting door to door and posters, to reach people you can set up a Facebook group or a website. Having a named group makes it easier to approach people, to ask questions to the council or talk with journalists. In any group people have many different skills and abilities that can cover the basics: making posters and leaflets and finding ways to print them; organising events: cooking or donating food, or negotiating free or cheap use of church halls or meeting spaces; reading planning applications or council reports and making a summary for everyone else. It's good to share tasks so that jobs don't always stay with the same people.

To start a group you don't need to be officially recognised by the council or be large in number; but if you want the support of the majority of tenants, your group needs to get in early and win the arguments against demolition. Being able to build wide support rapidly means that you can make demands rather than fighting each step of the way. On the Carpenters Estate in Newham, Carpenters Against Regeneration Plans (CARP) brought together tenants, leaseholders, freeholders and businesses. In 2012 they successfully resisted plans for a new UCL campus by drawing additional support from academics, UCL students union, trade unionists and activists.

www.savecarpenters.wordpress.com

In 2010, Islington Council announced a proposal to demolish part of the Bemerton Estate. 250 leaseholders on the estate formed the Bemerton Leaseholders Association to challenge the proposal. They campaigned to show that the proposed demolition of 800 homes didn't make financial sense: to break even the Council would have needed to build an extra 350 homes for sale. By organising early in the process, they were able to stand up for their rights and in 2012 the Council had to scrap the plans and promised improvements to open spaces and buildings on the estate.

Bemerton Leaseholders Association:

www.bemerton.org.uk





Telling your story is important

Community groups are always pitted against ‘official experts’ in the form of the council or a developer who use a lot of spin to sell regeneration schemes. Fancy brochures might look good but often only offer vague promises to local people. Once you have found real facts and information it’s important to start a local public debate on what’s going on. Be clear and factual. Rumours or sweeping generalisations could make people lose interest. Getting your story across can be complicated as it means having to simplify the ‘expert’ language of the law and government without losing the important details. It also means learning how to tell your story to reach different audiences.

Local and free newspapers are important official sources of information. Writing letters to the local press and working with local reporters can help you reach people who don’t read news online. If you organise an event or make a public statement it’s useful to send a short press release to newspapers. There are many websites available with good practical tips on how to make a press release. Knowing how to talk to the press is absolutely key. Be prepared: reporters will want your story ‘in a nutshell’ and will ask for someone they can name and quote. Having an updated facts sheet at hand can help you stay focused. Even if they might not use the information on this occasion, you are proving to be a trustworthy source of information and they might come back to you for comments later on.

Internet tools are also very useful to reach a wider public. You can set up a basic website using free online templates (such as wordpress, tumblr, blogspot etc) and create Twitter/Facebook accounts. The more noise you can make on social media the greater the chances that your local councillors and MPs will have to address your concerns. You may also attract the attention of local, citywide and national (sometimes international!) newspapers and researchers. We all learn from each other about what works best and what is a waste of time.

Other community organisations fighting displacement might contact you and ask for support. It is important that you have a way to share information and be in contact with groups with the same concerns as yours.

Build evidence for your story through photographs, videos, and radio recordings as well as documents. As the campaign develops, it is important to archive these along with newsletters, reports, interviews, minutes of meetings and so on, so that community activity against gentrification and displacement is recorded for use in the future and opened up as a resource and a space for reflection and debate.



The consultation game

If your estate or neighbourhood is affected by a regeneration plan, it is likely that there will be a ‘consultation’. There are two types of consultation: ‘statutory’ consultation means that the council has a legal requirement to seek comments from local residents on planning in their area; ‘non-statutory’ consultation is not a legal requirement. In either case councils and/or developers often hire ‘consultation consultants’, who are paid to listen and persuade, build phony agreement and write what’s called a ‘statement of community involvement’, to pretend that the community is behind the regeneration.

Participating in consultation is often time-consuming and frustrating. Yet, many residents and community groups do decide to engage to try to find out information. In Elephant and Castle, local campaigners tried to make the consultation into a platform to share information and keep a record of broken promises. They constantly brought up the real stakes of the development and pressured locally elected councillors through blogging, independent and mainstream media, as well as at official council meetings.

Public consultation days were challenged by some groups through leafleting and running an alternative consultation stall to publicly ask difficult questions on the new plans, such as:

- How does it compare with existing housing provision and waiting lists?
- What are the rent levels like in the new homes?
- Does the redevelopment comply with your council's planning policy on levels of 'affordable housing'?
- What are the benefits for the local community under Section 106 or the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy)? Both S106 and CIL are ways in which communities take money from developers' profits for local benefits.

Be prepared to work within and outside the consultation space. Often campaigns get stuck in consultation processes and forget to continue working in the area and pushing their argument to local people. You may have to argue for real power to affect decisions, e.g. by having your representatives on consultation committees or by having your organisations recognised as 'local stakeholders'. Your aim is to turn consultation into negotiation rather than just a talking shop with no real power to change council and developers' plans. To this end, it's great to organise your own 'consultation' activities to gather local communities' own visions and desires for the area.





A word about the law

Legal challenges to plans to demolish and redevelop estates can be useful as a delaying tactic and as a way to set precedents for other campaigns.

Some estates threatened with demolition called for a Judicial Review (JR) of their planning application decision. This more or less means that residents take the planning decision to court. You will need a sympathetic lawyer to help on this. Judicial Reviews can be won and can stop existing planning applications but developers often just submit fresh applications with minimal changes. Recently, new planning powers at the Greater London Authority mean that the Mayor can intervene in local plans by approving a planning application in dispute and taking the planning power out of the hands of the council.

If an estate is set to be demolished and if negotiations with leaseholders and commercial tenants fail to reach an agreement about relocation or compensation, councils can use Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to force them to leave. They have to have more than 7 years left on their leases to gain the right to object. Often people are not aware of this right or are afraid to go to court as it can be quite intimidating. Legal representation can be expensive but it is possible to object without a lawyer. Importantly, the council can only apply for CPO after the planning application for the estate redevelopment has been approved. Strategically, then, focus on winning the argument against the plans first.

Recent experiences show that the chances of a successful challenge are small and the council (or other 'acquiring authority') will most probably keep re-applying until the decision goes in their favour. However, calling for a Public Inquiry into a CPO usually receives a lot of media coverage and can be useful to learn important new information about the development plans that had previously been a secret.

The first many council tenants will know of any threat is when they get a letter from their council saying that they are going to regenerate their estate and that they are invited to consultations on it.

Here's a list of questions about where you live:

CONSULTATION

If a 'consultation' about regeneration comes to your local area, you can ask:

- Who is running it? Is it run by the council? The developer? Or a private company working on their behalf?
- If it is a private company, what other consultations have they been involved with in London? Were local people happy with it or not?
- What decision-making power do local people have in the consultation process?
- What guarantees are there that local people's views will be listened to, respected and turned into reality?
- How can you make sure local groups are part of the official mechanism to make decisions?

CHANGES LOCALLY

- Do you know how changes happen in your estate and community? Who do they involve - local or national governments, private individuals, property developers? Are there websites, newsletters or council letters that explain what they are doing and how it might affect you?
- Have local residents been part of any local decisions about these changes? If so, how easy and clear were the processes to make decisions?
- Is anyone challenging or opposing these changes? Who are the people opposing them? What are their issues and the arguments?
- Are these changes justified, for example: should your council sell off an open green area or a community facility near you so that private homes can be built? Who benefits from this?

"Carpenters Estate has the potential to be a true example of Olympic legacy, showing not just Newham but the world how empowered communities can derive low carbon and sustainable living in a diverse and cohesive community"

Carpenters Estate Resident
Quoted in The Carpenters
Community Plan (2013)

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- Community Housing Associations
- Refurbishment
- Community-led Self Build

Staying put

Community alternatives to fight for

When your estate is faced with demolition or redevelopment plans, you can organise to develop your own alternatives. The options in this section draw on tenants and communities in London coming together to maintain truly affordable housing and community control in their estates. The section starts with ways of using the planning process by and for local communities (community planning, neighbourhood planning and lifetime neighbourhoods), continues with the alternative to the demolition of council estates (including housing co-operatives and community land trusts) and ends with recent examples of refurbishment and community-led-self build as alternatives to demolition.

Community planning

There are many examples of plans led by local communities that have succeeded in stopping public and private sector development proposals, and realised alternative visions in their place. For example, King's Cross Railway Lands Group submitted a 'People's Plan' to Camden Council as a planning application in opposition to developer's plans in the early 1990's. Wards Corner Community Coalition followed the same course of action in 2013-14

King's Cross Railway Lands Group

www.kxrlg.org.uk

Wards Corner Community Coalition

www.wardscorner.wikispaces.com



Carpenters Community Plan

The Carpenters Estate is a council estate adjacent to Stratford Town Centre and the Olympic Park. Constructed in the 1960's, its 703 homes are made up of terraced housing, 3 storey apartment blocks and 3 tower blocks. Newham Council's masterplan for Stratford proposed the redevelopment of the Carpenters Estate, with at least part of the estate (the tower blocks) to be demolished. The aim of the Community Plan was to produce a positive community-led vision for the estate as well as to oppose the plans of Newham Council and their development partners. London Tenants Federation and Just Space received some funding from the Antipode Foundation to work on the Carpenters, while voluntary support was provided by Planning and Geography students at University College London.

The policies of the Localism Act (2011) and its support for neighbourhood planning were encouraging and other examples of community plans offered positive inspiration. Also, the planning responsibilities of the newly formed London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) offered an alternative to the local authority route that people wanted to test.

The Community Plan was produced through workshops and walkabouts with residents, a door-to-door survey (completed by half of the households) and interviews with local businesses. An exhibition of the draft Community Plan was held in 4 different local venues. The greatest challenge was how to deal with community organisations which were under the influence of the Council as this had caused divisions on the estate. Key issues in the Community Plan were:

- Making the case for refurbishment of all homes by carrying out analyses of costs and benefits, both environmental (embodied energy) and social (including the extreme shortage of social housing);
- Strengthening existing community facilities, developing

an accessible community hub for young and old including leisure, sports, educational and faith activities as well as spaces to meet and socialise;

- Reversing the depopulation of the Carpenters Estate in order to enable existing local businesses to return and grow.

The Carpenters Community Plan brought together local residents, businesses and other stakeholders. It was adopted at a public meeting and presented to the LLDC. It provided a much stronger community voice for the Carpenters Estate and interest in developing a Neighbourhood Forum

The Carpenters Community Plan (2013) is available on the LTF web project 'Communities influencing and challenging development in London' (cicdl):

www.cicdl.info/opportunity/20-lower-lea-valley-including-stratford

Neighbourhood Plans

The Localism Act provides a number of 'community rights', including a right for communities to develop Neighbourhood Plans. This means that community groups can create a Neighbourhood Forum and develop a Neighbourhood Plan as part of the official planning system. To develop a Neighbourhood Plan, an application must be made to the Local Authority to designate a Neighbourhood Area and Neighbourhood Forum. Government regulations say that the Neighbourhood Forum must:

- Have at least 21 members who live or work in the area and reflect its character and diversity;
- Have a constitution (this can be as short as 1 page);
- Register a 'catchment area' that the plan applies to.

The Neighbourhood Plan has to be generally consistent with the local borough's Local Plan. Once a Plan is produced, it



has to be examined by an independent planning expert and approved by a majority through a local referendum.

Neighbourhood Plans are being developed across London, including by communities where there is a high proportion of social housing. Examples include: Somers Town (Camden), Crouch Hill and Hornsey Rise (Islington), Church End and Roundwood (Brent), Grove Park (Lewisham) and Elephant and Castle (Southwark).

My Community Rights:

[www.mycommunityrights.org.uk/neighbourhood planning](http://www.mycommunityrights.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning)

Lifetime Neighbourhoods

Lifetime Neighbourhoods (LTN) are designed to be places that meet the needs of the local community at all stages of their life. LTN principles include community well-being, social networks, a thriving local economy and sustainable environment. There are many useful tools for assessing your neighbourhood including the walkability matrix and the building for life and future communities checklist. The concept can help define the long-term community aims for your neighbourhood and could be a feature of a Community or Neighbourhood Plan.

The London Tenants Federation have developed a tenants' definition of LTN as 'neighbourhoods in which communities are empowered and in which local shops, social and community facilities, streets, parks and open spaces, local services, decent homes and public transport are affordable and accessible to everyone now and for future generations.'

See:

www.londontenants.org/publications/other/LTF%20Lifetime%20neighbourhoods.pdf





Community Land Trusts

Community Land Trusts (CLT) are a legal way to make housing truly affordable on a permanent basis. Rights, obligations and responsibilities for the housing are shared between the CLT and the individual homeowners/tenants. In CLTs the land is legally separated from the buildings; it is owned by the CLT and leased (for a very low fee) to homeowners/tenants. The model can be applied to different forms of affordable housing, commercial and community spaces: affordable homeownership, social rented housing, limited-equity co-operative housing, mutual housing, small businesses, parks and offices, often for not-for-profit and community groups. In CLT's housing is permanently affordable because:

- Homes are sheltered from price increases due to gentrification. The rent and the price of purchasing the home do not include the land value, but only the improvements on the land;
- If you are a homeowner, you cannot sell your home at market-value. Resale restrictions written into the deeds require that the homes be sold to other low income groups;
- CLTs have resident and community control built into their governance. A standard CLT board usually includes tenants/homeowners in the CLT and representatives of the wider community.

Most CLTs in the UK are in rural areas. In London, the main difficulty is to have voluntary transfer of land from local authorities, but a recent high profile campaign in East London has secured a former mental health hospital as a CLT, the East London Community Land Trust.

See:

www.eastlondonclt.co.uk

The UK National Community Land Trust Network has recently developed a useful CLT Legal Toolkit:

www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk



The Andover Estate

The Andover Estate at Finsbury Park is the largest council estate in the poorest ward in Islington. Built in the 1970s, it has 1064 homes. Issues faced by the residents included disrepair, safety, street violence, insufficient access to GPs, not enough nurseries and overcrowding. The community on the estate was very organised, with an active Tenants and Residents Association (Andover TRA) and a very active community centre, 'Finsbury Park Community Hub'. They began talking to the council and local politicians and stakeholders to discuss issues and negotiate with them. They co-opted different professionals, including an architect and a landscape designer, to engage with the community. They also received funding from CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) and the National Community Land Trusts for a small study to explore self build on the estate.

After two and a half years the study became the Andover Estate Development Plan for a bottom-up regeneration of the whole estate. Proposals include 100-140 new homes for families living in overcrowded situations on the estate, a new sports pitch, a youth club and a health centre. Participation activities along the way included study tours, exhibitions, and design workshops with a strong emphasis on working with young people. Since 2012 the plan has been taken forward by the Andover Future Forum, which includes tenants, and homeowners in the neighbourhood, the TRA and other local stakeholders, including council officers. A key aim of the Forum is to establish a Community Land Trust to develop and manage the estate on a long lease from the Council. The CLT will also allow community-led development of new homes through a mix of self build on vacant land and conversion of unused garage sites into flats.

Andover Future Forum:
www.andoverfuture.org

Co-operative housing

Co-operative housing is defined as housing that is:

- developed by, with and usually for a democratic community membership organisation;
- is controlled (and in some cases owned) by a local democratic community membership organisation.

Housing co-operatives are a form of housing based on tenants' self-management. They are not-for-profit organisations and this means that their rents are usually lower than market rents in the same area. In housing co-operatives members collectively manage their homes. This involves taking responsibility for arranging repairs, making decisions about rent and co-op membership. Membership is usually limited to current tenants but sometimes includes prospective tenants. Tenant self-organisation ensures that all residents are responsible for their homes and that decisions are taken democratically. Co-ops can house anybody, but some give priority to groups that are excluded from housing waiting lists as 'non-priority homeless'. These include minority ethnic groups and single people on low incomes.

In London there are around 83 housing co-operatives, the greatest concentration in the country, which house an estimate of 20,000 people. Some co-ops are short-life, which means that they provide housing by taking on and refurbishing empty homes on a short-term basis. By using empty properties, they promote refurbishment and the reuse of existing resources.

Confederation of Co-operative Housing UK:

www.cch.coop

London Federation of Housing Co-ops:

www.lfhc.org.uk



Community Housing Associations

Community Housing Associations are housing associations created and run by the community/residents. They are managed by a board made up of a majority of residents elected by the members. Historically, community housing associations come from grass-root organising for community control. In the mid-1980s residents of the Walterton and Elgin estates in Westminster successfully fought the sell-off of their homes to private developers, taking ownership and control of 921 homes in 1992. They were able to do this by using the tenants' choice provision of the 1988 Housing Act and received advice and support from Paddington Churches Housing Association and the Housing Corporation. Between 1993 and 1997, Westminster Council paid over £22 million to WECH to implement a high quality refurbishment programme in which resident participation in the design and fitting of new homes was central. In 1996, a report found that the tower blocks on the Elgin Estate were asbestos-ridden and these were demolished by WECH and replaced with low-rise housing.

Today, Walterton & Elgin Community Homes (WECH) continues its legacy as a successful resident-controlled housing association. It has 640 homes, 489 in Victorian terraces on Walterton estate and 151 in the Elgin estate. 496 are tenanted households and 144 leaseholds. The WECH Board consists of 14 members elected from WECH shareholders, over 70% of whom are residents and the remainder co-opted for their knowledge and expertise. The organisation provides high-quality truly affordable housing and serves as a powerful example of people-led solutions to displacement and the privatisation of our public housing stock.

Walterton & Elgin Community Homes:
www.wech.co.uk






Refurbishment

Council tenants are often told that their estates must be demolished and rebuilt because they are structurally damaged beyond repair. But often this story is not based on real surveys, and in most cases council estates, even those in real disrepair, are structurally sound and can be refurbished. Sometimes, surveys are conducted but ignored, because developers and councils prefer demolition and rebuild. For instance, the Heygate Estate was structurally sound and could have been refurbished, as has been the case with many estates built in the same period and with the same construction method, including the Doddington and Rollo Estate in Battersea.

Refurbishment as an alternative to demolition and rebuild is often part of community plans and can be argued through social, economic and environmental costs. Refurbishment protects communities by avoiding the displacement of existing residents and by reducing the personal social and economic costs of rehousing. It is usually much cheaper than demolition because it reuses existing buildings and infrastructure, and it is more environmentally friendly because it avoids the ‘embodied carbon costs’ of demolition and rebuild.

The Edward Woods Estate

The Edward Woods Estate is a 1960s 528-homes council estate in Hammersmith and Fulham. It is made up of 3 tower blocks and 4 walk-up blocks. The refurbishment of the estate in 2010 included improving the insulation and external appearance of the tower blocks and the installation of photovoltaic panels to generate renewable energy to power communal lifts and lighting. The £16.3 million refurbishment was funded by a combination of organisations: the GLA (Targeted Funding for energy saving); CESP (Funding for energy saving); S106 (planning contribution) from previous regeneration schemes; HRA capital and Capital Receipts.



For more information Just Space and the London Tenants Federation: 'Demolition or Refurbishment? A review of the evidence' (2014)

Community Self-Build Housing

The recent National Planning Policy Framework encourages self build housing and Government guidance calls on Councils to measure the demand for self build and identify land available for self build development. The Mayor of London has created an £8 million fund for self build projects in the capital. It is called 'Build Your Own Home - The London Way' and responds to the Community Right to Build in the Localism Act. The scheme provides £5 million repayable finance for house builders and £3 million revenue grants for organisations looking to develop self build community projects. Council tenants can come together and identify vacant sites on their estate that could address housing needs through self build and create programmes to learn and share self building skills. As a legal model, the community self build could be:

- A series of individuals;
- A community company;
- Mutual co-operative;
- Community Land Trust.

The land could be owned by the council, put into a Community Land Trust or sold to the self builders. As for the finance, community groups can raise a mortgage, find a private sector development loan or apply for a public sector loan or grant (from the local council, the Mayor of London or Central Government).

Community groups don't usually have the capital to pay the same market rates as private developers, so there has to be a shift in how the community and public bodies calculate value. This can be saying that the project is going to remain affordable in the long-term and be of more benefit to the community than a tower block of expensive flats.

At the moment there are 21 community self build (also called group self build) projects at feasibility or development stage in London. Lewisham pioneered community self build in the 1970's and 1980's, led by Walter Segal in Honor Oak. RUSS (the Rural-Urban Synthesis Society) a Community Land Trust has been campaigning for self build housing in Lewisham for the past two years and has developed plans for 20-25 self build homes at Church Grove in Ladywell. The site is a former school, that has been demolished, with surrounding terraced houses. The group's board structure includes a place for the council in return for a long-term lease on the land, providing the Trust with a means to raise cash by having something to borrow against, rather than relying on council subsidy.

Church Grove Ladywell group self build:

www.churchgrove.info

Community Self Build Agency:

www.communityselfbuildagency.org.uk

Walter Segal Trust:

www.segalselfbuild.co.uk

National Self Build Association UK:

www.nasba.org.uk



Staying Put

An Anti-Gentrification
Handbook for
Council Estates
in London

Are you a council tenant or
leaseholder?

Is a council estate part of your
neighbourhood?

Have you heard that your council
estate will be 'regenerated'
or demolished?

Are you concerned about what
that means and how it will
impact upon you and
your community?

This handbook explains why the regeneration of council estates often results in established communities being broken up and moved away, and housing becoming more expensive. It is designed to help local communities learn about gentrification and the alternatives they can fight for. Through the experiences of council tenants, leaseholders and the wider community in London, it contains ideas, stories, tools and resources.

The Urban Injustices of New Labour's "New Urban Renewal": The Case of the Aylesbury Estate in London

Loretta Lees

Department of Geography, King's College London, London, UK;

Redacted

Abstract: This paper discusses the urban injustices of New Labour's "new urban renewal", that is the state led gentrification of British council estates, undertaken through the guise of mixed communities policy, on the Aylesbury estate in Southwark, London, one of the largest council estates in Europe. In this particular case of post political planning I show how the tenant support for the regeneration programme was manipulated and misrepresented and how choices were closed down for them, leaving them ultimately with a "false choice" between a regeneration they did not want or the further decline of their estate. I look at what the estate residents thought/think about the whole process and how they have resisted, and are resisting, the gentrification of their estate. I show revanchist and post political practices, but ultimately I refuse to succumb to these dystopian narratives, very attractive as they are, for conflict/dissent has not been completely smothered and resistance to gentrification in and around the Aylesbury is alive and well. I argue that we urgently need to re establish the city as the driver of democratic politics with an emancipatory agenda, rather than one that ratifies the status quo or gets mired in a dystopic post justice city.

Keywords: regeneration, gentrification, mixed communities policy, revanchism, post political, resistance

Introduction

Regeneration was always ever a gentrification strategy, and we knew it. We knew it from Blair's 1997 launch of New Labour's regeneration policy from the stigmatised Aylesbury Estate in London where the desperate 70s class neutral language of revitalisation, recycling, renaissance and especially regeneration was revived in the 2000s a language as deliberately anodyne as it is ideological and mendacious; an environmentally friendly cover for class cleansing in the urban landscape [Neil Smith 2011, writing about Owen Hatherley's (2010) *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*].

Now that New Labour's era of urban renaissance has hit the buffers of both an economic downturn, massive public debt and a change of government, it is time to reflect on the urban injustices it practised and left in its wake (see also Colomb 2007; MacLeod and Johnstone 2012). In this paper I focus on the urban injustices that have been practiced on the Aylesbury Estate in London.¹ I look at how the socio-materiality of this particular council estate was discursively constructed by those with power to further their goals of regeneration, that is state-led gentrification, into a new "mixed income", new-build community. I question the truth claims that have

been made about the Aylesbury as a “sink estate” and argue that they serve/d dominant interests. I look at how choices have been closed down for the estate’s residents and how their support for the regeneration programme has been misrepresented. In so doing I expose a variety of unjust practices that have been, and are being, enacted on the Aylesbury Estate. But importantly I look at what the residents think about the whole process (seeking alternative knowledges, imaginaries, and logics, from them) and how they have resisted, and are resisting, dominant interests and practices (cf Marcuse et al. 2009). I refuse to succumb to dystopian narratives, attractive as they are, like those of the revanchist city and the post-political city, and in so doing I show that in this particular case of post-political planning, conflict/dissent has not been completely smothered and resistance to gentrification is alive and well. In frontloading and prioritising the empirical over the theoretical in this paper I signal my discontent with the lack of in-depth empirical work on such issues, especially from the point of view of residents, in the British context.² As Fuller (2012:914) states, there needs to be a “far greater engagement with the governance and politics of state-led gentrification, since this is the terrain in which decision-making ultimately produces gentrification, displacement and injustices”.

The Aylesbury Estate, built between 1967 and 1977, is located south of Elephant and Castle in the London Borough of Southwark (Figure 1). It was designed by architect Hans Peter Trenton and built by John Laing Construction Ltd with an initial

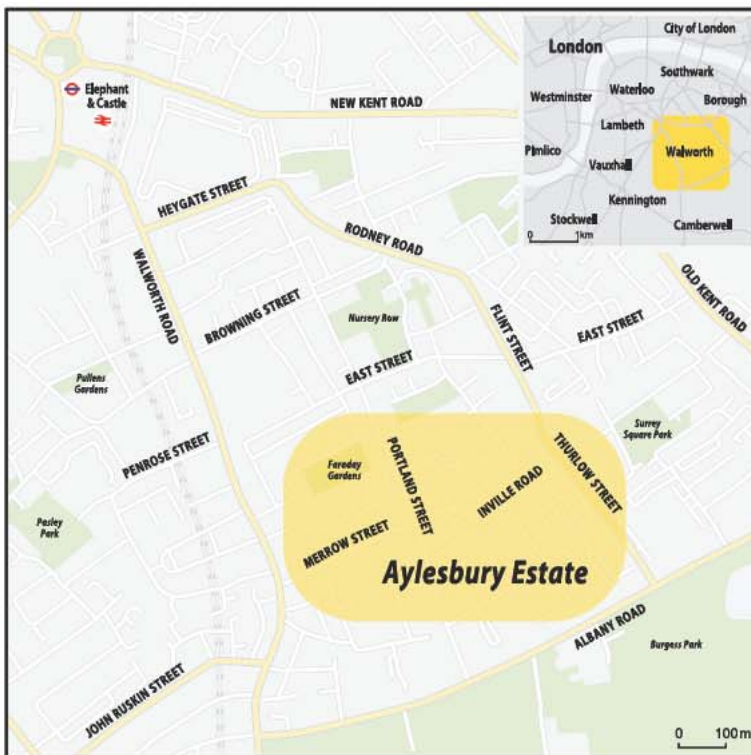


Figure 1: Location of the Aylesbury Estate in London

budget of £10,996,178. It was one of the most ambitious post-war housing developments built by any London borough, designed as a mesh of Jespersen panel system built tower blocks and low rise flats with elevated concrete walkways—"walkways in the sky"—that would link a number of estates between Elephant and Castle and Peckham (Figure 2). At the time the 2700 dwellings were designed to house a population of roughly 10,000 residents and built using Parker Morris standards which granted generous space standards. The estate is named after Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire and the various blocks on the estate are named after other local towns and villages, like Chiltern, Latimer, Taplow, etc. In the 1972 documentary "We was all one"³ you can see the Aylesbury being built to the soundtrack of children singing "Jerusalem"! When Fred Cook, who was raised in the back-to-back terraces of the Elephant and Castle first saw the new Aylesbury estate, he wondered at the luxury of the new flats: "I thought it was terrific, the fact you had a bathroom . . . In the old house we had an outside toilet—this was like a palace. You had all the amenities" (interviewed in Barton 2005). This represented the social ambitions of such modern architecture—to raise the living standards of the masses. Yet the Aylesbury was being completed when high-rise council estates were already becoming "slums in the sky" (Hanley 2007) and architect/planner Oscar Newman said that the Aylesbury was one of the worst examples of defensible space he had ever seen [see Jacobs and Lees (2013, forthcoming) on how Newman's defensible space ideas came to London].

In the 1980s the estate fell into disrepair, deprivation increased as old tenants moved out and new tenants moved in due to changes in council allocation policies, and it gained a reputation for poverty, crime and antisocial behaviour. The decline of the Aylesbury was coincident with the u-turn made by the Thatcher government on council housing and with trenchant critiques in the UK of high-rise public housing estates (eg Coleman 1985). By the late 1990s the Aylesbury was in the bottom category on the ACORN classification for inner city adversity, signifying an



Figure 2: The concrete modernism of the Aylesbury Estate Source: Author's own

area of extremely high social disadvantage: 68% of the residents were from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups compared with 48% in the borough as a whole (2001 Census), and it became a reception area for refugees and asylum seekers. Most of the estate was made up of flats, 2% were houses, and 17% of the residences were private through “right to buy”. With a population of approximately 7500 (2001 Census) on 28.5 ha of land the Aylesbury Estate was the largest public housing estate in Europe and it is in the process of being demolished and rebuilt with *mixed income* new-build housing.⁴ Until late into the twentieth century Labour leaders in Southwark had used housing policy to prevent gentrification from flowing into their borough but this was all to change when at the turn of the twenty-first century Labour lost overall political control locally (Carter 2008), at the same time as New Labour’s ideas began to concretise nationally.

New Labour’s “New Urban Renewal”

The rhetoric of mixed communities policy in the UK echoes the rhetoric of New Labour’s “urban renaissance” (Bond, Sautkina and Kearns 2011; Bridge, Butler and Lees 2011; Lees 2003a). In New Labour’s urban renaissance the council estate played a symbolic and ideological role as a signifier of a spatially concentrated, dysfunctional underclass. Blair’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was set up to deal with such social problems: “Over the last two decades the gap between these worst estates and the rest of the country has grown . . . It shames us as a nation, it wastes lives and we all have to pay the costs of dependency and social division” (Blair in SEU 1998:1). And council estates were one of their main concerns: “over the past 20 years, poverty has become more concentrated in individual neighbourhoods and estates than before, and the social exclusion of these neighbourhoods has become more marked” (SEU 2000:7).

New Labour were right; poverty had become concentrated on many council estates, and this itself is part of the history of council housing in the UK (Hanley 2007; Power 1998). Council housing was one of the biggest social revolutions in modern British history, the radical idea being that the state should provide homes for the working classes. The first council estate, The Boundary Estate, was built in London in 1900. After World War I Lloyd George enacted the 1919 Town and Country Planning Act which charged local authorities with providing houses for those *in need* in their areas. Later the 1949 Housing Act opened up council housing *for all*, as Nye Bevan wanted all classes to live together in a new classless society. This was the heyday of policies of social mix and social balance in council housing [but see Cole and Goodchild (2001) on how they failed in these objectives]. In the 1950s and 1960s inner city slums were bulldozed through urban renewal programmes that built new council estates in their place, including a number of modernist high-rise estates, such as the Aylesbury. The 1960s marked the high point of state council housing construction. By the mid 1970s over a third of housing in the UK was council, this marked the high water point. From the mid 1970s onwards there was a gradual downgrading of council housing, in 1977 (when the Aylesbury was finally finished) under a Labour government council housing was no longer for the masses but only to be allocated to those *in real need*,

for example welfare recipients, single mothers and the homeless. Since then, a series of "moral panics" have emerged over the residents of council estates (Jones 2011). In the 1980s with the legislation of Thatcher's "right to buy" the council housing system began to implode (Hanley 2007). New Labour's "new urban renewal"⁵ (Figure 3) was the final death sentence for monolithic council estates in Britain. As this paper shows it can also be seen as an example of capitalism rendering parts of the population (council tenants) disposable, a process of accumulation by dispossession (cf Harvey 2003).

From 1997 New Labour tasked itself with dealing with the downgrading of council estates. The SEU and the Urban Task Force both promoted the idea of mixed communities (Lees 2003a, 2008). Drawing on ideas about an "underclass" (Murray 1990) they set about deconcentrating poverty on British council estates [see Bridge, Butler and Lees (2011) on the relationship between the US policy of poverty deconcentration and British mixed communities policy; and Wallace (2010) on New Labour and the deployment of "community" in the governance of poor neighbourhoods]. Social mix informed regeneration policy and early programmes, such as the New Deal for Communities (NDC), launched to tackle social exclusion in deprived areas. Importantly, New Labour aimed to "reduce social exclusion and promote social mobility through cross-tenure bridging social capital, rather than through social mixing within housing tenures and neighbourhoods" (Bond, Sautkina and Kearns 2011:70). As Levitas (1998) and Watt and Jacobs (2000) argued, their ideas were dominated by a moral underclass perspective even if it came out as a social integrationist one. To New Labour, council estates were a product of past failed attempts at social engineering [see Wacquant

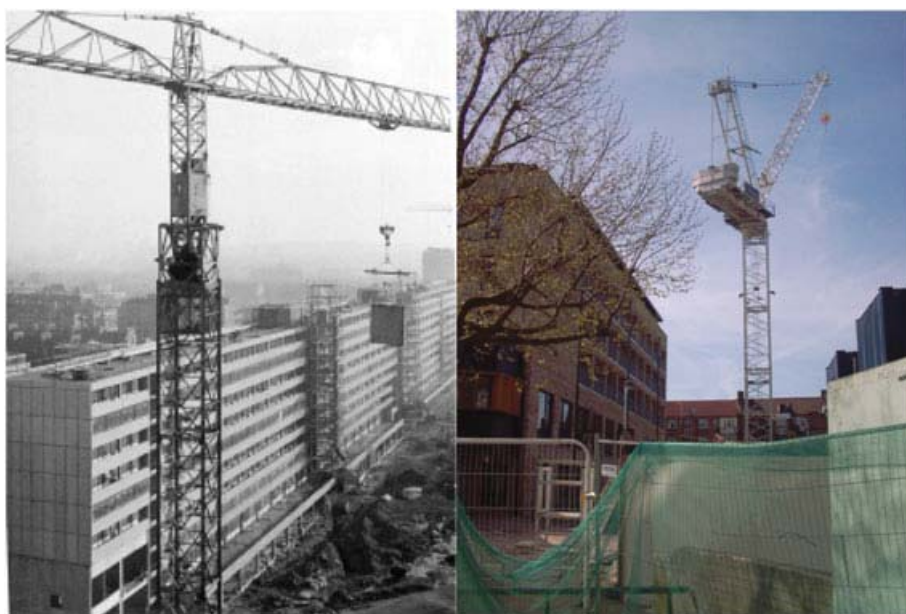


Figure 3: Old and 'New Urban Renewal' on the Aylesbury Estate Black and white/'old' photograph ©English Heritage (John Laing Collection) Colour/'new' photograph Author's own

(2009:308–309) for an excellent critique]. But they replaced a more benign social engineering with a more *revanchist* form of social engineering—the goal being a new moral order of respectable and well behaved (middle class) residents. This was especially revanchist on those large council estates in the UK being completely demolished and rebuilt as mixed communities. As Jones (2008:356) has argued: “In many ways the process of realizing urban developments in the UK today, with the emphasis on partnership working, community involvement and sustainability, is significantly different from the process as it operated during the post war building boom. In other respects, however, there are some striking similarities”. Hyra (2008:5) discusses similar mixed income projects in Chicago and New York City: “At the turn of the twenty-first century, America is experiencing a new round of urban renewal ... communities have gone from being red-lined to green-lined, from the crack house to the coffee shop ... It is imperative that scholars uncover the dynamics and consequences associated with these monumental transformations”.

The Aylesbury Estate Used to Symbolically Launch New Labour Policy

On the day after New Labour’s general election victory in 1997 Tony Blair made an unexpected visit to the Aylesbury Estate where he launched New Labour’s version of the US “welfare to work programme”, making an infamous speech highlighting the Aylesbury Estate’s residents as Britain’s “poorest” and the “forgotten”, many of whom “play[ed] no formal role in the economy and were dependent on benefits” (Blair 1997). Very quickly afterwards the Aylesbury was given NDC status and studies began on how the estate could be regenerated. The NDC was given £56.2 m over 10 years to lever in a further £400 m as part of its proposed stock transfer from council to housing association tenure. But the local community voted in a local referendum against the stock transfer of the Aylesbury from Southwark Council in December 2001. Seventy-three percent voted to keep the whole estate council (76% of the estate voted). Piers Corbyn, chair of the United Campaign to Defend Council Housing in Southwark, and brother of the London Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn, said: “This is a big blow to the gentrification of Southwark! ... This is a crushing defeat for privatisation. If there is money around for improvement it should be spent on council tenants” (Weaver 2001).

Although there was undoubtedly tenant dissatisfaction with the appearance of the estate, its maintenance, cleanliness, lighting, security and crime, most of the tenants interviewed in a MORI poll at the time were satisfied with their accommodation and with the estate as a place to live (*Southwark News* 18 April 2002). Southwark Council were forced to retain ownership of the Aylesbury and rethink. But after more studies, on 27 September 2005 the Liberal Democrat-led Southwark Council decided that the estate was too expensive to refurbish and that demolition was the most cost-effective solution. They set about *persuading* the tenants that the estate was structurally unsound and a poor quality place to live:

Over 70% voted to refurbish, because people didn’t want to move. So I’m thinking if it was that bad, everybody would have said let’s go, let’s get rid of it. People, including

myself, voted to make it better. Instead of moving us out, they could have repaired it. It's been done on other estates . . . That's what people wanted. It was turned down. What people wanted they didn't agree [interview, head of a tenant and resident association (TRA) 2011].

There has been research into the ways that "outside" agents/forces like the media, government and others have produced discourses of urban decline, of a "sin city", to further their retaking of the inner city (for a review, see Lees and Demeritt 1998; Smith 1996); there has been less work investigating the purchase of these discourses from "inside" of deprived neighbourhoods. This paper looks at both. In so doing it draws on archival research and textual analysis of relevant documents (eg policy and planning documents, newspaper accounts, minutes of council meetings, etc.); analysis of tape-recorded documentation by *Spectacle* (an independent television production company specialising in documentary and community-led investigative journalism; see <http://www.spectacle.co.uk>) on the consultation process in the early 2000s; 21 in-depth interviews with tenants, including those in TRAs, members of Urban Initiatives, and those associated with individual blocks, undertaken in 2011; and ongoing action research with tenants on the estate.⁶ The voices of Southwark Council and the Aylesbury NDC are fairly well documented and in the public realm; the task in this paper was to give a platform for other voices.

Stigmatising the Aylesbury as a "Sink Estate": Revanchism at Work

Morrison (2003) argued that there is a powerful language at work in regeneration projects which contrasts us (the middle class) with them (the working/under class), that a stereotyping and pathologising language is used. Southwark Council and the Aylesbury NDC did not just have to persuade the tenants that the estate was a poor place to live, but the wider public too. *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First* (see <http://aylesburytenantsfirst.org.uk/>) allege that the Aylesbury NDC funded a PR press campaign that branded them "The Estate from Hell" in *The Times* and *The Independent* newspapers in 2008 [see Beauregard (1993) on similar "voices of decline"]. Here are some excerpts:

Red Lion Row, a tiny South London backstreet overshadowed by one of the bleak grey apartment blocks of the infamous Aylesbury estate, has had a bloody recent history. It was here, last Boxing Day, that a 20 year old Nigerian born asylum seeker named Dipo Seweje was shot dead after being chased through the estate. His body lay undiscovered for 26 hours in a communal garden.

Here, too, in late 2005 an 18 year old pastor's daughter, Ruth Okechukwu, was pulled from a car and stabbed repeatedly by a teenage Angolan immigrant for failing to show him respect. A bunch of long dead flowers marks the spot where she died (Fletcher 2008).

It sounds like the marketing job from hell. A top public relations firm has been hired to give a good name to one of Britain's most notorious housing estates. The 7,500 residents of the Aylesbury Estate in south London are well aware that their home has become a byword for all that is worst about the concrete jungles built in haste during the 1960s housing boom (McSmith 2008).

The tabloids did likewise. *The Sunday People* made the estate an emblem of the government's failure with respect to council estates, one columnist said: "Estates like the Aylesbury and Heygate are where the new generation of drunks, junkies, muggers and wreckers are growing up now". *The Daily Mail* said: "To walk around the sprawling landscape of the Aylesbury estate is like visiting hell's waiting room" (<http://mtvgenerationgems.blogspot.com/2009/06/aylesbury-estate.html>)! As Wacquant (2008:271) argues, "It matters little that the discourses of demonization that have mushroomed about them [social housing estates] often have only tenuous connection to the reality of everyday life in them".

This media denigration was very useful for the NDC as it branded both the community and its residents as deviant and untrustworthy and thus justified paternalistic treatment of them (cf Jones 2011). It also stereotyped them as abnormal and needing the influence of higher income neighbours, aiding their pursuit of a newly built "mixed" community. Social inequality was recast as a defect of place, with local residents seen as deficient in participating in community—suffering from "network poverty"—leading to social breakdown and isolation (see Amin 2007; Clampet-Lunquist and Massey 2008). In 2008 staff in Southwark Council's regeneration department were ferried to the nearest tube station every night after work to prevent them having to walk through the Aylesbury Estate and risk being mugged. This bus service cost the council £650 a week (and was reported in *The Daily Mail*; see Condron 2008); it underlined the notoriety of the estate and legitimated their plans for the estate.

In fact, by 2005 the Aylesbury Estate had become a national symbol of urban blight, a symbol of British high-rise sink estates, when it featured on TV shows like *The Bill* and *Spooks* [see Smith (1996) on "the gentrification of primetime"]. This culminated in Channel 4 using it as a logo to promote itself between programmes (here a camera moves along a grim upper section of a block of flats, the Latimer, and there is a sense of decay, despair and foreboding; see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfOHndPQFw>). This was symbolic of material dilapidation and socioeconomic marginality. Movies like *Harry Brown* and *Attack the Block* and music videos like Madonna's "Hung up" also used the Aylesbury Estate as a backdrop to portray urban decay. Southwark Council exploited the concrete modernism of its estate. Indeed by the mid 2000s Southwark was third behind Westminster and the City of London in terms of the number of filming days they received (Martin 2005).

But what did residents on the Aylesbury, an estate that had been categorised as deprived and stigmatised as a "sink estate" actually think about their own backyard? Every resident who was interviewed was clear that there was poverty on the estate but that to classify it as a "sink estate" was wrong. Some of the residents talked about politicians visiting the estate after these media reports were published, actually searching for the "sink estate", but to no avail:

The best example was many years ago when the regeneration first started with the Aylesbury, was having politicians coming through the estate. Now we just walked them through the estate and they said where are all the youth hanging on the corner, where's all your trouble. I said it isn't here! (tenant interview 2011).

Residents contacted the newspapers and complained about the stories: "I wrote back and said it's not a hell hole to live in. There's people that live here ... don't just keep telling us we live in shit and that we've got drugs, crime, prostitution and everything around us when we haven't ... that really, really angers me" (tenant interview 2011). Others could see through it: "so all this banter about it being full of gunned and knife yielding gangs is all just fantasy and plays right into the hands of the council ... as I said, this discourse, this system of statements, behind which is some kind of clear agenda" (tenant interview 2011). Residents stated that most of the crimes were not committed by people on the estate, but by people from other areas—Peckham, Elephant, Deptford—who came into the estate because of its open (undefensible) design (see Barton 2005). Importantly, whatever the truth of the matter, the construction of the Aylesbury as a "sink estate" helped the Council and the NDC, but they had to prove that they had the support of the majority of the residents for their demolition/regeneration programme.

Consensus building or participative models have, according to some theorists, served to mask state steering technologies and are a form of "post-politics" (Honig 1993; Mouffe 2005; Ranciere 1999; Žižek 1999; see also Swyngedouw 2007, 2009). One of the big selling points of the "deal" on the Aylesbury was that residents would decide their own futures. This is a cruel deception. The tenants were faced with two unsatisfactory choices, if they rejected the regeneration "deal" they would continue to live on an estate that needs upgrading and repair (but would be very unlikely to get it) or if they accepted the deal (which actually they didn't!) they could have a newly built neighbourhood in which they may not even get a chance to live and even if they did move back their existing community would be broken up and totally changed. Any meaningful choice was highly constrained by the neglect of the Aylesbury (and much of the council housing sector) in terms of broken lifts, heating, dirtiness, etc. (the most mentioned issues in interviews⁷). Yet those who live on the estate are clear that despite the lack of attention to maintenance and repair, it is, for the most part, sound:

the estates are quite, quite good to be demolished ... some of these buildings [have] nothing wrong with them ... It just needs some investment (tenant interview 2011).

But they're lovely flats. We live in good flats. Why should we have to move? (interview, TRA representative 2011).

I think this is stronger than what they are building now. But this bit about ... it's like a pack of cards and is going to fall down and all that ... I think that's propaganda stuff, I think (interview, TRA representative 2011).

Bennington, Fordham and Robinson (2004:270) argue that NDCs in London were in a unique position to lever in funds due to the high land values, property prices and a city-wide context where demand outstripped supply. Watt (2009:235) goes further and argues that the contrast between disinvested local authority stock in London and the highly valuable land it sits on has created a "state-induced rent gap" with massive capital accumulation potential. The Aylesbury was, and still is, emblematic of this "state-induced rent gap".

The Post-Political Construction of Consensus

Ten years after Tony Blair's visit to the estate, the Aylesbury NDC's Steve Pearce (2007:np) claimed: "No social transformation is possible without physical transformation". The NDC and Southwark Council then chose an urban planning and design practice, Urban Initiatives, to draw up a master plan for the £2.4 billion 20-year regeneration of the Aylesbury. Urban Initiatives prepared an Area Action Plan (AAP) over a period of 2 years which was passed by Southwark Council in January 2010. According to Urban Initiatives an essential part of developing a robust AAP was imaginative and continuous consultation with those with a stake in the area, something the council boasted about:

Wholehearted community engagement has been at the heart of the AAP process from the outset and residents have been integral in shaping the plan. I would like to thank all of the local people who have put so many hours, along with the Aylesbury New Deal for Communities, into shaping this crucial document. 82% of residents expressed support for the plans at the final exhibition . . . We are confident that the extensive consultation over the last four years, together with a careful master planning process have resulted in an AAP which reflects the aspirations of the local community (Southwark Council 2010).

Indeed, Urban Initiatives claimed that "by going above and beyond the statutory requirements we have created a plan with real community buy-in and ownership" (*London Calling* 2010:12). They set up a neighbourhood team of 40 individuals representing residents, local businesses and social and community groups in the Aylesbury. Rebecca Beer, Managing Consultant at Urban Initiatives, stated:

We worked closely with the Team throughout the project we provided urban design training, took them on visits to Paris, Glasgow, Dublin and Amsterdam to demonstrate best practice examples of regeneration elsewhere; and played a bespoke planning game to understand the trade offs between development densities, the provision of open space and community facilities, as well as project funding and delivery (*London Calling* 2010:13).

Beer claimed that the regeneration of the Aylesbury has been, and indeed is being, guided by a community-led area action plan. The Aylesbury project has been hailed as a prototype in tenant-led democracy. But the tenants themselves and anti-gentrification groups would beg to differ and despite the much touted claims about widespread consultation, many tenants have not been involved. Take Shukura, a community activist, who had thrown her considerable energies into various schemes for revitalising the estate, but who tried fruitlessly to secure a post with the NDC. She was worried about the plans and that the majority of the residents were not being represented: "The NDC needs to engage with the tenants", she said. "How many of them actually live on the estate? How could they really talk to us about the way we live? (see Barton 2005). And those that were involved felt that they were not listened to:

They're telling you, you would be listened to . . . Yeah you come along and we'll listen to what you're saying. But it's just a bit of show because they don't really take what you said. They make up their minds and they're just saying that so that it looks good (interview, head of a TRA 2011).

They've made up their minds. So it's full stop. They've made up their minds as to what they're going to do (tenant interview 2011).

The group *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First* are especially critical of Southwark Council's consultation literature and exhibitions for giving out misleading information. They ask how come the Council ignored the 2001 ballot against demolition (undertaken with the ballot on stock transfer) where 73% of the 76% of tenants who responded voted against demolition. The group are currently investigating the corruption of this process. They ask, if the regeneration plans are community led, as Urban Initiatives argues, then why was there not support for the stock transfer and the demolition of the estate from the tenants? Further *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First* claim that the AAP is misleading in stating that there will only be 250 fewer family homes to rent when in fact there will be 700 fewer homes for ordinary people to rent on the estate. They argue that the loss of social housing is masked by new terms like "affordable housing" which incorporate more expensive part rent/part buy properties and by the fact that the Council is not obliged to provide for anyone who does not have a secure tenancy. *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First* clearly align themselves with wider campaigns over council housing in the UK.

The consensus that the Council and the NDC constructed is akin to other examples of post-political consensus. New Labour advocated that local communities should play a larger role in urban regeneration partnerships, the rationales were fourfold: local communities have a better idea of their own localised problems and solutions to them; participation empowers them against social exclusion; their local knowledge is a valuable resource to enhance the expertise of urban regeneration partnerships; and this serves democratic and accountability ends (Maginn 2004:5; cited in Imrie, Lees and Raco 2009). As Tony Blair said: "unless the community is fully engaged in shaping and delivering regeneration, even the best plans on paper will fail to deliver in practice" (SEU 2000:5).

Mouffe (2005), however, discusses the shortcomings of such consensus-based politics and challenges this "third way" philosophy of "cosmopolitan democracy" or "good governance" that conveys that adversarial politics are outdated. She argues that it is a liberal illusion that you can have politics without antagonism. In partnership planning like that enacted on the Aylesbury contestation and conflict have been supplanted by consensus-based politics which smother (but do not replace) conflict/dissent through carefully choreographed processes of participation. In so doing they have depoliticised the political (Baeten 2002, 2009; Crouch 2004; Paddison 2009). In fact, consensus building reached new heights when, in 2010, The Creation Trust, a community development trust, became the successor organisation to the Aylesbury NDC. Creation Trust is a charity, a local voluntary sector organisation that works as an advocate for tenants and residents in improving their quality of life and developing dynamic partnerships between communities, local and central government and businesses during Aylesbury's regeneration (see http://www.creationtrust.org/index.php?css_type=3). The reality is that many ex-NDC people make up the Creation Trust and their stance on the Aylesbury is no different despite the change of governance. The Creation Trust is a post-political construct par excellence—a consensus-building mode of engagement and participation. It is a neoliberal governance structure which ultimately serves to legitimate policies that privilege economic growth (cf Swyngedouw 2007, 2009). Creation Trust was heavily involved in the participatory planning process:

... there were workshops, displays, consultation after consultation ... we even had a mock up flat to show you what these flats would look like.

There was fun days so the parents could come and look at these displays and the kids could have free food, fairground, bouncy castle ... representatives within the estate, the Council and the NDC worked with ... the Bengali group, the Turkish women's group ... It was bloody hard work ... We all came and did it. All free of charge. All that work we've done over the years has all been free of charge (interview with Creation Trust board member 2011).

The residents were "... literally courted by the Council and the developers, the council's PR machine at the time, with fancy sandwiches, and pretty girls showing you all these nice models of how the estate could potentially look" (tenant interview 2011). In doing this the Council and the NDC/Creation Trust were able to mobilise the strategy that they wanted and a post-political governmentality replaced real debate and proper disagreement (Swyngedouw 2009:604). Communicative planning was supposed to respond to the issues that emerged over social engineering and collaborative planning was to be overtly consensus based, but neither have solved the top-down tradition of planning. In this way the social engineering planned for the Aylesbury was no different to that associated with the slum clearances that were part of the story of the birth of the Aylesbury (and many other high-rise estates). But although very reminiscent of the past urban renewal, this new urban renewal is different in that the bulk of the new properties will house much wealthier residents who did not live there before.

The 1960s vision for the Aylesbury was for an egalitarian "estate" created through architecture and planning, the 1990s vision, which remains the overall plan for the estate, is for an inclusive, mixed "community" at the neighbourhood level: "The Old Testament version of Labour Party social engineering mainly consisted of building more council houses and flats. The New Testament version attempts to remould character by remoulding urban space" (Barker 1999). The demolition and displacement that occurred with the 1960s slum clearances for the initial construction of the Aylesbury is no different to the demolition and displacement that began in 2010 as the first residents were moved out and is continuing in 2013. This is social engineering, social cleansing, sold as urban renewal/regeneration. The arguments put forward then and now are similar—poor quality housing, poverty, crime, etc.—but the means to attain redevelopment has changed significantly from centrally planned mass production to a public/private partnership (and there is a real fear now that it may be a purely private development in the future). The mode of governance, however, remains as top down as it did in the 1960s urban renewal schemes, despite new processes of public participation. As Brenner and Theodore (2002) remind us, neoliberal policy experiments operate in the context of past political projects and their legacy.

The New "Sim Estate"

Once the decision to demolish the Aylesbury Estate had been made by the Council, the concept of social mix became the discursive vehicle with which to sell the plan to the public and the residents:

A neighbourhood where there is a mix of tenures, incomes, ages and household types. Mixed communities help to overcome the problems associated with areas of deprivation such as reduced local business activity, limited local jobs and employment ambitions, downward pressures on school quality, high levels of crime and disorder, and health inequalities (Aylesbury AAP, Preferred Options Report, 179, Southwark Council 2010).

The new "simulated" Aylesbury was going to be more socially inclusive, better designed and contain more social capital. Social mix has been set up as the alternative to the degeneration and under-maintenance of the housing stock, mirroring the "false choice" (outlined in the above section on the sink estate) between gentrification and neighbourhood decline [see DeFilippis (2004) on such false choices]. The regeneration plan was a simulated vision of a mixed community held up by a simulated consensus. Given the pressure under New Labour's 2000 Decent Homes Standard which required better council house standards, but gave local authorities no funding to achieve this, it is not surprising that Southwark Council went down this road (Watt 2009). The strategy for the demolition and rebuilding of the Aylesbury Estate (The Aylesbury Estate: Revised Strategy) lists the construction of 3200 private new build homes and 2000 social rented new build homes. This fulfils the (then) UDP requirement for 40% social housing. But in essence the plan is to demolish the vast majority of the Aylesbury (despite much of it being structurally sound) and to create a new-build development that will attract middle class incomers: "The people who are going to be living here in the future, which excludes all of us who have been kicked out as part of the scheme, will be better educated no doubt, and will be wealthier" (tenant interview 2011). This is a clear example of a policy of state-led gentrification premised on mixed communities policy (Bridge, Butler and Lees 2011; Lees 2008). The plan does not acknowledge the "mix" already present on the Aylesbury, which is already very socially and ethnically diverse, nor does it address issues of social sustainability. Moreover, it undermines the estate functioning as a reception area for people seeking asylum, displacing this function elsewhere.

In the NDC's promotional material there is no recognition that different social groups may have different interests and middle-class strengths are presented as something that will be advantageous for low-income people, whose social networks are allegedly weaker. But tenants proclaim that their estate is already "mixed": "I think all this is rubbish to me. We have professionals living among our mix" (tenant interview 2011). And they can see through the council concealing exclusionary sentiments in the progressive clothing of social mix. Žižek (1989) says that subjects know when an ideological mask exists. Indeed tenants are clear that the idea and rhetoric of social mix is being used to detract from the fact that the council are going to privatise much of the property and land:

So I don't think they actually said it in any sort of words. But it was a policy, it was a strategy that they gradually implemented in a very quiet, interesting way. If you look at Southwark, it's very close to the City, very close to Westminster and what have you. So it would be very attractive to city goers ... if it stays the way it is they're not going to come and live in the estate (tenant interview 2011).

I think that (the idea of social mix) belongs to more high level policies. I think these are the dominant discourses that worked their way down from government level ... where it's proposed that by making more of a mix and not having such a segregated, and such contrasting differences between people in estates (and elsewhere) will have a positive outcome (tenant interview 2011).

I don't think they were really trying to sell the social mix ... behind closed doors I think what they probably say is that they'll attract new businesses and new people. Obviously guys with the money ... So there's a lot of undertone to it, which implies what's going to happen. But nobody is actually saying that we're going to bring people from the City to come and live with you (interview TO representative 2011).

Blomley (2004:99) has criticised a similar "game" in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where property owners "deployed a language of balance in the service of exclusion".

In this particular case it is critical to see the relationship between the notion of creating mixed communities (the new "sim" community) and displacement (see also Davidson and Lees 2010). The physical regeneration of the estate as suggested in current plans will displace approximately 20% of the existing households, the people whom, ironically, the regeneration process is being targeted at. The existing leaseholders who bought under "right to buy" will be priced out. The 1850–2050 "left over" social tenants might be appeased with new homes but will have to fit themselves into a new community almost twice the current density and in which the majority of the inhabitants will be middle class. Nevertheless, Southwark Council is going ahead with their plans to bring the middle classes into the Aylesbury, hoping that the middle classes will improve standards in local public services and bring more money into the area. The Michigan born Director of Regeneration in Southwark, Fred Manson, said "We're trying to move people from a benefit-dependency culture to an enterprise culture. If you have 25 to 30 per cent of the population in need, things can still work reasonably well. But above 30 per cent it becomes pathological" (quoted in Barker 1999). Manson was very close to the Blairite elite, he had advised on the Urban Task Force Report.

The first phase of the demolition (phase 1A) began in 2010 (Figure 4) and the impacts of displacement [see Davidson (2009a) on the ethics of dwelling] are already being felt:

from the very first day that the demolition was announced, the social bond was affected, because people knew that ultimately within the framework of the next few years, they wouldn't be seeing each other on a daily basis again. They wouldn't be part of the same community. I've got a friend of mine **** he could only afford to move out of the area with what the council was offering him for evaluation and ended up moving into a home somewhere just outside Sidcup, in Kent. ****'s probably in his late 50s and he lives with his wife. He's lived here all his life. He's got people that would see him on a daily basis and his family lives here in the area. He's now living there isolated just outside Sidcup having broken all of his social ties, he's now suffering from severe depression. I think that is symptomatic of a lot of people. There's a lady ... she'll come back and she'll



Figure 4: Demolition phases, Aylesbury Estate

come back because she had to move out to **** Heights ... she walks the dog around the estate, she'll call into a few people in the neighbourhood who she knows. She says she hates it where she is now. She's probably again in her late 50s. It's not easy to build new social ties, especially the older you are ... I think it's had a profound effect on people ... I mean the number of people I've heard who've died during this decanting process. I mean okay, they being elderly and you could argue that they would have died anyway. But I couldn't count them on my hands because I haven't got enough fingers, the number of people I heard who've passed away as a result of having to move ... I have no way of keeping track of this. But for me, it's genocide (tenant interview 2011).

Significantly the Council has become London's new Rachman,⁸ and this has affected leaseholders too. For example, Mr Hilmi is the owner of a one-bedroom maisonette on the Aylesbury Estate which he bought from the council in 1990 for £55,000. The council is offering him £67,000, but if one runs the council's own valuation through the Nationwide House Price Index (<http://www.nationwide.co.uk/hpi/default.htm>) calculator for Greater London the flat should now be worth £179,246. Yet according to Land Registry (<http://www.landregistry.gov.uk/>) figures, house prices in Southwark have risen on average 50% above the Greater London index since 1990. As such Mr Hilmi's property is more likely worth £206,250 (see <http://halag.wordpress.com/rachmanism/>). In the first decantments, as leaseholders on the Aylesbury saw their neighbours move out, they were left behind in blocks that became infested with vermin, and over time services were cut—heat, post, rubbish collections, and so on. Fighting in situ for full compensation is not easy!

And it is not just direct displacement that is an issue; down the line in the new so-called "mixed neighbourhood" the voices of tenants and lower income community groups will likely be submerged and subordinated by incoming middle class homeowners, as this group gain power in the area [see August and Walks (2011) on such a process in a very similar Canadian example].

Residents have real fears for the future: “Well, we’ve got very nice neighbours. That’s why I worry about moving, about being separated from all these people I’ve lived with for all these years” (Barton 2005).

It’s going to be a misery when they sell . . . people will be suffering with depression when they’ve got to move out. We’ve got to get . . . there’s got to be vans and everything that pick us up. It’s going to be really, really bad. As I said to you I prefer to stay where I am . . . Before we were told that if we moved out of where we are living, we could have a right to return. That changed . . . over the last 10 years the council have changed its regeneration over and over again . . . They say one thing and they change it to the next. People don’t know where they are. It’s really bad. It really is . . . don’t take it away from people who have lived here all their lives and move them away from their children. They’ve got nowhere to go. They’re elderly people . . . some of these could have a heart attack and die . . . Why demolish spaces when they are ok? (interview with TRA representative 2011).

A number of studies have underlined the difficulties that relocated public housing residents have in rebuilding social networks (eg Clampet-Lunquist 2004; Gibson 2007), and this should come as no surprise given the many studies of displaced communities and social networks as a result of post-war urban renewal programmes.

Resistance: Regenerated Out of Existence?

Many radical ideas have been eclipsed by the neoliberal tsunami and, especially in Britain, radical urban critiques have themselves been regenerated out of existence, “curdled into an alibi” for gentrification . . . The organised left only ever had a spotty record on housing and community politics and no real opposition to Blair’s regenerationism emerged there. More broadly, the political defeats after the mid 1980s left many with little energy to fight, and many otherwise good souls, exhausted by the defensive and broadly failed struggles against Thatcher and desperately keen to see a Blairite alternative, concluded that if they couldn’t beat them they better join them. Ex radicals became frontline regeneration managers for local councils, others even became developers. Architects and planners, not generally given to the language of gentrification, levelled no audible objection [Neil Smith 2011, writing about Owen Hatherley’s (2010) *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*].

It is currently in vogue to argue, as above, that neoliberal governance has structured a post-political condition, and the story thus far on the Aylesbury suggests just that. Indeed other authors on gentrification and social mix argue likewise: Loopmans, de Decker and Kesteloot (2010) argue that social mix strategies can be encompassed within Gramsci’s idea of “passive revolution” as they incorporate political resistance by internalising their claims. But I am concerned about what Bylund (2012) calls “postpolitical correctness”. The assertions about a post-political condition seem very real, but the orthodoxy of post-political debate has perhaps gone too far. A similar line of critique is being made by a small group of geographers who have become increasingly critical of the adequacy of vocabularies currently used to encapsulate the geography and place of urban injustice (Cloke, May and Johnsen 2010; DeVerteuil, May and von Mahs 2009). The latter argue that the vocabularies of, for example, the carceral, revanchist and post-justice city (Davis 1990; Mitchell 1997; Smith 1996) are incomplete analyses, inaccurate portrayals that fail to grasp the

complexity of urban reality. I would not go that far because these often are *very* accurate portrayals, but I am concerned that such accounts actively *produce* a post-political condition (cf Bylund 2012:322) and that they leave little room for first, resistance, and second, alternative visions/possibilities. I would like a more open and hopeful grammar of urban injustice (see Lees 2003b, 2004; MacLeod 2011; Marcuse et al. 2009). With these newly emerging critiques, and indeed earlier critiques (eg Lees 1998; MacLeod 2002) in mind, I would like to see some significant movement beyond these rather dystopian grammars of urban injustice, of the revanchist and the post-political city, as much as I am attracted to them [on the perverse allure of this, see Merrifield (2000)], for they leave no room for a politics of hope (cf Harvey 2000, 2004).

As such, I turn now to resistance on the Aylesbury Estate. Despite its best efforts, neoliberal governance has not managed to kill local politics on and around the Aylesbury Estate, and these politics are more than the rare and fragile political eruptions that Swyngedouw (2009) puts forward as the antidote to the post political. There is still dissent on the Aylesbury, there remains antagonism, and radically different views are still being voiced. "Political steering" has not silenced tenants and local activists on the Aylesbury (see <http://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/>), but the fact that the state and public policy became so heavily involved and invested in gentrification in the UK under New Labour, especially in London, made, and still makes, it a complex process to resist. Hackworth and Smith (2001:468) have argued that "effective resistance to gentrification has declined as the working class is continually displaced from the inner city, and as the most militant anti-gentrification groups of the 1980s morph into housing service providers". There were militant anti-gentrification groups in London (see <http://www.56a.org.uk/jam.html> on those in Southwark) but these never gained the notoriety that those in New York City did [see Smith (1996) on the Tompkins Square Park riots]. However, importantly resistance to gentrification has not declined in London; rather it has become intertwined with campaigns against the demise of council housing (Watt 2009). And "policy" is important, for new government policy complicated anti-gentrification efforts in London and the UK. As we have seen, dissent and resistance have been institutionalised into the urban regeneration (gentrification) process and in the same way that it is hard to argue against gentrification when it is sold to us through the morally persuasive discourse of social mixing, it is difficult to argue that the local community does not have a voice in the regeneration plans for their community. Under New Labour the state got hold of all the ribbons! Indeed the whole process of managing community relations became a business in the UK (and especially in London where local politics are more complicated), "communication specialists" began to offer advice to local boroughs on community and stakeholder engagement (see the video clips etc. on community engagement regarding regeneration of the Aylesbury at: <http://www.creationtrust.org/index.php?css type=3>). Part of the reason it has been so difficult to criticise British urban policy and resist gentrification in the UK has been because the British "urban renaissance" was actually full of socially, economically and morally persuasive arguments, and because they integrated protest and dissent over urban regeneration plans into the process itself.

They institutionalised public participation in the planning process, creating a post-political condition.

Many of the residents say: “No. Can’t resist. We just have to make sure we work together and make sure we give us a better place for ourselves and our family” (tenant interview 2011). But other folk are resisting. Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First have called for an independent inquiry into the manipulation of democracy (the CONSultation process as they are calling it) by those with vested interests. They are calling for the suspension of the activities of Creation Trust, and strategising off the new economic state of affairs, are asserting that “the whole estate demolition-privatisation strategy is completely unrealistic in the new and profound financial crisis”.

Equally importantly, they are calling for the construction of a new image of the Aylesbury:

Our lived experience of crime on the estate does not match the myth and this is borne out by statistics. We need to counter these pernicious negative stereotypes. By listing and emphasising the many positive features of our homes that we enjoy, and celebrating our diverse community, we strengthen our bargaining position. We are not going to be bullied into giving up good sound insulation, light, views and space because of exterior neglect and delays rehousing growing families due to current housing scarcity. The best, most practical, environmentally friendly, cost effective, community empowering and health giving solutions to the problems of the Aylesbury will not involve wholesale demolition. We believe that the reasons for wanting total demolition of the Aylesbury were political, not structural. We question the wisdom of any council selling off its property assets rather they should be enhancing them with investment and the best estate management. There should be whole sale block by block re evaluation of structural soundness and financial viability of refurbishment (The Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First, <http://aylesburytenantsfirst.org.uk/>).

Indeed, angry at the way that the estate has been negatively represented on television and in movies, a series of complaints were made to Southwark Council led by the Aylesbury Residents and Tenants Association: “Every time I see the [Channel 4] logo it makes me cringe. They put washing hanging out in areas that doesn’t even have washing. They put loads of rubbish across the whole of the area. It’s absolutely terrible!” (Jean Bartlett, Aylesbury Residents and Tenants Association, interviewed in Hastings 2012).

The result is that the council has now set strict rules to prevent negative storylines using the estate. Residents have been clear that they want the estate banned from appearing on television and in movies unless represented in a positive light. Artists have also been involved in critiquing the grammar of the sink estate—see David Hephher’s “Lace, concrete and glass: an elegy for the Aylesbury Estate”, shown in the Flowers Gallery in Hoxton in 2012 (see <http://www.flowersgallery.com/exhibitions/4342-lace-concrete-and-glass-an-elegy-for-the-aylesbury-estate>).

There has been, and is, growing anti-gentrification activism from the tenants and the leaseholders (if complicated by their different situations). In April 2012 the Southwark Notes Archive Group (SNAG) and Aylesbury Tenants First led an anti-gentrification walk “Walking the rip off: Heygate to Aylesbury”; in November 2012 there was a “one-day convergence against the gentrification of Elephant

and Castle".⁹ And there is resistance to the state-led gentrification of the Aylesbury from the outside as well as the inside. Anti-gentrification efforts around the plans for the Aylesbury comprise a mixture of tenants and DCH or "Defend Council Housing" activists from outside of the Aylesbury. Their concerns are firmly about gentrification, displacement and security of tenure. As Watt (2009) states, opposition to state-led gentrification in London is intertwined with one of the five threads of resistance that Hackworth (2007:190) delineates: that which "aims to protect or preserve gains made under the Keynesian managerial state". Given the importance of social housing as a buffer against gentrification in London, defending council housing is an anti-gentrification effort in its own right. The pressure from DCH probably led Southwark Council to organise a "housing commission", facilitated by the think tank The Smith Institute, to consider a 30-year housing investment strategy, looking at the future financing, ownership and operation of Southwark's homes. The key questions being asked are: Is there a future for traditional council housing? And if yes, who should council housing be for?

With a change of government, in June 2010, the Aylesbury regeneration programme lost £20 million of Homes and Community Agency (HCA) money. The future of the Aylesbury is on hold, despite a cross-party agreement that it will be regenerated, until further funds are in place. Southwark is currently looking for a long-term development partner to work with it on developing the estate over the next 20 years, but in the summer of 2012 they signed a contract with the London and Quadrant Group to regenerate site 7 (the next parcel of the estate on the list); demolition will begin in 2013. Down the line there will no doubt be more privatisation. Indeed, there remains much fear about the regeneration programme as this interview with a tenant (anti-gentrification) activist shows:

We are worried that if we lose the council housing, we lose it for good . . . We are unsure about the future. Most probably any tenants with rent arrears will lose their rights. They intend to provide 700 fewer council homes than currently exist. The selection process is unclear. They are trying to persuade elderly people to move away from London. But people have been living here for a long time, and have social networks here. People know each other and support each other . . . We want council housing, and more council housing, with secure tenancy rights. We do not use the term "social housing" which means all sorts of things (quoted in Workers' Liberty 2010).

There is optimism, but new fear too:

The Aylesbury has been set back now as well because it lost the HCA funding that it'd been allocated. So there is a bit of optimism there and there is now a fight on to try and swing it round and force the council to keep the estate and to maintain it and refurbish it. But I'm worried it will be swung round the other way. And instead of regenerating or building with HCA funds, they'll just hand the land over to a private developer completely like they've done with the (adjacent) Heygate (tenant interview 2011).

There are also fears that new groups claiming to represent local voices are being falsely set up:

Now the chap who set this Elephant Hub up, his name is ****. He used to be a Lib Dem councillor and councillor for regeneration at the time this whole scheme was cooked up

back in the late 90s. He's not on the council anymore. But he's working on the payroll of the private developer ... so I think it's very suspicious that he would want to get involved and establish a community group, when there's already one which has been long established (tenant interview 2011).

Conclusion: Moving Beyond Post-Political Correctness

it might be fruitful to fend off the risk of postpolitical correctness, a situation in which there is just the true exegesis of words and not many empirical problems left in the discussion (Bylund 2012:324).

The Aylesbury Estate is still in limbo, as indeed it has been for most of the past 15 years. The stock transfer and the mixed communities initiative (MCI) is largely on hold, exemplifying what Smith (2011) called the “naked class politics of austerity”. A politics even more obvious in the housing benefit changes that will render inner London to be almost completely gentrified; and the tenurial insecurities being mooted whereby new council tenants (and those displaced) will have no security of tenure and will have to reapply for their tenancy every two years, destroying their sense of place and permanence. This is especially significant in Southwark, which is the largest council landlord in London and the fourth largest in the UK. In the meantime some interesting things are happening. London's current mayor—Boris Johnson—has slowly begun to downgrade the mixed communities initiative: in June 2011 he dropped the previous mayor's (Ken Livingstone) quota of 35–50% of homes on large redeveloped sites in London having to be affordable/social housing; now it is up to the boroughs to decide on this issue. This “is simply the latest brick taken from the wall of a London-wide policy designed to encourage mixed communities” (Bill 2011).¹⁰ Developers are now being allowed to buy their way out of having poorer people living in their new developments, for example, Southwark Council has recently taken £9 million from the builders of 197 flats behind the Tate Modern (the NEO Bankside development) rather than force them to sell 34 of the units to social housing providers,¹¹ enabling the developer to build private homes for the rich alone. It seems then that the social experiment of using planning laws to mix communities across London is being abandoned by stealth. I argue in Lees (2012) that at least mixed communities policy in countries of the global North (unlike the global South) guarantees at least some social housing and protection for the poor (disputes over “affordability”, displacement and gentrification aside), it seems that in the very near future in Britain this may not be the case. In addition, the Mayor is now claiming that affordable rent is equivalent to social rent, thus removing the requirement in strategic planning policy to provide social rented homes in London at all.

Gibson-Graham (2006) have been critical of “strong theory”; that is, critical urban scholarship that provides explanations of the processes of urban restructuring that seem all powerful, all pervasive and impossible to challenge. Aligning myself with such critiques I would rather leave this paper with something optimistic to say, for we need a politics of hope, a politics that can emerge out of these “new ruins”. The problem with post-political rhetoric is that it is all or nothing, and implies that short of a total revolution nothing can be done. This amounts to a politics of

despair. I would argue that the economic downturn and the new ambivalence towards the mixed communities initiative from the current British government and Mayor of London provides opportunities for expressing alternative visions. There is capacity out there to formulate urban justice movements, alliances and coalitions that can result in more than just minor eruptions. The work that Just Space¹² has been doing with respect to the new London Plan demonstrates this, for they have launched robust challenges to the lack of socially rented housing in the new London Plan and to the displacement and gentrification occurring due to "regeneration" (see Edwards 2010). They are well aware of the importance of grammar and its injustices, as the debates over "affordable housing" and what that actually translates as show [see The London Tenants Federation's document on The Affordable Housing Con (<http://www.londontenants.org/>), which made the pages of a national broadsheet (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/davehillblog/2011/may/12/londons-affordable-housing-supply-failing-to-meet-need>)]. Likewise tenants on the Aylesbury Estate have been very adept at rejecting the urban injustices that have been constructed over them and practiced upon them, and this can only be built on. Resistance has been at the level of the individual (those who complained to the newspapers about the "sink estate" stories), at the level of individual blocks (through tenant representatives), for the Aylesbury as a whole (The Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First), Southwark wide (SNAG), London wide (Just Space, the London Tenants Federation), and indeed national campaigns to defend council housing (DCH). These different scales and geographies of resistance matter and they are still very much in progress. The Aylesbury has a window of opportunity now to suggest ways of forging equality with difference (something quite different to mixed communities policy) (cf Lees 2003b). The bottom line is that "for mixing to have a role in making our cities more just the people being mixed need to be in proximity on their own terms and those terms need some level of equivalence or comparability" (DeFilippis and Fraser 2011).

Like Just Space and the London Tenants Federation, I would argue that we need to urge government to maintain a viable public housing stock, and although high-rise housing has a negative reputation in London (but see Baxter and Lees 2009) this large-scale source of affordable housing needs to be protected because it is critical to preventing massive displacement (cf Freeman 2006; Hyra 2008; Newman and Wyly 2006). I would advocate, as do many on the Aylesbury Estate, the less socially destructive, step-by-step refurbishment of the Aylesbury, involving the tenants properly in this process. And although I too argue that now is the time to push such an agenda—in a time of austerity—this no doubt would be easier in provincial cities but will be less easy in London where despite the economic difficulties property prices continue to increase and rent gaps have survived. And in pushing for the protection of council housing and the gradual refurbishment of the Aylesbury Estate, we need to have a clear sense of how discourse (grammar) can be used to negotiate conflicting perspectives and alignments. As Modan (2007:321) says: "If we want to create communities that serve the interests of justice and equality, then we need to consider what's at stake in the ways we *talk* about places, and find *discourses* that can sustain the kind of society that we want to live in" (emphasis added).

We need to move towards a new grammar for the just city (see also Davidson 2009b) and the next task would be to work out theoretically what the bases of such demands for the “right to the city” might be: “There are strategic political reasons to do so today, joining the interests of the Excluded with those of the Included” (Marcuse et al. 2009:240). We urgently need to re-establish the city as the driver of democratic politics with an emancipatory agenda, rather than one that ratifies the status quo or gets mired in a dystopic post-justice city. To do this, urban study still “needs a stronger normative and utopian dimension to complement its tradition of diagnostic critique” (Lees 2004:4). But on the Aylesbury right now, the key is to prevent neighbourhood decline and protect lower income groups against displacement and gentrification. I am attracted to Katz’s (2004) multifaceted vocabulary of opposition to the impacts of globalisation through the differentiated ideas of resistance, reworking and resilience: “Here, she incorporates respectively an oppositional consciousness that achieves emancipatory objectives (resistance), an impact on the organization of power relations if not their polarized distribution (reworking), and an enabling of survival in circumstances that do not allow changes to the causes that dictate survival (resilience)” (see Cloke, May and Johnsen 2010:12). Thinking about and explaining resistance in this way avoids the situation whereby the grammar of revanchism and the post-political shuts down emancipatory possibilities. It enables us to think beyond the post-democratic city (Swyngedouw et al. 2010) and to resist, subvert and transcend urban injustices, like those that have been and are being enacted on the Aylesbury Estate.

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Endnotes

- ¹ The regeneration of the Aylesbury Estate is separate from the £1.5 billion regeneration of the adjacent Elephant and Castle, including the Heygate Estate and the Elephant and Castle shopping centre, yet both programmes are following the same programme of gentrification sold through the discursive vehicle of mixed communities policy. The new “socially mixed” Strata Tower in Elephant and Castle with separate lifts for the owner-occupier tenants and the social tenants underlines arguments about the fallacy of mixed communities (see Bridge, Butler and Lees 2011).

- ² By way of contrast some journalists have undertaken some great interviews with residents on the Aylesbury Estate, e.g. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2005/oct/14/communities.g2>
- ³ Thames television production directed by Ken Ashton looking at the changing way of life and decline of Cockney culture around the Old Kent Road, as seen by the residents themselves.
- ⁴ The history and fate of the Aylesbury Estate mirrors, in many ways, Cabrini Green in Chicago—one of the largest public housing projects in the US [see Bennett and Reed (1999) and Lees, Slater and Wyly (2008:203–204) on state-led gentrification and Cabrini Green] which is being redeveloped through the federal HOPE VI programme (see Cisneros and Engdahl 2009).
- ⁵ I have taken this term from Hyra (2008) who uses it to describe the US HOPE VI program of poverty deconcentration in which public housing projects in US inner cities have been demolished to make way for mixed income housing. Like Jones (2008), Hyra (2008) finds striking similarities and differences between post-war urban renewal in the USA and the "new urban renewal".
- ⁶ This research is ongoing, funded by a 2012/13 *Antipode* Foundation Scholar-Activist Project Award (see <http://antipodefoundation.org/2012/08/02/antipode-foundation-awards-201213-the-results/>). Getting residents to speak about their experiences is hard going; they are understandably tired, jaded and depressed by ongoing events and the uncertainty of their futures. Moreover, the Aylesbury has been the focus for research over the last 2–3 years for a number of different institutions and disciplines from art to film to social science; as such, the residents are "research tired" and in fact suspicious of *more* research and middle class researchers, and whether they will help their plight at all.
- ⁷ Baxter and Lees (2009) show that these are also the most significant issues for high-rise residents across the whole of inner London.
- ⁸ See Lees, Slater and Wyly (2008:14) on Rachmanism in London in the 1960s.
- ⁹ See <https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/2012/10/21/the-siege-of-the-elephant-convergence-sat-17th-november-2012/>
- ¹⁰ On the London-wide policy of mixed communities under Mayor Ken Livingstone, see Davidson (2008, 2010) and Davidson and Lees (2010).
- ¹¹ This is a familiar practice in other cities, eg San Francisco.
- ¹² Just Space is an alliance of community groups, voluntary sector organisations and special interest groups taking part in the EiP to press the GLA to improve the new London Plan, to make London a fairer and more environmentally sound city (see <http://justspace2010.wordpress.com/>). My thanks to Michael Edwards, Richard Lee, Sharon Hayward, and others, for sharing their experiences in Just Space with me.

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