THE LONDON BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
AND ACQUISITION OF LAND ACT 1981

Revised Inquiry into

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK
(AYLESBURY ESTATE SITES 1B-1C)

COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER 2014

PINS REFERENCE: NPCU/CPO/A5840/74092

Proof of Evidence of
Richard Baxter
For the Aylesbury Leaseholders Group

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12 December 2017

Background

1. My name is Richard Baxter. I have been a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and a Lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London. I have specialised in the modernist residential high-rise. My PhD explored the lived experience of high-rises in inner London. My early career fellowship, from 2012-2015, aimed to provide a biography of the Aylesbury Estate as home. My next research project is providing an account of the Grenfell Tower fire.

Sources

2. This statement is mainly based on the Leverhulme Trust funded research, which explored the Aylesbury Estate. The research project used qualitative methods, specifically archival research, oral history interviews and home tours with 25 residents, semi-structured in-depth interviews with eight people who had worked on the estate, and my photography. The project has resulted in a journal article in the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research and another in the latter stages of peer review in the journal Antipode so far. I also draw on my PhD research, which was funded by the ESRC and the Department for Communities and Local Government (then ODPM). Based on a representative sample, it explored 44 high-rises in inner London using a postal questionnaire survey, structured in-depth interviews and experiential photo diaries. As well as academic publications, the project resulted in a working paper on the high-rise for Communities and Local Government.

Aim

3. This statement contributes to the argument that the Aylesbury Estate's regeneration (in its current form) and the compulsory purchase of leaseholders' homes are not in the public interest. It takes the view that Southwark Council's assessment of the public interest has been influenced by stereotypes about the Aylesbury

estate and modernist high-rise estates more generally. The statement challenges these stereotypes about the Aylesbury Estate and modernist high-rise estates. It then illustrates the negative affect that the regeneration has had on some residents over the past twenty years. This negative affect needs to be considered in the assessment of the regeneration and the compulsory purchase orders.

The public interest: challenging stereotypes

Architecture and design

4. Southwark Council designed the Aylesbury Estate. An architectural team in Southwark's Department of Architecture and Planning designed the estate in late 1965. Like many architecture and planning departments in the UK, the department was influenced by the modernist architecture of Le Corbusier, and Alison and Peter Smithson. Some of the architects in the team had graduated from the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, where the Smithson's taught.

5. Similar to many modernist estates in the UK and beyond, the Aylesbury Estate's design has been demonised in popular culture. This stigmatisation has helped to justify estate demolition (Kallin and Slater, 2014). I interviewed two of the architects on the original team. They recognise that design mistakes were made. For example, they stated that the shared spaces in the high-rises, such as the lobbies, lifts and corridors, should have been given more thought and there are too many garages. However, these characteristics need to be balanced against a recognition that much of the estate was well designed (see Baxter, 2017: 8). For example, there are many green spaces and playgrounds in the centre of clusters of blocks. Community was important to the modernist architects building estates. As a result, Southwark's architects included a health centre, a community centre, a youth club,

communal laundry facilities and units for shops on the vertical walkways. The flats are successful. They are large due to the Parker Morris standards of the post-war years and have flexible spaces, for example a sliding partition can separate the kitchen and dining space from the living room. The flats also have built in storage. The high-rise blocks were built on a north-south axis and the flat windows are large to maximize sunlight into flats. The large windows also take advantage of the view.

Defensible space

6. Negative attitudes towards modernist high-rise estates tend to be influenced by Oscar Newman's ideas on defensible space. Alice Coleman brought these ideas to the UK in her book *Utopia on Trial*. The defensible space concept argues that anti-social behaviour and crime is more likely in spaces that are not overlooked by residents' windows and where residents do not feel a sense of ownership over the space. Newman and Coleman argued that modernist estates possess these indefensible spaces, such as stairwells, lift lobbies and internal corridors. The theory has influenced policy. For example, some design features, such as vertical walkways, were removed on modernist estates in the 1980s as part of Thatcher's DICE agenda. Some parts of the Aylesbury Estate's vertical walkways were removed or blocked off, such as a section over Thurlow Street. Defensible space has contributed to the belief that there is something inherently wrong with the design of modernist estates, which has subsequently influenced policy decisions to demolish.

7. However, it should be pointed out that defensible space is a controversial idea. Not all shared spaces on modernist estates are indefensible. For example, the green spaces and playgrounds in the centre of block clusters at the Aylesbury Estate are overlooked by multiple flat windows, thus providing surveillance. Furthermore, anti-

social behaviour and crime cannot be reduced to one factor, such as the estate's design (Baxter, 2008: chapter 6). My PhD argued that outcomes in high-rises are the result of interrelationships between multiple factors. Therefore, modernist estates, such as the Aylesbury Estate, cannot be intrinsically linked to anti-social behaviour and crime. If these negative behaviours were thought to be a problem at the estate (and this can be disputed) other measures could have been taken instead of demolition, such as closing off the high-rises and installing secured entry systems.

Living on the Aylesbury Estate

8. The social life of modernist high-rise estates tends to be demonised in popular culture. These stereotypes matter because they affect residents and policy decisions. However, they are extremely partial because they ignore ordinary and positive lived experiences. My PhD research found that high-rise living in inner London is diverse and that the majority of high-rise estates are liveable environments with residents mainly satisfied (Baxter and Lees, 2008). As is well documented, the Aylesbury Estate is a deprived neighbourhood and was awarded New Deal for Communities (NDC) funding in the early 2000s. This deprivation is associated with some social problems, which the NDC partially sought to address. However, it is emphasised that everyday life at the Aylesbury Estate tends to be ordinary and mundane. For example, the residents I interviewed discussed going to bingo, talking to neighbours, having family over to visit, cleaning the communal corridors outside their front doors and cooking in their kitchens. They discussed their memories of the community hall and the communal laundry facilities.

9. Out of the residents I interviewed, the vast majority were happy living on the estate and especially liked their flats. Most residents liked the space, the layout and the natural light. It was their home. As one resident stated '… they're beautiful places, I love it up here. I

love it. It’s a lovely flat.’ This argument about most residents feeling at home on the estate supports the 2001 vote when 73 per cent of residents stated they were against stock transfer and the regeneration.

10. Some of this attachment can be explained by the verticality of the Aylesbury Estate. For Le Corbusier, who influenced the design, vertical living was important in realising the utopian city. Positive vertical experiences and practices are therefore a feature of everyday life on the estate (Baxter, 2017: 9-13). Some residents stated in interviews that they enjoyed walking on the vertical walkways since they offer efficient and safe movement away from cars at ground level. Others discussed how their children liked riding their BMX bikes on the walkways. Some residents in first floor maisonettes also enjoyed talking to their neighbours on walkways below from their dinning room windows. These positive experiences contrast with popular accounts of anti-social behaviour, crime and stabbings on the walkways.

11. The high flats in the high-rise blocks are associated with positive experiences and practices surrounding the view. The significance of these experiences should not be underestimated. ‘Viewing’ involves positive sensations associated with sight, sound and touch. These sensations can result in positive feelings, such as enjoyment, warmth and wonder. The view can also involve verticalised behaviours involving furniture and possessions, with some residents positioning armchairs to face the view and placing their dining tables next to flat windows. In turn this material arrangement can encourage family and community ties. For example, some residents stated that family and friends liked coming round to dinner partially because they were surrounded by the view. Far from the images of social decay that have influenced the policy decision to demolish,

living on the Aylesbury Estate does involve unique vertical experiences. As one resident stated:

'I immediately fell in love. The space, the big windows, the view and I couldn't believe my luck … I felt like, you know, that I am home immediately. It felt the kind of positiveness in this place, every single time when I open the door. The view and light just strikes me and makes me smile' (oral history interview, 2014).

The affect of regeneration on residents

12. Obviously the potential negative affects of regeneration on residents and an area needs to be taken seriously. It must be an important part of any evaluation into whether the public benefit of the regeneration outweighs the private loss to residents and the impingement of their human rights. Arguments against regeneration projects of the type seen at the Alyesbury Estate include the loss of genuinely affordable housing units and the displacement of local residents, many of whom have lived in the area for decades. Some of the other expert witness statements explore these arguments in greater depth. However, I would like to add to these by emphasising two further points.

13. First, examining regeneration projects globally, academic authors Porteous and Smith (2001) argue that there is a tendency to foreground 'rational' considerations, exemplified by financial models, and devalue residents' lived experiences. Drawing on this work, it is emphasised that the estate and flats are *home* to many residents. By home I do not just mean a place where people gather, sleep and eat, but a special place that can be intensely meaningful. Home is thick with memories and emotions. It involves feelings of belonging, attachments and can be central in peoples' identity. All the residents I interviewed viewed the estate and/or their flats as home. Therefore, the leaseholders and tenants at the Aylesbury

Estate are not just experiencing a loss of house or personal property, but also a loss of home. An intensely painful experience, this loss of home should not be taken lightly and needs to be fully recognised in the assessment of the regeneration and compulsory purchase of residents' homes. As a couple of residents stated:

'I love this flat, I love this flat … but to move out of here is going to be murder, believe you me … It's my home' (oral history interview, 2014).

'It's horrible … Just the not being human and not being acknowledged that we are human beings' (oral history interview, 2014).

14. Second, this loss of home is not just a single event that occurs when residents move. At the Aylesbury Estate it has been a prolonged and multidimensional process that began around twenty years ago when the issue of regeneration was first raised (Baxter, resubmitted). Since this time residents have encountered a series of negative experiences and challenges that have resulted in feelings of loss and influenced well being. My research shows that the regeneration has decreased the extent of community. For example, the 2001 vote, and debate over the regeneration, has created tension amongst some community members and weakened community ties. As buildings get closer to demolition longer term residents leave and tend to be replaced by new tenants on short-term contracts. This demographic change decreases the sense of community in the buildings, thus influencing residents' attachment to their homes. Residents have also been affected by changes to the material fabric of the estate. For long term residents witnessing demolished sites from flat windows, for example, can be a difficult experience since it can signify the loss of a familiar environment or friendships. It also means that residents are constantly reminded of their future move,

which increases feelings of anxiety and a sense of loss. As one resident stated:

'At the moment it is very sad to see the demolition of Wolverton. Yes it's very sad. Slowly slowly this estate is coming down and then I'm thinking about myself and what's going to happen in the next five or ten years when Taplow is coming ... Slowly they're eating the apple and then the last bit is going to be us' (oral history interview, 2014).

15. The interior decor of flats, furniture and personal possessions can be important to residents and associated with memories of domestic life. The regeneration has meant that some residents fear leaving some of these items behind, such as kitchen units that have become a familiar part of their lives. Some residents have also been forced to get rid of some of their possessions in preparation for the future move because they will have to downsize; flats at the Aylesbury Estate are large compared to modern flats. This removal of possessions is again associated with feelings of separation.

16. The regeneration has also been accompanied by high levels of anxiety. For many of the residents interviewed even the thought of the move has resulted in anxiety over the future loss of home. As one resident stated 'For the first time in my life I felt at home. But the thought of having to move. It makes me feel so empty.' Anxiety has also resulted from uncertainty over the regeneration. There have been regular changes to the plans for regeneration and ambiguity over whether residents have the 'right to return.' As flats are vacated in blocks approaching demolition, the doors and windows are boarded up with sheets of steel that are welded shut. This steel has made some residents in still occupied blocks worry about what might happen if they are some of the last to leave. As a resident stated:

‘Sometimes it worries me. I think to myself well if they start moving people out which they’ve done over those blocks I’d hate to be left here all alone. Being left here for the last and with all that horrible steel’ (oral history interview, 2014).

Conclusion

17. It has been argued that the current regeneration and compulsory purchase orders have been influenced by stereotypes about the Aylesbury Estate, and modernist high-rise estates more generally. These stereotypes only provide a partial account of the estate. For example, most of estate life is mundane and most of the residents interviewed enjoyed living in their flats. The high-rise residents, especially, benefit from a range of vertical experiences, such as the view from flat windows. This more balanced appreciation of estate life should inform the assessment of the compulsory purchase orders.

18. The negative affects of the regeneration on leaseholders and tenants also need to be more fully recognised. The regeneration involves not just the loss of house or property, but also the loss of *home*. As well as displacement, the regeneration has meant that residents have also encountered a series of negative experiences that have affected their well-being and resulted in feelings of loss over a twenty-year period. Therefore, the severity of this process should be factored into the assessment of the regeneration and the compulsory purchase of residents’ homes.

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Extending displacement in urban regeneration: home unmaking at the Aylesbury Estate in London

Abstract

This paper explores displacement as a process that begins before residents are forced to move in urban regeneration, and involves an unmaking of home. It also develops home unmaking as a practical activity of everyday home dismantling. Using the case study of a modernist high-rise estate, the Aylesbury Estate in London, the paper reveals the multi-dimensional and gradual unmaking of home that occurs before residents move through four categories: the estate's community, its stigmatisation, its materiality and its domestic imaginary. In so doing, it illustrates the dynamic and complex nature of home unmaking in urban regeneration, and argues that this dismantling of home is a further injustice of urban regeneration. The paper demonstrates the advantages of taking literature on home seriously in gentrification research.

Key words: high-rise, estates, urban regeneration, displacement, home, home unmaking

Introduction

The Aylesbury Estate is a modernist high-rise estate in the Borough of Southwark in London, UK (figure 1). It is one of the largest social housing estates in Europe with estimates suggesting that it accommodated up to 10,000 residents in the late 1970s. Designed in 1965 by Southwark Council's Architecture and Planning Department, it is a utilitarian form of modernist architecture. Residents were moved from tenement houses to the estate in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as part of post-war slum clearance. Estate life was initially very good, with residents enjoying the modern amenities in flats, the community and new vertical architecture (see Anonymous 2017). However, like Red Road in Glasgow, the Aylesbury Estate has come to symbolise the failure of the modernist utopian dream (see Campkin 2013)(Coleman 1985). Physical and social problems, such as the deterioration of the material fabric and crime and anti-social behaviour, began in the 1980s. These have been magnified in the popular imaginary through estate stigmatisation (Campkin 2013).

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– THE HIGH-RISE HOME: Verticality as Practice in London

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Abstract

This article investigates the relationship between verticality and home. It develops the idea of 'verticality as practice'. This appreciates verticality not as something that takes place in three-dimensional landscapes, but as the outcome of everyday practical activity. Examining a modernist high-rise estate, the Aylesbury Estate in London, the article identifies and examines a range of vertical practices, illustrating how they are intertwined with home. Vertical practices, such as those associated with the view, help to make a unique and special home, becoming intensely meaningful to residents. However, they also unmake dimensions of home when they interact with the estate's marginality.

Introduction

The verticality of the modernist residential high-rise was always important to the architects of the International Style, such as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius (Le Corbusier, 1935; Wolfe, 1982). They argued that new vertical technologies, like reinforced concrete and lifts, symbolized the modern age. High-rise architecture also provided the urban poor with open green space between the buildings and unobstructed views of the city. This vertical environment was, therefore, a big improvement on life in the dark, confined and overcrowded neighbourhoods of tenement housing (Glendinning and Muthesius, 1994). The vertical encapsulated how modernity could project society into a more socially progressive age. Although this focus on technology and society meant that less attention was paid to home, architects were by no means against the making of home in their vertical buildings as they pioneered a more objective form of living. Feelings of home and belonging would rather be the outcome of creating functional and technological living environments.

Although the high-rise has long fascinated scholars, verticality and home have tended to be on the margins of academic literature on the high-rise. Most of the housing literature on the high-rise, which has dominated writing on the environment, has documented its decline, examining resident isolation (Amick and Kviz, 1975) and anti-social behaviour and crime (Rainwater, 1971; Power, 1997). Turning attention to the reasons for high-rise failure began a long debate that has absorbed representations of the high-rise (see Hillier, 1973; Spicker, 1987) and delayed alternative understandings of the environment. Different accounts have only arisen during the last decade, with Jacobs (2006) paying greater attention to the high-rise's materiality and others exploring high-rise living in London (Baxter and Lees, 2008), Hong Kong and Singapore (Yuen and Yeh, 2011). Moving beyond the focus on the high-rise as housing, a small number of studies are beginning to explore the high-rise as home (e.g. Jacobs and Cairns, 2008; De Vos, 2010; Ghosh, 2014). This understands the high-rise as a domestic environment that is intensely meaningful to residents, and important in identity and belonging (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Contributing to this emerging work, this article aims to explore the relationship between verticality and the high-rise home.

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HIGH-RISE LIVING IN LONDON:

TOWARDS AN URBAN RENAISSANCE?

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