

## **Summary Witness Statement**

1 I am **Beverley Robinson**, leaseholder.. I am a black woman of Caribbean origin. Family members live locally. The Aylesbury has been my home for many years.

### **Right to Buy**

2 I bought my flat under the Right to Buy in February 2005. The application was made in 2003. I chose to become a homeowner with the promise that my part of the estate (the south west corner) was going to be refurbished. I had already enjoyed living on the Aylesbury as a Council Tenant for 19 years with a large African and Caribbean community. I have lived here for 30 years and would like to continue to live here.

3 I loved the spacious rooms and views from my flat and from the communal balcony. The only defect notified to me under paragraph 16(c), schedule 6, Housing Act 1985, pursuant to my RTB application, was “defective roof”. The cost to remedy the defect was stated as £10,000 and the apportionment to my flat as £63.69. [see **BR1**] .

4 In 2004 90% of the South West corner residents had approved the refurbishment scheme. This gave me confidence that at least my part of the estate was going to undergo the refurbishment. [see **BR2**]

5 Other reasons for my purchase: my flat is 10 minutes from close family members. There is excellent public transport in the area, 2 train stations, 2 Underground Stations also many buses (30 bus routes service the Elephant and Castle). There is the prospect of a Bakerloo Line extension station within 7 minutes walk.

6 This excellent public transport makes it very easy for my family to access my home when they come to stay especially visitors from overseas.

7 [this paragraph refers to the neighbourly and community activities I value, centred on the Caribbean and African culture so ingrained within the Aylesbury.]

**8 For the wonderful views from my flat see 2 photos - Exhibits BR/A and BR/B**

**The Aylesbury Community**

9 The Aylesbury was, and is, a vibrant community, very diverse. I loved that I could relate to people with the same skin colour as mine. There are strong support networks [continues to explain the community activities, mutual support, enjoyable recreation, etc..]

10 I valued (and still do) the variety of shops and market stalls in East Street and the Walworth Road.

11 I often see people from the community on the Walworth Road that have been forced out of the area and they have expressed to me that the move out has caused stress and unhappiness. There is nothing there that meets their cultural needs so they come back into the area to meet up with friends and shop at East Street. Moving away from the area does not contribute to their wellbeing.

12 I am fortunate because this important part of our culture is on my doorstep and I do not wish to lose it.

13 With regard to my medical needs, I have been going to the same Group Practice in the area for 30 years and also attend the local hospitals in the area - Guys and St Thomas's - which I can get to within 30 minutes which I attend almost weekly. I am involved in a lot of local hospital community support groups.

14 There are ample parking facilities on the estate and for some of my family who come to visit this is very convenient. The lease to the NHHT property that I was offered at Camberwell Fields prohibits leaseholder parking and forbids the residents from obtaining an on street parking permit [See **BR3**]. This would have been detrimental to me because it would reduce the marketability of the property for sale to a family that used a car . At present there is estate parking at the foot of my flat.

15 The wonderful environment drew me into exercising the right to buy. I could see all over London from different aspects of my property, including many of London's landmarks, and the nearby green space of Burgess Park.

16 I was extremely distressed to learn later of the council's intention to demolish the estate.

**17 Virtually all the above advantages of my flat and living environment continue today.**

### **Refurbishment**

18 My belief in refurbishment has never wavered and I still maintain and would prefer that my property and those on the Order Land (which have not been demolished or stripped out by the Council) be refurbished so that I can remain in my home within the block.

19 On 30 October 2015 I alerted DCLG to the likelihood of the Council damaging buildings on the Order Land [see **BR4**]. The response from DCLG was that no action would be taken until the conclusion of the Inquiry. The destruction has latterly increased. We have requested the Council to cease damaging and destroying buildings on the Order Land but they refused our requests.

20 It was not until early 2014 [see **BR5**] that the full implications of Compulsory Purchase and loss of home became clear to me. I got together with other leaseholders on the order land and formed the Aylesbury Leaseholders Action Group (ALAG). Document BR5 shows the approximately 20 occasions starting March 2014 and ending September 2017 on which ALAG has attempted to alert decision-makers to the need to improve policy and practice and has made representations aimed at mitigating the unfairnesses and stress being caused to leaseholders.

21 Document BR5 shows that through this period the Council neglected opportunities to remove obstacles to acquire by agreement. Notwithstanding the Cabinet decision of 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015 to change the unfair policy with regards

to leaseholders' savings, many difficulties remain for leaseholders who seek to be properly compensated for the loss of their home. One of these obstacles arises from the shared ownership leases. Document BR3 shows that in comparison with my 100% equity Right to Buy lease, Shared Ownership/Shared Equity leases are distinctly more unattractive.

22 I first expressed concerns about this to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2014 [see BR5]. Another major disadvantage is the restricted marketability caused by the pre-emption provisions (designed for different circumstances) and the 100% staircasing provisions. I do not understand why these provisions should apply to a leaseholders being compulsorily dispossessed and displaced, and for whom 100% ownership is impossible on account of the affordability gap.

23 With regards to the pre-emption provisions I express my concerns to Ms Lennon of Notting Housing Trust (NHHT) in an email of 22 July 2015.

The Council has made no effort, in spite of numerous representations by the leaseholders [see BR5], to address the disadvantages of shared ownership/shared equity by reintroducing the “comparative value” or “like for like” option introduced in 2006 but rescinded in 2010, or by providing loans (secured on the property) to enable acquisition of 100% equity.

24 From mid 2015 until the non-confirmation of the order in September 2016 I was in discussion with the council about a number of rehousing possibilities but none would have met my needs nor would have properly compensated me for the loss of my home and property.

25 I note the reference in paragraph 5.19 of the Council's Updated Statement of Case [November 2017] to the provisions of the “Compensation Code” . This “code” does not exist in documentary form and cannot therefore be understood by leaseholders. I also note the council's reluctance to have regard to statutory and other flexibilities to address the ameliorations which ALAG has put to them on so many occasions [see BR5], for example under the wide-ranging powers and discretions permitted by Section 2, Local Government Act 2000.

26 The last of the occasions on which amelioration points were put to the Council (BR5 section 21) was on 12 Sept 2017 when I repeated ten points to the Chief

Executive. She indicated some would be addressed but there has been no follow up.

### **Non Confirmation of the Order - September 2016**

27 I was much encouraged by the Secretary of State's decision not to confirm the compulsory purchase order on a wide range of grounds. As I hope will be clear from this witness statement and from other residents, significant obstacles still remain to fair treatment of displacees. Furthermore I understand that evidence will be given in support of the refurbishment of my block in which I have always been confident.

It is highly regrettable that the Acquiring Authority has demolished or rendered unrepairable a number of blocks. These actions on the part of the acquiring authority may have been intended to prejudice the freedom of the Secretary of State. Fortunately the current condition of the site does not preclude the refurbishment of certain blocks still remaining.

The Secretary of State had good reason not to confirm the order following the first Public Inquiry in 2015 and those reasons still subsist and can be strengthened by this witness statement and others to be received for the second Inquiry.

The Order should not be confirmed.