



# Resounding no vote for 'worst stock transfer'

**Matt Weaver**

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Attempts to sell off one of Britain's most notorious housing estates have been overwhelmingly rejected by tenants after what experts described as one of the worst stock transfer proposals ever put forward.

More than 70% of residents on London's Aylesbury estate, in Southwark voted against a government-backed plan to transfer the 2,500-home estate to Horizon housing group.

Prime minister Tony Blair used the estate to launch a crusade for deprived communities days after coming to power in 1997.

The vote is being hailed by campaigners as a rejection of the boroughs attempts to "gentrify" Southwark and underlines the continuing unpopularity of housing transfers in London.

Housing experts also warned that councils would have to put forward better proposals to tenants in future if they want to transfer their homes.

One transfer expert, who did not want to be named, said: "If this proposal had got a yes vote it would have given a green light to any shit scheme."

He added: "It was the worst proposal I have ever seen."

The Aylesbury scheme included a plan to sell off 1,329 homes to the private sector, an unprecedented level in area where pressure for affordable housing is acute.

Despite the unpopularity of modern high rise blocks among tenants the scheme included plans to build a new 300-home tower block. Space standards on the new homes proposed in the scheme were also well below best practice.

The transfer organisers had made optimistic predictions about the level of public funding available. The redevelopment programme was based on the assumption that either the council or the housing corporation would provide £65m.

The scheme was also criticised by government architecture advisers, the commission for architecture and the built environment, for misleading residents about the physical appearance of the proposals which it said contained "fundamental flaws".

The no vote highlights the relative unpopularity of transfers in London compared with the rest of the country.

In England as a whole roughly one in four transfer proposals are rejected, but so far tenants in four London boroughs have voted against council plans to sell off all their homes compared with only three council areas where tenants have backed the idea.

Piers Corbyn, chair of the United Campaign to Defend Council Housing in Southwark said: "This is a crushing defeat for privatisation. If there is money around for improvement it should be spent on council tenants."

Mr Corbyn, who is the brother of the Labour MP for Jeremy Corbyn, added: "This is a big blow to the gentrification of Southwark."

Southwark council leader Stephanie Elsy said the council was seeking an urgent meeting with housing minister Lord Falconer on the future of the estate. She said: "Tenants have had their say and we will have to look at whatever options are now available."

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