

# We'll fight to stay put until the Heygate replacements are ready

By John Prendergast

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**HEYGATE ESTATE** tenants have begun to dig their heels in about being moved off the soon-to-be-demolished estate and have asked the council to slow down the decant process until the new homes they want to move into are ready.

Representations made to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Monday were rebuffed by the Executive Member for Housing Management, Kim Humphreys, who stated that the estate would not be safe enough to leave the remaining people there. They were beyond the 'tipping point' in terms of community safety, he said.

The council plans fully to decant the estate as part of the area's regeneration plan by September next year, and despite no signed agreement with development partners it insists it will push ahead with the decant. The residents were promised that they could move directly to new homes in 2003, but when the new homes did not appear they were informed they would have to move into a temporary home first.

Responding to a request to revisit the timetable for removing residents Cllr Humphreys said: "In terms of those that have been left behind it

would be unsafe to allow them to remain. As the estate empties we would be remiss as landlords if we left them to stay."

Currently the estate of 1,100 residents has a quarter of its secure tenants and leaseholders left, along with an unspecified amount of temporary tenants who, in some cases, have lived there for up to eight years.

However, speaking to remaining residents on the estate this week the 'News' found that their concerns were focused on the difficulties in finding a new home on the council's Homesearch system.

Rose Farrin (pictured left with Dennis), 68, who lives in the Cuddington block, said: "They're offering us old council stock that no one else wants. Southwark Council are treating us like crap. There's a new block near the Town Hall, but there's only twelve people from the Heygate in there and the rest were key workers. At our age, it's a disgrace. We'll stay here if we have to and fight them in court. If we're the last people here, we'll hold out."

Another resident, John Hayes, 82, said the stress was causing him and his elderly wife great distress. He added: "They promised us brand new houses, but they won't be completed until 2010, maybe even longer with all this credit crunch. The stuff in the Homesearch brochure is rubbish."

The latest issue of Homesearch has



41 properties available to bid on throughout the borough, with statistics in it showing that for the 33 properties that were available in the previous issue, 2903 bids were received from residents in Southwark.

Pete Mason, 71, said: "We're not getting priority in the system; Heygate people aren't getting first refusal on properties. We don't want to be uprooted in our 70s. Heygate has been a good estate. There was some trouble in the late '70s and early '80s here but that was it. Over the years, the kids have been brilliant. The papers make a big fuss about it, but the Heygate is not a slum."

Cllr Fiona Colley, who chaired the scrutiny committee, voiced her concerns that the estate would stay empty for years if the decant went ahead with no agreement with developers in place. She said: "The last thing we want to do is have a big pile of rubble in the middle of Walworth for years. It was disappointing when they (Cllr Noblet and Humphreys) said they didn't want to slow the decant down."

"I think there is still an opportunity to talk to people and rethink but they seem to be hiding behind the issue of community safety now."

The regeneration scheme is estimated to cost £1.5 billion pounds when it is completed, and will involve demolishing the shopping centre.

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