

ELEPHANT AND CASTLE

As demolition starts on Heygate band of residents still fight for home deal

By John Prendergast

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WHILE THE council trumpeted blocks coming down on the Heygate last week the news seemed to have bypassed the few remaining residents on the vast estate.

The council has stated that only eleven dwellings are still occupied, where once more than 3,000 people called the Heygate home.

The 'News' spoke to some of those still on the desolate estate and most were unaware that the building work was underway, only alerted by the fact a few TV crews were filming links on various pathways.

The Baduna family, one of the few tenants left on the estate, still reside there almost four months after 'finding' a new home in the area, a story reported by the 'News' just before Christmas.

Beset by bureaucracy they did not sign their tenancy agreement with the council until last week, and painting work to enable them to move has still to be finished properly.

Oner Baduna, 36, is an amputee with just one leg and the extended stay on the Heygate has resulted in his 'good' leg being put under further



The Badunas talk to Adrian Glasspool and (inset) Rehme Mustafa

strain as he hugs himself up the stairs in the family's maisonette.

The majority of people left in their homes are leaseholders, trying to group together to hold out for a decent deal from Southwark.

Most are keen to settle on a sale but they feel the council's current assessment of 'market value' forces them out of the area as they cannot afford similar properties in the area if they settle.

A two bedroom ex-authority flat on the neighbouring Rockingham Estate is on sale for £215,000 this week. Leaseholders on the Heygate told the

'News' they had so far been offered £150,000 to £168,000 by the council for their three bedroom homes.

Rehme Mustafa, 76, lives isolated in one block and is desperate to get out of her home. Her deceased husband bought it to secure his family's future, but wrangles over money has left his elderly wife scared and alone.

She said: "At night it is all blackness and I am scared on my own. There is one single light outside on the block so it not safe at all."

The family have lived on the Heygate since the 70s and Mrs Mustafa's children now remain her

only contact with the outside world as they support her. Having recovered from breast cancer she is now frail and struggles to carry a bag of sugar even a few steps.

She added: "All I am asking for is for the council to replace what we have. I worry at night as I just don't know what is going to happen. At the minute the only comfort I have in life is Turkish TV."

Adrian Glasspool is a 36-year-old teacher and is ready to go to a Lands Tribunal to get what he considers to be a fair deal.

The remaining residents all know each other now and he hopes to get them to talk to the council as a collective, although he admits this may be difficult.

He added: "I have stuck it out this long so I will continue to do so. I expect that if we go to court there will be only a few of us left. You can't expect somebody like Mrs Mustafa to go through another winter here. Surely it is better to pay us the market value rather than going down a compulsory order (CPO) route which is so expensive."

He added: "But what is market value? What the council uses is information from 1998/99 and even comparing us to the Aylesbury Estate which is also being knocked down."

A spokesman for the council stated: "We are still proceeding to acquire the remaining properties by negotiation and by addressing owners' specific individual concerns."

"This is the most productive way of addressing the issue and our first option. We remain optimistic that we won't need a CPO but of course retain that option."

Simon Hughes, the MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark said: "It is good there are only a handful of families left on the estate who are either tenants or leaseholders, plus the one remaining freeholder. It would be nonsense if everybody was not able to move within the next few weeks, at the most, as the demolition has now begun."

"The TRA and I only met last week and we are determined to make sure that we don't give up on helping the remaining residents have the same secure future as those who have already moved happily away from the estate."



Cllr Fiona Colley

Work starts on low-rise blocks

DEMOLITION ON the Heygate Estate got underway last Friday as experts began to take apart some of the low rise buildings.

Work started on the Rodney Road and Wingrave structures which when completed will see 98 out of 1,212 units razed to the ground.

However there was not a wrecking ball or explosive in site, instead a dinosaur head shaped crane head picked apart the blocks ripping away concrete slabs like pieces of a jigsaw.

While all parties hailed it as a huge day for the area's £1.5billion regeneration project, the Cabinet member for Regeneration, Fiona Colley, admitted some people will be sad to see their old homes come down.

She added: "There will be mixed emotions for people who lived here. But towards the end of its life the estate was not a great place to live. The heating was always breaking down and people did not feel safe here."

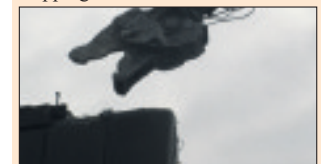
Both Lend Lease and the council have stated they will explore interim uses for the site so they don't remain vacant for years. Early proposals on the table include tree nurseries, play facilities and communal gardens.

The 'News' reported in July last year that under current plans the larger blocks such as Ashenden, Kingshill and Swanbourne will not come down until late 2014.

Council Leader Peter John stated in the same report that he hoped to bring that date forward, but warned that taking down the asbestos ridden estate will be a 'laborious' process.

Cllr Paul Noblet, the shadow spokesman for regeneration in the borough, said: "It is a big day for the area and it is a reflection of the hard work done by the previous administration, as well as the work that has gone on since then."

"It is one step in the regeneration process but there are still questions to be answered on what is happening with the leisure centre and the shopping centre for instance."



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On the ropes

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