



Mojisola Ojeikere, 63 Marston

My husband and I brought up three children in our home on the Heygate estate. We liked our flat because it was spacious and quiet with friendly neighbours, and close to my husband's work in Westminster. We had both worked full time to get a mortgage so that we could buy the lease. So we were surprised and worried when the council announced that it needed to be demolished. At first they said it was because of the asbestos, which meant that they couldn't install double glazing to bring our home up

to the latest building standards. We didn't question it at the time.

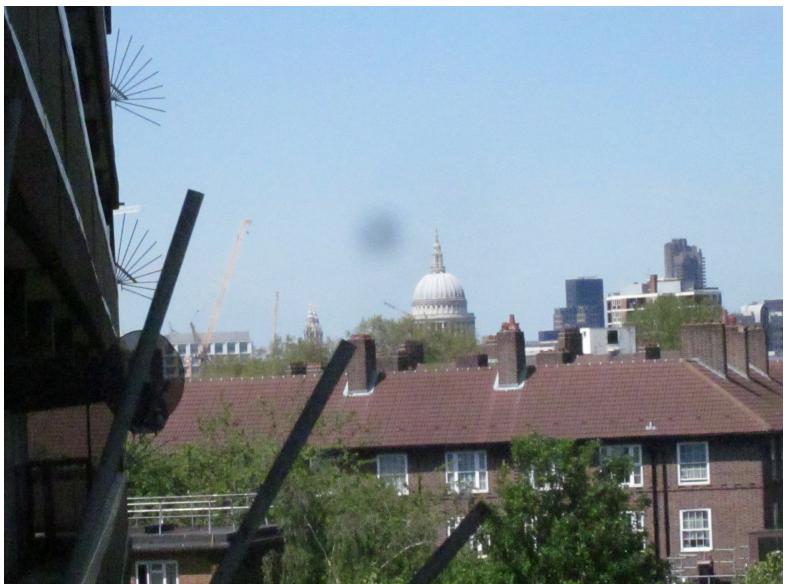
We were told we would be able to buy new homes in the replacement development with the help of a preferential 'retained equity' option (i.e. we would buy 50% of the new home and not pay rent on the other 50% we didn't own). But this never happened. The retained equity option didn't get written into the council's agreement with the developer, and leaseholders were forced to relocate elsewhere with the low valuations offered by the council. Many like myself have been forced to move to the outskirts of London where property prices are lower.

We now live in Romford. The move has been very difficult for the whole family, especially my children who miss their friends. Their schooling has been disrupted and they have had difficulty integrating into their new environment. My husband now spends less time with us because he spends much of his day commuting.



Double Glazing installed in many flats

The battle with the council over the valuation of our home has been long and weary. Our surveyor questioned the council's claim about asbestos and found that most of the asbestos had been removed from homes on the estate during major works in the 1980s. Indeed, many homes on the estate had already been equipped with double glazing prior to the announcement of the development plans.



View of St. Paul's from our balcony

In spite of this the council refused to budge on its valuation, which equated to around half the value of similar size flats being sold in a nearby council-owned block called Perronet House. Negotiations between our surveyor and the council reached a stale mate, with the council saying that if we didn't agree then they would serve a Compulsory Purchase Order, and we could argue the case in court afterwards at the Lands Tribunal.

In the meantime we were left alone in our block with no neighbours and no block cleaning or maintenance. At the beginning of 2010 they switched off the lifts and the district heating service. We were given an electric hot-water heater and a couple of electric fan heaters and told to reconsider the council's offer as it could no longer guarantee our safety on the estate. I wrote to the council asking for permission to install a central heating system out of my own pocket, but this request was turned down.

What's more, the council subsequently rendered our flat uninhabitable by employing contractors to smash up toilets and rip out pipes in the empty flats on our block to deter squatters. This was done badly and resulted in leaking pipes, which caused irreparable damage to our flat before the leak was eventually stopped.



View of the Rose Garden from our flat

By this time we had had enough and decided we couldn't stay any longer - we didn't know how much longer it would be before they served the Compulsory Purchase Order, which would allow our case to go to the Lands Tribunal, and the stairwells of the block started being used by rough sleepers and kids spraying graffiti.

To summarise, the council by its actions ensured that my home is not fit for habitation by rendering it inaccessible, damp, cold and the surroundings filthy and dangerous. The council's dealings with regard to the redevelopment scheme have caused me and my family untold hardship. I feel that we have been harassed and intimidated out of our homes.

Heygate News

The regeneration of Elephant and Castle was given the green light by Southwark Council's Executive Committee on February 19th when the planning guidance for the redevelopment was formally adopted.

This is a long awaited and important milestone for Heygate residents who have been consulted for years and are yet to see any real action. This finally gives you, the residents, a certainty that the regeneration and rehousing plans are now planning policy and that Southwark Council will work with you every step of the way from now until you move into brand new homes in a revitalised Elephant and Castle.

Copies of the planning guidance can be downloaded from our website at www.elephantandcastle.org.uk or by calling 020 7525 4922 to get a CD-ROM posted to you. There will be hard copies available for you to look through at local libraries, Rodney Road Housing Office and the offices of Elephant Angels, situated on Heygate Estate. An exhibition will also be held at the Heygate early this year.

For those of you who are tenants, the confirmation means the plans to demolish the estate and offer you a brand new Housing Association home in Elephant and Castle, or an existing council flat elsewhere in the borough are moving forward.

The situation is different for those of you who are leaseholders. You will be offered market value for your houses and a range of options to assist you to buy one of the new homes if that is what you wish to do. We have already discussed these plans at leaseholder meetings and will continue this process as set out in this newsletter.

Please read this newsletter carefully for details on how want to work with you throughout 2004 and about the range of opportunities there will be for you to become more closely involved. ▀

