

FEATURE - AYLESBURY LEASEHOLDERS



EXCLUSIVE

By Emma Ailes

emma@southwarknews.co.uk

A 95-YEAR-OLD war veteran has been left hospitalised by stress after the council announced it was evicting him from his Walworth home of 43 years.

WWII hero Harry Arpino, who fought with the Royal Engineers, has been offered "a pittance" for his two bed home on the Aylesbury estate, which the council want to bulldoze to make way for a multi-



million pound development.

Harry and his wife Ann are among a group of leaseholders in their seventies and eighties being kicked out by Southwark Council ahead of the planned demolition of their block in January.

The council has just signed a deal with housing association L&Q for a new development of three higher rise blocks of 147 units on the site - which residents have heard are likely to sell for upwards of £250,000.

The elderly leaseholders were promised by Southwark Council that when the time came to move, they would be offered help, support, and above all, a fair price for their homes.

But the group, who are already dealing with the enormous heartache of losing their family homes, say the reality has been far different.

Among them is May Wood, 73, who was

originally offered around £100,000 for her two bed-flat in Wolverton 1-59 - only just over half of what the leaseholders' own surveyor believe it is worth. The council has since upped its offer to around £130,000.

"They're trying to bully us out on the cheap," she says. "When it started, they said we wouldn't be any worse off when we had to move. It's all been broken promises."

"Everytime someone from the council comes round, they say 'clock's ticking...'"

"Then they said to me, 'you might get something cheaper if you move out of London, Mrs Wood.'"

"Who said I wanted move out of London?" I said. I'm a Bermondsey girl. I've lived in this area all my life.

"In the end I said, 'right, pay me my money. I'll go and buy a caravan."

"I'd rather do that than go in one of them little flats that you've been offering us and trying to take

all my money."

The worry of losing their homes, combined with the effort of standing up to the council, is taking its toll on the elderly residents. Three of them have recently been hospitalised with stress-related illnesses, including one resident who suffered a heart attack. Harry himself was in hospital for three days.

"I started suffering dizzy spells and they had to call an ambulance for me," says the 95-year-old, who volunteered as a lollipop man until his eighties.

"The first thing the paramedic asked was, 'are you under any stress?'"

"Well, I wake up in the morning thinking about it and go to bed at night thinking about it. We just don't know what's going to happen to us. The council haven't told us anything."

That stress has recently been brought to a head, with the news that the council has started Compulsory Purchase Order proceedings to force

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to the end"

What could the leaseholders get for their money?

THE COUNCIL has made offers to buy out the Wolverton leaseholders at a price of around £130,000 for a two bed property and £140,000 for a three bed property.

The money would fund two years in a care home at £850 a week, the average cost of residential care with nursing in London, according to the Care of Elderly People Report 2011.

We asked Jonathon Lloyd-Ham, manager of local estate agents Field and Sons in Kennington, what kind of home leaseholders might be able to buy for

their money.

"Nothing, full stop. Even for a small one bed flat above a shop on Walworth Road, you'd be looking at anywhere between £160-£180,000.

"You wouldn't even get a small one bed for £140,000, anywhere in this area. Even further out in Peckham or Bromley, those days are truly gone.

"Walworth's really been coming up over the last three or four years. It's central London, you've got everything on the door step, transport links. You were getting an awful lot more for your

money three or four years ago.

"They're just not going to be able to stay in this area. In Walworth, two bed ex-council properties start at around £240,000 to £250,000, three beds from £250-300,000.

"Just down the road in Kennington, fairly standard houses are breaking the £1m barrier.

"Unfortunately with the Aylesbury Estate, we just don't touch properties there. Everyone knows they're going to be coming down, so they're not worth anything."



This fifteen sq ft lock up in Belgravia with a 44 year lease could be yours for just £100,000.



Alternatively, this second hand Mercedes Benz on sale for £100,000 caravan sleeps five people.



It may not have mains electricity, running water or a toilet, but apparently at £126,000 this one room beach hut in Chislehurst near Dorset is still a bargain.

Blair: "no more forgotten people"

IN 1969, the first block of the brave new world that was the Aylesbury Estate was completed. The Wolverton leaseholders were among the very first residents to move in.

Con Whiffin remembers the day: "I've always said it was like a holiday home. I loved it. We'd come from a little place in Deacon Street which had no bathroom, outside toilet, freezing cold."

But after a period of decline in the '80s, the Aylesbury, reputedly Europe's largest estate, began to earn a reputation.

It was dubbed "hell's waiting room" by the tabloids – albeit unfairly, as many actual residents of the estate argued.

In 1997, when the estate was still less than 30 years old, Tony Blair chose it as the place to make his first official speech, declaring he would build a Britain where there would be "no more forgotten people".

In 2005, the order was finally given to demolish the estate and rebuild. But in 2010 the scheme once again stalled when the new coalition government unexpectedly pulled £180m of PFI



funding.

The full regeneration of the Aylesbury is still a far off prospect. Southwark Council is hoping that the redevelopment of the area around Wolverton will kick start it again.

"In the end I said, 'right, pay me my money. I'll go and buy a caravan. I'd rather do that than go in one of them little flats that you've been offering us and trying to take all my money.'"

THESE ARE the first images of 'Harvard Gardens', the new development planned for 'site seven', where the leaseholders' homes currently stand. Housing association L&Q says the development will consist of 75 affordable homes and 72 for outright sale. Work is scheduled for completion by 2015. See www.harvardgardens.co.uk



the leaseholders out – the second time it has tried to do so. The first time round, the leaseholders found out from a notice on a lamppost.

Councillor Peter John, Leader of Southwark Council, who is currently in charge of the Aylesbury regeneration portfolio, insists that "no leaseholder will be thrown out on the street" – but by the same token warns: "If people think they can hang on and we'll pay whatever they want, they are mistaken."

"This regeneration has to happen, and that does mean moving leaseholders," he told the *News*.

"Nobody wants to go down the route of arguing it out in court. We will try to find solutions.

"One thing we would be willing to look at is finding a new independent valuer and both be bound by that.

"But people have to understand that we don't have a limitless pot of money. We can only pay market value."

And here lies the crux of the problem for the leaseholders: what – and who – dictates market value?

The council says that valuations can legally only take into account 'market evidence', meaning recent sale prices on the same estate.

In February this year, a flat in the Aylesbury's Foxcote block, a 'park view' property with four bedrooms over three floors, went for £156,000. Another four bed in the imposing Missenden went for £148,000.

Two bed properties on the estate, similar to those belonging to many of the leaseholders in Wolverton (or so the council argues) have recently gone for around the £130,000 mark; one beds at around £105,000.

The leaseholders were originally given offers of £100,000 for a two bed, £110,000 for a three bed. After negotiating long and hard they have seen those offers raised to £130-£140,000, with

the option of a part buy / part rent L&Q property nearby.

But they argue that these valuations are still £40-60,000 short of the worth of their homes – and nowhere near enough to buy an equal-sized property in the neighbourhood where most of them were born and have lived all their lives.

"They must think we're idiots," 63-year-old market trader Tony Beattie says. "These are big, spacious homes, ten yards from a bus to the city, five minutes from Elephant and Castle and the tube. We're not stuck somewhere in the middle of the estate, we overlook East Street.

"Properties being built further out than ours are being marketed as "all in Zone One". But when we show that evidence to the council, they say 'oh no...'"

"But who is going to pay the shortfall?"

"They wanted to know if we had savings, see our bills, pensions, bank account details,

everything, so they could dictate to us what we could afford," May Wood continues.

"One of our neighbours, Mr Hilmi, who is 82-years-old, had paid out in advance for his funeral. They demanded to know where the money had gone. It's disgraceful! We often go up and find him crying."

With the CPO now in progress, that time, it seems, may have come. However, the leaseholders will not go down without a fight.

"I think they thought because of our age we'd just roll over, but we're here, we're fighting, and we'll take it to tribunal," Tony says.

"We've lived together here, raised our children here, lost family here. It's more than just four walls. It's our homes.

"We're not asking for a lot really. Not asking for the top of the Shard! Just a fair price for what we bought and paid for."

Editorial - page 2

**THE LONDON BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK (AYLESBURY ESTATE
WOLVERTON 1-59 (NO. 2) COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER 2012)**

OBJECTION TO COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER

An objection to the above Compulsory Purchase Order ("the Order") is submitted on behalf of the under-mentioned persons ("the Objectors"). The Objectors each have a leasehold interest in an apartment at Wolverton, Aylesbury Estate, Sedan Way, London SE17. The full name and age of each objector is given below, together with the apartment number that he, she or they occupy and a brief description of the apartment, and the length of time they have been in occupation of the apartment.

1. Mr Michael Edward Chappell (aged 73) and Mrs Kathleen May Chappell (aged 72), 2 Wolverton. 2-bed flat, with garden. Occupied for 43 years;
2. Mr Anthony John Beattie (aged 63), 13 Wolverton. 2-bed flat. Occupied for 43 years.
3. Mr Gary Michael Chappell (aged 50) and Mrs Denise Belinda Chappell (aged 48), 17 Wolverton. 2-bed flat with garden. Occupied for 27 years, but 43 years residence on the Aylesbury Estate including growing up with parents on the Estate;
4. Mr James Whiffin (aged 78) and Mrs Constance Whiffin (aged 81), 19 Wolverton. 3-bed maisonette with two large balconies. Occupied for 43 years;
5. Mrs Freda May Wood (aged 73), 20 Wolverton. 2-bed flat, with garden. Occupied for 43 years;
6. Mrs Sylvia Patricia Langley (aged 73), 21 Wolverton. 3-bed maisonette with two large balconies. Occupied for 43 years;
7. Mr Harry Arpino (aged 95) and Mrs Antonetta Arpino (aged 86), 22 Wolverton. 2-bed flat with garden. Occupied for 27 years, but previously lived on Wolverton 28-59 for 15 years;
8. Mr Djevdet Hilmi (aged 82), 36 Wolverton. 1-bed flat. Occupied for 32 years.

GROUNDINGS OF OBJECTION

The Objectors have the following grounds of objection to the Order:

1. All the Objectors have lived at Wolverton for many years, ranging from 27 years to 43 years; some for most of their lives. They are happy with their apartments and where they live. The apartments are more spacious than modern replacement dwellings of today as the Aylesbury Estate was built in the 1960s to Parker Morris standard +10%. All of the Objectors have approximately 100 years' remaining on their leases. Those who have gardens wish to continue to enjoy them and those with balconies to sit out on them. None of the Objectors wish to be uprooted from their homes. To forcibly evict them after the length of time that they have lived at the Order Land would be harsh and oppressive.

2. Some of the Objectors are very advanced in years. Only one is less than 50 years old. Five of the Objectors are in their 70s; three are in their 80s; and one is 95 years old. A forced move at this stage could be particularly traumatic for the older residents and detrimental to their physical and mental well-being. Mrs Langley of 21 Wolverton has breathing problems, which greatly restricts her mobility. Mr and Mrs Arpino at No. 22 are housebound and rely on their garden.
3. Notwithstanding the package of support measures referred to in paragraph 5.11 of the Statement of Reasons and the assurances in the Council's "Leaseholder Toolkit" referred to in the Statement that they will be placed in an equivalent position, the Objectors have not been offered or seen any alternative accommodation which would be suitable and offer the same advantages as their present apartments. Indeed it is unlikely that they will find similarly spacious apartments or apartments with similar gardens or such large balconies as they currently own.
4. The Objectors question whether it is necessary to demolish their blocks in order to achieve the Council's regeneration objectives. All but one of the Objectors live in the block facing the main road, East Street, which is in a rather different category to the apartment blocks further into the Aylesbury Estate. Being on the edge of the Estate, neither of the blocks suffers as much from social and environmental problems as the inner blocks.
5. The blocks occupied by the Objectors are in a prime location, set back off the road, with grass at the front and back; there are car-park spaces and garages which can be rented; shops across the road and supermarkets at both ends of the street. There is excellent accessibility to public transport with four bus-stops directly outside the gate to the blocks and just a short walk from the Elephant & Castle underground (Zone 1) and overground stations. It is believed that the blocks are basically sound. They would benefit from a "face lift", as has happened elsewhere, but there is no reason to destroy buildings which still have a reasonable length of useful life. The Objectors consider that the Council should give further consideration to the option of refurbishment of this part of the Estate.
6. The Objectors wish to highlight two errors on the Schedule:
 - i. Page 10: Column (3) - Mr W Paredes is the reputed tenant at 25 Wolverton and not 24 Wolverton as stated.
 - ii. Pages 11-17: Incorrect post code stated for Wolverton 28-59, SE17 2AA, it should be SE17 2AB.
7. The Objectors make the following additional points to the Statement of Reasons:

Page 2 – 1.1: It is reported "the built fabric is dated and cannot be retained in the long term because of deterioration in quality", if this is so, then this is due to neglect, poor maintenance and under-investment over many years. The 1997 Council-commissioned structural survey by Jenkins & Potter found no defects that could not be dealt with under routine maintenance. Furthermore, destroying communities and demolishing perfectly good homes because they look dated is not environmentally or socially sustainable.

When the Estate first opened in 1969 the layout such as the raised walkways were credited to the design and followed the principles of the modernist architecture movement with "walkways in the sky" – separating pedestrians from street level and, more importantly, keeping children *safe* away from the roads.

Crime statistics from the New Deal for Communities National Evaluation show that crime rates on the Estate were on average 52% lower than the Borough as a whole during the five-year period 2000-2005. This does not therefore indicate that there were 'crime and safety issues' on the estate neither is there any evidence to show that any crime committed on the estate was a result of poor urban design principles.

Page 2 – 1.13: The two blocks on the Order Land are both low-rise and lifts are not essential. All 59 properties are easily accessed via stairs or an external ramp. The ramp has a very mild gradient and presents no obstacle in terms of access; it is regularly used by existing residents, particularly, the disabled and elderly, one of whom is 95 years old. It is seen as a positive design feature in contrast to lifts, which are not liked by everyone, and would require extensive costly maintenance and would increase energy consumption.

Page 10 – 5.5: This statement is incorrect: The Order Land comprises buildings of up to a maximum of 3-storeys and these can in no way be described as 'monolithic'. There are no 14-storey buildings at all within the boundaries of the Order Land. On the contrary, the proposed development plans to replace the existing 3-storey blocks with 10-storey blocks, according to the design proposals, appear unequivocally monolithic in design.

Page 11 – 5.9: The emphasis on the part of the Council so far in negotiations has been to press the relocation opportunities, which so far have turned out to be unaffordable. Liaison between different Council departments has been poor; there is a complete lack of continuity, whereby different officers from different departments continually ask the same questions.

Page 11 – 5.11: This statement is inaccurate: The Objectors were told and understood from the "Leaseholder toolkit" (pages 13 and 16) they would each be assigned a 'Case Management Officer' to help support them through the whole process, this has never happened. The last meeting arranged by the Council with the Objectors as a group was on 7th March 2012, some five months ago, and subsequently, two of the Objectors have been hospitalized for stress related attacks.

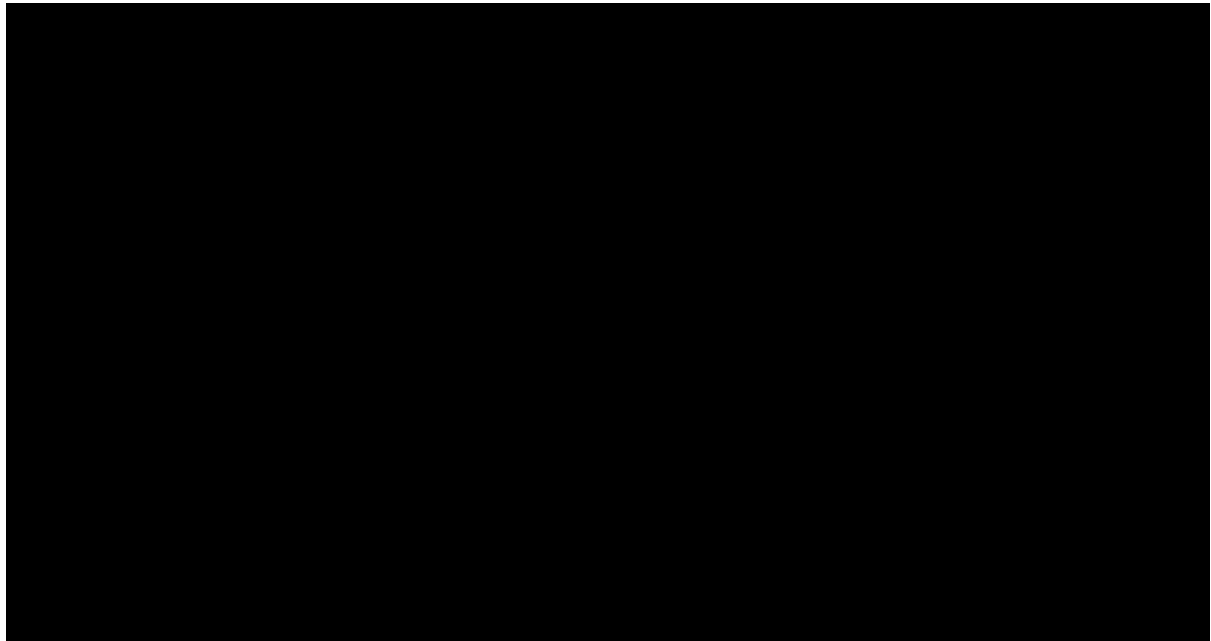
Page 12 – 5.14: If "on 26th September 2006, the Council resolved to offer an enhanced re-housing package to affected homeowners" then why were the Objectors not informed of this until 19th January 2012?

Page 12 – 5.15: It should be made clear the Objectors have not been told "they may purchase (as an option) a suitable alternative property....." they have, in fact, been told they must purchase. It should also be made clear that the Council's enhanced re-housing package comes with provisos e.g. the Objectors would not be allowed to leave their new properties as inheritance as they can with their current properties.

Page 12 – 5.16: The Objectors have not benefitted from the support services working solely with Estate residents as suggested.

Page 14 – 6.4: The Objectors consider that the proposed terms of dispossession in relation to the Human Rights Act does constitute unlawful interference on the basis that their loss is not currently being properly addressed.

8. When Wolverton 1-59 opened in 1969 it was quickly occupied by its new and excited residents, mainly young couples with children; who couldn't believe their luck, moving from the local slums to brand-new properties with a bathroom and an inside toilet, some even have two! Most of these Objectors have been enjoying their retirement for many years now but these good, honest, decent people were hard working citizens, who seized the opportunity and struggled to buy their properties while bringing up their families, to have something to leave for their families. They were postmen, lorry drivers, market stall traders, seamstresses, school assistants, shop workers, office workers, painters and decorators and one gentleman served in the war. Of course, two of our number, are still currently working hard to pay off their mortgages but they are all proud of having achieved home ownership. This has always been a close knit community where residents look out for each other and enjoy the peace and quiet of sitting in their gardens and on their balconies. It was always nice to see everyone's gardens and window boxes full of colour; it was obvious people cared about their community before it started being boarded-up.



15 August 2012