

3. Public Inquiry Aylesbury Estate, London
4. Witness Statement Professor Loretta Lees
5. 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015

### Relevant expertise and professional role

Since September 2013 I have been Professor of Human Geography and Director of Research, Department of Geography, University of Leicester. I was previously Professor of Human Geography and Chair of the Cities Research Group at King's College London. I have a PhD in Geography (awarded 1995) from the University of Edinburgh. I am an international expert on urban regeneration, gentrification, urban sustainability, urban policy, urban communities and urban public space. I have published five books on processes of gentrification<sup>1</sup> and two books specifically on London<sup>2</sup>. All of these books are underpinned by academic research on topics of direct relevance to my witness statement. In addition, I have particular expertise on council estate regeneration/renewal/gentrification in London, which informed the production of a booklet - The London Tenants Federation, Lees,L, Just Space and SNAG (2014) *An Anti-Gentrification Toolkit for Council Tenants in London*<sup>3</sup> and an academic paper on the Aylesbury Estate - Lees,L. (2014a) The urban injustices of New Labour's 'new urban renewal': the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London<sup>4</sup>. These two pieces of research were submitted as evidence to the London Assembly's Housing Committee Investigation into Social Housing Estate Regeneration<sup>5</sup>.

I am an expert urbanist and a Londoner. I was invited as an expert guest to the first meeting of the Urban Regeneration Committee at the GLA to talk about urban regeneration in London<sup>6</sup> and I have delivered numerous key note speeches in both London and around the globe on gentrification, mixed communities policy, and so on. My current academic focus is on the future of council housing in London in terms of the future social sustainability of London as a whole (Lees, 2014b)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Lees,L. et al. (in press, 2016) *Planetary Gentrification*, Polity Press: Cambridge; Lees,L. et al. (2015) (eds) *Global Gentrifications: uneven development and displacement*, Policy Press: Bristol; Bridge,G., Butler,T., and Lees,L. (eds) (2011) *Mixed Communities: gentrification by stealth?*, Policy Press: Bristol; Lees,L. et al. (2010) *The Gentrification Reader*, Routledge: London; and Lees,L. et al. (2008) *Gentrification*, Routledge: New York.

<sup>2</sup> Imrie,R. and Lees,L. (2014) (eds) *Sustainable London? The future of a global city*, Policy Press: Bristol; Imrie,R., Lees,L. and Raco,M. (2009) (eds) *Regenerating London: governance, sustainability and community in a global city*, Routledge: London.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.londontenants.org/publications/other/Staying%20Put.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Lees, L. (2014a) The urban injustices of New Labour's 'new urban renewal': the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London, *Antipode*, 46:4:921-947.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Volume%203-%20Social%20Housing%20Estate%20Regeneration%20Consultation%20Responses.pdf> (Volume 2 Sub-006, Sub-006a, Sub006b)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s26533/Regeneration%20the%20Situation%20in%20London.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Lees, L. (2014b) The death of sustainable communities in London, in Imrie,R. and Lees,L. (eds) *Sustainable London? The future of a global city*, Policy Press: Bristol, pp.149-172.

In this statement I draw in particular on my academic research on (and thus evidence from) the Aylesbury Estate and on my international expertise on mixed communities policy and state-facilitated gentrification and displacement. This statement questions the decision taken by Southwark Council and the Notting Hill Trust to redevelop this estate as a newly built, mixed community. My statement relates to the broader context of the reduction of social housing provision across London in general, and the increasing rent and house prices that make it difficult for lower and even middle income groups to remain in the city.

**My key argument is that Mixed Communities Policy leads to gentrification and displacement and that this is not in the public interest of either Aylesbury Estate tenants nor of London more generally.**

The 'new' urban renewal of the Aylesbury Estate is underpinned by mixed communities policy. Yet mixed communities policy has been found, after extensive academic and policy research, both in the UK and the US, to produce gentrification and the displacement of public housing tenants. Current plans to redevelop the Aylesbury will not only displace tenants from one of the largest public housing estates in Europe they also go against the idea of the social (and economic) sustainability of cities (as is embedded in the London Plan and national urban policy).

### ***What is 'mixed communities policy'?***

The concept of mixed communities re-emerged as a major urban policy and planning goal in the 1990s in reaction to large concentrations of supposedly socially homogenous populations of poor people living in the inner cities of Western Europe and North America. UK policy makers drew on US policy makers ideas about poverty deconcentration. In 1992 Congress passed the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOPE VI program (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere), the result of the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing. HUD began to demolish large public housing projects at the centre of US cities and to disperse project residents using Section 8 rental vouchers. In the late 1990s in the development of New Labour's urban renaissance agenda the council estate played a symbolic and ideological role as a signifier of a spatially concentrated, dysfunctional underclass. Blair's Social Exclusion Unit was set up to deal with such social problems: 'Over the last two decades the gap between these worst estates and the rest of the country has grown....It shames us as a nation, it wastes lives and we all have to pay the costs of dependency and social division' (Blair in SEU<sup>8</sup>). Council estates were one of their main concerns: '....over the past 20 years, poverty has become more concentrated in individual neighbourhoods and estates than before, and the social exclusion of these neighbourhoods has become more marked' (SEU, 2000<sup>9</sup>). Their solution was a 'New Deal for Communities' based on the creation of mixed communities - 'the Mixed Communities Initiative'.

Schoon (2001)<sup>10</sup> outlines the distinct rationales in policy debates for social mixing. First, the 'defending the neighbourhood' argument claims that since middle class people are stronger advocates for public resources, socially mixed neighbourhoods will fare better than those without middle class households. Second, the 'money-go-round' argument claims that tenurially and socio-economically mixed neighbourhoods are able to support a stronger local economy than areas of concentrated poverty. Finally, the 'networks and contacts'

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<sup>8</sup> SEU (1998) *Bringing Britain Together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*, Cm4045, The Stationary Office: London.

<sup>9</sup> SEU (2001) *A new commitment to neighborhood renewal: national strategy action plan*, Social Exclusion Unit: London. P7.

<sup>10</sup> Schoon, N. (2001) *The chosen city*, Spon Press: London.

argument draws on Robert Putnam's (1995<sup>11</sup>) influential account of bridging and bonding social capital to promote social mixing as the way to generate social cohesion and economic opportunity. Central to New Labour's urban renaissance agenda was the idea that in socially mixing council estate communities the benefits of urban revitalisation/gentrification would 'trickle down' to the lower and working classes economically, socially, and even culturally.

### ***Mixed Communities Policy and the Aylesbury Estate***

On the day after New Labour's general election victory in 1997 Tony Blair made an unexpected visit to the Aylesbury Estate where he launched New Labour's version of the US's 'welfare to work programme', making an infamous speech highlighting the Aylesbury Estate's residents as Britain's 'poorest' and the 'forgotten', many of whom 'play[ed] no formal role in the economy and were dependent on benefits'<sup>12</sup>. Very quickly afterwards the Aylesbury was given New Deal for Communities (NDC) status and studies began on how the estate could be regenerated. The NDC was given £56.2m over 10 years in order to lever in a further £400m as part of its proposed stock transfer from council to housing association tenure. *But significantly the local community voted in a local referendum against the stock transfer of the Aylesbury from Southwark Council in December 2001. 73% voted to keep the whole estate council (a massive 76% of the estate voted).* Although there was undoubtedly tenant dissatisfaction with the appearance of the estate, its maintenance, cleanliness, lighting, security and crime, most of the tenants interviewed in a MORI poll at the time were satisfied with their accommodation and with the estate as a place to live<sup>13</sup>. Southwark Council were forced to retain ownership of the Aylesbury and rethink.

After more studies on 27 September 2005 the Liberal Democrat-led Southwark Council announced that the estate was too expensive to refurbish and that demolition was the most cost effective solution. They set about *persuading* the tenants that the estate was structurally unsound and a poor quality place to live. Lees (2014a)<sup>14</sup> discusses how the Aylesbury Estate became stigmatised as a national symbol of urban blight and here a resident reflects on the decision-making:

'Over 70% voted to refurbish, because people didn't want to move. So I'm thinking if it was that bad, everybody would have said – let's go, let's get rid of it. People, including myself, voted to make it better. Instead of moving us out, they could have repaired it. It's been done on other estates... That's what people wanted. It was turned down. What people wanted they didn't agree...' (interview Head of a TRA [Tenant and Resident Association], 2011; cited in Lees, 2014a).

The GLA's planning report (PDU/0306/01) of 27 September 2001 on The Aylesbury Estate<sup>15</sup> said:

'23 The government is committed to providing balanced and mixed communities and schemes like this which encourage a greater mix of tenure types and a more balanced income profile are consistent with the Government's general policy directions as expressed explicitly in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3, issued by the Secretary of State in 2000'.

'24 New Deal for Communities has identified a need for more private homes on the Aylesbury Estate and this is reflected in the provision of 1,000 market dwellings....'.

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<sup>11</sup> Putnam, R. (1995) Bowling alone: America's declining social capital, *Journal of Democracy*, 6 65-78.

<sup>12</sup> Blair, T. (1997) 'The will to win', ODPM, The Aylesbury Estate, 2 June, <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/seu/news52f.html?id=400>

<sup>13</sup> *Southwark News*, 18.04.2002.

<sup>14</sup> Lees, L. (2014a) The urban injustices of New Labour's 'new urban renewal': the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London, *Antipode*, 46:4:921-947.

<sup>15</sup> [http://legacy.london.gov.uk/mayor/planning\\_decisions/strategic\\_dev/sep2701/aylesbury\\_report.pdf](http://legacy.london.gov.uk/mayor/planning_decisions/strategic_dev/sep2701/aylesbury_report.pdf)

Mixed communities policy has long underpinned the regeneration of the Aylesbury Estate. More recently, the Notting Hill Trust with Homes and Community Agency (HCA) funding from the Estate Regeneration programme are now the key players in the redevelopment of the Aylesbury. In 2015 the Notting Hill Trust and Southwark Council's vision remains of a mixed community. Indeed on the Notting Hill Trust's website they emphasise 'Maintaining mixed communities' and the fact that 'From the start Notting Hill Housing also recognised that communities needed to be mixed income'<sup>16</sup>. The irony is, that as the Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholder's First show, the estate is already very socially mixed<sup>17</sup>!

What the residents think (cited in Lees 2014a<sup>18</sup>):

'So I don't think they actually said it in any sort of words. But it was a policy, it was a strategy that they gradually implemented in a very quiet, interesting way. If you look at Southwark, it's very close to the City, very close to Westminster and what have you. So it would be very attractive to city goers....if it stays the way it is they're not going to come and live in the estate' (tenant interview, 2011).

'I think that (the idea of social mix) belongs to more high level policies. I think these are the dominant discourses that worked their way down from government level...where it's proposed that by making more of a mix and not having such a segregated, and such contrasting differences between people in estates (and elsewhere) will have a positive outcome' (tenant interview, 2011).

'I don't think they were really trying to sell the social mix...behind closed doors I think what they probably say is that they'll attract new businesses and new people. Obviously guys with the money...So there's a lot of undertone to it, which implies what's going to happen. But nobody is actually saying that we're going to bring people from the City to come and live with you...' (interview TO representative, 2011).

### ***The evidence base on Mixed Communities Policy***

Social mix policies rely on a common set of beliefs about the benefits of mixed communities, with little evidence to support them, and a growing evidence base that contradicts the precepts embedded in social mix policies that should make policy-makers sit up and take note. As Cheshire (2009)<sup>19</sup> argues mixed communities policy is essentially a faith-based policy since there is scant real evidence that making communities more mixed makes the life chances of the poor any better. Indeed, academic research has found that the rhetoric of 'social mix' more often hides a gentrification strategy and in that a hidden social cleansing agenda (Cameron, 2003; Uitermark et al., 2007)<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, conceptually, policy claims about the causal links between more socially mixed communities, increased social mixing, the development of social capital and cohesion, and decreased social exclusion and deprivation, have been criticised as something of

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nhh50.com/?places=notting-hill-housing-in-the-1980s>

<sup>17</sup> <https://aylesburytenantsfirst.wordpress.com/?s=mixed+community>

<sup>18</sup> Lees, L. (2014a) The urban injustices of New Labour's 'new urban renewal': the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London, *Antipode*, 46:4:921-947.

<sup>19</sup> Cheshire, P. (2009) Policies for mixed communities: a faith based displacement activity?, *International Regional Science Review*, 32:3:343-375.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron, S. (2003) Gentrification, housing redifferentiation and urban regeneration: 'Going for Growth' in Newcastle upon Tyne, *Urban Studies*, 40 2367-2382. Uitermark, J., J. Duyvendak and R. Kleinhans (2007) 'Gentrification as a governmental strategy: social control and social cohesion in Hoogvliet, Rotterdam', *Environment and Planning A*, 3:1:125-141.

an ‘analytical sack of potatoes’ (Fine, 2001; Kearns, 2003)<sup>21</sup>. Drawing on ESRC funded research (ESRC RES-451-26-0340), Bridge, Butler and Lees (2011)<sup>22</sup> collated academic and policy evidence on mixed communities policy from around the globe and stated clearly: ‘...the overwhelming conclusion of this review is that is that social mix policies are largely ineffective in enhancing the welfare of the poorest residents, and in some cases detrimental to the welfare of the urban poor’ (p.319).

International experts on mixed communities policy are clear that it is a failure with respect to the social mobility of the poor and that the end result is more often than not some form of gentrification. As Gotham (2001)<sup>23</sup> has shown with respect to the HOPE VI program in the US: ‘the redevelopment of public housing [in the US] is a form of “exclusive” development that is designed to exclude the very poor from the revitalised spaces and render them safe for resettlement by the wealthy and affluent’. Mixed communities policy in London has not aided the revitalisation of depressed neighbourhoods, rather it has reduced affordable housing and contributed to spiraling rents and prices (Arbaci and Rae, 2013; Imrie and Lees, 2014)<sup>24</sup>.

As the *What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth* (2015)<sup>25</sup> report makes clear, we know very little about the ways in which the ‘new’ urban renewal programmes enacted on London council estates have shaped the lives of the original dwellers that they were designed to improve. This is because many of the original residents fail to make it back to the redeveloped neighbourhoods. The Heygate Estate, adjacent to the Aylesbury Estate, is one such example of an estate where all the tenants and leaseholders have been displaced (Lees, 2014a; see also the maps in *An Anti-Gentrification Toolkit for Council Tenants in London*)<sup>26</sup>.

### ***The evidence on displacement from the Aylesbury Estate to date***

Gentrification induced displacement can be direct or indirect. Marcuse (1985:207)<sup>27</sup> is clear that displacement is related not only to the actual removal of low-income households by eviction or compulsory purchase, but also the fact that indigenous residents might not feel at home anymore in the changed neighbourhood because of the general decline of working class culture and identity. As he argues, ‘When a family sees the neighbourhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighbourhood, when the stores they patronise are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking

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<sup>21</sup> Fine, B. (2001) *Social capital versus social theory*, Routledge: London, p.190. Kearns, A. (2003) Social capital, regeneration and urban policy, in Imrie, R. and Raco, M. (eds) *Urban renaissance? New Labour, community and urban policy*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp.37-60.

<sup>22</sup> Bridge, G., Butler, T., and Lees, L. (eds) (2011) *Mixed Communities: gentrification by stealth?*, Policy Press: Bristol.

<sup>23</sup> Gotham, K.F. (2001) ‘Redevelopment for whom and for what purpose?’ in K. Fox Gotham (ed.) *Research in Urban Sociology Volume 6: Critical Perspectives on Urban Redevelopment* (Oxford: Elsevier) p.437.

<sup>24</sup> Arbaci, S. and Rae, I. (2013) Mixed tenure neighbourhoods in London: policy myth or effective device to alleviate deprivation?, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37:2:451-479. Imrie, R. and Lees, L. (2014) (eds) *Sustainable London? The future of a global city*, Policy Press: Bristol

<sup>25</sup> <http://whatworksgrowth.org/policy-area/estate-renewal/#.VUCVBtjnnIU>

<sup>26</sup> Lees, L. (2014a) The urban injustices of New Labour’s ‘new urban renewal’: the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London, *Antipode*, 46:4:921-947. <http://www.londontenants.org/publications/other/Staying%20Put.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Marcuse, P. (1985) Gentrification, abandonment and displacement: connections, causes and policy responses, *Journal of Urban and Contemporary Law*, 28:195-240.

their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services, all clearly are making the area less and less liveable, then the pressure of displacement is severe'. Marcuse (1986)<sup>28</sup> discusses exclusionary displacement:

'Exclusionary displacement from gentrification occurs when any household is not permitted to move into a dwelling, by a change in conditions which affects that dwelling or its immediate surroundings, which

- (a) is beyond the household's reasonable ability to control or prevent;
- (b) occurs despite the household's being able to meet all previously imposed conditions of occupancy;
- (c) differs significantly and in a spatially concentrated fashion from changes in the housing market as a whole; and
- (d) makes occupancy by that household impossible, hazardous or unaffordable'.

The first phase of the Aylesbury demolition (phase 1A) began in 2010 and the impacts of displacement were already being felt:

'...from the very first day that the demolition was announced, the social bond was affected, because people knew that ultimately within the framework of the next few years, they wouldn't be seeing each other on a daily basis again. They wouldn't be part of the same community. I've got a friend of mine – \*\*\*\* - he could only afford to move out of the area with what the council was offering him for evaluation and ended up moving into a home somewhere just outside Sidcup, in Kent. \*\*\*\*'s probably in his late 50s and he lives with his wife. He's lived here all his life. He's got people that would see him on a daily basis and his family lives here in the area. He's now living there isolated just outside Sidcup having broken all of his social ties, he's now suffering from severe depression. I think that is symptomatic of a lot of people. There's a lady...she'll come back and she'll come back because she had to move out to \*\*\*\* Heights....she walks the dog around the estate, she'll call into a few people in the neighbourhood who she knows. She says she hates it where she is now. She's probably again in her late 50s. It's not easy to build new social ties, especially the older you are...I think it's had a profound effect on people...I mean the number of people I've heard who've died during this decanting process. I mean okay, they being elderly and you could argue that they would have died anyway. But I couldn't count them on my hands because I haven't got enough fingers, the number of people I heard who've passed away as a result of having to move...I have no way of keeping track of this. But for me, it's genocide' (tenant interview, 2011; cited in Lees, 2014a<sup>29</sup>).

Residents have real fears for the future:

'It's going to be a misery when they sell...people will be suffering with depression when they've got to move out. We've got to get...there's got to be vans and everything that pick us up. It's going to be really, really bad. As I said to you I prefer to stay where I am...Before we were told that if we moved out of where we are living, we could have a right to return. That changed...over the last 10 years the council have changed its regeneration over and over again...They say one thing and they change it to the next. People don't know where they are. It's really bad. It really is. ... don't take it away from people who have lived here all their lives and move them away from their children. They've got

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<sup>28</sup> Marcuse, P. (1986) Abandonment, gentrification and displacement, in Smith, N. and Williams, P. (1986) (eds) *Gentrification of the City*, Allen and Unwin, p.153-177.

<sup>29</sup> Lees, L. (2014a) The urban injustices of New Labour's 'new urban renewal': the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London, *Antipode*, 46:4:921-947.

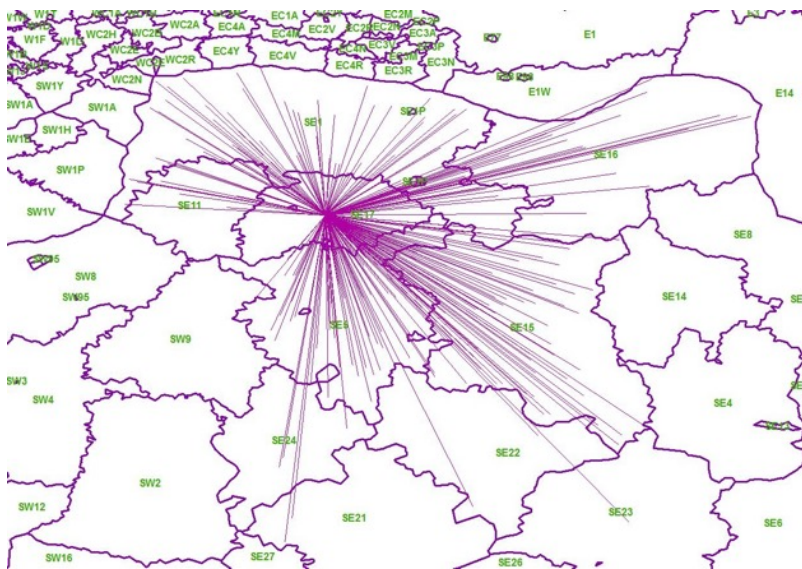


nowhere to go. They're elderly people...some of these could have a heart attack and die. ... Why demolish spaces when they are ok? (interview with TRA rep, 2011; cited in Lees 2014a<sup>30</sup>).

A number of academic and policy studies have underlined the difficulties that relocated public housing residents have in rebuilding social networks (eg. Clampet-Lundquist, 2004a,b; Gibson, 2007)<sup>31</sup>, and this should come as no surprise given the many studies of displaced communities and social networks as a result of post-war urban renewal programmes. As even the GLA (2015:14)<sup>32</sup> now recognise, 'a process of "gentrification" may, over time, accompany regeneration, the new homes being occupied by households more affluent than previous residents'.

The maps below (Figures 1 and 2) provide evidence that the displacement of council tenants and leaseholders from the Aylesbury Estate is already a real issue, and this is before the larger redevelopments have even taken place. The maps were produced using data provided by the Notting Hill Trust, postcode data of where council tenants and leaseholders have moved to, data that is now in the public domain. The data is limited and the displacements are no doubt much larger, for example, Figure 1 only includes data for tenants who have moved via the Council's Home Search programme, and Figure 2 only includes details of leaseholders who have given forwarding addresses.

**Figure 1: Council tenant displacement from the Aylesbury Estate**

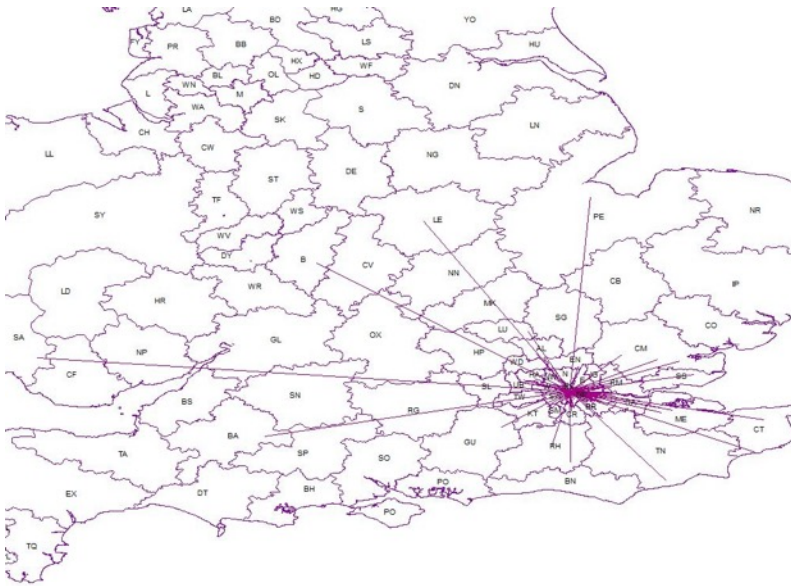


<sup>30</sup> Lees, L. (2014a) The urban injustices of New Labour's 'new urban renewal': the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London, *Antipode*, 46:4:921-947.

<sup>31</sup> Clampet-Lundquist, S. (2004a) Moving over or moving up? Short-term gains and losses for relocated HOPE VI Families, *Cityscape*, 7, 1, 57 - 80. Clampet-Lundquist, S. (2004b) HOPE VI relocation Moving to new neighborhoods and building new ties, *Housing Policy Debate*, 15, 2, 415 - 447. Gibson, K. (2007) The relocation of the Columbia Villa community: views from residents, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 27:5-19.

<sup>32</sup> <https://roeregeneration.wordpress.com/2015/03/06/london-assembly-paper-knock-it-down-or-do-it-up/>

**Figure 2: Leaseholder displacement from the Aylesbury Estate**



***What we are seeing is what Hyra (2008) has called ‘new’ urban renewal***

‘New’ urban renewal: is a term that Hyra (2008)<sup>33</sup> has used to refer to the C21st urban renewal of public housing projects in the US through the Federal Government’s HOPE VI program. He argues that today’s urban renewal of public housing projects in the US is similar to, but distinct from post-war urban renewal. Like post-war urban renewal it is state-led, but it differs in that today there are global factors contributing to this urban transformation and as opposed to post-war urban renewal, where a good proportion of low income groups benefitted from the renewal, today real estate developers and those seeking to invest in property prosper whilst low income groups are displaced from the communities they know and call home. The case of the Aylesbury Estate shows the very same and it is not in the public interest of either the Aylesbury residents or of London as a whole, if we want a properly diverse and socially mixed city as The London Plan claims it does.

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<sup>33</sup> See Hyra,D. (2008) *The New Urban Renewal: the economic transformation of Harlem and Bronzeville*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago. Hyra was a community development expert in the US Department of the Treasury, he also worked for HUD, and is now a professor at the American University, Washington , DC.



