



EAST END HOWLER

For
Community
and
Solidarity

— East London's FREE Working Class News Sheet —



One thing is certain - news that the Metropolitan police planned to site its Olympic operational centre on Wanstead Flats should never have appeared first on the pages of the Evening Standard in early June. The proposed plans, which involve creating a fenced, high-security compound with buildings, parking areas, stables and even police holding cells for at least three months during 2012, are so close to residential neighbourhoods in Newham and Redbridge that they were always likely to become controversial.

To enable the police to use Wanstead Flats as a base, the City of London Corporation, who manage the land for the benefit of local people, intends to amend an act of parliament that has protected Epping Forest from enclosure for 132 years. The precedent this sets, on top of the disruption, the secrecy and the sense that the Olympics are being used as an excuse for those in power to do whatever they like, has resulted in a storm of protest. But even after years as a community worker in Newham, the strength of feeling has been a surprise even to me.

The Save Wanstead Flats campaign has grown from a public meeting in mid July, which itself came about

because a small group of local people saw the Standard article and approached Durning Hall Community Centre in Forest Gate (where I work) for help. We provided our main hall for free and helped with publicity, but on the evening of the meeting, we have no idea how many would turn up. As we soon discovered, the meeting was packed to capacity, with over 250 people attending and a unanimous message emerging from local residents - there was overwhelming opposition to a police operational base, concerns about the conduct of the City of London Corporation and real anger about the lack of consultation. A steering committee was formed - and more than 20 people signed up to be part of it.

SAVE WANSTEAD FLATS

LOCAL RESIDENTS' PUBLIC MEETING

Thursday 6th October
7pm at Durning Hall Community Centre
Earlham Grove,
Forest Gate E7 9AB

YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO QUESTION
representatives invited from the Metropolitan
Police and the City of London Corporation on
their plans for Wanstead Flats in 2012

It took a month for the police and the Corporation to react, but in what looked like a direct response to the public meeting, they finally decided to undertake what is laughably known as 'community engagement' in early August. A public relations company was hired to arrange meetings with a selected few, rather than the wider public, whilst a website set up to sell the case for using Wanstead Flats during 2012. Worryingly, local residents finally found out that 'consultation' on the plans for the Flats would end on 26 September, with comments considered by Redbridge council later in the year. With the first, closed 'listening' event arranged for mid-August, this meant that there was only a six-week period, half of it during the peak holiday season, when local people would be able to voice their concerns. This isn't a proper consultation – it's a tick-box exercise.

The campaign has continued to insist that representatives of the police and the Corporation attend a public meeting arranged by local people themselves and on their own terms, with sufficient time to make sure local communities around the Flats have been informed. A small delegation turned up at the police's initial presentation of their plans and hand-delivered invitations to the campaign's public meeting, which has been set for on 6 October. But we are still waiting to hear whether the police or Corporation officials will turn up to answer questions.

Meanwhile, a Mass Community Picnic has been called for Sunday 5 September at 1pm, on the spot to the west of Centre Road where the police want to site their base. It's an opportunity for everyone who lives near Wanstead Flats to come along with food, picnic blankets, their children and their friends and join others to demonstrate the local community's opposition to these proposals.

Choosing to try and site an Olympics policing base on Wanstead Flats has touched a nerve – and in part, it's

one that reveals genuine and underlying concerns about the Olympic Games itself. So much of the rhetoric both during the bid and in the five years that have followed has focused on what a privilege it is for London – and east London in particular – to play host to the Games. There have been so many promises about the benefits that residents will experience. Instead, the biggest impact has been disruption, decisions made with little involvement of local communities and a sense that we are being pushed aside to make way for a sporting event that has little to do with us.

What is possibly more surprising is how long it has taken for more people to stand up and say, "enough!" The same broad support was far from evident when the residents of Clays Lane had their homes bulldozed to make way for the Olympic park. Perhaps because Wanstead Flats is used by such a wide range of people of all ages, or because a local community centre was prepared to offer its support, has helped to galvanise opposition.

But whatever the reason, the Metropolitan police and the City of London Corporation has a real fight on its hands – and plenty of questions that this time need far more than vague assurances.



HOW CAN YOU HELP THE SAVE WANSTEAD FLATS CAMPAIGN?



For a start by visiting the campaign website:
<http://savewansteadflats.org.uk>

Please feel free to print the Mass Community Picnic Flier, the flier about the Local Residents Public Meeting and the Petition sheet and hand it out to family, neighbours, friends and even local strangers.

If you are feeling even more ambitious find out more and how to join the steering group at:
savewansteadflats@gmail.com

SAVING THE FLATS

The Wanstead Flats campaign of 1946

This article has been reproduced with the kind permission of Eastside Community Heritage - <http://www.hidden-histories.org.uk/wordpress/>

The campaign against the attempted enclosure of Wanstead Flats by Henry Wellesley, Earl Cowley in 1871 and its eventual inclusion within the Epping Forest Act of 1878 is well documented. Less well known is another campaign 75 years later against the compulsory purchase of around half of Wanstead Flats for housing development immediately after the Second World War. This article will highlight this hidden history that had a profound impact on both Wanstead Flats and the social geography of West Ham County Borough.

Like many post Second World War stories it starts during the 1930s. Wanstead Flats immediately to the north of Forest Gate was a popular destination for local people. Organised events such as the fairs, bands and music hall performance at the bandstand, boating and fishing on the lakes and sport such as football and cricket, drew people from a wide area. Many people also appreciated an open space to escape the crowded housing and industrial development of West Ham and wider East London. Indeed, Wanstead Flats has been recognised as a vital green space or "wedge" by the London County Council (LCC) in 1935 and the City of London as Conservator of Epping Forest organised a conference held at the Guildhall in 1939 to develop proposals for its improvements.

Any development was postponed by the outbreak of war in September 1939 and Wanstead Flats itself hosted a variety of civilian and military uses during the Second World War. These included allotments, anti-aircraft gun batteries, barrage balloons and bomb shelters. The bandstand was to be a collection point for salvaged wood from bomb damaged buildings and surplus food grown on the allotments. Later, parts of the Flats were closed off for use as a troop assembly point before and during the invasion of France in 1944. The area was also used as a German Prisoner of War camp. By 1945, using emergency wartime powers 102 "hutments" were already housing West Ham residents on the area north of Capel Road and East Ham borough authorities proposed temporary housing between Manor Park and Aldersbrook.

The Second World War had a serious impact on the housing stock within West Ham which had been severely damaged during World War Two. The Royal Docks and associated industry had been primary targets (Target A), for the Luftwaffe air raids. During the London Blitz of 1940-41 thousands of high explosive and incendiary bombs had fallen on the area. Later, 68 V1 flying bombs and 33 V2 rockets hitting the area added to the destruction. In total 14,000 houses were destroyed and many more were damaged within West Ham. By 1945 23 % of West Ham was designated as severely war damaged and was described as an area of "rubble strewn gaps and patched houses."

Although the population of West Ham had continued to decline from a high of around 320,000 people in the mid 1920s around 50,000 people were expected to return from evacuation or military service at the end of the war. By 1946 West Ham council had over 10,000 people awaiting homes. Many homeless people were crowded into unsuitable housing or living in temporary "Rest Centres", often in local schools which were returning to educational use. Some people resorted to squatting. West Ham council reported squatters in former military huts on Wanstead

Flats during the "Squatting Summer" of 1946. Other people were forced to live outside of the area splitting up families and friends. Diaries of the period record the despair and strain of overcrowding. People scoured the small ads in newspapers and shop windows for rooms. to let and Daltons Weekly became required reading for home hunters.

Development on Wanstead Flats had already received the support of Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health in the newly elected Labour Government. Bevan, the leftwing MP for Ebbw Vale, was acutely aware that housing would be a defining issue for the government. He had pledged to build 200,000 houses a years. Although as Minister of Health, Bevan was ultimately responsible for housing policy, responsibility for delivery was divided between the Ministries of Health, Works and Town and Country Planning. The housing itself would actually be built by local authorities. Even with this unwieldy division, wags opined that Bevan had "Half a Nye on housing", Bevan was determined to provide new housing quickly for the war weary population and was frustrated with any delays.

In January 1946, speaking in a debate in the House of Commons about the emergency housing situation in East Ham he declared:

"The people must have shelter... The Commoners of Epping Forest must surrender to the overwhelming needs of the people."

The 1944 Town and Country Planning Act introduced by the wartime coalition government led by Winston Churchill had given local authorities sweeping powers to deal with "blitz and blight" through reconstruction and redevelopment. To alleviate the housing situation West Ham council was determined to quickly provide better housing for the post-war population. It had already launched the "Homes Now" campaign to pressure the government over delays in providing finance and materials for housing.

The second part of this article will appear in the next edition of the East End Howler.



NEWHAM MONITORING PROJECT

The first Save Wanstead Flats meeting was organised by the Durning Hall Community Centre. The editors of the East End Howler feel that the efforts of members of Newham Monitoring Project (NMP) deserve a special mention.

Newham Monitoring Project is an independent community-based organisation, which was set up in 1980. We are based in the east London borough of Newham.

NMP works with members of the community suffering racial discrimination / violence, police misconduct and civil rights issues. We monitor the response of statutory organisations - such as the police, the council and housing services - to the community, in order to advocate for fair treatment and access to justice where this is not being met.

Since its foundation, NMP has always pursued one simple aim - 'the right to a life free from harassment, safe from attack'.

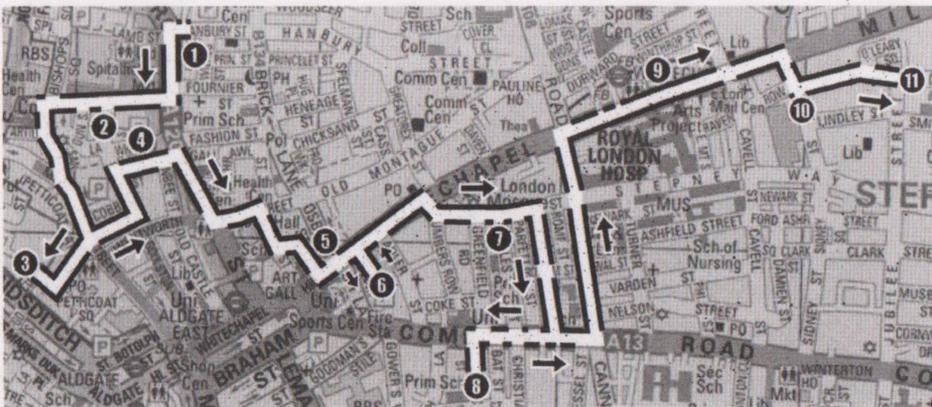
To find out more about NMP please visit the group's website: <http://www.nmp.org.uk>

Our services include:

- A casework service providing advice, support, advocacy and access to specialist legal assistance for individuals and families
- A free 24-hour emergency helpline for members of ethnic minority communities in east London facing racial attacks or policing issues
- Community outreach and educational projects such as know-your-rights workshops in relation to police 'Stop and Search' powers
- Campaign work around issues arising from our cases and /or pertinent to the ethnic minority communities, such as the impact of anti-terrorism policing measures

RADICAL EAST END HISTORY WALK

Details to be advertised on the Action East End blog here - <http://actioneastend.wordpress.com/>



Fancy an interesting walk that will take in the scenes of radical working class history in the East End of London and answer questions like... What does Winston Churchill have in common with a gang of Latvian revolutionaries?

Join us for a little light exercise, and refreshments later on, to learn about various East End Radicals.

ABOUT ACTION EAST END



The East End Howler is produced by Action East End. We are a small group of local residents keen to highlight issues not taken up by popular media. All of this, as so much in this life, costs money...and surprise surprise we're not millionaires! So please donate a small amount for each copy of the Howler you take.

If you like what we're doing and feel like doing more, please send an email to: actioneastend@googlemail.com

We will add you to our mailing list and keep you informed of our latest activities. Alternatively if supply us with an address we will send you a paper copy of our news letter and a free East End Howler through the post.