



EAST END HOWLER

For
Community
and
Solidarity

— East London's FREE Working Class News Sheet —

WE AIN'T MOVING!

East London refuses to be kicked out by property speculators, councils and greedy landlords



Local people are beginning to win important battles against those are trying to turn London into a paradise for property speculators. We watch in horror as soulless developments rise up around us, cutting off our natural light, taking our green spaces and even our place in the city. These new developments are aimed at those who can afford to pay top prices, either to buy or to rent. A large proportion of the new properties are being snatched up by overseas investors, many from China, who are hoping to make a killing in London's property market. East London is one of the main targets of these developments.

Continued on Page 2 ►

The end result of treating homes as 'investments' is the effective social cleansing of ordinary Londoners from boroughs such as Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney. There is virtually no investment in homes that are affordable by someone on or below the average London wage, which in Newham is £27,000. This means that people are forced to move out of London or spend large amounts of their diminishing income on substandard housing provided by many private landlords. Rents are now so high, because of the demand placed on the market by overseas investors, speculators and buy-to-let landlords, that evictions are now common place, especially against recipients on benefits.

But people have had enough, and increasingly residents are organising themselves against those who put profits before people. And, they are winning!

The Focus E15 mothers campaign lead the way with an important victory against Newham Council. By closing the Mother and Baby Unit where the young mums lived, the council was planning to disperse them as far away as Hastings and Birmingham. This would then leave more room in the borough for more 'desirable' residents that Newham is trying to attract with its support for luxury developments and 'regeneration' schemes. The mothers organised an effective campaign and at least won the right to stay in the local area even if they are still in private rented accommodation. However, these young women were not content with winning a better deal for themselves. Some of them have now formed a more general campaign against social cleansing and evictions and for social housing.

The Poor Door campaign against Redrow at 1 Commercial St near Aldgate (covered in the last issue of the Howler) also ended in a partial victory. This campaign

targeted the Redrow's development because it had one entrance for the main residents and another entrance, down a side alley, for the 'affordable' tenants. After several months of regular protests Redrow was forced to sell its freehold in the building and the new owners are now looking into the ending of the two door system. We are currently waiting for the outcome of this.

The campaign by New Era housing estate residents in Shoreditch ended in an amazing victory just before Christmas. They had expected to be evicted but with a recent surge in support for their long-running campaign, the developer Westbrook announced that it is selling the estate to a social housing landlord and it is expected that the rents will be kept within reach of the current tenants and they will not have to move out.

What we are seeing in these campaigns is a battle for London. We are beginning to have an impact and developers are being made aware that London is not theirs for the taking. It is not empty space for them to play around with, building monuments to their own egos and using it as a resource to enrich themselves. Instead, it is place full of working people who have a history and a sense of belonging. It is us who should decide what happens to London and not the Redrows, the Galliards, the Westbrooks and their overseas investors. Politicians of all parties have either supported what is happening or sat back and let it happen. We have had some victories but the battle for London is only just beginning. This issue of the Howler features some of the main campaigns in East London as well as looking at the powerful forces that we are up against.

FRED AND JOHN TOWERS NOT FOR SALE!

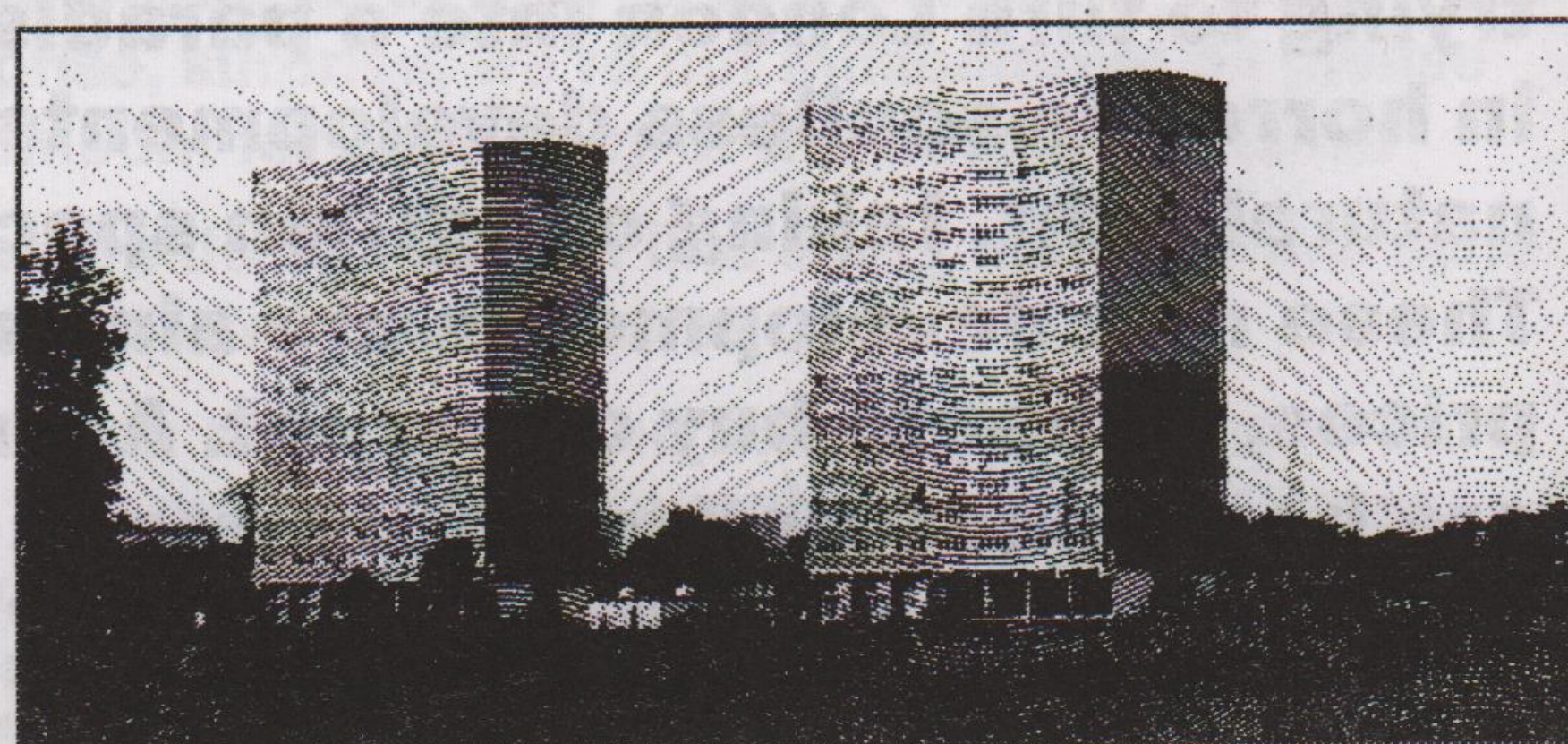
On November 11th, shameless Waltham Forest councillors, led by Labour's Chris Robbins, unanimously voted for 'decanting' of human beings, the destruction of communities and the demolition of homes. Councillors overrode the majority of residents of the 234 council homes in the John Walsh and Fred Wigg towers in Leytonstone who voted for Option One- the refurbishment of their flats. The councillors were only prepared to consider Option 3- moving people out, knocking down their homes, building private flats, losing 70 council properties in the process.

Residents are beginning to organise a fight-back, with the support of the Focus E15 campaign and others who are concerned that this sort of thing is happening much too often- the handing over of council property to developers who will build flats for investors and those who can afford market rents

and getting rid of or reducing the amount of homes at social rents.

Public Meeting: Tuesday, February 24, 2015
The Epicentre, 41 West St, Leytonstone E11 4LJ

For more information:
fredwiggtower@hotmail.co.uk
www.focusE15.org



THE BALANCE SHEET SO FAR

Victories

Queen's Market (Upton Park)

Friends of Queen's Market and market stall holders waged a successful campaign to stop the site being redeveloped. The market is still thriving but there is always a threat. Therefore, the campaign continues and is ready for any new attack from developers and Newham Council.

Focus E15

The young mothers from the Focus E15 hostel won the right to be rehoused in the area rather than being sent outside of London. They continue to campaign against evictions and have had a number of successes. The campaign raises awareness of the dangers of social cleansing and the problem of evictions.

Poor Doors

Redrow sold its freehold in One Commercial St and new owner agrees to negotiate getting rid of the 'Poor Doors'. Campaign shows how a serious protest can force developers to back down.

New Era housing estate

Residents win the right to stay on the estate with the developers, Westbrook, withdrawing their interest in the estate. Promises have been made from Hackney Council to keep social rents. The campaign shows how a long-term campaign by residents can force a big developer to back down.

Tower Hamlets Save Our Nurseries

The parents' campaign to save four nurseries in showed that the council will back down if both users and workers put up a united fight to save services. The fact that they took the fight to the public with public petition-signing sessions proved to be a good tactic.

Ones to come

- Galliard's plans to turn the former West Ham site into a luxury housing development.
- The campaign to save Carpenters' Estate from redevelopment and to ensure that it is used to provide social housing for people from the local community.
- Waltham Forest's attack on the residents of the FredJohn Towers. The council plans to sell off part of the estate to private developers, moving all of the residents out for 6 years and increase density by squeezing in another block on green space.
- The need to intensify the fight against the increasing number of evictions.
- The spread of luxury high rises in East London and the lack of social housing.
- The increase in density of housing and the lack of green spaces.
- The tendency of social landlords to demolish estates and rebuild with a reduced number of units for social rent and most of the units targeted at the upper end of the market (eg Aberfeldy Estate and Leopold Estate).
- The handing over of the Royal Albert Docks to a Chinese company by Boris Johnson. The plans are for an enclave for Asian businesses and are unlikely to contain any social housing. The deal itself is tainted with scandal as Johnson is accused of not giving all companies an equal chance to put in plans for the site.

TIME TO CELEBRATE!

They won! A grassroots campaign of East End housing tenants, led by women, have beaten Westbrook Partners, an \$11 billion American corporate vampire ('Investment firm').

Early last year Westbrook bought the New Era estate in Hoxton, East London, for £23 million. The Benyon estate, owned by a wealthy Tory MP with a Downtown Abbey type mansion and grounds, bought a 10% stake. New Era is social housing, home to 93 families on low or middle incomes. They live close to their families and look out for each other – keeping an eye on the neighbours' children and helping the elderly. The residents can't afford other housing locally; rents have been rising 10-19% every year. The area used to be

rundown, with the resulting crime & drugs. Today there are French cafes, food trucks, and green parks. 'Now that it's nice we're told we can't live here anymore' said Danielle Molineiri, a tenants' spokesperson. A Westbrook insider agreed: 'they are getting something that other Londoners have not' (strangely, this argument is not used against the rich).

Westbrook's first move was to immediately raise rents by a 'reasonable' 10% (their words) and issue new one year leases. Soon after they were threatening to raise rents from an average of £800-1500 a month to £2400. The tenants' energetic and imaginative campaigning led to Benyon and then Westbrook pulling out.

Continued on Page 4 ►

The most publicised action was the protest march from posh Mayfair, through central London to 10 Downing Street, where they presented PM Cameron with a 300,000 signature petition. The presence of Russell Brand helped get media coverage. However, the tenants had been campaigning without high-profile publicity for many months before this final action.

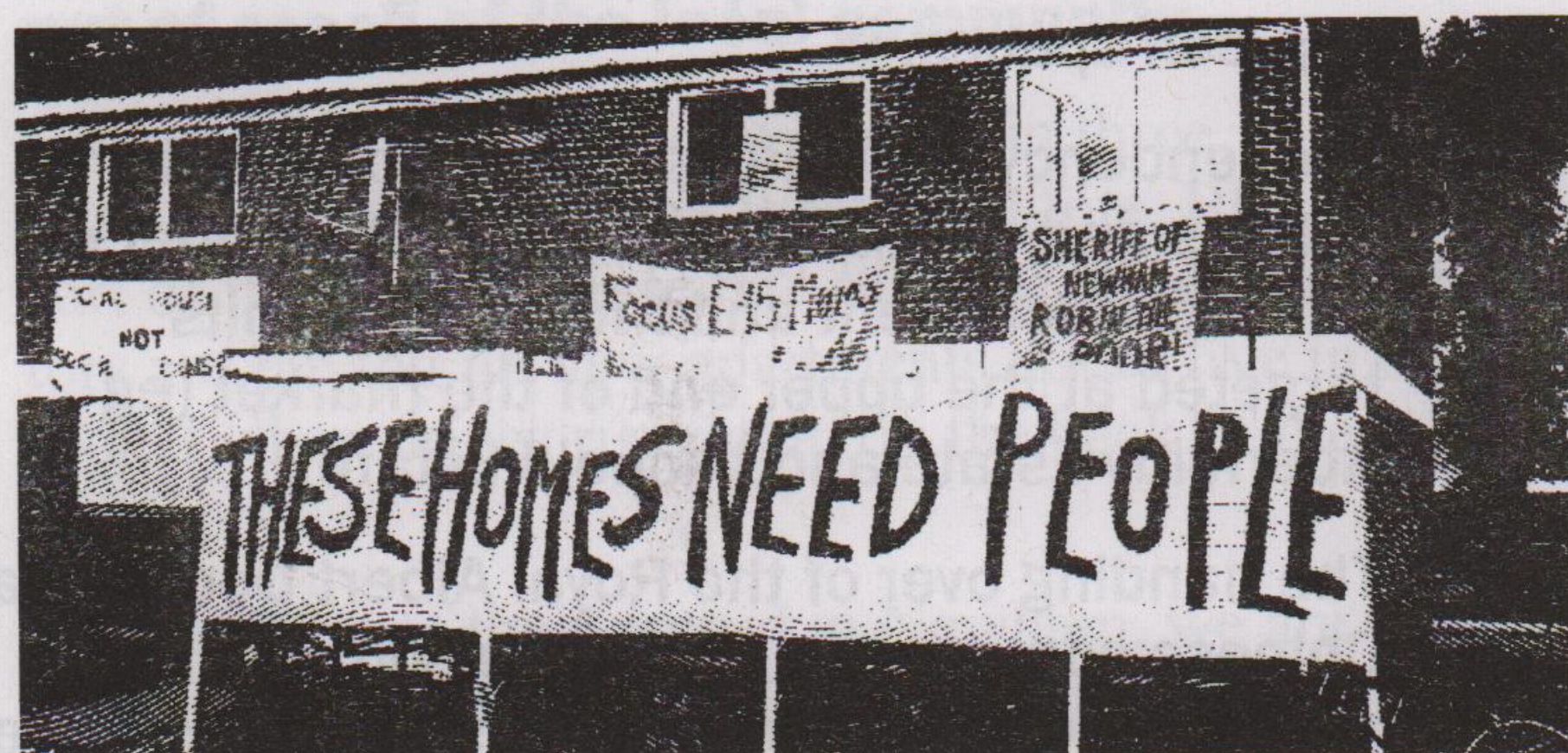
They made links with American Westbrook tenants who were facing similar tactics. According to a tenant in the Bronx, New York: 'We're living in sub-human conditions....there's no locks on the doors. It's infested with roaches, mice. Right now, he (the landlord) uses the building like an ATM machine. As a turnover, quickly, to get the tenants in and get them out any way he can'. Another said: 'I wouldn't be surprised to hear one of these days that one of the tenants fell through the floor or the ceilings fell on them. They're not really doing the work. They're just covering it up and waiting for time to pass'.

Housing advocates and tenants recognise that these

issues are symptoms of a wider problem – the drive by property firms to put the squeeze on people in social housing in order to raise rents. They are part of a deliberate strategy of real estate developers to overbid on too many properties where the only way to make their business plans work is to dramatically raise rents by pushing out lower rent tenants, or to starve buildings of basic maintenance.

Seemingly against the odds, the New Era tenants won. Westbrook gave up and the estate has been taken over by a new (social housing) landlord, the Dolphin Square Foundation/Dolphin Living. DSF promised a year's moratorium on rent increases and a review to come up with a fair rent policy (at a suggested 40% of income). In the words of the victorious tenants: 'Time to celebrate and spread the message! If you don't fight you won't win! We hope this will inspire everyone out there to say no to predatory landlords, rackrenting and social cleansing!'

UPDATE FROM THE FOCUS E15 CAMPAIGN



This year the Focus E15 campaign continues to gather pace with the same amount of energy and determination as last year. Our key messages are:

- *Repopulate the Carpenters Estate in Stratford where around 400 homes have been left empty by Newham Labour council for over 6 years.*
- *Say no to evictions and social cleansing.*

Outrageously, evictions in London are at an all-time high. Networks of activists have started to organise Eviction Resistance which is supported by the Focus E15 campaign and has had some successes. The campaign has also offered support to some of the young residents still under threat of eviction from the hostel Focus E15 in Stratford. Some of the residents have been handed eviction notices by their housing association, East Thames. One young person, who contacted the campaign, is on a zero hour contract and was sanctioned by the benefits office for no apparent reason. As a consequence she fell behind with her rent and was told by East Thames that she would be evicted for rent arrears. This is a vicious trap that many of the young people find themselves in. The campaign was able to exert pressure and her eviction warrant was

removed. No more evictions from the hostel Focus E15!

The Focus E15 campaign has made links with people from the Fred/John Towers in Leyton who have been told by the council that their tower blocks will be demolished and probably sold to a private developer. We will be having a public meeting about this in February. Check our Facebook page for updates. Another date for your diary is that housing campaigners and supporters will converge on City Hall as part of the March for Homes. The Focus E15 campaign will be leading the March for Homes East London on Saturday 31st January which is being organised by Defend Council Housing and South London Peoples Assembly. Please join us at 12 noon at St Leonard's church in Shoreditch. We will have our sound system and banners. Come and use our open mic to have your say about the housing crisis.

Also don't forget that the campaign's central hub is our lively street stall. We are there every Saturday from 12pm -2pm outside Wilkos on the Broadway in Stratford E15. Let's get organised and get active in our communities!

Celebrity activists – Perils and Promise

The day that New Era Estate residents scored an incredible victory in booting out US investors threatening to triple their rents, the Independent reported that “Russell Brand’s revolution may actually be working”. Just as in most other articles on the issue, Brand’s face was featured prominently, whilst the residents were barely to be seen. The idea that it is ‘his’ revolution is typical of media reporting around the thriving housing movement, where news of a grassroots political victory only becomes worthy of reporting should a well-known face be attached. Residents will of course be delighted with the level of exposure brought by Brand’s involvement, and it would be wrong to ignore that it has an impact. But the media focus needs reigning in – the real drivers, winners and people worthy of celebrating in any struggle, are the collective, not the individual.

The way the media turns collective struggle into an individual leader’s distracts from the most important messages of these successes – that whoever you are, YOU CAN DO THIS. The powerful message is that collective action works, regardless of your background or experience in activism. You get together with people who share your goal, and you thrash at your targets until they listen. The message should be – watch and learn and be inspired, copy their successful tactics,

learn from their failures.

It’s of course not just Russell Brand that needs to be viewed critically as a celebrity – politicians are often more than happy to parachute in to show support for a cause once it becomes clear it would be good for their image.

Witness the spectacle of Boris Johnson backing New Era residents (Guardian, 17th November) whilst at the same time courting the very foreign investors who put working class communities in jeopardy by hosting the MIPIM conference for rich foreign investors, and the plans to turn central London old Royal Mail building at Mount Pleasant into luxury housing (only 12% “affordable” housing). Support must always be received with a critical eye, lest the struggle be hijacked as a political photo opportunity.

What should be taken away from these successes is that ordinary people, when they organise together, whatever their age, gender, race or class background, if they have a common cause, there is no stronger force against austerity, gentrification, the abuses of capitalism and the violence of the state, than the power of people. Neither corporations nor governments (local or national) like sustained focus on their dirty practices.

HOMES AT RISK FOLLOWING LANDLORD NEGLECT

Since January 2014 Tower Hamlets Renters have been supporting tenants in a 19-flat block of privately rented apartments in Shadwell. The campaign centred at first upon supporting Michael James, who was threatened with eviction by his landlord after he reported seriously dangerous conditions threatening the safety of himself and his neighbours.

Defending Michael’s right to stay in his home, Tower Hamlets Renters initiated a campaign of protests, attended local council meetings and publicised Michael’s story in national media and local news. As Michael’s story developed, so did the situation in his block of flats: environmental services department conducted an inspection of entire building and discovered three hazards per home. The Council is now in the process of trying to force the landlord to return the building to a safe standard.

Following a meeting with tenants and the Council, we discovered that the help of the environmental services department may well be a wolf in sheep’s clothing. There are three means by which people living in the block may now lose their homes: firstly, as the block requires so much work the landlord may decide to move tenants out for the duration of the repairs, with no obligation to let them return; secondly, as a number of the flats are considered require an HMO license, the landlord may opt to kick the tenants out rather than apply for the licence, and finally, the landlord is under no obligation to maintain the same rent levels for the same flats following these mandatory repairs, regardless of the fact that the repairs are required under health and safety legislation.

During 2014, Michael James was subject to two attempts to evict him using Section 21 (two-month notice to quit). It later transpired that the landlord was

Continued on Page 6 ►

missing paperwork without which Michael ironically becomes an assured tenant. It turns out any private tenant who signed a contract between January 1989 and February 1997 was by law entitled to a Section 20 stating they were on a short-hold tenancy rather than an assured one. In this instance, the landlord has been unable to provide proof of Michael's Section 20. Thus, from being the person in the block with the most instability, now Michael is actually the only person who is not at risk of being evicted.

Following our experience of working with Michael and his block, Tower Hamlets Renters are now focused on promoting the proposed 'landlord licensing scheme' that would have helped prevent the whole fiasco. Such a licence would mean that tenants would be protected from eviction if they reported poor conditions. Furthermore, it would be illegal for landlords to rent out substandard accommodation, protecting tenants from ever suffering as Michael did in future.

BOLEYN POINT!

Green Street in Newham faces further threats from developers with the departure of West Ham from Boleyn stadium. Galliard Homes is putting in proposals to Newham Council for a major housing development on the West Ham site. Unfortunately, these plans are aimed at the luxury and upper-end of the housing market. With average income in Newham of just £27,000 a year, these homes will be well out of reach of the local community.

Galliard promised 838 new homes in three 13-storey high tower blocks on the West Ham Site. BUT what sort of flats would these be? All over Newham speculators are buying up new apartments not to live in but to re-sell when prices rise again on the back of the local economy.

On the basis of their record in Newham, we are extremely suspicious that Galliard will provide any social housing on the Boleyn site. They promote the property they have built to the wealthy, specialising in sales to investors from the Far East (see article on Capital Towers in this issue of the Howler).

Along with our chums The Friends of Queen's Market we call for 100% social housing on the site. We cannot expect Galliard to deliver this as they have provided NO SOCIAL HOUSING at Capital Towers near the Bow Flyover. The relationship between Galliard and Newham Council seems very cosy. Local people will have to mobilise to combat these attacks on our living conditions.

Instead of more luxury housing, we need to have homes built for locals with a low rent. These 833 flats should all be social housing. If Galliard objects, point to the enormous profits they make, point to Section 106 of the Growth and Infrastructure Act of 2013, which stipulates social housing as a component of building projects, point to the new homes bonus.

The redevelopment of the site should include:

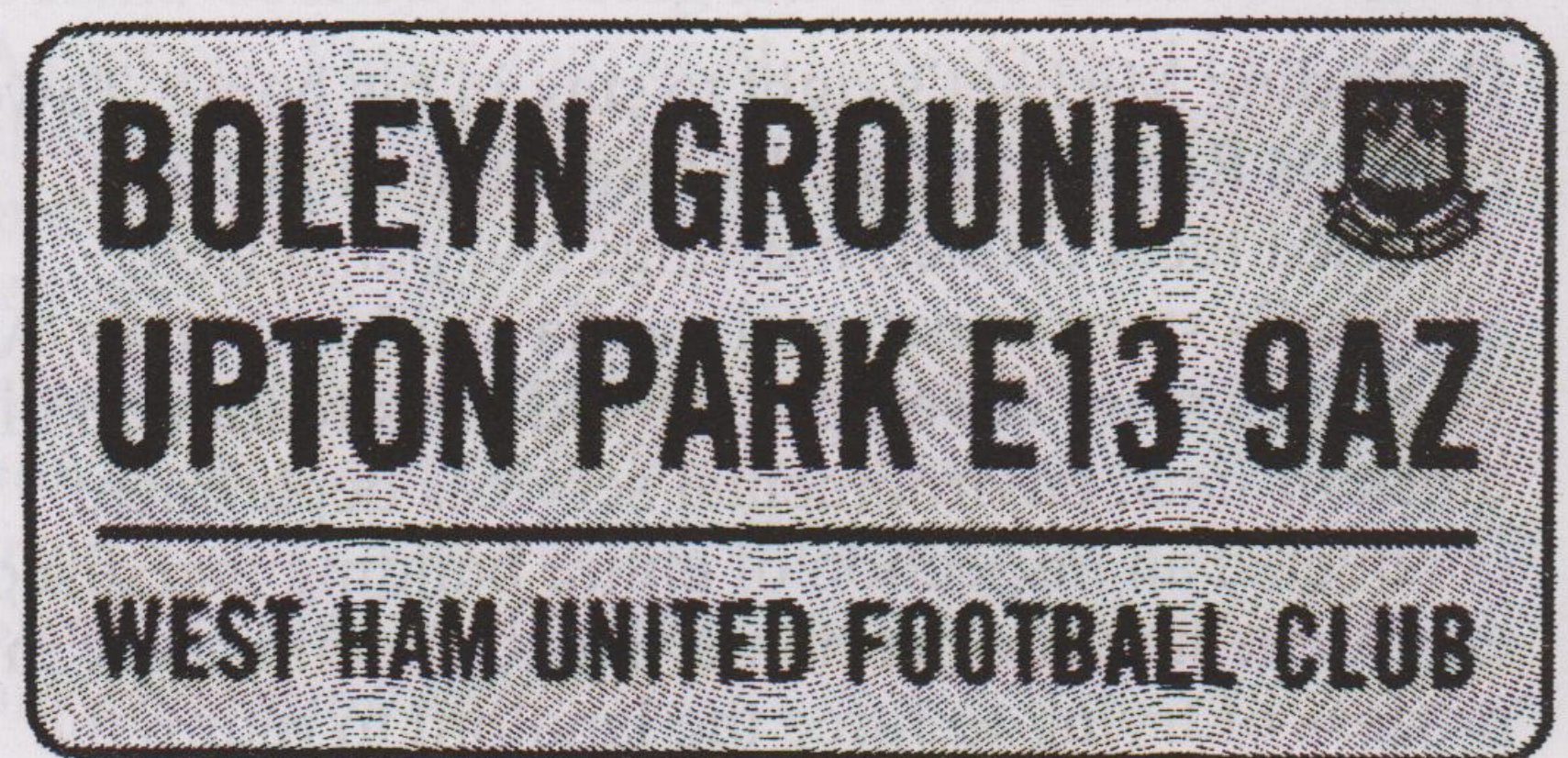
- *All the housing should be in a price range that local people, on or below the average income for Newham, can afford. This means 100% social*

housing, giving Newham Council a chance to catch up on their commitment to social housing in the borough.

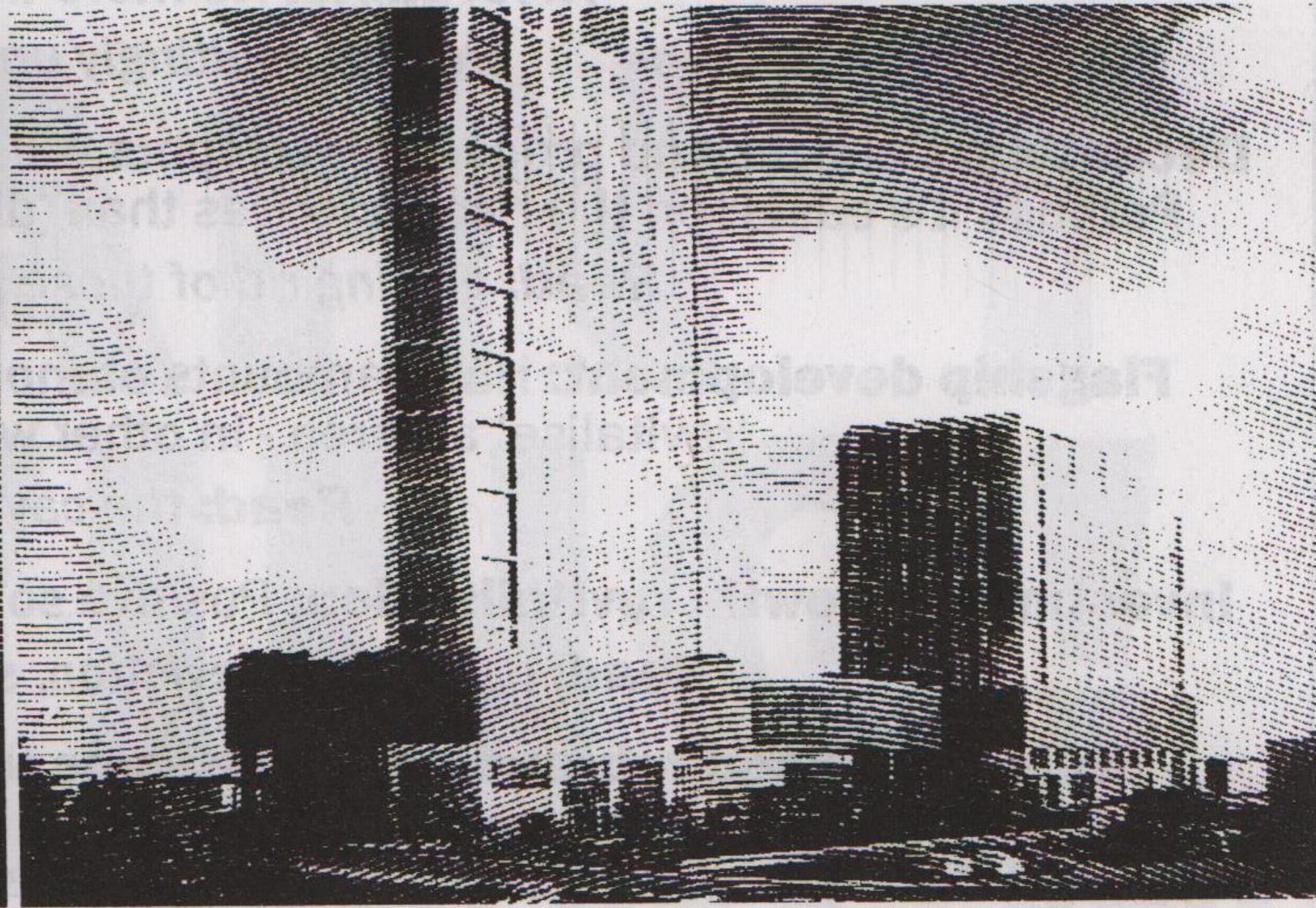
- *There should be a variety of type of units, suitable for families as well as single people.*
- *The buildings should be low rise, with some terraces, in keeping with the character of the area. This type of housing is better for families and also does not block the light from the surrounding streets.*
- *The housing should not be sold to buy-to-let landlords who would immediately put rents up.*
- *The development should enhance the area, making it a better place to live, by providing more green spaces and facilities such as a health centre.*

We agree with the Newham Council's Core Strategy when it says that people should stay longer in Newham and put down roots. However, their housing policies contradict this strategy. It has not fulfilled its commitment to provide homes for the people of Newham by providing social housing and instead has focused on attracting people from outside the borough who have more money, often investors who leave their properties empty or have no intention of living there.

We think that the way to implement the policy is to provide housing that is of good quality and within the reach of actual Newham residents. Only if we do this will we retain the communities we have built up.



GALLIARD GLOATS OVER "FULLY PRIVATE" DEVELOPMENT



The property developers Galliard are responsible for many new developments all over London which have amassed millions for them. One of the latest developments is the Capital Towers project just east of the river Lea and the Bow Bridge in Newham. Work has just started and a massive crane now towers over the A102 and the Bow Flyover.

Prospective 2 bedroom flats on the new development are advertised at the prices of from £449,000 up to £488,000! Galliard gloats that there is no social housing on the site and that it is "fully private". Action East End has learnt that all of the flats have already been sold before they have even been built, mainly to Chinese investors.

In December 2013 flats in the development went on sale in a hotel in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, and were promoted with what critics said was "was reminiscent of TV comedy hotelier Basil Fawlty's "no riff raff" rule for the launch of Gourmet Night at Fawlty Towers." This was put through by Fraser and Co., with offices in the West End, Hong Kong and Singapore, who drum up trade for Galliard with wealthy Far Eastern investors. Its managing director, Robert Fraser, was quoted in the Financial Times as saying: "Entry level schemes in Stratford, Greenwich and Canary Wharf have sold well recently. In Hong Kong, most people buy their own homes off-plan, so they are comfortable investing in this way. They see London as a financial safe haven that offers good value compared with property back home".

At the time Darren Johnson, Green Party member on the London Assembly, said: "It's unbelievable that 191 luxury apartments in Stratford are being advertised to millionaires in Kuala Lumpur with the promise they'll never have to rub shoulders with the hoi polloi. Is this really what our Olympic legacy is about?"

Galliard replied that "The development is being mar-

keted in the Far East and a question that regularly arises is whether all units on a site are for private sale. We feel obliged to indicate this on Far East material."

It appears that Newham Council has connived with this totally private development with a spokesman for the Mayor Robin Wales stating that: "The developers agreed with Newham to pay a sum for affordable housing elsewhere in the borough, and we saw no reason to overturn Newham's decision." In a feeble excuse as to why they allowed Galliard to build a development where there is no social housing, let alone "affordable" housing, Newham Council replied: "Our view was that the development approved — of one and two bed flats in two very high density tall buildings next to the busy A12 and the Stratford High Street flyover — was not appropriate for social housing." This seems rather peculiar as up the road from there on Stratford High Street are several old social housing blocks whilst just over the border in Tower Hamlets sits another social housing development, the Bow Bridge Estate.

So bang went any pressure from Newham Council to demand that Galliard provide social housing as part of the project. This seems to be more and more the case with Newham Council as they appear to be abandoning any pretence at providing social housing in the borough and inviting in the big property developers to build ever more opulent high rise buildings exclusively for the rich. We believe the sum paid to Newham Council was almost £1 million.

Questions

Exactly how much money was paid to Newham Council?

Is this money being used to develop social housing in Newham or is it sitting in the Council's bank accounts?

UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPER-SPEAK

The Howler explains some of the language used by property developers, councils and the media to soften the violence of gentrification and the housing crisis.

Affordable: No more than 80% of market rate.

Read: *Insultingly unaffordable for most.*

Decanting: Councils and property developers will actually refer to people like they're canned goods. Perhaps it's easier on their consciences than 'displacing families and shattering communities'.

Read: *getting rid of those pesky working class types.*

Flagship development: Huge amounts of money pumped into a single development to try to 'revitalise' an area - in other words, to kick off gentrification.

Read: *the cavalry is coming.*

Investment, growth, revitalisation: Positive sounding buzzwords that mask what often happens.

Read: *demolition, eviction, scattering of original tenants.*

Neighbourhood rebranding: At the same time as people are being turfed out, places are increasingly being given new names, presumably in an attempt to create a 'buzz' about an area loud enough to drown out the sound of the bulldozers. Usually 'something-Quarter', 'something-Town', 'something-Village'. Eviction clearly isn't enough - histories have to be erased with it.

Read: *We consider the previous residents to be skeletons in our closet.*

Regeneration, improvement: Making changes to an area to attract bigger businesses and richer tenants. As no attempt will be made to counteract the inevitable increase in house prices, anyone who currently lives there is screwed.

Read: *Doing absolutely anything we can to attract rich overseas property investors.*

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Tower Hamlets Federation of Tenants & Residents Associations: C/o Unite Community Centre, St Georges Town Hall, 236 Cable Street, London E1 OBL | Email: admin@th-federation.org.uk | Website: th-federation.org.uk | Tel: 07903060303

Tower Hamlets Renters: C/o Unite Community Centre, St Georges Town Hall, 236 Cable Street, London E1 OBL | Email: towerhamletsrenters@gmail.com

Focus E15 - Social Housing not Social Cleansing: Website: <http://focuse15.org/>
Email: focuse15london@gmail.com | Twitter: <https://twitter.com/FocusE15>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Focus-E15-Mothers/602860129757343>

Friends of Queens Market: 142 Clements Road, London E6 2DL
Email: friendsofqueensmarket@yahoo.co.uk

Newham Monitoring Project: Office telephone: 020 8470 8333
24 hour Emergency Helpline: 0800 169 3111 | The Harold Rd Centre, 170 Harold Rd, Upton Park, London E13 0SE

Random Blowe: Great blog on what's happening in Newham and all points north, south, east and west
<http://www.blowe.org.uk/p/about-random-blowe.html>

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 the popular media. All of this, as so much in 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 e-mail to: actioneastend@gmail.com

We will add you to our mailing list and keep you informed of our latest activities. Alternatively, if you 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.