



Estate Watch London, and beyond

London Tenants Federation

London, UK

Just Space

London, UK

Loretta Lees

University of Leicester

The **London Tenants Federation** brings together social housing tenants across London to act on matters affecting their homes and communities. **Just Space** is an informal network of around 200 community groups, which acts as a voice for Londoners at the grass roots level with respect to London's planning strategy. **Loretta Lees** is Professor of Human Geography, University of Leicester, and Chair of the London Housing Panel.

Contact:

info@londontenants.org

richardlee50@gmail.com

loretta.lees@le.ac.uk

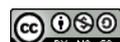
Abstract

In this update we outline a collaboration between the London Tenants Federation, Just Space and the urban geographer Loretta Lees that resulted in a new website *Estate Watch London* (<https://estatewatch.london/>). This is a community resource designed to provide information on, and to monitor, those council and housing association estates across London under threat of demolition. As well as showcasing our own research undertaken *with*, not *on*, local estate communities, we also urge residents to add information about their estates keeping it as up to date as possible.

Keywords

Council estate renewal, grassroots evidence, community resources, collaboration, tenant led

'Whatever had been promised in the beginning, everything has been changed every time. So now we are quite worried because we really don't know what is going to happen. We really don't know, what is going to happen with us, with our property. Unfortunately Haringey are offering, for the properties, a very low price. And with that money we cannot buy anywhere in London' (Love Lane resident, talks of the stress and uncertainty caused by estate renewal).



Introduction

Estate Watch London (<https://estatewatch.london/>) is a new, online resource for London communities experiencing council estate regeneration. It was created by the London Tenants Federation and Just Space in collaboration with urban geographer Loretta Lees. In this update we set out the wider context in which the website was developed, discuss its aims and content, and more broadly we discuss campaigning that is estate based and tenant led, the important role of universities, and the meaning of collaborative practice.

Context

With austerity limiting their ability to bring existing council estates up to Decent Homes Standard¹, local authorities in England (and to some degree in the devolved nations of the UK more widely) have been encouraged to cash in on their underlying land value to finance more housing, and claim they have no alternative. With the nation's highest land values and greatest housing pressure, hyper-gentrified London is at the forefront of this 'new' urban

Figure 1

Love Lane Estate,
Tottenham, with the new
Tottenham football stadium
looming in the background.

Photography:
Loretta Lees, 2020



Video 1

Aylesbury Estate being
demolished.
Video: Loretta Lees, 2018



This video only plays using Adobe Acrobat

¹ The Decent Homes Standard is a technical standard for public housing that underpinned the Decent Homes Programme brought in by the New Labour government which aimed to provide a minimum standard of housing conditions for all those housed in council and housing association property.

Figure 2

Gascoigne Estate
demolition.
Photography:
Loretta Lees, 2020



renewal (Lees, 2014; Lees and White, 2020), but where London leads “other cities subject to high housing demand” are expected to follow (Adonis 2015:7).

Demolition schemes are often fiercely opposed. Estate residents frequently question the need for redevelopment rather than incremental refurbishment and fear displacement from their homes and neighbourhoods (LTF et al 2014).

‘...As I said, the redevelopment is not for us, it’s not for poor people, it’s for people that are working, although I’m working, but it’s just for a whole different set of people’ (Gascoigne Estate resident, lamenting the renewal is not really for them).

The Research

The 3 year ESRC project led by Loretta Lees² collated evidence (read the full report at <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/estate-renewal-in-london-an-assessment-of-regeneration-induced-displacement/>) that showed:

- The scale of decanting from council estates has been under-estimated: there have been at least 161 schemes in London since 1997 which have involved demolition, and at least 55,000 households (approximately 150,000 to 200,000 residents) have had to move.
- The majority of properties on redeveloped estates are sold at market rate and few of those defined as ‘affordable’ housing are at equivalent rents to the lost council housing. Housing association rents are usually higher than council rents, properties are generally smaller, and in being moved into housing association properties council tenants lose the extra protections built into council housing tenure.

² Drawing on PI: Lees,L., CoIs: Hubbard, P. and Tate, N. ESRC 2017-2020. Gentrification, Displacement, and the Impacts of Council Estate Renewal in C21st London. Our special thanks to CoIs Phil Hubbard and Nick Tate, RAs Natalie Smith and Adam Elliot-Cooper, and consultant Jon Reades; and to Sian Berry GLA for her support.

Figure 3

New properties on the regenerated Ocean Estate

Photography:
Loretta Lees, 2019



It's new properties [new housing association properties] but financially a lot of people actually they're not happy with that, they're saying it's way too much rent than what the Council properties were so they're really squeezing tighter [financially]. Some of the people they complained and to be honest this is in a way putting them people into a benefit-trap' (Ocean estate former resident, discusses the unaffordability of the replacement 'affordable' housing).

- Returning to the original footprint of the estate is often impossible for leaseholders given that similar-sized properties in the new developments tend to become much less affordable after redevelopment: shared ownership properties are rarely attractive for those who previously bought their property under 'right to buy'.

We don't want the new ones, they are too expensive. A studio flat there is £428,000. And the Council is offering me [£]250 [thousand] for my three-bedroom... And a three bedroom [in the new-builds] is [£]850,000' (Aylesbury Estate resident, makes clear the undermining of their leasehold, right to buy, investment).

As part of this research 120 in-depth interviews were carried out with tenants and residents of 6 London estates undergoing regeneration – quotes from these interviews are used in this article and on *Estate Watch London*.

London Tenants Federation and Just Space

As the research project drew to a close, *Estate Watch London* was developed by London Tenants Federation (LTF) and Just Space (JS) as a web resource for communities facing estate regeneration.

LTF brings together social housing tenant organisations from across London to act on matters that affect their/our homes and communities. Bringing forward grassroots evidence, experience, and comments, ensures a strong, collective voice in decision making (see <https://londontenants.org>).

JS is a London wide network of community groups influencing plan making and planning policy. It has more than 13 years experience of working in collaboration with universities in their teaching, research and public engagement (see <https://justspace.org.uk>).

Estates under threat

As well as disseminating university led research, the website has been developed as a community resource with information about over 100 council and housing association estates across London that are under threat of demolition. Maps and links enable you to view the estates by London Borough, monitor each scheme as it progresses, and the website makes space for residents to add information about their estate in real time.

Mayor of London's involvement

The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan's *Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration* promised tenants and residents they would in future be at the heart of decision making; as a condition of GLA funding all residents of an estate regeneration scheme would have a vote (ballot) on proposals to develop their estate.

However, the Mayor has continued to approve and fund estate regeneration across the city; indeed since 2016 he has approved 82 estate demolitions. The right to a ballot has been undermined by exemptions, with so far 44 estates being denied a vote. Where ballots have been held, the option of refurbishment is often never properly articulated and the Mayor has ignored complaints about ballots offering a false choice. In reality ballots are a PR exercise to gain a vote for demolition.

Refurbishment

Given the huge need for more council housing, not less, we must hold onto what we have. LTF and JS commissioned UCL's Engineering Exchange to produce detailed evidence about the social, environmental and economic benefits of refurbishment. An evidence-based report, factsheets and videos are all on the *Estate Watch London* website (see UCL Engineering Exchange, 2014, "Demolition or refurbishment of social housing? – a review of the evidence").

Resources for residents

Estate Watch London includes a number of useful handouts written *by* tenants *for* tenants, including:

- 7 reasons why we should beware of estate regeneration
- Holding onto existing council homes and keeping tenants united
- Tenant-led regeneration – alternatives to demolition
- 5 guarantees leaseholders should seek
- Residents Charter template

University-community collaboration

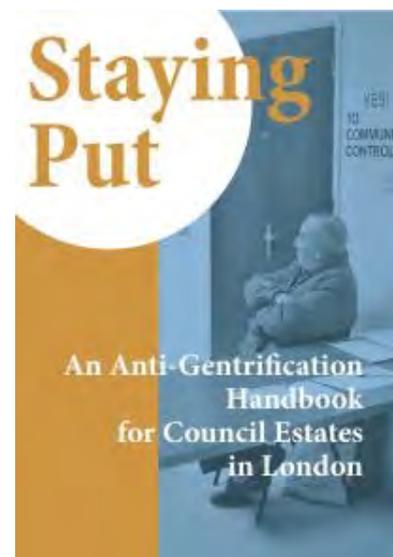
LTF and JS have collaborated with Loretta Lees for well over a decade now (see *Staying Put* below) based on an ongoing commitment to listen to the voices of local council estate communities, revealing the truth about what is going on, and supporting solutions that come from the grassroots.

The aim is to develop and enact collaborative practice – in which we need to constantly rethink the role of universities (and, within that, academics). Working across the power imbalance between universities and community groups, and avoiding the exploitation of community knowledge and organising require long term commitment. The university has learning and resources to share, but must recognise the expertise of community organisations and respect community decision making and ownership.

Based on these principles, we would like to use this online platform to encourage tenant organisations, community groups and universities to replicate our collaboration elsewhere - beyond London, and indeed beyond the UK. Please contact us if you would like to discuss getting involved in and/or contributing to such a collaboration in your own community.

Figure 4

London Tenant's Federation,
Lees, L., Just Space and
Southwark Notes Archive
Group (2014)



References

- Adonis, A. (2015) City villages: More homes, better communities, in: A. Adonis and B. Davies (Eds.) *City Villages: More Homes, Better Communities*, pp. 5-20 (London: Institute for Public Policy Research) http://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/city-villages_Mar2015.pdf?noredirect=1
- Lees, L. (2014) The urban injustices of New Labour's "New Urban Renewal": The case of the Aylesbury Estate in London, *Antipode*, 46(4), pp. 921-947.
- Lees, L. and White, H. (2020) The social cleansing of London council estates: everyday experiences of 'accumulative dispossession', *Housing Studies*, 35:10, 1701-1722, DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2019.1680814](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2019.1680814)
- London Tenant Federation, Lees, L., Just Space, & Southwark Notes Archive Group (2014) *Staying Put: An Anti-Gentrification Handbook for Council Estates* (London: London Tenants Federation) <https://southwarknotes.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/staying-put-web-version-low.pdf>