

THE ETHICS OF ESTATE REGENERATION

ARCHITECTS FOR SOCIAL HOUSING
IN RESPONSE TO THE
ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS



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In June 2016, Dhruv Sookhoo, a researcher for the RIBA Housing Group, published an article in the RIBA Journal titled 'Ethics of Estate Regeneration'. This was published as a guide to architectural practices in response to the rise in campaigns of resistance to estate regeneration schemes, and in particular to the criticism of the role of architects in the social cleansing of working-class residents from Inner London the programme of estate regeneration was serving. Architects for Social Housing had been at the forefront of this criticism. This began with our protest in June 2015 against the AJ120 Awards, which had nominated HTA Design, Hawkins/Brown and Mae Architects for their part in the ongoing demolition and redevelopment of the Aylesbury estate; and continued with our protest, in October 2015, against the RIBA's nomination of Roger Stirk Harbour + Partners' Neo-Bankside luxury development for the prestigious Stirling Prize. Our announcement of this protest, which received considerable coverage in the architectural press, led to the RIBA inviting ASH to a meeting to discuss our criticisms. Apparently oblivious to both these and the negative press our protest had drawn to the awards, the following year the RIBA nominated Trafalgar Place, the first development site on the demolished Heygate estate, for the Stirling Prize. Once again ASH announced a protest, and once again we were invited to meet with the RIBA. In addition to issuing our demands, which included precluding the nomination of any estate regeneration scheme that resulted in the loss of homes for social rent and the social cleansing of the existing community for the Stirling Prize, at this meeting ASH presented the RIBA with our point-by-point response to Sookhoo's article. This report is that text, with the RIBA article reproduced in inverted commas in black, and ASH's response in red.

'Getting to grips with the ethics of estate regeneration is as pressing as the practical means of achieving it.'

'The ethical dilemma for architects engaged in estate regeneration is the need to balance the rights of existing residents, who have invested socially and financially in their neighbourhoods, with the unvoiced claims of potential new neighbours desperate for a home.'

The balance between existing residents and their future neighbours isn't about the rights of the former and the claims of the latter, but about the ability of each to afford the new housing being built on the land currently being occupied by the homes of residents. This isn't an ethical dilemma for architects but an economic determination of who gets to live in the housing they design. Residents' Right to Return to the new development, which has been brandished by everyone from Michael Heseltine and Brandon Lewis to Sadiq Khan, is meaningless if they cannot afford to do so. Nor is it clear for which potential neighbours the new housing is being built when current prices preclude all but the very wealthiest investors.

'Estate regeneration can be a controversial, complex, bruising business. Architects engaged in it have recently found themselves accused by activists and the media of being complicit in social cleansing, heritage heresy, crimes against sustainability and profiteering. Residents' ongoing negative experiences of estates resulting from poor construction, maintenance failures or perceived systematic underinvestment may provide a dismal basis for forecasting the new project team's intent or ability to create socially equitable, livable neighbourhoods.'

Describing the role of estate regeneration in social cleansing as the accusations of 'activists' is inaccurate and dismissive when numerous housing groups, estate resident campaigns, and even the occasional architectural practice, have demonstrated the truth of the claim. Equally, systematic underinvestment in council estates isn't 'perceived' but a fact verifiable by council records and the testimony of estate communities and their repeatedly rejected requests for the refurbishment of their homes. In this context, 'socially equitable' and 'livable' are abstract terms that occlude the real source of the managed decline of housing estates by councils preparatory to their demolition and redevelopment.

'Architects anxious about slotting into a past narrative of social decline may choose to avoid regeneration projects altogether. However, the incoming architect's decision to accept a regeneration commission should be based on how likely they feel able to positively influence what happens next. Wrestling socially responsible, architecturally worthy projects from years of decline or underinvestment requires our most capable, morally grounded architects. Withdrawing for fear of unjust disapproval or project

complexities is an abdication of responsibility for a widely regarded societal challenge: providing more, high quality homes where they are needed most.'

One would hope that the anxiety of architects is of rather less concern to the profession than the uncertainty, threats, intimidation, lies, depression and fear that residents live through during the ten or more years of the regeneration process. 'Morally grounded' is, again, a meaningless term, and an inappropriate one for the RIBA to use given its recent election to its Presidency of Ben Derbyshire, who as Managing Partner of HTA Design is overseeing the redevelopment of the Aylesbury Estate, one of the worst examples of architects collaborating in the social cleansing of an estate community. Characterising residents' disapproval of plans to demolish their homes as 'unjust' betrays a set of pre-existing assumptions about the reasons for that rejection incompatible with an 'ethical' approach to regeneration. And taking responsibility for a societal challenge means not only designing more and better homes, but above all ensuring that they are homes people who need them can afford to rent or buy, starting with the people whose existing homes are being demolished to make way for them. 'High quality' homes, like 'affordable housing', has become a euphemism for building up-market investments as part of the social cleansing of a community, and its uncritical use here betrays the author's complicity in this process, or at best an ignorance of its language.

Consider all options

'Being passive is not an option. Architects may be reluctant to exceed their brief, but remaining ethically active throughout the regeneration process means embracing a strategic role within the project team. According to Claire Bennie, "Architects are often brought into the regeneration process when the client mindset appears unshakeable. But architects have a vital role in informing the context for decision-making and ensuring all options are considered."

Characterising the role of architects in the regeneration process as 'ethical' risks reducing their agency to one of individual conscience. This ignores their position as employees within a practice under the direction and in the employment of a company director. Judging by their current roles in estate regeneration schemes, relying on the consciences of directors such as Steve Tompkins, Alex Mae, Ben Derbyshire, Paul Karakusevic, Andy von Bradsky, Sadie Morgan and others is unlikely to result in architects being 'ethically active'. On the contrary, estate regeneration is a social, not an ethical, issue, and as such should be covered under the *RIBA Code of Professional Conduct*, in which the duty of architects to 'have a proper concern and due regard for the effect that their work may have on the local community' (paragraph 3.1) falls well short of the strictures that should be observed. Much as a doctor does under a Hippocratic oath, these codes should prohibit architects from working on estate regeneration schemes that will result in the social cleansing of existing residents. By this standard, the collaboration of Haworth Tompkins on the demolition and redevelopment of Robin Hood Gardens, of Mae on Knight's Walk,

of HTA Design on the Aylesbury Estate, of Karakusevic Carson on the Colville estate, PRP Architects on Central Hill estate, or RIBA Sterling-Prize nominated dRMM on the Heygate estate – to name just a few practices – would be professionally prohibited.

‘Using the design process as a vehicle to frame, model and test decision-making and assumptions should encourage enlightened clients to be more self-critical about their objectives and how best to achieve them while addressing competing moral claims. Acting ethically is a practical business. For example, it is perfectly reasonable for architects undertaking an initial phasing study to ask how residents will be temporarily housed during regeneration to ensure their work minimises social disruption. It is also sensible to ask about long-term maintenance funding to explore whether design intent can be sustained.’

Relying on ‘enlightened clients’ that are interested only in increasing their profits and reducing their obligations is no answer to the ethics, or more accurately the social responsibilities, of estate regeneration. ‘Moral claims’ have yet to stop a single step in the march of global capital that has transformed people’s homes into commodities on the property market driving the crisis in housing. And while the issue of resident housing during the so-called ‘decanting’ process (so-called because residents rarely return), and the setting aside of funds for the future maintenance of new developments, are both important, more important still is the financial ability, as distinct from the stated right, of existing residents to return to new housing that, under the guise of ‘high quality’, are being built for prices far beyond their economic reach.

‘Being analytical provides clients with the added value expected of an architect by flushing out overlooked practical problems. It may also allay your fears about potential hidden agendas.’

Such ‘agendas’ aren’t hidden, they simply need looking for. As an example of which, when HTA Design, under the direction of newly elected RIBA President Ben Derbyshire, took on the brief for the Aylesbury estate redevelopment, he ignored both the 2001 ballot in which 73 per cent of residents on a 76 per cent turnout voted against the proposed stock transfer of their homes to Notting Hill housing association and the demolition of the estate that would follow; as well as the 2009 submission by Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First to the Government Inspector on the ‘systematic failings of the Aylesbury Area Action Plan consultation process.’ Despite this, in November 2015 Ben Derbyshire wrote:

‘Although we were not involved in the process that led to the decision to redevelop Aylesbury, we have absolutely no reason to doubt the thoroughness of the process that gave rise to the Area Action Plan, which was adopted by Southwark and the residents of the estate as the basis for the redevelopment brief. Indeed, we believe this enabled HTA Design as master planners, and the team of architects, including

HTA Design, Hawkins\Brown, Mae, and Duggan Morris, to develop the adopted AAP proposals into the scheme now approved by the council and supported by the majority of residents.'

'Unfounded criticism can overshadow regeneration projects, sapping morale within architecture practices, making clients risk averse and potentially inhibiting a full exploration of all options necessary to discover the best possible solution for residents. Promoting a reflective approach to design decision-making within practice, including openly evaluating the veracity of criticism against evidence built through design, may prove a powerful tonic. If, having examined the evidence, you find external criticism justified or your client closed to other, deliverable options, it may be worth considering your involvement.'

Describing such criticism as 'unfounded', just as describing resident disapproval as 'unjust', betrays, once again, the allegiances, or at best assumptions, of the author. The 'exploration of all options', as has been demonstrated on the Cressingham Gardens, Knight's Walk and Central Hill regenerations, is little more than window dressing when those options are consistently, and without consultation with residents, reduced to full demolition when the alternatives are deemed to be financially unviable for the profit margins of the developers and the political motivations of the local authority. Here again, the ethical duties of individual architects are meaningless in the face of the political and financial motivations driving estate demolition. Recent history has shown that, under the obligation of a brief – a duty inscribed in the Architects Registration Board's *Standards of Conduct and Practice* (paragraph 5.1) – architects are the last people to evaluate the veracity of criticism from residents. On the contrary, judging by the present article and similar statements made by leaders in the profession, it is architects, and not the residents they presume to enlighten through their designs, who require the 'tonic'. And where one might hope to read a recommendation to architects to refuse to participate in the shameful collaboration of the profession in the social cleansing of our housing estates, the advice to them to 'consider your involvement' is almost laughable in its timidity.

Demolition debate

'Architects' self-awareness about their own predispositions is required to honestly challenge pro-demolition and anti-demolition dogma and to make evidence-based recommendations to clients and residents on a case by case basis. It is not inherently unethical to weigh up the long-term benefits to existing and future residents against losing what is perceived by the architectural community as a valuable building, and recommend demolition. Nevertheless, architects are reluctant to participate in projects requiring the demolition of buildings that represent historical social progress, receive international acclaim or that have been personally instructive. But where demolition and rebuild allows for a purpose-built project able to benefit existing residents, provide new homes and make better use of resources in the long term, failing to at least consider

demolition is potentially short-sighted. Indeed, preserving a building solely for its architectural pedigree or its value to the architecture profession's past self-concept could be construed as self-serving and stifling our ability to realise socially responsible public projects in the present.'

Recommendations to clients based on evidence are to be welcomed, but given the refusal by architectural practices to consider any evidence except that presented by the client, whether local authority, housing association or property developer, it's unlikely that they will challenge the dogma of estate demolition propagated by the media, politicians, think tanks, housing commissions, and all the other bodies influencing public opinion in its favour. Nor are the alternatives that require weighing by architects a choice between the long-term benefits to residents and the historical value of the buildings they live in, but between the ability of existing residents to continue to live on the estate and being priced out by the demolition and replacement of their homes by unaffordable replacements. ASH has demonstrated that through infill and roof extensions it is possible to increase the housing capacity on council estates by 50 per cent and more without demolishing a single existing home, and therefore to accommodate the housing needs of future residents. Characterising estate regeneration as a choice between doing nothing and demolition is itself an example of the dogma the evidence of design can challenge, if only architects look outside the brief of clients interested only in the profit margins high-quality developments will accrue for investors.

'Architects should, however, beware of demolition as a politically expedient, potentially inappropriate means of dealing with so-called sink estates. A growing body of work demonstrates that where finance permits and building fabric is sound, architects can effectively address social stigma and poor energy performance without unnecessary social disruption or loss of heritage. Collective Architecture's fabric first high-rise refurbishment of Cedar Street, Glasgow is targeting Passivehaus EnerPHit and questioning the tendency to demolish within the city. Ryder's Bolam Coyne refurbishment brought part of Erskine's listed Byker Wall, Newcastle back from dereliction to provide new homes and stem urban decay.'

Except in the perceptions of a public that for 30 years has been fed the myth of 'sink estates', and which has recently been revived by this Conservative Government, it is not the 'social stigma' of living on a council estate that needs addressing by financial investment, but the neglected maintenance of the estate by local authorities, sometimes for decades, preparatory to their demolition. And as has been shown by, for instance, Balfour Tower, where the cost of renovation following heritage listing has driven the previous residents out, refurbishment must never become a back door through which the social cleansing of an estate community can be achieved as effectively as through demolition and redevelopment.

'Mae's Hillington Square, King's Lynn, provides a model of how to replan and retrofit a seemingly unlovely, ubiquitous slab block estate: replacing rows of garage doors with extended living space to create an active street, shortening endless deck access to provide residents with places to linger, and redefining the public realm to reconnect the estate to the historic neighbourhoods beyond.'

'Seemingly unlovely' is an inappropriate aesthetic judgement for the author to make, without factual basis beyond the stereotypes about council estates, when describing a community's homes, and displays an unreflexive class bias to his opinions about estate living and their largely working-class communities. The denigration of council housing by politicians has played an influential role in convincing the general public of the necessity of demolishing estates, and the author should be careful of uncritically adding his voice to the growing clamour.

'If a new client is unwilling to frankly discuss or evidence their rationale for demolition or refurbishment, it may be time to reconsider the commission.'

Again, the advice to architects to 'reconsider the commission' is a pusillanimously weak conclusion to draw, given the devastating consequences estate demolition has on the lives of the thousands of residents that may live on even a single council estate, and falls far short of the measures an article on the ethics of estate regeneration should be expected to recommend.

Participation through design

'Fostering greater participation through the design process increases architects' opportunity to mediate between the claims of residents who want change, those resisting change and the needs of potential new neighbours. There are lessons to be learnt from community planning that has long aspired to shift the focus from consultation on preset development options to community participation, as a means of framing development decision-making and establishing a shared vision for regeneration.'

'Fostering' is an oddly paternal term to use of architects who know far less about the realities of estate regeneration than the residents they are being expected to foster. As evidence of which, ASH has found that most residents, faced with the alternatives, welcome change, but in the form of infill and roof extensions that generate homes for potential new neighbours, and above all the maintenance and refurbishment of their own long neglected homes. Characterising residents who resist the demolition of their homes and the destruction of their community as 'resisting change' is inaccurate and dismissive, as anyone who has worked with estate residents would know. The 'lessons to be learnt' are those by architects who work with, listen to and represent residents' views, not by those who try to use their design skills to convince residents of the long-term benefits of demolishing their estate to build new homes they can't afford either to buy or to rent.

As the reference to framing decision-making demonstrates, the author conceives of regeneration exclusively in terms of redevelopment, and the role of architects purely in terms of convincing residents who know better to buy into a vision they don't share. ASH has yet to meet an estate community that is in favour of their homes being demolished, being decanted to temporary accommodation for five years, living on a building site for another five years, and then being offered the Right to Return to homes costing up to four times as much to buy or twice as much to rent, in what are often less well-made and smaller homes, with reduced tenancy rights, privatised, subcontracted and unaccountable management free to raise their service charges whenever they wish, and often tied into electricity and gas contracts with power companies also free to raise their charges whenever they wish. This is the reality of estate redevelopment architects need to learn, and no amount of community participation in designing their own graves is going to make residents happy to get into them.

'A good first step would be to establish or revitalise a representative residents' group to inform and test the brief, design decision-making and development assumptions. Persuading clients of the value of evaluating regeneration options transparently with residents may begin to build trust and understanding around a shared project.'

Constituting resident engagement panels, steering groups and other forms of resident representation is already standard practice in estate regeneration. The first step in doing so, though hardly a good one, is to attempt to divide leaseholders from council tenants and play them off against each other with competing offers, although residents are increasingly resisting this tactic. More recently, as in the case of Lambeth Council with the residents of Cressingham Gardens estate, local authorities have introduced the new requirement that these putatively representative groups be composed exclusively of residents in favour of having their homes demolished. *The People's Plan*, a 350-page document drawn up by the residents of Cressingham Gardens, was dismissed by Lambeth Council out of hand and its authors, despite having the backing of 82 per cent of residents, have been branded as trouble-makers and bullies unrepresentative of the estate as a whole. On the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates there has been no communication between residents and Hammersmith and Fulham Council for nearly two years. While Waltham Forest Council has never even bothered to ballot residents for their opinion of the plans to reduce the homes for social rent on the Montague Road estate by a third. Tenants and leaseholders alike are beginning to realise that steering committees, resident engagement panels, regeneration surgeries, overview and scrutiny committees, cabinet meetings, and all the other consultation structures supposedly set up by councils to listen to residents' opinions are in fact there to silence their opposition. In this context, talk of 'transparency' and building 'trust and understanding' around a 'shared project' is so much verbiage that serves only to hide the brutal reality of estate regeneration for residents, and the collusion of the architectural profession in their social cleansing.

'Perhaps project constraints make co-production proper unattainable. But committing to discuss options frankly with residents, address their concerns through design iterations and challenge ill-founded assumptions will demonstrate a willingness to recognise their lived-experience and perspectives as relevant, alongside professional expertise. Given architects' ability to interpret technical and qualitative information graphically, they are uniquely placed within the project team to act as facilitator able to interpret, interrogate and integrate the varied forms of evidence produced by residents into the design process.'

'Ill-founded assumptions', like 'unjust disapproval' and 'unfounded criticism', is the third time the author has belittled and dismissed the just and well-founded concerns of residents and housing campaigners about the regeneration process. 'Demonstrating' a willingness to recognise those concerns is not the same as architects responding to and acting upon them. As community resistance to estate regeneration has grown, councils have stopped even pretending to consult residents. Far from interpreting, interrogating and integrating residents' perspectives, the role of the profession – as for example with PRP Architects on Central Hill estate – has been reduced to drawing up redevelopment plans that ignore everything residents have said, and as such are poorly attended at exhibitions typically open for a few hours. Across London, the consultation process, such as it is, is being reduced to little more than a formal minimum as residents unanimously reject the justifications for the demolition of their homes. By contrast, the exhibition of ASH's plans for Central Hill estate, as for West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates – both of which responded to residents' overwhelming wishes to save their homes from demolition – were attended by hundreds of residents, and have been put forward by both estates to the councils as viable alternatives to demolition. Few other practices have anything like this democratic backing, for the simple reason that the overwhelming majority of architectural practices take their brief from the client and not from the residents. In our eyes, this is a dereliction of the professional duty of architects to 'have a proper concern and due regard for the effect that their work may have on the local community'.

'Speculatively, future alternative forms of design practice such as community-based charrette or design review panels, consisting of local residents and professional experts, could enable residents and developers to positively challenge one another's assumptions. In this instance the architect can mediate power differentials between residents, professionals and developers, and facilitate a design process that harnesses both local lay expertise and professional expertise. How the architect might square duties to act for their developer-client with the role of community facilitator raises interesting ethical questions. Is there a supplementary role for a community-based design advisor during regeneration projects and how would it be funded?'

The repeated use of the term 'assumptions' with regard to residents' opinions implies that their all too rapidly acquired knowledge of the regeneration process, and what it will

mean for them, is a prejudiced bias that requires dismissing. The challenge here is not between the assumptions of residents and developers, but between their respective motivations: the resistance by the former to being socially cleansed from their homes, the enormous profit margins of the latter. Talk of mediating 'power differentials' between international property developers like Capco and Lendlease, or housing associations like London & Quadrant and Notting Hill Trust, and the residents of homes that are built on the land these companies are after, betrays either a profound ignorance of that differential or a collusion in its propaganda. As we saw at the judicial inquiry into the benefits to the community of issuing compulsory purchase orders on the homes of leaseholders on the Aylesbury estate, residents had little chance against Southwark Council's team of expensively employed lawyers. If this raises 'interesting ethical questions', they're about the democratic accountability of local authorities to the constituents who voted them into power and the abuse of that power. As for a community-based design advisor, they already exist in the form of so-called 'independent' resident advisors; but as seen with Central Hill estate, their willingness to challenge the plans of the council that pays their salaries is limited.

'Meaningful resident participation is already in evidence but it requires investment in training and capacity building. Neil Deely of Metropolitan Workshop says: "Holding back information is counterproductive to building trust. It's far better for architects working on contentious regeneration projects to invest time with residents and clients, so that both understand the options, provide useful feedback and become a team. Given the right information residents will generally work collaboratively.'"

The only evidence of meaningful resident participation is that provided by the local authorities, property developers and consultation agencies in whose interests alone the consultation process is conducted. We challenge the author to produce a single estate community who thought that the consultation process that led to the demolition of their homes was transparent, took account of their views or could in any way be described as 'meaningful'. If the regeneration options initially presented to residents – as they were at the Aylesbury, Cressingham Gardens, Knights Walk, Central Hill, Fenwick, Westbury and Montague Road estates – are rapidly reduced to the full demolition of the estate and its redevelopment as luxury homes, no amount of time invested with, or information given to, residents will convince them of the benefits of destroying their community. A look at completed or ongoing redevelopments means residents 'understand' only too well what this option means for them – whether at Myatts Field North estate, where, following regeneration by PFI consortium Regenter Myatts Field North Limited, residents in the newly rebranded 'Oval Quarter' are trapped by 40-year contracts with E.ON into living with increased utility bills, but without running water, in what they have described as leaking, noisy, smelly, badly-made homes; or at the Heygate estate, where the 1,200 council homes that housed the local community for forty years have been replaced by 2,535 luxury apartments in which only 79 units are earmarked for social rent.

'Architects can empower residents to become well-informed partners, able to articulate preferences for their neighbourhood by explaining key development issues, e.g. how increasing density relates to project viability and maintenance. This proactive approach informs affordable homes developer Pocket's offer to directly involve residents in negotiations about the relative financial and social benefits to the community of accepting increased density from minimum to maximum intervention. As Michael Holland, head of regeneration strategy for Pocket, explains: "We aim to add to the community, rather than just add unit numbers. Pocket believes that residents can act as a positive catalyst for estate regeneration, and will welcome it if they are given the opportunity to influence density and share in the respective upsides." The developer's preference for achieving viability by combining repair and infill aims to reduce resident disruption and preserve social capital.'

It is no surprise that the increase in the number of homes local authority land can hold has been made the deciding factor in whether or not the council estates currently built on it should be regenerated, when that increase is the measure of the profits their demolition and redevelopment will generate for investors and cash-strapped local authorities. But the argument for the demolition of estates should not rest on the ability of developers and local authorities to increase their housing capacity, but on the identity of the residents that will be housed in their replacements. Savills real estate firm, which is advising London's councils, the London Housing Commission and the London Mayor on estate regeneration, in their January 2015 report to Cabinet titled *Completing London's Streets*, recommended the demolition of 136,500 council homes, on whose local authority land they claim they can build between 54,000 and 360,000 additional homes. But the selling point for Savills' recommendation is their argument that the demolition and redevelopment of housing estates using their 'Complete Streets' model not only delivers more housing, but also creates what they call 'value uplift'. Through the implementation of this model, they write, 'underperforming, undesirable and low value' locations will be transformed into 'actively sought-after, high-performing and higher value' real estate. Far from involving residents in negotiations about the 'financial and social benefits to the community' of increasing density, estate regeneration, as conceived by Savills, is an active means of gentrification, raising house prices across the wider area according to what they call a 'multiplier effect'. To this end, the new homes built on the demolished council estates must necessarily be 'high value' if they are to serve their main function, which is the social cleansing not only of the community whose homes have been demolished, but also of the local neighbourhoods around the new development. Savills, in any case, have already answered the question of whether the community benefits: 'We say nothing specific', they write, 'as to whom the additional value of the Complete Streets regeneration would accrue.'

There must be other criteria determining estate regeneration than 'project viability', which is another term for the profit margins of the developers and local authorities. First among these is the financial pressures on existing residents of increased rents and service

charges; second is the effects on the physical and mental health of residents and their children of being decanted to temporary accommodation outside their community for several years and/or living next to a building site for several more; and, third, the environmental effects of releasing thousands of tons of carbon from demolishing existing concrete buildings and constructing their high-density and high-rise replacements.

As for the benefits of increasing housing density on existing estates, Pocket Living is a singularly poor example of what such density 'adds' to the community. The homes they propose, which fall well short of the Government's 'Nationally Described Space Standard', will add only to the profits which they, like all developers, are making from the inflated house prices in the UK capital, and which preclude increasing numbers of Londoners from finding affordable accommodation, let alone getting on the housing ladder. We remind the author, as we do the Head of Regeneration Strategy for Pocket Homes, that the price of housing is not determined by the cost of its construction, which is the justification for the reduced size of Pocket Living homes, but by the profit margins of the land owner and developer and the commodity market on which the property is sold.

Again, we challenge the author to name a single estate community that has 'welcomed' the disruption to their lives, the threat to their futures and the demolition of their homes brought about by the current model of estate regeneration. And while ASH is actively pursuing the increase in the housing capacity of estates through options for infill and roof extensions, the profit motives of developers and housing associations, the economic motives of councils and their advisors, and the political motives of central government, mean full demolition and redevelopment, contrary to this assertion, is overwhelmingly the option preferred.

'Using the design process to more transparently model commercial options connected to density and viability has the potential to engage residents with the needs of those outside the immediate neighbourhood to access a home. The need for commercial confidentiality within a competitive market may limit the degree of transparency. But a willingness to share more information has potential to shift the focus from opposing regeneration on the grounds it serves abstract market-demand and profit-generation, to honestly engaging residents with the ethical question: how many new neighbours could benefit from additional housing, and could my neighbourhood be improved through the regeneration process without significantly reducing my own quality of life?'

Were the distinction proposed here, between the homes of existing residents and the potential for building new homes, the key issue in estate regeneration, the question might be an ethical one. But in reality, this is a false opposition. The distinction is between residents being forced from their homes and then offered, at best, the Right to Return if they can afford rents that have gone up by 25 percent and more and house prices that have doubled or even quadrupled, and the building of property investments that by no stretch of the definition can be said to be addressing the housing needs of UK citizens. As

an example of which, on Cressingham Gardens estate, Lambeth Council are proposing to build apartments starting at £435,000 for a 1-bedroom property going up to £863,000 for a 4-bedroom property, while their proposed average buy-out prices for homeowners is around £250,000 for a 1-bedroom home, going up to around £470,000 for a 4-bedroom home, in effect almost doubling house prices on the estate. While on West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates, property developers Capco are building luxury apartments that have been advertised at £800,000 for a 1-bedroom property, £1,200,000 for a 2-bedroom property, and £1,700,000 for a 3-bedroom property. And while owners of a 4-bedroom council flat on the Heygate Estate were offered £190,000 in compensation for their demolished homes, in One The Elephant, the new development by award-winning architects Squire and Partners, 1-bedroom properties are selling for £630,000, 2-bedroom properties for £880,000, and 3-bedroom properties for £1,495,000. These aren't 'abstract market demands'; they are evidence of the property speculation that is driving the estate demolition programme in London, and which has nothing to do with the 'ethics' of providing new homes for Londoners.

As for likelihood of 'commercial confidentiality' limiting transparency, this was the get-out clause employed by Savills when producing the series of viability assessments for property developers Lendlease that allowed them to reduce their initial promise of 500 homes for social rent on the Heygate redevelopment to the existing promise of 79. And it has been used by every council and housing association undertaking an estate regeneration scheme as justification for not making public the viability assessments on which their decision to demolish estates, rather than refurbish them, has unilaterally been made. This isn't 'limiting the degree of transparency', as the author claims; it is withdrawing the deciding factor in every estate regeneration scheme behind a cloak of secrecy that fails to conceal the financial motivations driving this programme. Until this information and much more is available to them, talk of 'honestly engaging residents' is disingenuous at best.

'Clearly, using the design process to support resident negotiations requires straightforward dialogue about contentious issues, acceptance that conflict may arise and commitment by the project team to manage it. For example, without evidencing the need to rehouse residents during construction, they are unlikely to accept disruption as temporary situation and begin planning positively for their return to the estate. The principle merit of engaging residents with the ongoing design process is that it demonstrates and frames legitimate project constraints, enabling residents to make the best possible personal decisions.'

Since the need to re-house residents during the demolition and redevelopment of the estate is not for their benefit but for that of the landlords, builders, developers and investors in the new properties, no amount of evidence is likely to convince residents to accept it as necessary. Nor, as we have seen in the displacement maps of former residents on the Heygate and Aylesbury estates, is that re-housing necessarily going to be

temporary, and more likely to be the precursor to residents being offered accommodation elsewhere. And whether or not, under the management of the project team, they plan positively to return to the estate, they will be unable to do so if, as is planned with the Montague Road estate, the number of homes for social rent has been greatly reduced, or, as with the plans for the Central Hill and Cressingham Gardens estates, the rents on what will no longer be council estates but housing associations have been increased to a level they cannot afford. Within this context, the only 'personal decisions' residents will be in a position to make will be whether – as was recently recommended to residents of Central Hill by Lambeth Council – to claim housing benefit in order to pay their increased rents; to take out another mortgage or enter into a Shared Ownership deal in order to buy a replacement home for the demolished one they were previously sole owners of; or whether to bid for a new council home elsewhere in the borough or in a distant borough where the rents are cheaper. Given these choices, talk of 'engaging' residents in the design process, or 'demonstrating' the constraints of the project, demonstrates at best the author's complete lack of understanding of the regeneration process, and at worst a cynical collaboration in the disinformation spread to cover its consequences for residents.

As for 'legitimate project constraints', the argument for the financial viability of redevelopment over refurbishment, which is consistently used by councils and housing associations to justify their demolition plans, falls at the first hurdle when one considers that the total cost of emptying and demolishing the Aylesbury estate's 2,500 council homes was estimated by Southwark Council at £150 million, around £60,000 per home. Yet Southwark Council has already spent an incredible £46.8 million on the Aylesbury regeneration scheme – £32.1 million on acquisition and demolition, and £14.7 million on management and administration (i.e. their own salaries) – in the process regenerating just 112 homes. That's an average cost of £417,000 per home. Compare this with the £20,260 per home the council has spent bringing 611 homes up to the Decent Homes Standard elsewhere on the estate, and the roughly £10,000 per home spent refurbishing Islington council's Six Acres estate, which was built on the same model and at the same time as the Aylesbury estate. Similarly, on Central Hill estate Lambeth Council's own surveyor has estimated the cost of refurbishment at £18.5 million, around £40,000 per home, whereas replacing the estate's 456 existing homes has been estimated by one of Lambeth's own architects, Karakusevic Carson, at £225-240,000 per home. That's around £120 million before a single new home has been built in a reportedly broke borough supposedly trying to reduce its housing waiting list. And that doesn't include the considerable cost of demolition and compensation for leaseholders. The truth is that refurbishment has consistently and repeatedly been shown, by ASH and other housing campaigners, to be the more financially viable option for genuine estate regeneration. The only thing it has been shown not to increase is the profits of developers and local authorities.

'Open, design-led development processes linked to the resources necessary to realise change can achieve what resident resistance aimed at stalling regeneration cannot. It has potential to support sceptical residents to move on to negotiate a realistic settlement, avoids silencing residents in favour of change, and begins a process of investment that recognises the needs of those outside the immediate community. In particular, resident participation in modelling estate intervention in terms of design and financing offers the potential of avoiding adversarial resident-developer relations, while enabling residents to question the function of private investment and level of developer profit necessary to realise a regeneration process that supports long-term benefits for existing residents and new neighbours alike.'

Contrary to the author's assertion, for which we know of no examples, the only concessions and victories that have been won have been won by residents fighting to save their homes through campaigns of resistance. The reduction of a full demolition scheme to partial demolition on Knight's Walk was achieved only through the residents' resistance supported by the design alternatives to demolition produced by ASH. Similarly, residents of the New Era estate saved their homes not through negotiating a 'realistic settlement', but through fighting the eviction of their community. Once again, the characterisation of residents as resistant to change is an inaccurate one, and the suggestion that those in favour of seeing their homes demolished are being silenced by resident campaigns is a claim already being employed by local authorities, such as Lambeth and Southwark councils, to justify ignoring the overwhelming majority of residents that are resisting their plans on the Aylesbury and Cressingham Gardens estates, to name just two. On the contrary, adversarial relations between residents and developers are not only on the rise, but have been shown to be the only means residents have of making their voices heard over the systematic falsehoods and disinformation spread about estate regeneration, of which the current document is another unsavory example.

To answer the author's question, the exclusive function of private investment is to generate profit for investors, developers and their company shareholders; but the duties of democratically elected local authorities to the residents of council estates must be measured in different terms to those used by a property developer, and so must those of the architects they employ. In articulating what those duties should be, the current document fails at every step. Quite apart from its high-handed tone when speaking of the role of architects in convincing estate residents of the benefits of demolition, this text betrays a complete absence of practical knowledge about the political and financial realities of estate regeneration. If we thought the author and the RIBA had any interest in understanding those realities, we would introduce them to the residents leading the campaigns we have referred to in our comments, and with which ASH has been working over the past two years. Contrary to this report's assumptions, residents know far more about the issues this text fails to address than its author, and would be happy to share their knowledge with him. However, it is far more likely, given the frame through which

the author has chosen to view estate regeneration, that this text is simply another example of the architectural profession's shameful collaboration in the social cleansing of predominantly working-class communities from their homes through the Trojan Horse of estate demolition. The fact that the author, Dhruv Sookhoo, is a researcher in residence for Metropolitan Workshop, the practice that has been employed by Lambeth Council to produce the feasibility studies for the demolition and redevelopment of Westbury estate, and which is running workshops to 'train' residents to explore the design proposal for the demolition and redevelopment of Central Hill estate, does nothing to suggest his neutrality or disinterest in reaching the conclusions he has in this report.

Similarly, in *Altered Estates*, the RIBA President Ben Derbyshire writes:

'In our view it is essential that we are clear about the objective of estate regeneration: is it to improve the lives of those who live on and around existing estates, or is it to make more effective use of public land to help solve the "housing crisis" by creating additional homes and widening access to home ownership?'

Although he doesn't answer his own question, this statement, which Ben Derbyshire recently drew our attention to in the comments section of the online edition of the *Architects' Journal* as the clarification of his position, makes it clear that his position is one of allegiance to this Conservative government's programme of home ownership, and its recent extension, in the *Housing and Planning Act 2016*, of the Right to Buy council homes to housing associations. However, we already know that 40 per cent of the council homes purchased by residents under the Right to Buy are now owned by professional landlords and are being rented out at market-rent levels for their profit, much of it coming from the housing benefit bill that is transferring billions of pounds of public money into private hands. Not only that, but under the new legislation, the discounts offered tenants will be recouped by councils forced to sell council homes that become vacant on the private market, further reducing the stock of homes for social rent. What this statement clarifies is that Ben Derbyshire has no interest in building homes for social rent, which is what Londoners, above all, need. In which case, as an employee of Notting Hill Housing Group on the Aylesbury estate redevelopment scheme, he's in good company, as they are systematically substituting affordable rents (i.e. at up to 80 per cent of market price) for social rent on all their estate regeneration schemes, not only on the Aylesbury, but also on their Bermondsey Spar and Elmington estate regenerations.

Finally, none of this report considers the effects of the Government's *Housing and Planning Act 2016*, which has removed the obligation to build any homes for social rent on new housing developments, replacing it instead with the duty to build Starter Homes whose sales cap of £450,000 in London is only nominal and may be amended by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Communities, the newly appointed former Deutsche banker Sajid Javid. Nor does it mention the phasing out of secure council tenancies, or the charging of market rates for council households earning little more than

the minimum wage, both of which will have devastating consequences on the likelihood of current council tenants returning to or occupying the new homes supposedly being designed by architects for their benefit. Above all, this text fails to address the new planning legislation, written specifically to further estate demolition, which reclassifies the council estates on which hundreds of thousands of households still live as 'brownfield land', and automatically grants planning permission in principle to any developer that proposes a new housing development in their place. To write about the ethics of estate regeneration without mentioning any of this would be laughable were it not also the most serious dereliction of the social duties of an architect, and we question the readiness of the RIBA to publish this report as the official statement of their position on the most contentious issue facing British architects today.

Architects for Social Housing

Illustration by Clifford Harper