

Evaluation of the work of Architects for Social Housing

Endorsements of ASH report *Central Hill: A Case Study in Estate Regeneration* (April 2018)

‘ASH is at the forefront of exposing the sheer folly of housing estate demolition in London. How, in an age when we are so concerned about environmental sustainability, do we even consider creating even more waste and carbon pollution through unnecessary demolition? How, in an age when we are so worried about the decline of social cohesion, do we even consider breaking up successful local communities? As this report shows so expertly, creative refurbishment is the way to improve housing conditions for millions of those living in our great city. It deserves to be read carefully and urgently, and then adopted by politicians and public servants on all sides of the political spectrum.’

Professor Murray Fraser

**Professor of Architecture and Global Culture and Vice-Dean of Research
Bartlett School of Architecture, Faculty of the Built Environment
University College London**

‘It’s hard to overstate how vital ASH’s work has been for the growing movement of people, and politicians like me, who are challenging the orthodoxy around regeneration. They show in striking and practical ways that there is an alternative to razing our estates to the ground and destroying our communities. By working closely with residents they have not only produced better plans than the top-down councils and developers, but have also inspired those campaigning to save their homes to fiercer action, making them even more determined to win and see their alternative vision built. This case study is a hugely important resource for all of us looking for a better way.’

Siân Berry

**Co-leader of the Green Party
Chair of the London Assembly Housing Committee**

‘With Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, now complying with Jeremy Corbyn’s policy that no estate should be subjected to so-called “regeneration” without a ballot of the residents, which must show there is support for such upheaval, there is now hope that the outstanding and popular housing and community of Central Hill may be saved. Having worked in the Lambeth Architect’s department, which I joined shortly after Rosemary Sjernstedt (the architect/designer of the estate) left, I am appalled at the council’s apparent determination to destroy the best of the building legacy created in the borough’s once famous department between 1964 and the early 1970s. I want to state my enthusiastic support for the work that ASH has done in analysing and challenging Lambeth council’s proposals and demonstrating that an alternative approach is technically and financially feasible, which could still increase the housing numbers on the

site but avoid the social and environmental damage. Lambeth council has to date blanked any invitation to open debate on the comparative merits of their proposals on the grounds of “commercial confidentiality”. This feeble get-out has to be dropped if any meaningful ballot is to take place.’

Kate Macintosh

Architect of Dawson’s Heights estate and Macintosh Court

‘A very valuable document to have in the coming months. Overwhelming pressure from Londoners in response to the Mayor’s draft Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration was evidently strong enough to force him to reinstate the requirement for ballots. While the mayor has delayed his response on this in such a way as to waive-though a large number of schemes before the ballot requirement takes effect, this is a sign that public opinion is beginning to influence policy. Sustained pressure from tenants and other residents, from London organisations and principled professionals will be needed and ASH’s report will be a great help.’

Michael Edwards

**Honorary Professor, Bartlett School of Planning
University College London**

‘ASH’s excellent work demonstrates rigorous political and economic analysis of existing policy documents and reports, drawing out issues of social justice. This is not unusual for an activist group, but ASH’s practice goes further, and combines critique with propositions, showing that another world is possible, one that prioritises refurbishment over demolition, and provides social housing for existing communities.’

Professor Jane Rendell

**Director of Architectural Research, Bartlett School of Architecture
University College London**

‘*Central Hill: A Case Study in Estate Regeneration* is a timely and rigorously assembled study that shows how and why architectural design must to be part of the argument for creating alternatives to the predominant ways of implementing regeneration in contemporary London. All too often, the critique of regeneration is undertaken through academic scholarship that does not yield concrete proposals, while architects are caught up in logics of commercial practice, becoming complicit in socially exclusionary development processes. ASH’s approach to the Central Hill estate marries the critical and the propositional, seeking to enact change in ways that do not harm its residents but rather build on the existing resources of established communities, the qualities of existing architecture, and that recognise the importance of place-attachment and established social bonds to well-being today and in the future. In contrast to the mainstream tabula rasa approach to estate regeneration then, the only dismantling that ASH carry out is of

the tenuous case for redevelopment as a strategy for delivering socially or environmentally sustainable benefits, and of the ways in which viability arguments are constructed in order to promote such strategies over less costly renovation and infill options. ASH's work also points to the importance of understanding regeneration as a moral issue, rooted in the question of how social needs, power and/or greedy capital figure in the motivations of authorities, developers and financiers for instigating change. All in all, this study makes a powerful and valuable contribution to debates across the urban disciplines about the relationship between politics, ethics and the socio-materiality of cities.'

Dr. Juliet Davis

**Architect and Reader in Architecture and Urbanism
Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University**

'The dismantling of the UK's once flagship social housing programme has been presented as inevitable, not optional and fiscally sensible, rather than a ticking time bomb for taxpayers. We have been led to believe that the costs of maintaining and even expanding the UK social housing stock are greater than those incurred by its privatisation. In reality, however, selling off affordable homes adds £4 billion to the Housing Benefit bill, and is fuelling a sharp rise in homelessness and poverty. Architects for Social Housing provide the evidence needed to prove that there is another way: spotlighting the sell-offs and offering actionable strategies for saving the housing stock.'

Dr. Harriet Harriss

**Senior Tutor in Interior Design and Architecture
Royal College of Art**

'The work that Architects for Social Housing has done with the residents of Lambeth, including those on Central Hill estate and in Macintosh Court, is exactly the type of bottom up-problem solving that the Green Party espouses. ASH's work is consistently well-researched, and their expert help and advice has fed into Lambeth Green Party's housing policy with real examples of what works for communities. Unlike the dominant model of 'regeneration' currently operating in several London boroughs, including Lambeth, that uses spin and propaganda to confuse and bully residents into submitting to plans, the Green Party and ASH work alongside communities in a genuinely collaborative way. They look beyond the status quo to find innovative solutions to increase the supply of good-quality, genuinely affordable council housing. Therefore, we are very happy to endorse this *Case Study in Estate Regeneration*.'

Pete Elliott

**Green Councillor for the Gipsy Hill ward
Co-Convenor, Lambeth Green Party**

‘As the debates rage between local and national governments, political parties and politicians about how we solve a broken housing system, a housing crisis or a political argument relating to who should be allowed to live in a city, the residents who live in social housing all over the UK appear to be insignificant. Architects for Social Housing have put the voices and the thoughts of the residents of the Central Hill estate, a community facing demolition, at the forefront. The report argues that residents do not want demolition of their homes and ASH has worked alongside them in finding real solutions through refurbishment. This is an important document which those who believe it is their decision what happens to this community need to read.’

Dr. Lisa McKenzie
Lecturer in Sociological Practice
Middlesex University London

‘I am currently leading a research project on community-led social housing regeneration and I find Architects for Social Housing’s approach excellent and very necessary. Their work on Central Hill demonstrates a co-design approach to regeneration that carefully engages with the community and understands the value of the human capital and the existing built environment. Theirs is not an opposition to regeneration, but a thorough work that demonstrates through urban design evidence that an alternative approach to regeneration – which includes the demands and needs of the residents, and which does not demolish a valuable piece of architecture or displace a community – is possible.’

Dr. Pablo Sendra
Lecturer in Planning and Urban Design
Bartlett School of Planning, University College London

‘ASH’s *Central Hill* case study is an exemplary document, which not only tells us how it’s done, by pointing out and clearly describing the tactics and strategies of design within an engaging, elegant and economical narrative, but makes it look relatively easy. It also celebrates the values of the estate’s original design, to realise a significant return on Lambeth council’s original investment in realistic optimism and the resulting infrastructure of social good. Alas, it also bears witness to the malfeasance of a local authority which should have the interests of its communities at heart, and the case study is likely, tragically, to be the only product of its own project. What opportunities for constructive dialogue will have been wasted due to pig-headedness, financial self-interest or a heady combination of the two? It’s also a fine prospectus for ASH itself. As a piece of work that can be judged on its own usefulness and its own merits, it’s a primer for a collective that appears to be too busy ‘doing’ (often ‘fighting’) to reflect and produce self-promotional literature on its own account. Their promotion happens by word-of-mouth and their efforts are instead concentrated on producing, with evident love, a selfless guide to challenging the pervasive “decant, demolish, privatise, rebuild and profit” narrative with the genuine regeneration of social housing.’

Michael Jardine
Architect, HUB Architects Ltd

‘When buildings age and neighbourhoods change, are there alternatives to the wholesale destruction, dispossession and displacement of communities who live there? Of course there are alternatives, and the architectural community is obliged to conceive and achieve them. The earnest proposals put forward by Architects for Social Housing are not radical in any way, except for the fact they address the very roots of challenges their true clients face. Their realistic proposals to refurbish, grow, and densify Central Hill estate, without displacing current residents, are common- sense responses, professionally considered and powerfully presented. What may appear radical to some is that the architects’ proposals are not contrived with the aim of pleasing those who lay claim to power, but serve instead the common interest of those who live in and around the estate. How shocking is that? Common sense- proposals conceived for the common good, in ways that can enable a community to begin again, with dignity, and which would benefit the city as a whole by refusing to engage in the violence of predatory eviction and erasure. The citizens of London would be foolish not to embrace this ethically and ecologically responsible scheme, and to support ASH in their urgent effort to sustain vulnerable but viable communities, rather than destroying them for the sake of novelty and voracious greed. Very few architects have the courage to speak truth to the abusers and hoarders of wealth and power, and the modesty to listen to those who have been denied a voice, but who most know what it is they desire and need.’

Ted Landrum
Architect and author of *Midway Radicals & Archi-Poems*
Department of Architecture
University of Manitoba

‘Coops for London believes that that the solution to the housing crisis lies with a community-led approach with a focus on homes not units. We are increasingly concerned that recent estate regeneration projects have not considered the needs of resident tenants and leaseholders sufficiently. We therefore wholeheartedly support initiatives like those of ASH that sees regeneration, as they write “not in terms of demolition and redevelopment but of maintenance of existing stock and sustainable increase in housing provision”.’

Jessica Jacobs and Emily O’Mara
Co-founders of Coops for London

‘I cannot praise the work of ASH enough, their tenacity and the detail of work in their project is exemplary. Their use of space is intelligent and carefully thought out and their figures speak for themselves. If we had more ASH’s in the social housing arena we wouldn’t have a housing problem. They present an alternative to estate demolition that

should not be overlooked. I am in total support of them and their report *Central Hill: A Case Study in Estate Regeneration*.'

Nikita Woolfe

Director and Producer of *Concrete Soldiers UK*

'ASH are community-focused practitioners who have developed an exemplary approach to the issue of estate regeneration. Where local authorities have significantly failed is in not really listening to or respecting the wishes of a community that has formed on a housing estate. Most regeneration schemes are therefore imposed on residents who have little or no benefits, with the worst-case scenario of massive disruption and displacement. Demolition should always be a last resort, after infill and refurbishment and maintenance options are all fully explored. The *Central Hill* case study produced by ASH is a powerful critique of developer- and market-led estate regeneration schemes, which lack vision and offer little prospect for affordable housing.'

Constantine Gras

Artist in Residence

Lancaster West Estate

'I've no doubt this publication will be an important contribution towards supporting residents in resisting the injustices of displacement and dispossession that result from estate demolition and redevelopment.'

Jessie Brennan

Artist and author of *Regeneration! Conversations, Drawings, Archives and Photographs from Robin Hood Gardens*

'The rush to exploit the capital potential of social housing seems to have obliterated any rational thought or morality in the politicians and local authorities responsible. The ASH scheme represents a worked-through plan to return to a sane, rational housing regeneration policy that primarily respects the wishes and very real investments of the communities of people who are the residents.'

Dr. Stefan Szczelkun

Artist and author of *The Conspiracy of Good Taste*

'As many of London's council-built housing estates are currently threatened with demolition, ASH have produced a timely report, *Central Hill: A Case Study in Estate Regeneration*. Based upon ASH's "resistance by design" principles, the report provides a detailed architectural, financial and environmental critique of the current dominant policy practice of estate-regeneration as demolition. In so doing, the report makes a compelling case as to why an alternative to Lambeth council's demolition-centred

approach to Central Hill (alongside five other threatened estates) might be preferable – not least from the standpoint of estate residents – and how such an alternative could be realised. It's often said by proponents of estate demolition that housing activists have no alternative to the hegemonic model of "doing estate regeneration". This report demonstrates in forensic detail what such an alternative could look like in practice, that is given the right political will to implement it.'

Dr. Paul Watt

Professor of Urban Studies

Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies

Birkbeck, University College London

'This work is extremely useful for raising clear and simple arguments against social clearances disguised as urban "regenerations". The chapter on Community, in particular, brilliantly demonstrates with beautiful and accessible images the dishonest propaganda of promoters of estate demolition. Thank you for demonstrating that there are alternatives!'

Nicolas Fonty

Architect and Urban Designer, JustMap

'In this important report ASH demonstrate how one of London's seminal post-war housing estates can be densified and refurbished to offer a low-cost and environmentally sustainable alternative to demolition and re-building, while keeping together the strong bonds of family and community built up over several generations. ASH's thesis is strong and clear, it is well-researched, fully costed and borne of wide consultation, receiving backing from 77 per cent of the residents. This report must be seen by those responsible for providing housing, as it offers them a brilliantly simple and affordable means to house 40 per cent more people on the site, in better conditions, for half the cost of new-build. But it must also be seen by those architects and others who are complicit in the needless destruction of communities, for this report sets a new baseline for intelligent, holistic design they will likely be ashamed to read. An intelligent, sensitive, thorough, powerful, brave, important and joyful body of work.'

Sam Causer, RIBA

Architect and Director

Studio Sam Causer

'We need to actualise cities "ecosophically", gently, without cutting them open or ripping their heart out. It is about letting the city be, doing a lot with very little, where it's needed, case by case, room by room, apartment by apartment, building by building, garden by garden, street by street, connection by connection, so the city can offer the expected benefits to those who inhabit it. We need to invent a strategy of urban thinking, a blend

of architectural practice and urbanism in a common continuum, the same discipline, anchored in the immediate, of both short and long term, avoiding lunar visions of masterplans. Let's start from what is: peoples' interiors, the issue of housing, the issue of labour, of enjoyment, of cultivation, of the issue of housing. Let's offer to each of them: quantities, facilities, services, the necessary light to contemporary life. Let's add benefits to what's already beneficial. Let's be wise and only answer simple questions. What is already there? What should be done to facilitate and actualise each thing? The question of inhabiting is primary and should not be treated lightly; on the contrary, it should employ all means, connections, knowledges, experiences, competences and shapes to answer the essential question about the use of the world, its inhabitability. . . . These ideas, which I wrote down in 2007 for the study PLUS, are as applicable to London in 2018, where their principles – encapsulated in the motto: "Never demolish, never remove or replace, always add, transform, and reuse!" – are being put into practice by Architects for Social Housing, whose report, *Central Hill: A Case Study in Estate Regeneration*, I agree with and support.'

Frédéric Druot
Architect and Director
Frédéric Druot Architecture

'ASH have done so much to protect housing estates from demolition by affirming their architectural, social and political heritage and value. Moreover, they have demonstrated with their designs that much of the rhetoric which condemns them as incapable of being effectively maintained or refurbished is based on misguided policy and questionable intentions. This latest report on the stunning Central Hill estate is a case in point.'

Jamie Burton
Human rights lawyer, Doughty Street Chambers
Expert Group for Housing Rights Watch

'Let's assume that there is still some morality, some sense of humanity, and some belief in civil society in our politicians, planners and, yes, even in our developers. Let's also assume that they are open enough to see the merits of convincing arguments that present alternatives to their policies on London's social housing. Let's ask them to look at simple and practical design proposals that avoid demolition and redevelopment and the upheaval and destruction of communities. Now let's ask them to read Architects for Social Housing's report on *Central Hill: A Case Study in Estate Regeneration*.'

Dr. Mark Crinson
Professor of Architectural History
Department of History of Art
Birkbeck, University College London

‘The report on the future of Central Hill in Lambeth by Geraldine Denning and Simon Elmer of Architects for Social Housing is in my experience a unique piece of work. It sets out to demonstrate how a council estate with a stable community that mainly wants to stay can be improved; its facilities expanded; and the supply of social and affordable housing increased at a far lower cost than the cost of demolition and rebuilding. It also sets out clearly the environmental and social arguments for doing this and it demonstrates the intrinsic value of social housing. Having worked in Lambeth on some of its most difficult estates, and having uncovered very similar arguments to those used in this report, I strongly recommend it to policy makers, architects, developers, social landlords, and community leaders who are committed to a better future for social housing.’

Professor Anne Power

Head of London School of Economics, Housing and Communities

Honorary Fellow of RIBA

Chair of National Communities Resource Centre at Trafford Hall

‘This piece of work could not be more timely: I am convinced there is no bigger issue for this election, and crucially over the 4 years until the following one. Much of the ward I represent – Coldharbour in central Brixton – is comprised of social housing and it is this, not the fashionable watering holes of the town centre or the architecturally anomalous and substandard blocks of private and UN-affordable housing, that make it such a joyous and extraordinary place to represent with its wonderful communities, and a fitting locus for the battles for social justice it has witnessed. These estates, which include Loughborough, Southwyck House (or the ‘barrier block’) and Angell Town, along with democratically significant buildings including Brixton Recreation Centre and the real markets, are undoubtedly at huge risk in the immediate future under the administration’s policies and priorities. Having fallen out with said administration over this, over the plan to put fee- paying gyms in libraries, over the ruination of so many small businesses in the town centre and much else besides, I am standing as an Independent after 12 years as a Labour councillor. I’ll see Brixton brought to the ground over my dead body, but I’d rather try more conventional means of protest first. A piece of work like this must be essential reading for everyone who values strong and sustainable communities, and real places and societies in which to live. Thank you.’

Rachel Heywood

Independent Councillor for Coldharbour Ward

London Borough of Lambeth

General endorsements of ASH's work

'Architects have a key role in our society's responsibility to initiate change, and the evolving discourse of ASH and its members are an essential and much needed reflection of this.'

Tomasz Romaniewicz
Coffey Architects

'If you want a thorough grounding in what's causing the ongoing housing crisis and what needs to be done to provide a solution that's dictated by our agenda, this is essential reading.'

South Essex Heckler

'First time I've heard a genuinely powerful proposal for how to combat this, and such a comprehensive and concise view on the whole thing.'

Olga Winterbottom

'So much information and analysis here on the issue of social housing, starter homes, right-to-buy sell-offs and estate regeneration.'

Andree Frieze
Green Party councillor, Ham & Petersham ward

'I strongly applaud the work ASH have undertaken, on a number of levels, these last few months. Their actions and very successful message-delivery have reached a wide audience, and I, for one, find the manifesto an excellent hook upon which to hang my own beliefs, emboldened in the knowledge that there is a growing movement standing against the complicity of the architecture profession in exploiting homes and the built environment as mere financial commodities. Due to this movement, I feel able to say that I will never work for clients whose aim is to use architecture as a vehicle for producing money. Architecture is there to support life; a creative, diverse and complex life. This must remain its priority. Thank you, ASH, for clarifying this objective, and strengthening my resolve to achieve it.'

Sam Causer
Architect and Director
Studio Sam Causer

‘Wonderful blog post. I hope to view a great deal more by you.’

Robert Marie

‘This is probably the finest writing on the subject of this administration’s policies on social housing I have come across.’

Joseph Asghar, photographer

‘Thank you, ASH, for a superb critique. This kind of analysis is a great complement to the on-the-ground work you have been doing at West Kensington & Gibbs Green, Central Hill and so on.’

Michael Edwards

Teaching Fellow at the Bartlett School of Planning

Author of *The Housing Crisis and London*

‘Excellent analysis. I’m so glad you’re doing this work, even if it must feel sometimes like writing the eulogy for council housing UK.’

Single Aspect

‘Well done ASH for putting all these pieces together. We seem to have some sort of deep state of housing interests now, shaping housing policy to their own ends, and the magnitude of their ambitions needs to be brought to public attention.’

Jerry Flynn, 35% Campaign

‘Your website is superb. I look forward to reading it and, in particular, your most recent posts have been extremely powerful and pertinent to everyone in the country. I’ve shared them widely.’

Briony Sloan, Chair of Rawdon Greenbelt Action Group

‘I feel as if I have just had a warm, relaxing bath reading this article. Such a relief to hear about happenings from such dedicated, informed, effective and, to top it off, even dryly humorous group. Thanks very much for posting.’

Orenda E, former leaseholder on the Heygate estate

‘Well done guys, keep it up.’

Peter Barber, Director of Peter Barber Architects

‘So happy you are saying all the things many of us believe but wouldn’t dare to say.’

Fenna Haakma Wagenaar, architect

‘A judgment has to be made, not just on the quality of a building, but whether it contributes to the Common Weal, or its opposite. ASH have demonstrated that there are other ways to practice architecture and maintain professional integrity.’

Kate Macintosh, architect of Dawson’s Heights and Macintosh Court

‘This important challenge to academics relating to architecture and housing, and to the Labour party, needs to be published and widely distributed. Its great we have people like ASH on the job of uncovering the iniquities of the forces of oppression that hide in the thickets of local and other bureaucracies.’

Stefan Szczelkun,
Author of *The Conspiracy of Good Taste*

‘Brilliant article. Fabulous research. It’s the kind of investigative journalism “proper” journalists don’t seem to do any more. I wonder why . . .’

Steve Tiller, Hackney Momentum Steering Group

‘A long read but well worth the effort, as it goes into forensic detail about what happens when a council estate in London is “regenerated” and what happens to the former residents.’

On Uncertain Ground

‘Nice to see a link to ASH, who have been a relentless opposing voice against the orchestrated theft of social housing by developers and their stooges in local government. The many essays on their site amount to an eloquent and damning corpus of work, critiquing policy failures, corruption and avarice almost everywhere you care to look.’

Anonymous comment in *The Guardian*

‘It’s rare to read such a succinct presentation and such powerful few words about the housing crisis. I have followed the disaster that is the British housing system for years and cannot believe the ignorance and complete disregard for facts which has surrounded the issue. Your work is inspiring and deserves a much broader reach.’

Roger Barton, architect

'As a residential sector architect, I left the profession for academia because I knew where it was going. If anything can be done now, let's do it!'

Claude St Arroman, architect

'Your research and writing is consistently useful and always important. I suspect it reaches much further than you know!'

Donna Turnbull, housing campaigner

'ASH helps residents have a voice and a vision.'

Patmore Cooperative

'I fear you underestimate your own importance. We all learn, at some point, that the lonely dissenting voice in the room is often the only one worth listening to. You are the maverick who won't sit down, and I beg of you – don't ever sit down.'

Parker Tron

'I don't know where you find the time and energy, but I do know the salaried agents of the housing swindle would be cock-a-hoop at your demise. I'm afraid we can't let that happen.'

Joseph Ashgar, photographer

'ASH presents consistently important and intelligent narratives.'

Nicky Binder

'ASH has been the single most important source of information to help me understand housing issues and help save our estate. We're in a far stronger position because of you. Your influence reaches further than you realise.'

Gloria Spielman, resident and campaigner on Treves and Lister House

'While I was never in thrall to pseudo-avant-garde or mainstream architecture, and have been focusing on collective housing for some 20-plus years, I've learned a lot from your research, posts and presentations. I've learned to let go of some assumptions I've had and to ask different questions regarding architecture and its production. Finally, I make sure all my students learn about your work, and it's them that most need to hear it and are willing to listen (practicing architects aren't going to change their minds about anything they believe no matter how strong, good or logical your arguments). But students do give

a damn. The problem is, they don't get taught to think about architecture the way you guys do. So even the socially-minded ones end up like Karakusevic-Carson because that's the only way they know how to be political or to help in any way. But students are hungry for it; I see it in their application statements, things they choose to write about when they have a free choice and, when given a chance, in the way they think about people and space in design studio.'

Luis Diaz, architect and lecturer

'I would second ASH's importance for students, that hopefully will go into practice and change things for the better. I've definitely mentioned you to several other students, and it seems to me that education, as it needs to, is becoming more socially and politically aware. More could be done to better educate students about the systems they become part of, but it's hard to do that within what is often the vacuum of university.'

Ellie Perkins, architect

'Dear ASH, I'm writing to you today after visiting your residency at the ICA and immersing myself in what was one of the most shocking yet liberating experiences of my recent life. These two juxtaposed emotions were delivered in equal parts by the realisation that the unrelenting destruction of the vital social fabric of our city is being consistently chosen over what appears to me an unquestionably better alternative, namely the rejuvenation and not the "redevelopment" of our London estates.

'For the last four years I have progressively become more interested in the history, landscape and, more recently, the defence of social housing in the UK. Whilst during this time I have consistently sided with the main conviction of your organisation – that rejuvenation and adding housing stock is always better than 'redevelopment' – I find myself harbouring this position more strongly than ever before. I have been working for a homeless charity for the last year and have come face-to-face on a daily basis with the brutal implications of our societal failing to provide enough affordable housing for working people in this city. It has sharpened my anger at council 'initiatives' that will ultimately lead to a net loss of social stock (most recently the horrendous £2 billion gamble unfolding in Haringey) and the advancement of so-called 'affordable' housing over genuinely affordable housing tied to local wage rates.

'I think this is why your exhibition today struck such a strong chord with me. Whilst I have studied various community produced plans in response to council-sanctioned estate regeneration (including Cressingham Gardens' People's Plan in Brixton, StART's Community Land Trust plan in Tottenham, and plans of various spaces threatened by Camden's Community Investment Plan), the plans presented in the Design Alternatives to Estate Demolition section of the exhibition spoke to me like nothing else has as of yet. Your plans for Knight's Walk, West Kensington and Gibbs Green, Central Hill, Patmore

and Northwold estates all seemed inherently sensible ways for providing critically needed affordable stock whilst keeping and improving the already existing housing and facilities on these estates. It struck me time and again that the plans you put forward are without doubt favourable to any plans the councils that these estates sit within seem to be set on. I left filled with a sense of bemusement and resentment that councils seem to be consistently ignoring such accessible and sensible plans that have genuine resident input in favour of technocratic formulations that more often than not run against both the desire of residents and the pressing housing needs that all (particularly London) boroughs face.

‘Now to the purpose of my e-mail. I left the ICA today with sense of purpose I have not felt before. While estate regeneration has been a topic close to my heart and I have been yearning to get involved and combat this oppressive and short sighted policy, I have felt at a slight loss in how to channel this desire. I’m not a resident of a council estate or housing association property and, in some ways, I have felt disingenuous in getting directly involved with a resident-led campaign such as Save Cressingham Gardens. After witnessing the exhibition today, reading the literature produced by ASH (particularly your outstanding report on the reasons for the Grenfell Tower fire), and researching your extensive contribution since 2015 to defending social housing in the UK, I feel that I have found the organisation I would like to channel my energy through.

‘I must confess that at this current time I lack certain skills that would be naturally suited to your organisation. I’m not an expert in planning, design, architecture or law, (I want to advance in the Planning sector as my future career and plan to do a Masters in Urban Planning in the next few years). However, what I can bring is a deep desire to help, research skills gleaned from my degree in Social Policy at LSE (I wrote my 1st Class Dissertation on TMO’s specifically within Lambeth) and a commitment to do whatever would be helpful in advancing ASH’s agenda. I saw that you have offices in Kennington. I’m hoping it may be possible to come in at a time to suit ASH’s member availability to discuss how I could be of help in any way?’

Alex Talbot
Department of Social Policy
London School of Economics and Political Science