

DEFEND COUNCIL HOUSING

VOTE NO to Privatisation on Clapham Park

The council wants to privatise Clapham Park - demolishing half the estate, and selling the rest off to a private housing company.

They say the only way to get repairs and improvements is to accept transfer to another landlord. Ask yourself why the Clapham Park Project have spent so much on glossy propaganda to convince us to vote for the transfer, while they haven't told us about the risks.

We've all experienced what privatisation of public services means. A few senior managers get big pay rises, accountants make the decisions, business plans get changed and services get worse. Privatisation of council housing is no different.

Of course we all want improvements to our homes - but not at the price of losing our secure tenancies, higher rents and service charges and having an unaccountable landlord.

Privatisation is being politically driven. But whilst they are keeping it quiet Lambeth Council have already prepared a Plan B. Major demolition is not necessary (for details see over).

All over the country council tenants, backed by trade unionists and many councillors and MPs, are campaigning to win direct investment in council housing - with no strings attached.

Resist the blackmail. Vote No and tell Lambeth council we want direct investment in our homes - not privatisation!



Can you smell a rat?



The proposal to sell off Clapham Park are running into trouble. Residents are furious at plans to demolish half the estate, privatise the rest, and build nearly 1,500 luxury flats, just to finance the repairs and improvements that we need.

We've had countless glossies over the last few years promoting Clapham Park Project but all the promises are deliberately kept vague and general. Is anyone clear exactly what improvements they are guaranteeing to each tenant individually? Have you been told specifically what work will be done to your home?

And despite repeated requests the Clapham Park Project has still not given residents any firm guarantee of where they will be rehoused if their homes are demolished.

Can you smell a rat?

Tenant Satisfaction: Only 3% more satisfied - and that's before the higher rents kick in!

It is astonishing how little tenant satisfaction levels rise after transfer, despite thousands of pounds spent on each home. And most of the tenants surveyed are still inside the 5 year rent guarantee period. What happens to tenant satisfaction when the rent guarantee runs out?

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee found that on average, tenants are only 3% more satisfied with the 'condition of homes' - and 6% less satisfied with the 'works undertaken' after transfer. Tenants are actually less satisfied with the quality of the repairs service after transfer; and 15% of tenants considered that housing services generally had got worse. 17% of housing associations surveyed by the National Audit Office had already exceeded guidelines on rent increases.

The report comments: 'A Housing Manager of a local authority might see his salary increase by 20% to 30% on transfer, and this factor could influence the decision to recommend transfer.'

Public Accounts Committee Improving Social Housing Through Transfer

Published: March 2003

EIGHT GOOD REASONS TO VOTE NO TO TRANSFER...



1 Evictions up

You will lose the security of tenure that you have as a council tenant. So if you fall into debt, it will be much easier for them to get you out.



2 Rents Up

Housing Association rents are higher - 20% on average - and have 'service charges' on top which can be increased any time. Guarantees only last for 5 years.



3 No Accountability

As council tenants we get to vote for our landlord in local elections every 4 years. The board of Clapham Park Homes will be accountable to no one.



4 Homes Demolished

All of Clapham Park West will be demolished as well as some of the blocks on the East. There has still been no guarantee that tenants decanted from the West will get back to the West.



5 Higher Costs

Transfer will cost millions and the company will have to pay high interest rates on its borrowing. This money could be used instead to carry out the repairs we need!



6 Privatisation

Transfer means more of our rents going on profits for the banks rather than repairs to our homes. Banks and lenders will be in control.



7 Green Spaces Lost

If you can see a bit of green now, CPH are probably planning to build on it. Mature trees will be lost & the space round the luxury flats could become a 'private garden'.



8 No Return To The Council

Clapham Park Homes make lots of promises but what happens if they go bust? The money could run out, leaving the Estate in a mess and locking many people in 'temporary' accommodation.

Who is behind Clapham Park Homes?

Clapham Park Homes like to make out that they will be an accountable, responsive local landlord but they will be part of an huge business empire, Metropolitan Housing Group, which has been aggressively expanding its territory for some time.

Metropolitan's priorities are developing new homes and building flats for sale at market prices. The Housing Corporation that oversees Housing Associations wants to see the number of Housing Associations reduced and are pushing for mergers and takeovers.

Only a few of the biggest players will stay in business so Housing Associations are all desperately trying to expand their operations to survive. These increasingly regional organisations become more and more remote. Existing tenants end up coming second.

Privatisation means risk. Housing associations like to call themselves 'not-for-profit' companies. So does BUPA – and we wouldn't want them running our local hospitals would we?

These companies all operate in the world of big business and corporate finance. They end up borrowing more and more money from the banks - and use our homes as security for the loans. If the development goes pear-shaped, it is tenants who will pay the price.



Not much to show

When Clapham Park Project began they were given a £56 million grant from the government: £21 million for our housing needs, to support Lambeth to refurbish and improve our homes; and the remaining £35 million to bring about social and economic development of our community. This is our money - public money.

So far they have spent £7 million of it, very little on refurbishing our homes. Only £3.6 million has been spent on community projects while £1.38m has gone to refurbish their office at Brixton Hill Place, a building which does not even belong to the community.

Over £2.5 million has been spent on the Master Plan and stock transfer campaign to prepare our estate for privatisation. This includes training and paying staff to knock on our doors and ask how we intend to vote. They have employed a specialist company called the Croydon Campaign Company, who are responsible for the propaganda caravan parked by the shops in Poynders Road, plus the 20 huge posters that CPP want to put up. They also do the patronising adverts at the bus stops and some of the deluge of glossy propaganda that CPP have put through your door over the last couple of years.

Clapham Park Homes is a partnership between the Clapham Park Project, and a housing association, the Metropolitan Housing Trust.

The Clapham Park Project is a quango set up on the estate under a scheme called "New Deal for Communities", and it has a budget of £56m of public money to spend.

Metropolitan Housing Group is one of the largest housing associations in the country, with homes all over London and the East Midlands.

X The Housing Corporation describes their repairs service as "below average", "declining", and "a matter for concern".

X They have high management costs (348th out of 461 places in the HA 'league table') which will be passed on to tenants and leaseholders.

X Their chief executive earns £113,048 a year - over £2,000 per week.

Not hard to guess what their priorities will be then!

"Metropolitan and Genesis, which are among the top 10 developers, are all ranked below the half way mark for efficiency."
(Inside Housing)

"Metropolitan chief executive Tony Shoultz said: "It would help to link London and the Midlands and give the group a strong management base in the east so future development there can be very economic and very well managed."
(Housing Today)

UNREPRESENTATIVE & UNACCOUNTABLE

CPP make a lot of play about the new board of directors being representative and accountable but they won't – and by law they can't.

Directors are legally required to look after the financial interests of the company – not represent particular groups of people.

The Audit Commission (government watchdog) reports:

"Sometimes problems stem from expectations that are set up when resident board members are recruited... Often this misapprehension is a direct result of mis-selling the role at the time of the ballot."

The council will wash their hands of problems on Clapham Park.

In reality the key decisions will be taken by senior managers under direction from the parent company - Metropolitan Housing Trust.

Far from being 'empowered' as they like to pretend, tenants will be left with no one they can effectively get by the scruff of the collar to get things done.

The money is there...

Tenants pay more than enough in our rents to pay for all the repairs and improvements we need. The problem is the government robs our rent accounts, and then has the cheek to put strings on giving it back.

Well, we can win investment without privatisation at Clapham Park if we stand up to their blackmail, demand our rights and VOTE NO!

Lambeth Council have already prepared a Plan B to meet the Decent Homes Standard. Voting No in Clapham Park will show the government they can't just railroad through their privatisation plans against the wishes of the community.

Tenants everywhere, backed by 250 MPs and all the major trade unions, are calling for direct investment in council housing. Tell the council we want them to stand up for council tenants and lobby the government for investment in our homes!

"I was born in Clapham and from the age of 5 months, with my Mother and Father and seven brothers and sisters, lived for more than 24 years on Clapham Park West in the same house that my 83 year old Mother and brother still live in.

I was also a Councillor for Clapham Park Ward in the 1970s/early 1980s, and naturally still visit Clapham Park almost weekly, so I have an intimate knowledge of the estate, its environment and its residents.

The idea that the Clapham

Park Project, or the NDC, has made any significant or visible improvements to the environment, or the lives and well-being of the vast majority of Clapham Park residents, beggars belief.

There has, however, been case after case of appointed residents being removed from CPP structures for not towing the line, and others miraculously changing their views after being the beneficiaries of CPP financial largesse.

Some residents have been paid by CPP, in the most unethical way, large sums of money (on a results basis) to

doorstep tenants in a heavy-handed manner.

The layout of Clapham Park West, its generous gardens and broad open-space green areas, and the fact that there are NO homes within 50+ feet of King's Avenue and Poynders Road was a deliberate policy.

It is that legacy that is at risk from the nasty CPP proposals, let alone all the proven economic and political reasons for opposing council housing sell-offs that, ultimately, will only benefit the developers of the 1200-1500 planned homes for sale at inflated prices.♥

Stephen Stannard

There is an alternative

We only need £28 million to reach the Decent Homes Standard, which means homes which are safe, warm and dry, with new kitchens and bathrooms for all those who need them. Doesn't it seem odd that they want to spend £560 million, demolish half the estate, and build 1,428 private flats, just to finance the £28 million that's needed to give us Decent Homes?

In fact Lambeth council have already asked the Clapham Park Project to prepare an alternative plan to meet the Decent Homes Standard, in case there is a NO vote. It means using the £21 million of public money which has already been allocated to the Clapham Park Project, and making up the shortfall by selling off a small amount of derelict land. ("Fallback Option", Section 3.5 of the Clapham Park MasterPlan.) Its not perfect, but it's a lot better than the wholesale destruction of green spaces, the risks associated with privatisation, and the disruption of being "decanted", especially for elderly people.

¡ A DETENER LA PRIVATIZACIÓN! ¡ VOTE "NO" !

Clapham Park Estate necesita reparaciones, pero debe continuar siendo propiedad del council. Si llegara a pasar a manos de Clapham Park Homes, las rentas dispararían, usted perdería fácilmente sus derechos como arrendatario, y el control democrático desaparecería del todo.

El council puede conseguir £21 millones del Clapham Park Project para reparaciones y renovación. Todo lo que el council debe hacer es recolectar £2 millones al año de la renta que todos pagamos, durante los próximos cinco años, para poder lograr que todo el estate tenga un nivel decente.

La vivienda council es para gente común y corriente. Sin embargo, si el estate es transferido a Clapham Park Homes, mucha gente será trasladada a un lugar temporal. A partir de ese momento, esta gente tendrá que vivir en medio de un sitio de construcción por años, para que, así, Clapham Park Homes pueda construir 1550 apartamentos destinados a gente que puede pagar altas hipotecas.

¡ VOTE NO Y NO ENTREGUE SU APARTAMENTO!

RISK IDENTIFIED

Robson Rhodes Ltd, financial consultants employed by the council, have done a report on the risks associated with selling off Clapham Park.

The Masterplan for Clapham Park identified a number of areas where problems could arise - property prices, interest rates, building cost inflation, and meeting the building deadlines. If the interest rate goes up, or house prices slow down, or building costs go up, where is the extra money going to come from?

This campaign needs your help - NOW!

Defend Council Housing is a voluntary, non-party-political organisation led by council tenants with the support of councillors, MPs and trade unionists. There are no well paid consultants running our campaign. We need your help to go round and talk to everyone on the estate to explain the issues while the ballot is taking place. Get in touch today!

Clapham Park DCH
020 7060 0121
National DCH
020 7987 9989
www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk