

Alton ACTION

TIME FOR A PEOPLE'S PLAN: BY THE COMMUNITY FOR THE COMMUNITY!

ALTON ACCIÓN | ALTON AKCJA | ALTON AKЎЯ | ALTON FICIL | ALTON کاروانی

Join our Launch event, hosted by UCL in collaboration with AltonAction and Just Space:

Wednesday 21st October 8pm

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://ucl.zoom.us/j/94229515647>



Image courtesy of Roehampton artist and resident Alesia Tonette

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VIEW FROM THE ESTATE

Our interviewee lives in a split level three bedroom flat with her husband and their 3 children, and is a permanent resident within the area marked out for demolition and rebuilding in the current regeneration proposals.

When were you first made aware of the regeneration proposals?

I met a lady from the Regeneration Team back in October 2014; I don't remember her name, she was a Jamaican lady I think. Before this meeting they sent me letters, then confirmation for an appointment, and she came and we filled out a form and got an appointment at Wandsworth Town Hall. She asked for pictures, proof of everything, and passports and everything.

Early Mover?

A few weeks after I received a letter saying I was on the early move system and that I was Band A*. Firstly they offered me 2 bedrooms - but after another review they offered 3 bedrooms.

After a year and a half I called and said, look you told me I was Band A - I told them the reason I wanted the early move was because I wanted to move near my husband's family, for help with the children when they were little. They said OK definitely we'll move you.

I gave them a lot of areas, not just one area - Balham, Tooting, Streatham, Wandsworth Road - I gave many options! - but - you know - nobody contacted me.

I think it was a few years after they asked if I and my husband drove, then they said we want to offer you Battersea, but they said you're not allowed if you're driving - because it has a station. I said I didn't ask for a place near a station, we have to drive because of my husband's work. He comes back one o'clock at night, so remember we need the car.

After that - just before the lockdown - they offered me the same size house as this place - inside Roehampton, near the Alton playschool. I said I have two boys and two girls now, how can I live in one single room again - this place had two doubles and a single - I said it was too little for us. They said it has a garden - but it's the same as this place just on the ground floor. I didn't ask for a ground floor place, I need a house that fits us all.

They came to me again in early 2017 - a young man - when they did the first Redrow consultation for the regeneration and said they don't have all my information so they have to get it again. He asked for all the details again - to put me in the system for the waiting list - again!

It's quite confusing because every time you call they say different things, and each time it's a new person and they say they don't have that information. I'm now on my third person since him. A lady came and said I'll be your caseworker, she took all my information then next time she was gone and there was a new lady.

They called about Nine Elms in 2018. By that time I was really interested in moving early, as they had promised me it wouldn't take long, I had been told I was Band A and it would be months. I was so desperate because of the children, and wanting to move near my husband's family, but nothing has happened.

What kind of problems do you have with the flat?

I have very bad damp (here), especially in the bedrooms - and even in the sitting room. I bought double curtains because it's very cold and I just have this small heater which doesn't work. They took out one radiator when I moved in. I asked for a bigger radiator but they said they couldn't do it. In my room I have a tiny heater close to the wall - I said if you could at least put it by the window but they said no. My children, they did not have asthma. They have asthma now, all of them.

So the three bedrooms upstairs even in winter time I never close the windows because of the damp, because if I close them it'll get grim. When I reported this they say if you use a washing machine or tumble dryer this causes the damp - I said excuse me, you didn't even ask if I have a tumble dryer or not - I don't have one. I do not remember their name.

The boiler was breaking down when I moved in, they were forced to replace it with a larger new one and also said they would put in more radiators. But this never happened, in fact there is now one less working radiator from when I moved in. Whenever I cook there is heavy condensation, windows have to be open all year round.

I've reported it so many times but I gave up, after trying to tell me it was my fault, they now say there's nothing they can do.

Tell us briefly about the block and living conditions

It's mostly leaseholders in this building, but the council have bought most of them and brought in temporary residents. There aren't many people who are permanent council tenants - just me and two other families, that's it.

So for 6 years you have been left waiting with the expectation of a move? From as soon as I moved in, after one year (in temporary accommodation) they offered this place to me; I did not make any changes in this house because I am always saying tomorrow after tomorrow... I am really stressed to be honest. I finally decided I did not trust them. In lockdown I decided just to do the floor as I am getting cold and my children are getting cold and nothing has happened. Always my husband tells me: don't do it, we do not know if we are going to move. We are always living "stuck", we cannot move. So I just decided now... anymore.. because when I just receive the letter they say oh Redrow they are not doing it anymore ... so I say that's it

They have been here photographing the flat and furniture, as though a move was about to happen, and that the new place would be "like for like". They even took my bank account as they said we are gonna give you the compensation money.

How do you feel about it now thinking back to 2014?

Really I used to be stressed and disappointed but now I am just... I do not think about moving because it is not gonna happen anyway I know because I know one of my friend "H". She lives same as me - she wanted an early move. Nothing happened. She said she wanted to move near to her mum. Now her children have moved to secondary school there is no point and she says I am gonna stay here.

There is a lot of complications and confusion and everybody they say they are moving I say so you trust them. They have been saying that for more than 20 years. Nothing has happened, I am not believing anymore. I just want to stay in my house and make a home where I can live now.

*Band A refers to a category defined by Wandsworth Council whereby they identify those they deem in urgent need of re-housing.

WE HEART ALTON ESTATE

What do you love about living on the Alton Estate? Is it that your neighbours look out for you? Or that you are part of a vibrant community? Do you like the views from your flat or walking your dog in the early morning? Whatever it is, we want to know! Please send us your photos, drawings, poems or any other art inspired by your life on the estate. We'll showcase your submissions on our social media and some highlights in the next issue!

Recollections/Memories of Alton Estate

Ever since its completion in 1959 the Alton estate has had a diverse and vibrant population. What was it like growing up here? How has the estate evolved over the last 70 years? We'd like to know! If you have some time to chat (outside your door or outdoors) we would love to hear about your life on the estate and share it with other readers. Please get in touch with us by email altonaction2020@gmail.com



Image courtesy of Roehampton artist and resident Alesa Tonette

ALTON ACTION – WHO ARE WE?

Alton Action are a new group initiated by Alton Estate residents and local activists to foster the creation of a community plan by the people, and for the people of the Alton Estate. Our aim is to deliver the improvements that residents need; through collaborative workshops and discussions with the residents, we can make sure that your voices will be heard, and your needs will be met.

Over the last 15 years, the focus of several failed regeneration plans has been on maximising developers' potential profits on a lucrative site on the outskirts of one of the most expensive cities in the world. During this time Wandsworth Council have withheld investment in the areas earmarked for demolition, allowing their buildings to become dilapidated to the extent that the council are failing to provide a decent standard of living for the residents who are housed there.

Despite the recent withdrawal of the developers, Wandsworth Council has committed itself to continuing with the regeneration of the Alton Estate. Their plans do not reflect a community-focused investment; one that meets the housing, social and environmental needs of the people who live on the estate. The council intends to push ahead with the original plan for 'Alton Green', which would involve demolishing the maisonettes on Danebury and Harbridge Avenues, as well as the original entrance to the estate at Allbrook House. This area will be remodelled with unaffordable new builds and will provide limited, if any, social housing.

Alton Action are not associated with any property developers or property investors – our concerns are the current and future housing, social and environmental needs of the residents of the Alton Estate. We propose a community-focused investment that meets the housing, social and environmental needs of the people who live on the estate while maintaining its architectural and cultural integrity. This will mean rejecting the council's previous plans, which failed to meet the needs of the residents and proved undeliverable. This will mean creating a new People's Plan for the Alton Estate proposal, in collaboration with the Alton residents (yourselves) and planners, architects and surveyors who are willing to listen (the team from UCL). Once drafted, the People's Plan will need further design, costing and the support of Wandsworth Council and the Greater London Authority to deliver it.

THE MASTERPLAN

Irene - on the Alton Estate. From the project 'The Masterplan' by London based photographer Sam Hadfield.

'The Masterplan' contemplates the rise, fall, mutation and impending reinvention of one of Britain's earliest and largest post-war housing schemes, The Alton Estate, in Roehampton, South West London.

This series combines new imagery with archival material and first-hand accounts of residents in order to ruminate on the multifarious ways this estate has been experienced and recorded. Simultaneously fetishized and condemned, the rich, often conflicting history of this place has been shaped by layers of memory and myth, now absorbed by its buildings, landscapes and inhabitants.

Sam is looking to meet more residents who will participate in his project!



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www.samhadfieldphotography.com



Peter Peri is an artist who grew up in Roehampton Village. Image courtesy of Peter Peri

AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER PERI

Tell us about the history of your family and how they and you came to live in the Alton estate area

My grandmother Mary was born in West London, she was adventurous and in the 1920s went to live in New York first, then Paris and Berlin. In Berlin she met my grandfather Peter László Peri who was a Hungarian Jewish artist and architect. Both of them were Communists and when Hitler came to power they were forced to leave the country after she was briefly imprisoned for political activities. In London they first lived in Hampstead like a lot of emigres from Germany. Then my grandmother moved to Roehampton when she got a job in the 1950s teaching at Granard School. I was born in Queen Mary's Hospital in 1971 and lived in Roehampton Village until I was 10, then we moved to Redwoods Close at the bottom of Alton Road.

Tell us about your childhood on the Alton Estate – people, places, lasting impressions

I vividly remember walking through the point blocks down Danebury Avenue on my way to nursery and primary school in the 1970's. I always felt the blocks were mysterious powerful presences in amongst the landscape of grass areas and ancient trees. Going past Robert Clatworthy's Bull sculpture and looking up at the famous Slab blocks on stilts further down Danebury Avenue I was really impressed by the sense of grandeur that space had. We usually shopped at the Co-op and I had my first bank account at the NatWest in Danebury Avenue, there used to be a great toy shop along that parade too. I went a lot to the library and to its summer holiday book clubs, which I really enjoyed. I'm particularly sad about the plans to demolish the library, it was well stocked with interesting books and I always remember it being busy.

How has the Alton Estate environment affected your work as an artist?

A lot! Those childhood memories of the way the buildings interacted with nature made me want to express something to do with geometric forms in a living context through abstract art. Later on when I was a teenager my best friend lived in Winchfield House on Highcliffe Drive, around that time I started to read about the history of Le Corbusier's architecture and his Marseille L'Unité buildings' relationship to those blocks. I was excited to discover films set on the estate like Francois Truffaut's Fahrenheit 451. Realising that in the 19th century more millionaires lived in Roehampton than anywhere else in England and learning how the grounds and even individual trees from those rich people's houses had been incorporated into the Estate's original plans made me understand how much thought had gone into the environment around me. I still find that very inspiring.



ALTON ACTION - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is a community plan?

It's a document prepared by the community to identify what we want to improve or achieve in the area. It can include whatever the community agrees is important.

How will we create a community plan?

Residents, businesses, and local organisations will work together to create the plan.

Ideas will be discussed and developed in a series of workshops:

We will have the expert support needed from planners, architects, surveyors, economists and innovators in the field of social investment. This network will expand and grow in parallel with the involvement of the Alton community.

Why do we need a community plan? Isn't it the council's job to make plans?

The council had 15 years to make progress on regeneration, but despite all the resources spent on them the plans they've presented are unsuitable. Meanwhile resources haven't been put into maintaining the estate and meeting the needs of the community.

How do we know that the council will listen to us?

We can't guarantee it, but a positive plan developed and supported collectively by residents is much harder to dismiss or ignore than an individual objection.

We know that many objections were raised by individual residents, businesses, and local organisations in consultation. The council hasn't listened and wants to stick to the plans created with Redrow, even after the developers abandoned them.

We don't think this will change unless the community shows the council a positive and viable way forward together.

Will it be safe?

Yes, our events and workshops will be held safely in line with public health guidelines, or be held online.

How do I get involved?

We need ideas and support from across the community to make this work.



GET INVOLVED !

Alton Action, University College London and Just Space will work with Alton Estate residents to analyse how the proposed regeneration scheme will affect local people and co-produce an alternative Community Plan for our area

The campaign group Alton Action, a group of researchers from University College London (UCL), and the Just Space network have secured funding from the Higher Education Innovation Fund (Research England) to carry out a knowledge exchange project with Alton Estate residents. The aims of the project are to analyse how the regeneration scheme proposed by the council will affect local people and to co-produce an alternative Community Plan for our area.

The project, coordinated by Dr Pablo Sendra, Associate Professor of Planning and Urban Design at UCL, will take place between October 2020 and March 2021. The team includes specialists in heritage and conservation, community participation, public space, housing and urban design. The Just Space network who, with the London Tenants Federation, have developed the platform EstateWatch.London, will also participate in the project.

The project will consist mainly on online engagement activities (for now, until we can meet in person). We will also explore ways of how to engage those that do not have access to internet.

If you would like to contribute to a community vision for Alton Estate or you are concerned about how the regeneration scheme may affect you, please come to our launch event and meeting, where we will discuss the programme of activities and how to get involved.

If English is not your first language, please know that a Somali and Urdu speaker will be on hand to help translate.

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If you want your voice to be heard, if you want to help shape the People's Plan - get in touch!

 altonaction2020@gmail.com

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