7: Exile

'You can have whatever you want', says Robert Holden, happiness expert, founder of The Happiness Project and Success Intelligence, author of *Happiness NOW!*, *Shift Happens!* and *Loveability*, whose website tells us that he is a consultant to Unilever, IBM, Dove and the Royal National Theatre. That he has a PhD is also stressed, though in what and from where is vague, and repeated enquiries to his press officer on the subject are blanked. In a video-recorded presentation he tells his enraptured off-screen audience that he learned the secret of happiness at the age of twenty-five from an Indian guru: it is 'to get past your idea of who you think you are . . . to get even more to the truth of who you are'.

Some residents of the Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle weren't trying hard enough to get past their idea of who they were. What other explanation could there be? The 'whatever' that they wanted was to stay in their homes among neighbours whom they knew and trusted. They wouldn't have minded, either, if the London Borough of Southwark would keep some of their promises rather than oversee the estate's decline over a fifteen-year process of delay, false starts and obfuscation. Try as they might, they didn't get their wishes, despite the fact that in 2008 Southwark offered to pay Holden's company to provide a bit of Happiness Therapy to such residents as might want it.

The Heygate was planned from 1968–9 and built from 1970–74, a late and large descendant of the Boundary Estate that on its

twenty-five acres provided 1,212 council homes, reduced to 1,033 by the sale of 179 to their tenants. Designed by Tim Tinker, Rick Mather and John Kesteven, three young members of the architects' department of the London Borough of Southwark, it consisted of five concrete slab blocks, up to twelve storeys in height, within whose wall-like shelter was a lush enclave of low houses and gardens. It was built using the Jespersen industrialized building system, meaning it employed repetitive concrete panels prefabricated in a factory. The estate replaced a treeless tissue of tenements that Tinker recalls as 'a rat run, terrible, really horrible, like Naples'.

Subconsciously reflecting the area's quaint name, the Heygate was the colour of elephants and looked like a castle. On one face the blocks presented the pronounced repeating horizontals of their access balconies in a way that was abstractly beautiful. Residents praised their spacious and light-filled flats, but you could also call the estate forbidding, not helped by the fact that a cost-cutting exercise removed balconies proposed for the inner faces of the blocks. 'I bitterly regret it,' says Tinker now, 'it was a decision from on high. If you cut something like that you can never put it back.' Movement was elevated onto walkways one or two storeys above the large roads built around it, following a functionalist belief in the separation of different modes of transport. Next to the estate was a linked pair of large traffic roundabouts, together with a system of pedestrian underpasses and a shopping centre. 'Planners laid it down and we did it,' says Tinker. 'All they wanted was housing. The political parties were outbidding each other to build the most housing. There was a shortage of bricklayers so they were obliged to build a proportion in system building. There were absolute fixes. Flexibility was very limited. The system tended to dominate, therefore they tended to build on large sites.'

The Highways Department stipulated the separation of cars and pedestrians, because their 'aim in life was to keep traffic running at

30 mph'. The architects then had to make sense of these demands. Tinker denies the common charge against architects of his generation, that they were trying to create a brave new world, as cliché puts it, that reflected more their theoretical fantasies than real life:

> No, we never set out to build a utopia. That's a nonsense; we were trying to do the best we could. The fundamentals in my book were correct. People would give their right arm for these sort of living conditions. It was a place near to the centre where you can park your car, it was quiet – it was unbelievable. You could walk to school or workplace without being hit by a car. That actually worked.

The estate is Corbusian in its concentration of units in high structures, so as to liberate the ground for trees and transport, although it also reflects the more recent ideas of the architect Leslie Martin in favour of courts and perimeter buildings rather than point blocks. Astyphobic assumptions linger – the ideas that old streets have to be erased to allow for the new, that people should be lifted high above the miasmatic ground and turned to face the light, that the street-level contamination of multiple uses and of people and cars, should be subjected to hygienic separation. But, as architects were by the 1960s and 70s talking about the joys of street life, it was also hoped that community spirit could be recreated by the protected interior and the raised walkways.

The Heygate was a companion to an earlier huge estate to the south, the Aylesbury. They both came towards the end of the post-war surge in large-scale council housing, just as the backlash was starting to attack its architectural and social defects, real and perceived. Thus one judgement, in *The Architecture of London* of 1983:

> In the twentieth century, as a result of heavy bombing and the Second World War, the LCC and subsequently the London Borough of Southwark replaced much of this nineteenth century housing stock. The resulting urban picture is sad – at best a piecemeal catalogue of local authority housing fashions. The most unfortunate developments are to be found south of the Elephant and Castle: the Heygate Estate and the Aylesbury Estate.

In Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner's *Buildings of England* guide to south London, also of 1983, the Heygate's slabs 'make an impressive sight from a distance ... but that is all one can say in their favour'. The twin roundabouts, just outside the estate but part of the same grand 1960s planning, were voted by readers of the *Evening Standard* as one of the places they would most like to see removed by the year 2000.

It became axiomatic that such estates were inhumane and out of scale in their design, from which it followed that their residents would be alienated and miserable, their walls covered with graffiti, their immobile lifts puddled with piss. They attracted ritualized epithets – concrete monstrosity, mugger's paradise, no-go area, windswept walkway. They would leak and fail, as when in 1968 four people were killed by the partial collapse of Ronan Point, a twenty-two-storey tower in east London. The architects of these schemes were accused of social engineering, of a naive belief that enlightened modern design would create enlightened modern people. Then, with opposite but equal determinism, critics of such projects asserted that their design caused crime and deprivation.

Like much received wisdom, these views were based on reality, but oversimplified. They overlooked the extent to which factors other than architecture, such as housing policy, contributed to the success or failure of estates. They failed to discriminate between better and worse examples, or to notice when modern blocks were successful, or when traditionally designed projects were dysfunctional. When riots took place on the Victorian streets of Brixton, nobody blamed the architecture, but when on the Broadwater Farm

Estate in Tottenham, they did. Throughout the 1980s and 90s it was an unchallenged truth that modernist mass housing had failed.

In 1997, on the day after his first election victory, a dewy Tony Blair chose the Aylesbury as the setting for his first speech as prime minister. 'There will be no forgotten people in the Britain I want to build,' he said. These sombre blocks were chosen as symbols of the exclusion and deprivation he would banish. By then plans had already started to transform Southwark, which would lead to ambitious plans for eliminating the gigantic mistake, as it was seen to be, of the Heygate.

They were led by Southwark's director of regeneration and planning, Fred Manson, who was a new type of bureaucrat in a new type of job. As his title suggests, his role was not just to be a planner who said no to things, but one who would positively encourage regeneration. Manson was smart, articulate, energetic, engaging, design-aware, imaginative, unafraid of challenging convention.

With Manson's encouragement the Tate's new gallery of modern art came to the borough, and the Millennium Bridge would link his borough to the riches of the City of London. He would help bring to Southwark the Renzo Piano-designed Shard, the tallest building in western Europe, and the headquarters of London's new mayor, City Hall. He also ran a programme of public space interventions by interesting young architects, which were partly implemented.

In Manson's view the problem with places like the Heygate was that they were insufficiently middle class:

> we need to have a wider range of people in the borough. Because social housing generates people on low incomes coming in and that generates poor school performances, middle-class people stay away . . . we have to believe we can change attitudes. We're trying to move people from a benefit-dependency culture to an enterprise culture. If you have 25 to 30 per cent of the population in need, things can still work reasonably well. But above 30 per cent it becomes pathological.

The point was abrasively made, without giving much impression of love for the poor, but it was in the name of the common good. Nobody, well off or not, went the argument, benefited from social ghettos. Better if people of different incomes could live together. If ambitious middle-class parents raised the standards of schools, everyone would benefit. The borough of Southwark, whose housing was at the time 60 per cent social rented, would no longer be stigmatized as 'Councilville'. 'The borough's simply got more than it wants for local needs,' said an anonymous planner. 'It just sucks in refugees and other people with problems.' Manson's ambitions matched Tony Blair's aim 'to bridge the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the rest of Britain'. Southwark, with its vast council estates, represented the failures of the Old Labour policies from which Blair wanted to escape.

In 1998, as chronicled on the website heygatewashome.org, Southwark council started a survey of their stock of 40,000 homes. In the same year their Strategic Committee agreed that there should be 'substantial change' to Elephant and Castle – its hated roundabouts, the shopping centre, the Heygate. The area was well placed, close to the centre of London and well connected by transport. It had a 'strong potential for wealth creation uses' and could be 'a model of high quality urban living'. It was recognized that 'the Council cannot on its own raise money to finance the project' and that therefore 'it is essential that the majority of the funding is from the private sector. The major asset that the Council has is significant landholding in the area. Better use of this land is key to the development of this project.'

'Benefits of the new projects' were to 'assist all residents in the borough'. The importance of consultation was stressed, although it

was noted that repairs to the Heygate were already being deferred, owing to uncertainty about its future. It seems that the council already had demolition in mind, although they hadn't discussed this with those who lived there. These residents fell into two main groups: those holding secure tenancies from Southwark, whom the council were obliged to rehouse, and those who had bought long leaseholds. There would be a growing third category, of council tenants who came to the estate once redevelopment plans had been conceived, who were not given rights of tenure.

In 1999 the council selected the developers SLR Ltd as their partners in a scheme intended to provide a new public square, a public park, replacement homes for residents of the Heygate, and about £250m in cash to the council. In 2002 the deal collapsed, with Southwark accused by both developers and residents of killing it by asking for unreasonable levels of profit for themselves. The *Estates Gazette*, an organ of the property business, blamed 'council stupidity and greed, plus developer overoptimism'. Manson, speaking in 2015, puts a different view: SLR 'didn't believe that the Local Authority would walk away, so they just kept pushing and pushing and pushing.' He had left Southwark by the time the deal broke down, but he believes the council did the right thing.

In 2004 the council published a new framework which would establish Elephant and Castle as 'a new cultural entertainment/creative business focus'. Under the scheme, 4,200 new homes would be created, of which 1,200, or 28.6 per cent would be 'social rented' – that is, at levels of rent that enable people on low incomes to live in the area – to replace those lost by demolition of the Heygate. The development would be a pioneer of carbon neutral design, with a biomass boiler and a water supply from a chalk aquifer borehole. Bill Clinton came to pay tribute.

In 2005 the council promised fifteen 'early housing' sites in the surrounding neighbourhoods, to where holders of secure tenancies could move when the Heygate blocks were demolished. In a 'groundbreaking and revolutionary' programme, some residents were involved in choosing the architects and specifying the layouts and decoration of their new homes.

In 2007 a consortium led by the Australian property company Lend Lease became the council's new development partners. Later in the same year the 'decant' of residents was brought forward, in order to 'provide symbolic and tangible evidence to the people of Southwark that the Council is driving ahead with the regeneration of the Borough'. This came as a shock to the people who were to be moved out. They had received no warning and as the homes they had helped design did not yet exist, they would not be getting them. They were offered a 'right to return', but one valid for only seven years. By 2008 the estate would be half empty, with most of the remaining residents elderly. Hundreds of others, often forced out with eviction notices, were tipped into a borough where they had to bid for one of the thirty-five void properties available per fortnight.

It was about now that the offer of Happiness Therapy was made, followed in 2009 by the announcement that six of the proposed fifteen 'early housing' developments – only one of which had been built – would be scrapped. Remaining tenants were instead offered guided tours 'to find out more about what different areas of the borough have to offer'. In 2010 the estate's supplies of heating and hot water stopped working and were not restarted; residents were offered portable electric heaters instead. In 2013 the last leaseholders – those who had bought homes there and were not renting them from the council – were evicted and obliged to pay £7,000 for the costs involved. It was found that the council was going to be paid £50m, plus an uncertain promise of jam tomorrow, for a site on which they had spent £65m and had described as a 'major asset'. Meanwhile the number of social rented units on the Heygate site

had shrunk to about eighty. (The precise number will not be fixed until what are known as 'reserved matters' are decided.)

The replacement of the Heygate was sustained by assumptions and myth. Both the council and media had called the estate 'infamous', 'crime ridden', a 'mugger's paradise'. According to the *Independent*, 'this crime-racked labyrinth of grey high-rise blocks and small terraced houses, linked by raised foot bridges and stone stairwells, stands as a monument to the failure of post-war mass housing'. The actor Michael Caine, who grew up nearby and whose vigilante movie *Harry Brown* was shot on the Heygate, said it was a 'rotten place . . . which fortunately is being pulled down. It should never have been built.'

Yet the same article quotes Laura Cross, a resident, saying that this had been a safe, happy place to live: 'Every morning you'd come out of your door and there'd be people on the balcony and you'd chat,' she said. Also Kevin Watson: 'this wasn't a bad place to live. There was a sense of belonging. We'd all meet up at the bingo. It's important for the older people to have that friendship network.' According to a study by the Metropolitan Police the estate had half the crime rate for the borough as a whole, from 1998 to 2003, when it was still fully occupied.

Objectors to the demolition have gathered a portfolio of testimonials from former residents:

- I am fed up of reading that the estate was a hotbed of crime and deprivation by the media and local politicians.
- I feel quite angry when people call the estate a slum. It's not a slum and it never has been. It was run down because of the regeneration. What we were told once is that they are trying to 'introduce a better class of people to the Elephant and Castle'; well I said, 'You can't get a better class of people than us.'

- It was one of the strongest and friendliest communities in the borough.

Among the oversimplifications was that all mass housing blocks were the same. In fact the team who designed the Heygate, learning from the experience of the Aylesbury, improved on it. 'We went to a great deal of trouble to avoid muggers,' says Tinker. 'I was always conscious of these issues.' Another exaggeration was that it was a maintenance nightmare. An anonymous council source, speaking in 2010, said 'it was a crap building in the first place and it became too costly to maintain'. Yet according to the council's survey of its buildings in 1998–9, the thirty-year cost of upkeep on the Heygate would have been below the average of the council's stock. Tinker suspects that 'politicians confused the Heygate with the Aylesbury'.

It was ignored that there was lush and diverse vegetation in the central area sheltered by the slabs, with 450 mature trees mostly put there by Tinker and his colleagues – planes, a huge silver maple, hydrangeas, bay trees and a three-storey-high loquat. Campaigners used methods approved by the Forestry Commission to put the trees' combined value at £15m. Early regeneration proposals didn't seem to notice they were there, preferring to obliterate and replace them with saplings that would take decades to match what would be lost; only under pressure were plans revised to include at least some of the existing trees.

There was also some piquancy in the fact that Lend Lease eventually sent delegations to inspect The Curve, a public garden created on railway lands in Dalston by the landscape architect Jo Gibbons and the architects muf, so that they could learn from it for their new landscape. They did so four times. It was piquant because The Curve's beauty was based on what Gibbons calls 'the hidden ruderal' ecology that grows on part-neglected land, and it inspired the last survivors of the Heygate to create something similar in the estate's

final years, which was then wiped out by Lend Lease even as they were coming to Dalston to see how they could do something like the thing they were wiping out.

It was claimed from the beginning that residents supported the plans. A MORI poll in 1999 found that '70% of Heygate residents expressed a wish to move to a new home on the site of the Heygate Estate', which the council later reported as saying '70% of Heygate residents expressed a wish to move to a new home'. The point, which the council's truncation concealed, was not that anyone loved every aspect of the existing estate, but they wanted to stay together in one place. Overwhelming support for change was claimed on the basis of another survey, in which 5 per cent of residents responded. Jerry Flynn, a former resident, says that consultations consisted of

> a few tick boxes with very general questions. They were confined to soft areas, like 'What do you think of the design?' They didn't ask 'What do you feel about the amount of social housing?' or 'How do you feel about developers making a lot of money out of the site?' The next thing you know is that answers are collated and they say, 'Look, everyone agrees with the scheme.'

The council also went back on a promise to ballot residents on the proposals. Asked about this in a filmed interview, Manson is uncomfortable:

> You're getting straight into the political questions and politicians have to speak about what they said about those areas and what they were bringing ballots to.
>
> A lot of other issues have come up and it is all those factors in combination which is going to determine what the council does.
>
> I didn't understand the question. You can't ask me that question.

Heygate was accused of horrors it didn't cause because it looked the part. It was big and concrete and had walkways, therefore it had to be a hell of crime and bad maintenance. It was conflated with the nearby roundabouts and their threatening subways, which were not part of the estate. If residents offered different or more nuanced views, they were ignored or misrepresented. The upshot of the demonization and the half-truths is that many former residents felt brutalized and mugged, not by criminals but by their local authority. One, Ian Redpath, accused the council of 'systematically' running down the estate. Another, Angela Ampomah, said, 'We have been here for so long; we have had our children here and now you want to just throw us out like an empty bag of crisps? This regeneration has been a crime against the people who lived here; it has killed their livelihoods, their morale and their spirit.'

On Oprah Winfrey's show the happiness expert Robert Holden told his hostess that his philosophy 'is based on some very timeless principles and it starts with a very wild idea which is actually that the physical world doesn't really exist'. We inhabit, he said, 'a mental world and actually we project ourselves onto the world. This is the key. We project what we think we deserve onto the world.' Here could be another explanation for the failure of Heygatians to be happy with their treatment by Southwark: perhaps the estate never existed, it was all a state of mind and all that is necessary to find inner peace is to realize this truth. It would make as much sense as many of the other fantasies spun about the place in the last two decades.

By early 2015 it had gone, leaving an expanse of mud and such trees as were retained. In one corner was an odd fragment of Tinker's original design with its own stub of now purposeless walkway attached, the Crossway United Reformed Church. This expanse is the site of Lend Lease's future development of 2,500 homes. The gains and losses in public benefit can be summarized as follows:

Twenty-five acres of publicly owned land transferred to the private sector.

Expenditure by the London Borough of Southwark of £65m.

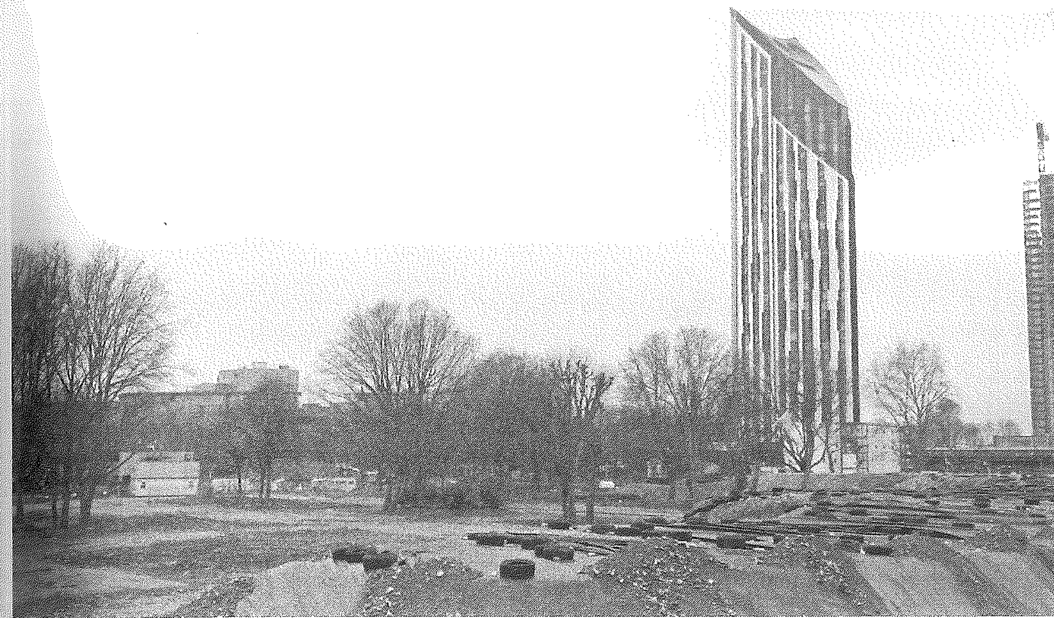
Payment to Southwark by Lend Lease of £50m, plus the promise of 'overage' – a share of future additional profits on the development. However, this depends on a negotiation with Lend Lease in which there is every reason to suppose that they will use their superior legal firepower to push as hard as they can to pay little or nothing. We can suppose this (a) because this is how property companies usually behave in such circumstances and (b) because Lend Lease have previous when it comes to squeezing public authorities, in New York and in Barangaroo, New South Wales. Overage will not in any case be paid before 2025.

The 1,033 social rented flats of the unregenerated Heygate replaced by (according to the best available estimate) 82. There will also be 198 'affordable' and 316 'shared ownership', which are intermediate levels between social rented and market properties.

Two decades of disruption and uncertainty.

The break-up of established communities. Holders of secure tenancies were rehoused at other locations in the borough. Leaseholders were often unable to buy replacement homes nearby, and were scattered in a fifty-mile-wide diaspora around London.

'Central London's largest park in over seventy years', according to Lend Lease, a claim which ignores the previous existence of a large, tree-filled area in the centre of the estate, that was designated as Metropolitan Open Space.



The new park will not have this protection, and will be privately owned and managed.

The development will not be zero-carbon as previously promised – that is to cause no net release of carbon dioxide – but zero-carbon-growth, which means that it will not release more carbon dioxide than the former estate. As is usual in such calculations, the enormous cost in energy and carbon of demolition and rebuilding is not taken into consideration.

'It's a tragedy it's been lost,' says Tinker. 'By all means knock it down if you can do better. I'm actually livid that they didn't. The whole idea was that they were going to sell the site so they could move social housing elsewhere. They did no such thing. It has been municipal gentrification on a grand scale. The people who bought into it have been ripped off.'

There were other changes to the area, not funded by the redevelopment of the Heygate. A private residential tower, Strata SE1, which would win the 2010 Carbuncle Cup for Britain's ugliest building, was built. The wind turbines at its summit, installed as a gesture of eco-friendliness, but which stopped turning after complaints about their noise, became objects of ridicule. Another tower, One The Elephant, started construction in 2014. The southern of the two roundabouts was reconfigured into a different traffic layout, but not to the extent that it became nice. Plans were also made for improving the larger northern roundabout, possibly with more positive effect, although multilane roads will still dominate. Blocks of flats were proposed and built in nearby locations. The rebuilding of the shopping centre was proposed – the new one will be less tatty, but is unlikely to serve the needs of local people as well as the small shops and cafes of the older one did.

There are some good things here, some of them subsidized by

several other large developments that are planned in addition to the Heygate replacement, although objectors argue that the council drove poor bargains to get them. On balance Elephant and Castle will be a physically more pleasant place than it was before. Some of the new architecture will be better, some worse: a plain shoddy block called Flamingo Court, for example, or a twenty-seven-storey tower by the developers Delancey that has many of the bad aspects of 1960s council housing and not all the good. Peter John, the leader of Southwark Council, says that he has met ex-residents of the Heygate who are happy with their new homes; it is in fact impossible to judge the balance of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among those affected, as the relevant research has not been carried out.

Those involved were not all or entirely fools or rogues. The way things looked in the mid-1990s, Manson's ideas seemed to make sense. John defends the actions of his Labour administration, which came to power in 2010, on the basis that they got the best deal they could. He says that the borough's previous Liberal Democrat rulers had failed to stipulate any level of affordable housing in their agreement with Lend Lease, but were going to leave it to the processes of granting planning permission to achieve this goal. He argues that the property market was weak in 2010, that he faced the prospect of the project not proceeding at all, which, as it had already been delayed by years, was politically unacceptable. 'Sometimes pragmatic choices are necessary to get housing. We could have pushed for 35 per cent affordable, but ended up with nothing. And 35 per cent of nothing is nothing.' He also likes to point out how much affordable housing the council is achieving elsewhere in the borough. He has a point, but it doesn't alter the arguments around the Heygate.

The deeper issue is that, in order to realize projects like this, local

authorities are obliged to enter unequal partnerships with multinational developers. The latter, for whom deal-making is their principal business, have bargaining skills and resources that councils find hard to match. Councils, as developers are well aware, are subject to political winds, changes of administration and public pressures that can weaken their position at a given moment. The good intentions of the project are therefore progressively reduced. 'When the council encounters a problem it takes the easy route,' says Flynn. 'Who at the table is in the weakest position? The community. We are nothing compared to developers. They are hard-nosed. They question everything and they don't question nicely. They do it very aggressively.'

Fred Manson expresses sympathy with those who would have kept more of the old estate – 'it was gorgeous, really well laid out' – but argues that the means and resources available to the council made incremental changes impossible. There were other factors, such as needing to convince London's new mayor that Elephant and Castle could be a 'strategic centre', which would mean more infrastructure money being directed its way. 'At the time', he says, 'a lot of people didn't think that the Elephant had any credibility at all.' The only option, he says, was to do a deal with a big property company for the replacement of the whole estate, which was why there was no ballot of the residents ('there was no point in asking people because that decision had been made'.) But 'a really interesting lesson that I have now learned is that if you hand something over to a single developer you lose control over everything'.

Under different administrations the council has been played by developers. It has had its tummy tickled, arm twisted and arse kicked. It has got a poor deal in return for its considerable assets, multiple promises have been broken and violence done to the lives of many who lived there. If the original vision had been of Blairite inclusiveness, of all incomes living together, of smart middle-class

people helping poor people to raise their aspirations, many of these residents, in whose name the regeneration project had started, would not be part of it. A predominantly working-class place near the centre of London is being made into a zone of expensive apartments into which some people on low incomes will be admitted.

Paul Barker, one of the young men who wrote *Non-Plan* in 1969, studied Southwark in the late 1990s. The council, he wrote,

> needs to remember its history, as well as gazing into its future. Estates . . . were built by councillors who also believed they were building a brighter tomorrow. The trouble came when a good idea was pursued too doggedly, on too large a scale. As I buy a bag of oranges in East Street market, I hope we're not going that way again.

Going that way again, in a different form, is what the council did. In the 1950s and 60s politicians looked at overcrowded and insanitary Victorian streets and saw only slums. So they swept them away, overlooking the social structures that they contained, the qualities of the houses and the possibility that they might be renovated. In the 1990s they starting looking at towers and slabs like the Heygate in a similar way, with similar prejudices and exclusions. It may not have been necessary to eliminate the entire estate. Perhaps it could have been partly rebuilt and partly renovated, which would have been less disruptive to those living there. We will never know for sure, but if you listen carefully you might hear the soft disheartening thuds of babies being thrown out with bathwater.

Troublingly, the redevelopment of the Heygate was in 2015 held up as model by both the Conservative housing minister Brandon Lewis and the Labour politician Lord Adonis. The most charitable view of the project should be that it was a well-intentioned plan flawed in execution and undermined by circumstances beyond the council's control, from whose mistakes lessons might be learned.

But no such qualifications were expressed by Lewis or Adonis. For them it is the future.

The right to **** off and die

The Heygate would become a pioneer of a tendency whereby central London and not-so-central London became less and less available to people on low or medium incomes. In the north-west of the city, for example, the borough of Barnet decided to rebuild the West Hendon Estate – described by the council leader as 'grotty' – in a Heygate-like partnership with the developers Barratt. As at the Heygate, the number of social rented units went down, non-secure tenants faced an uncertain future and leaseholders were threatened with eviction by compulsory purchase orders. They were offered £175,000 for a two-bedroom flat, compared with the £415,000 at which new units were expected to sell. Both leaseholders and non-secure tenants faced the possibility of ending up far from London. Residents of all kinds complained about the break-up of communities and the loss of mutual support. According to the website mappinglondonshousingstruggles.wordpress.com, seventy to eighty estates were, in 2015, being made over in this way, affecting 160,000 people. Some of these will be the useful and reasonable upgrading of run-down estates. Many are about building new homes mostly for sale at market rates, with a much smaller number at rents that the former residents could afford.

The process was assisted by changes in rules on the benefits paid to people on low incomes, brought in as part of the austerity drive launched by the coalition government of 2010–15. A cap was put in place such that a family with children could claim benefits – including assistance with housing – totalling no more than £500 per week. In Greater London, where average rents were well over £1,000