Residents angry at being priced out of mammoth redevelopment

Mira Bar-Hillel and Josh Leeb

THOUSANDS of flats and the largest new park created in central London in over 70 years will transform a neglected neighbourhood after planning consent for redevelopment of a notorious council estate.

The Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle featured in videos for songs including David Grant’s I Love You, Don’t Let Me Go and was the backdrop for fantasy film Attack the Block.

Its high-rise concrete walkways, popular in the Seventies when the area was known as ‘London’s lowest’ and synonymous with crime. Demolition started in 2001 and will now be stepped up, with the aim of the first homes being moving in this year 2013.

Southwark council approved a £3.5 billion masterplan by developer Lend Lease to build up to 2,500 homes on the 22-acre site, the biggest regeneration scheme within Zone 1.

But at a six-hour planning meeting, local protesters claimed the plan will not be enough affordable homes.

Police were on standby as dozens of activists held placards with slogans including ‘Elephant and Castle rip-off’ and ‘Gated communities are zones’. Committee chairman Nick Dorell threatened to hold the meeting behind closed doors unless the protests ceased but continued after security staff removed the placards.

Southwark MP and Labour deputy leader Simon Hughes was among about 200 people at the meeting, which stretched into the early hours yesterday. Mr Hughes had supported the original plans but was against the plan because just 25 per cent of the homes will be affordable.

He added: ‘The council has a policy that 35 per cent of all housing should be affordable. They are breaking their own rules.’ He also criticised planners for meeting in a room too small to hold all those who turned up.

‘Objectors’ spokesman Jerry Hym said: ‘Over 800 social rented units will be lost, and the so-called affordable rents are way beyond what most people who live in Southwark can afford. Southwark has more than 15,000 people on its housing waiting list – but none of them will be living on the new Heygate.’

Dan Laidbroad, chief operating officer of Lend Lease, said the project was a ‘once-in-a-lifetime opportunity... that will not only transform the Elephant but will be a benchmark example of regeneration and best practice’.

Prices have not been revealed but Lend Lease is already offering flats on the site of the former Elephant and Castle Leisure Centre, from £250,000 for a one-bedroom property.

The project was originally supposed to see the famous pink shopping centre, roundabout and link road demolished to create a civic square and emphasise the area’s good public transport connections.

As recently as 2004 the ‘vision’ also included a new arts and cultural facility, performance space, theatre, science museum, library, council offices and secondary school.

However, the breakdown in negotiations with the shopping centre owners resulted in a more piecemeal approach. The northern roundabout, the most dangerous interchange for cyclists in London, will be reconfigured, while the shopping centre will be refurbished and get a new tower.

The Heygate Estate was emptied in 2008 and the tenants were promised new homes. However, all but 15 have been rehoused in older properties.

Pub gets another round as stars call

Maxine Frith

A CHELSEA pub has been saved from redevelopment into a £20 million boutique after a huge campaign against its closure.

Local residents including Hugh Grant and former footballer Sid Campbell were among more than 1,000 people who signed a petition against a planning application to turn The Phone Arms into a residential complex with steam room, swimming pool and gym.

A government planning inspector yesterday upheld Kensingston and Chelsea council’s original decision to reject the application, by property developer Robert Bourne, whose 26-year-old daughter Lily runs the pub.

Publishing its decision, the Planning Inspectorate said closing the Phone – which was footballer George Best’s local – would harm the character of the neighbourhood, which is a conservation area.

Tereence Bendish, honorary secretary for planning at the Chelsea Society, said: ‘We are all absolutely thrilled about this decision because I think it draws a line under this completely unnecessary development which would have been detrimental to the area.?’
where’s the affordable housing?’

LONDON’s chronic housing shortage has joined past unreliable transport as a threat to its growth for the first time.

Senior executives at the capital’s biggest companies rated “housing” above “transport” in a poll carried out by the CBI. Housing charities said the watershed findings showed that the “brain drain” caused by the dearth of affordable homes to buy and rent is now the biggest single obstacle to London’s economic success.

Campbell Robb, chief executive of Shelter, said: “This alarming report shows just how wide-reaching the impacts of the capital’s housing crisis have become. Rising rents and house prices mean that for many talented professionals, living in London is no longer attractive and the cost of living is often too much. This is a huge problem for our future and is likely to blight the prosperity of our capital.”

CBI WARNS PROPERTY SHORTAGE IS THREAT TO ECONOMY

time on developer’s plans

LONDON, England’s second city, faces a property development crisis as the capital’s housing shortage threatens to become a threat to its economic growth.

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