

## FEATURE - AYLESBURY LEASEHOLDERS



## EXCLUSIVE

By Emma Ailes

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**A** 95-YEAR-OLD war veteran has been left hospitalised by stress after the council announced it was evicting him from his Walworth home of 43 years.

WWII hero Harry Arpino, who fought with the Royal Engineers, has been offered "a pittance" for his two bed home on the Aylesbury estate, which the council want to bulldoze to make way for a multi-



million pound development.

Harry and his wife Ann are among a group of leaseholders in their seventies and eighties being kicked out by Southwark Council ahead of the planned demolition of their block in January.

The council has just signed a deal with housing association L&Q for a new development of three higher rise blocks of 147 units on the site - which residents have heard are likely to sell for upwards of £250,000.

The elderly leaseholders were promised by Southwark Council that when the time came to move, they would be offered help, support, and above all, a fair price for their homes.

But the group, who are already dealing with the enormous heartache of losing their family homes, say the reality has been far different.

Among them is May Wood, 73, who was

originally offered around £100,000 for her two bed flat in Wolverton 1-59 - only just over half of what the leaseholders' own surveyor believe it is worth. The council has since upped its offer to around £130,000.

"They're trying to bully us out on the cheap," she says. "When it started, they said we wouldn't be any worse off when we had to move. It's all been broken promises."

"Everytime someone from the council comes round, they say 'clock's ticking...'"

"Then they said to me, 'you might get something cheaper if you move out of London, Mrs Wood.'

"Who said I wanted move out of London?" I said. I'm a Bermondsey girl. I've lived in this area all my life."

"In the end I said, 'right, pay me my money. I'll go and buy a caravan.'

"I'd rather do that than go in one of them little flats that you've been offering us and trying to take

all my money."

The worry of losing their homes, combined with the effort of standing up to the council, is taking its toll on the elderly residents. Three of them have recently been hospitalised with stress-related illnesses, including one resident who suffered a heart attack. Harry himself was in hospital for three days.

"I started suffering dizzy spells and they had to call an ambulance for me," says the 95-year-old, who volunteered as a lollipop man until his eighties.

"The first thing the paramedic asked was, 'are you under any stress?'

"Well, I wake up in the morning thinking about it and go to bed at night thinking about it. We just don't know what's going to happen to us. The council haven't told us anything."

That stress has recently been brought to a head, with the news that the council has started Compulsory Purchase Order proceedings to force

# "to the end"



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the leaseholders out - the second time it has tried to do so. The first time round, the leaseholders found out from a notice on a lampost.

Councillor Peter John, Leader of Southwark Council, who is currently in charge of the Aylesbury regeneration portfolio, insists that "no leaseholder will be thrown out on the street" - but by the same token warns: "If people think they can hang on and we'll pay whatever they want, they are mistaken."

"This regeneration has to happen, and that does mean moving leaseholders," he told the *News*.

"Nobody wants to go down the route of arguing it out in court. We will try to find solutions."

"One thing we would be willing to look at is finding a new independent valuer and both be bound by that."

"But people have to understand that we don't have a limitless pot of money. We can only pay market value."

And here lies the crux of the problem for the leaseholders: what - and who - dictates market value?

The council says that valuations can legally only take into account 'market evidence', meaning recent sale prices on the same estate.

In February this year, a flat in the Aylesbury's Foxcote block, a 'park view' property with four bedrooms over three floors, went for £156,000. Another four bed in the imposing Missenden went for £148,000.

Two bed properties on the estate, similar to those belonging to many of the leaseholders in Wolverton (or so the council argues) have recently gone for around the £130,000 mark; one beds at around £105,000.

The leaseholders were originally given offers of £100,000 for a two bed, £110,000 for a three bed. After negotiating long and hard they have seen those offers raised to £130-£140,000, with

## What could the leaseholders get for their money?

**THE COUNCIL** has made offers to buy out the Wolverton leaseholders at a price of around £130,000 for a two bed property and £140,000 for a three bed property.

The money would fund two years in a care home at £850 a week, the average cost of residential care with nursing in London, according to the Care of Elderly People Report 2011.

We asked Jonathon Lloyd-Ham, manager of local estate agents Field and Sons in Kennington, what kind of home leaseholders might be able to buy for



This fifteen sq ft lock up in Belgravia with a 44 year lease could be yours for just £100,000.

their money.

"Nothing, full stop. Even for a small one bed flat above a shop on Walworth Road, you'd be looking at anywhere between £160-£180,000."

"You wouldn't even get a small one bed for £140,000, anywhere in this area. Even further out in Peckham or Bromley, those days are truly gone."

"Walworth's really been coming up over the last three or four years. It's central London, you've got everything on the door step, transport links. You were getting an awful lot more for your

money three or four years ago.

"They're just not going to be able to stay in this area. In Walworth, two bed ex-council properties start at around £240,000 to £250,000, three beds from £250-300,000."

"Just down the road in Kennington, fairly standard houses are breaking the £1m barrier."

"Unfortunately with the Aylesbury Estate, we just don't touch properties there. Everyone knows they're going to be coming down, so they're not worth anything."



Alternatively, this second hand Mercedes Benz on sale for £100,000 caravan sleeps five people.



It may not have mains electricity, running water or a toilet, but apparently at £126,000 this one room beach hut in Chislehurst near Dorset is still a bargain.

## Blair: "no more forgotten people"

IN 1969, the first block of the brave new world that was the Aylesbury Estate was completed. The Wolverton leaseholders were among the very first residents to move in.

Con Whiffin remembers the day: "I've always said it was like a holiday home. I loved it. We'd come from a little place in Deacon Street which had no bathroom, outside toilet, freezing cold."

But after a period of decline in the '80s, the Aylesbury, reputedly Europe's largest estate, began to earn a reputation.

It was dubbed "hell's waiting room" by the tabloids – albeit unfairly, as many actual residents of the estate argued.

In 1997, when the estate was still less than 30 years old, Tony Blair chose it as the place to make his first official speech, declaring he would build a Britain where there would be "no more forgotten people".

In 2005, the order was finally given to demolish the estate and rebuild. But in 2010 the scheme once again stalled when the new coalition government unexpectedly pulled £180m of PFI



funding.

The full regeneration of the Aylesbury is still a far off prospect. Southwark Council is hoping that the redevelopment of the area around Wolverton will kick start it again.

THESE ARE the first images of 'Harvard Gardens', the new development planned for 'site seven', where the leaseholders' homes currently stand. Housing association L&Q says the development will consist of 75 affordable homes and 72 for outright sale. Work is scheduled for completion by 2015. See [www.harvardgardens.co.uk](http://www.harvardgardens.co.uk)



the option of a part buy / part rent L&Q property nearby.

But they argue that these valuations are still £40-60,000 short of the worth of their homes – and nowhere near enough to buy an equal-sized property in the neighbourhood where most of them were born and have lived all their lives.

"They must think we're idiots," 63-year-old market trader Tony Beattie says. "These are big, spacious homes, ten yards from a bus to the city, five minutes from Elephant and Castle and the tube. We're not stuck somewhere in the middle of the estate, we overlook East Street."

"Properties being built further out than ours are being marketed as 'all in Zone One'. But when we show that evidence to the council, they say 'oh no...'"

"But who is going to pay the shortfall?"

"They wanted to know if we had savings, see our bills, pensions, bank account details,

everything, so they could dictate to us what we could afford," May Wood continues.

"One of our neighbours, Mr Hilmi, who is 82-years-old, had paid out in advance for his funeral. They demanded to know where the money had gone. It's disgraceful! We often go up and find him crying."

With the CPO now in progress, that time, it seems, may have come. However, the leaseholders will not go down without a fight.

"I think they thought because of our age we'd just roll over, but we're here, we're fighting, and we'll take it to tribunal," Tony says.

"We've lived together here, raised our children here, lost family here. It's more than just four walls. It's our homes."

"We're not asking for a lot really. Not asking for the top of the Shard! Just a fair price for what we bought and paid for."

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