

# ELEPHANT'S MAMMOTH TASK

Southwark Council and Lend Lease have faced significant challenges in redeveloping one of south London's most colourful estates. As they prepare to clear the site, local residents hope the regeneration will bring social benefit to the area. **David Hatcher** reports. Photography by **Tim Foster**

The Heygate Estate has become an urban playground. Home to graffiti artists, free runners and pop-up gardeners, the imposing concrete maze of abandoned terraces in Elephant and Castle, south London, has an air of social disintegration but is also bizarrely tranquil. The atmosphere is incomparable to anywhere in London.

This is about to change. Heygate's peaceful ambience will be disrupted in the next couple of months by the construction of a perimeter fence and the clearance of the site ready for demolition in September.

Australian developer Lend Lease and local authority partner Southwark Council are to transform the run-down, 1,196-unit 1970s estate on a phased basis into a 3,000-home complex by 2025. The £1.5bn redevelopment will be one of the largest and most symbolic regeneration projects in London's recent history – turning a deprived gateway to the City of London into a modern environment designed to attract a new demographic to the area. It will also provide the largest new park in the capital for more than 70 years.





But as with every large regeneration scheme, it has proved impossible to please everyone. Residents began to be rehoused as early as 2004 but one final leaseholder is still in occupation and is battling to prevent the redevelopment. A subsequent judicial review of the council's decision to enforce a compulsory purchase order (CPO) of the site, which concluded in March, is to be determined by the secretary of state in July.

The scheme's detractors say former tenants were not consulted with properly and have been forced out of the area, and that it will become gentrified and exclusive. Those helping to implement the project say communications with local stakeholders have been long and detailed, that suitable accommodation has been found for those that have moved out, and that affordable housing and cheap business space will maintain the area's cosmopolitan feel.

The development will affect a huge number of people, which poses enormous challenges for Lend Lease but also offers great potential for social benefit and financial reward. Rehousing or removing local residents is the definitive example of how the property industry impacts on

the life of the man on the street – for good or bad.

*Property Week* talks to former residents, graffiti artists, local businesses, developers and politicians, to find out whether the Heygate's impending metamorphosis could be a blueprint for other developers as they respond to the capital's increasingly challenging housing and community needs.

**Fight or flight**

"It is a wearing and stressful battle to fight. It is a process of attrition and most people just get worn down and settle. If you are a leaseholder you are in a very bad position, as the likelihood is that in London you are not going to get the compensation you need to buy a property to stay in the area you are in."

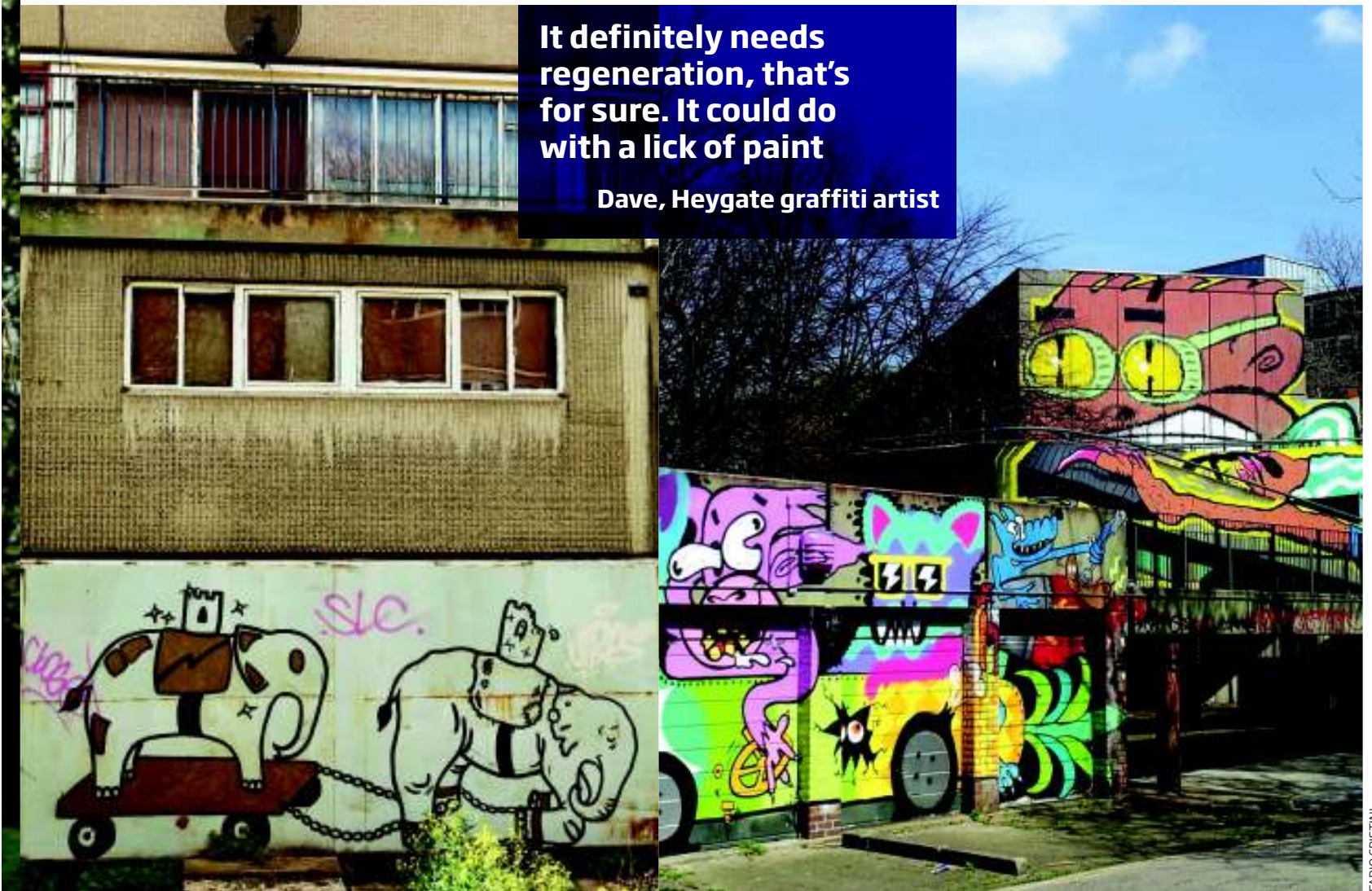
Jerry Flynn is a former resident of the Heygate and a spokesman for Elephant Amenity Network, a 150-strong group opposed to the manner in which Lend Lease and the council have approached the redevelopment. It campaigns for open masterplanning – whereby the local community has a democratic and active involvement in plans – benefits for all from the scheme, and "housing that really is affordable".

Flynn gave evidence at the judicial review on behalf of the three remaining leaseholders that are subject to the CPO, only one of whom is still in occupation, and declined to be interviewed by *Property Week*. The Heygate was home to the Flynn family from the 1980s to 2007, when they had to move because of the redevelopment.

He claims that there was no special treatment given to existing residents in terms of their rehousing priority, that only historic council property was offered as an alternative and that families were given just six months to find a new home, after which time notices to seek possession were issued. At the judicial review Flynn argued that during the "stressful and pressurised process", the council had been poor at interacting with residents and that few of them would be allowed to return to the Heygate.

"[The council and Lend Lease] were presenting evidence that said everyone was happy with the rehousing process and that they could replace all the affordable houses, which I don't believe they are able to do. Only a handful will be able to move back into the Heygate," he says.

This view is echoed by Terry Redpath, a resident of the Heygate from 1974 to 2008, whose »



FABIO CRISTINI



« family had lived in the area for a century. He says he was forced to move out of London as a result of the process.

"If [the council] had offered a sensible buy-back offer, they would not have had to go down the CPO route," he asserts. "Leaseholders were isolated and were picked off one by one. Most ended up frustrated and stressed out.

"I could no longer afford to stay in the area and, in the end, the offer I was made plus £45,000 of life savings bought me a terraced property 15 miles out of London. I have, I feel, given up my home to accommodate the building of homes for overseas investors."

This is rejected by the council and Lend Lease, which maintain that the residents who were moved out between 2004 and 2011, when the last swathe exited, were given better accommodation and that suitable provisions are being made within the new development to house people with a variety of incomes and backgrounds.

"The idea that there hasn't been proper consultation is absolutely ridiculous," says Jon Abbott, project director for the council, who has worked on regenerating the area since 1999.

"Right from the beginning we have been involved with the tenants and residents' association ...

## There is a huge silent majority of people that have been moved out of the Heygate that are happy in their new homes

**Fiona Colley, Southwark Council**

One-to-one, face-to-face meetings were had with residents, and [there was] a dedicated group of housing officers talking about and sorting out their individual housing requirements."

The popularity of the borough as a place to live and therefore to develop means there has been a large provision of new affordable housing units in recent years – 600 were developed in Southwark in the 2012/13 financial year.

"People that have been moved out of the Heygate are enjoying their new homes," says Fiona Colley, cabinet member for regeneration and corporate strategy at Southwark Council.

"A lot of them are in brand-new housing association homes built in recent years within the borough. I come across people that used to live in the Heygate when I visit local residents and, when I ask them whether they prefer their new homes, they just laugh at me for asking the question – there is a huge silent majority that are extremely happy in their new homes."

The first homes at the new Elephant and Castle scheme will be in a building called Trafalgar Place, which will be completed in mid-2015. They were put on sale last month at prices starting at £310,000 for a one-bedroom flat. Across the



whole scheme, 25% of the units will be affordable housing or social rented.

Much to the frustration of the Elephant Amenity Network, this is 10% below Southwark Council's affordable housing policy. But the compromise has been made because of economic viability – the council and developer agree that, without such flexibility, there may not have been any regeneration at all.

"In a deal we signed in 2010 we committed to 25% affordable housing and we have honoured that," says Rob Deck, project director at Lend Lease. "Some viability studies have shown that we should have actually delivered lower than that because of the economy, but we have stuck to it and it will give a good balance of tenures across the scheme."

The Heygate is in Elephant and Castle, close to the City and the West End and, given the housing shortage in the capital, demand for the new units is expected to be strong.

"With the largest new park in central London at the heart of the estate's regeneration, as it approaches completion, one only needs to consider what has happened in similar fringe zone 1 locations that are being transformed – such as King's Cross – to see the potential for value growth," says Samuel Blake, director of development consulting at BNP Paribas Real Estate, who advises the council and lives locally.

### Meanwhile style

Although the area is expected to thrive once development is completed, there will be no new residents living in the scheme for at least another two years. By the 2015 completion date it will be more than a decade since the first residents moved out, and the lack of activity at the site has irked some local people.



"It's pretty sad to see a whole community displaced like that," says Tim, who repairs bikes at 56a Infoshop, "a radical social centre and bookshop" on nearby Crampton Street. "I mean, how many years has it been now? It shouldn't be left like that. They need to make sure the whole thing is social housing to let the people who were there before go back there."

Southwark Council tendered for a developer for the project back in 1999, but preferred developer Godfrey Bradman's Southwark Land Regeneration failed to reach a final agreement with the council and the deal collapsed in 2002. Lend Lease was then chosen as a new preferred developer in 2007 and signed the eventual development agreement in 2010. Planning applications were made last year and approved in January.

"The reality is that we have been through a significant recession and that brings with it all sorts of challenges to projects like these and many have stalled," says Lend Lease's Deck. "Our programme for developing out the scheme is quite aggressive in terms of the speed of development, and we are aiming to do it in the fastest time possible, given the market appetite."

For the meantime, the Heygate has become a paradise for graffiti artists to exhibit their work – much of the look of the estate now changes on

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**Terry Redpath, former Heygate Estate resident**





Opposing council (from left): last remaining resident is fighting to stay at Heygate. Meanwhile free runners and graffiti artists are using the space and local social centre 56a Infoshop is supporting Elephant Amenity Network's campaign for affordable housing



a near-daily basis. A "regeneration artist" on the estate, who wishes to be known only as Dave, says his group of friends are making the best use of the space while it is unused.

"I haven't been to any places with an atmosphere like this and it's an amazing place. There are plenty of abandoned buildings but nowhere as open as this place. It definitely needs regeneration, that's for sure. It could do with a lick of paint. Knocking it down, building bigger flats and getting more money from the area is understandable but I don't really agree with it," he says.

Interim uses – such as a place for graffiti artists and free runners, as well as the establishment of the Elephant and Castle Urban Forest, which encourages gardening in the estate – are being tolerated by the council, as long as the activities are safe and until such time as the estate needs to be cleared.

"What is happening on the estate now was never going on when it was occupied, and is being run by people who never went there before," says Southwark Council's Colley.

"It can't remain like that but we are trying not to get too heavy handed or petty, just as long as there is nothing dangerous happening."

The estate has always had a somewhat unusual atmosphere. For some it is synonymous with crime and deprivation, whereas for others it holds positive memories of community and family. Either way, it is broadly agreed that the ground floor of the estate was poorly planned and is now badly outdated, as it is dominated by garages and car uses.

All stakeholders hope any new development will be able to provide vibrant, social interaction. The council and Lend Lease have committed to provide 10% affordable business space within

the 178,000 sq ft of office, retail and leisure that is also expected to be developed.

"There are a lot of successful local businesses in the surrounding area, including many Latin American restaurants that we want to ensure there is suitable space for, to make sure they do not end up being pushed out, and we want to make sure there is suitable space for businesses to move into as they grow," says Colley.

The regeneration of the Heygate, with so many passionate local residents, undertaken during a time of broader economic pressure, would be a challenge for any developer or council. Pleasing everybody involved is perhaps impossible. In a few months' time, the graffiti artists and free runners will be gone. It can only be hoped that the estate's spirit of independence and community does not disappear with them. ■



Place to be: Lend Lease and Southwark Council will build luxury flats at Trafalgar Place

