



**PRESS RELEASE:
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Local residents urge London mayor to change rules after Newham ‘buys’ yes vote on estate redevelopment

Residents of a housing estate in East London have accused Newham council of using public money to ‘buy’ a yes vote in a recent ballot on the ‘regeneration’ of the estate.

Newham council has been seeking to redevelop the Carpenters Estate in Stratford since 2001. Residents say it has been in a state of managed decline ever since.

In December 2021 a resident ballot returned a yes vote in favour of the council’s plans to demolish almost 60% of the estate. 73% of residents voted yes to the council’s proposals for redevelopment, on a 66.5% turnout.

However, the campaign group Focus E15¹, which includes residents of the Carpenters Estate, has accused the council of spending large sums of public money to secure victory in the ballot.

According to data obtained through a Freedom of Information Request, Newham and the council’s housing company, Populo Living, spent at least £350,000 on campaigning for a Yes vote, whilst residents had no access to public funds to run a campaign for a No vote.

Residents have also accused Newham and Populo Living of ‘underhand tactics’ and ‘blatant propaganda’ during the council’s campaign in favour of partial demolition. This mirrors the claims of residents of the Love Lane estate in Tottenham, where councillors have called for an independent inquiry into a recent redevelopment ballot.²

Focus E15’s solicitors, Public Interest Law Centre, have written to Sadiq Khan’s deputy mayor for housing, Tom Copley, urging the mayor to take action to ensure a ‘level playing field’ in future ballots.

The letter calls on the mayor of London to cap local-authority spending on canvassing aimed specifically at persuading residents to assent to redevelopment proposals, and make funding available to local residents who wish to run their own (typically anti-demolition) campaigns.

Separately, Sian Berry, Green Party London Assembly Member, has written to Tom Copley asking for the Carpenters Estate ballot to be voided and re-run.

The Carpenters Estate contains a total of 710 council housing units including 3 tower blocks. Newham, which has been ‘decanting’ residents from the estate since 2005, claims it is committed to providing at least 50% ‘genuinely affordable homes’ through redevelopment of the estate. However, campaigners say this provision will not match the traditional low rents of council homes.

Newham has the highest rate of homelessness in the UK, with up to 50% of children living in poverty.

Jade, a resident of the Carpenters Estate and Focus E15 campaigner, said:

‘As a community we feel invaded. We’ve had flurries of ‘Vote Yes’ leaflets through our doors, and countless representatives of the council knocking to persuade us of the Yes vote. We never had funds or resources like the council to campaign against the demolition of our homes. Around 420 homes sit empty on this estate as the council has moved residents off for at least 15+ years. We want nothing more than to see these homes opened, refurbished and used – and not demolished!’

A spokesperson for the Public Interest Law Centre said:

‘The huge resources available to local authorities to secure a ‘Yes’ vote to demolition, compared with residents who have access to none, is staggering. This is certainly unfair and potentially unlawful.’

Sian Berry said:

‘Throughout the ballot process at the Carpenters Estate, resident groups have voiced concerns about excessive spending on a ‘yes’ campaign, biased information from those running the election, and paid canvassing.’

‘Normal democratic principles should be applied to these votes for them to hold weight in decision making. This includes the principle that each option on the ballot is equally valid as a choice. If a level playing field is not ensured through the ballot process, then estate ballots cannot be considered to represent residents having a democratic choice in the future of their homes, or to fulfil the Mayor’s 2016 manifesto promise to: “require that estate regeneration only takes place where there is resident support”’.³

‘Last week, I wrote to the Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development to raise these issues and request action. I am calling for the Carpenters Estate ballot result to be voided, and for the ballot to be rerun only if rules are changed so that residents have equal access to independent campaigning resources.’

‘It is vital that the Mayor takes action to introduce additional guidance on the conduct of ballots, so that estate residents have a truly fair vote on development schemes.’

ENDS

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1. More information about the Focus E15 housing campaign can be found via the campaign's website: <https://focuse15.org/>
 2. For more on councillors' demands for an inquiry into the Love Lane Estate ballot, see: <https://haringeycommunitypress.co.uk/councillors-demand-inquiry-into-love-lane-estate-ballot>
 3. See p. 24 of Mayor's 2016 manifesto 'Sadiq Khan for London: A Manifesto for all Londoners' https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/569cb9526a21db3279000001/attachments/original/1457451016/x160668_Sadiq_Khan_Manifesto.pdf?1457451016