



MOVING_ME?

London council estates are undergoing the most sweeping changes in a generation with major 'renewal' programmes causing varying degrees of anxiety, with residents' lives disrupted, and in some cases, being requested to leave their home. Moving_Me? is a collection of single square format mobile phone photographs and stories contributed by residents on affected estates that best represents how they feel about the structural and social change taking place around them.

The photo elicitation project is part of 'Gentrification, Displacement, and the Impacts of Council Estate Renewal in C21st London'. Moving_Me? provides tenants and homeowners the opportunity to respond creatively to the research by submitting one photograph that sums up their view of the change taking place around them. Photographs were submitted with or without comment. The photographs and stories will be archived alongside the research interviews, collected documents and published papers.

Moving_Me? is funded by the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) and led by the University of Leicester, with co-investigation by King's College London.



RETRACING OCEAN

AK has a keen interest in photography and, along with friends in a closed WhatsApp group, has been sharing old photos of the area where he has lived all his life, and showed what some of the new builds on the Ocean Estate previously looked like, this is his story...

"I was moved from Bengal House to a new build when it was demolished. I lived there with my family and it was very overcrowded. The building had infestations of cockroaches. Where we live now is much better, more room. The ground floor houses are nice.

We can't go into the stairwells to the new flats upstairs. People can hear their neighbours moving around in the flats. (AK is shown some old photos of pre-demolition of the Ocean Estate and of the demolition itself sparking many memories, before showing the exact location of some of the photos). I know the name of everyone of those tags (points to graffiti on walls and names the individual people who created the tag) - all are friends or related (smiles). So see this pub, this was on this junction over there, notice how the zebra crossing lines up (corner of Ben Johnson and Harford roads, site of new SO Stepney building). We are around the back here, (walk along Harford Road, pointing to SO Stepney building) so about half way along this building and in a bit. You can see the blue handrail line-up at the edge of the photos. So this was the neighbourhood office. There was a lot of drug dealing around here. You can see passed the café to where the gas works used to be. There were roads here. Both-nee-ah house, not Bothnia house, that's how we used to say it (big smile). That was full of infestations, yeah bad way. It's changed a lot around here; it is much cleaner and tidier generally. There is not as much crime, still a lot of drugs but not as bad as it used to be. It's alright to be honest, bit of racism and that but not too bad. Anyway show me how to take better photos using the camera on my phone..."



OVERLOOKING THE CANAL

K was in his 20s when he moved to the Ocean Estate in 1950 with his family from a flat in Whitechapel, which was scheduled to be demolished, this is his story... "I moved to the Ocean estate with my family into a lovely brand new 3-bedroom flat in Arabian House on Ernest Street. Being brand new it was better than where we used to live. They were planning to demolish our old flat. I think the London County Council (LCC) built Arabian House. Stepney was not a desirable area back then although we liked it. Around the time my Mum died the council fitted central heating, which made a real difference. Then my Dad and Sister passed away and I found myself with a 3-bedroom flat. I was a full-time carer for my sister after my dad passed away, so could not work. I really wanted to get back to work and I did not need a 3-bedroom flat, when families needed them. In 2002 I asked the council to move me and they offered me a 1-bedroom house overlooking the canal, it was all newly decorated and I took it straight away. I really like it there. I was then able to get on a security course and got myself a great job in Liverpool Street, which I really enjoyed. The druggies and drinkers often hang around the back near the bins, I don't go out once it's dark, too dangerous. None of this is new; it was always like it. I remember the police knocking at my door one day and asking did I see anything suspicious over at Mile End Park; a man was set on fire! That was 20-years ago. Hasn't changed much really. I retired several years ago, I like the community centre now, I hear they want to close it and get rid of (J Community Worker). He is great; he does so much for people. The council met but weren't interested. He helps people with forms, shopping, cooks us food, he collects a disable lady in his own car otherwise she would not get out. He is wonderful but many residents don't care, they will be sorry when he is gone. Terrible. I like photography, I've got old albums going back to my childhood. So print them all myself on my Epson printer on gloss paper; Off to Blackpool in October to see the lights, looking forward to that."



BENGAL HOUSE

XY moved from Bengal House (The Ocean Estate) as a baby but has a recurring memory of infestation and overcrowding, he likes things in order now, this is his story... “This was where Bengal House used to be. We moved away when I was a baby but I remember the infestations. The cockroaches. You met my sister, remember? She is older than me. We were over-crowded in Bengal House, its nice where we live now. We have a big family, Mum had lots of kids. I prefer around here. Much cleaner, I don't like rubbish. There is more order, it's nice.”



MOVING PILLOW

J works on the Ocean estate in Mile End and lives in a council property on an estate close-by. J's childhood was one of continuously having to move home, as her mother was a temporary tenant, this is her story... "I had to move seven or eight times when I was young, meaning changing schools and all the stress. When we had to move when I was 13 I put my foot down and refused to move school. I ended up having to get up at 5.30am every morning to travel one and half hours to get to school. By 15 I had given up with school. The only reason I have this job is that I managed to get on to an apprenticeship near the end of my 20s. The council could not raise the funding so decided to just let me sit in on all the courses as I was so enthusiastic and motivated - I ended up being the only one to complete the course! This allowed me carry on and gain all my qualifications in social care and I ended up actually working for the council. I had my pub licence when I was 23 so if I did not do the apprenticeship I would still be working in pubs. Housing wise, at 19, my mum moved to Kent and Kent county council were great and found me a place of my own in Sittingbourne. Then someone looking to swap contacted me, they were in London in Hackney and I needed to be close to a new job I was starting. I have been in the same place ever since. It's great; I love it and don't feel any sense that I will be moved. The streets are bit dangerous around where I live and many of the middle class people moving in get mugged on their way home, particularly when they have had a drink. The Police are about to start a new initiative to try and deal with it. Now I think about it, I owe a lot to Tower Hamlets Council, even though I don't work for them now, they got me my education, my flat and led me to this job, so I am really grateful. The pillow is the only item that has stayed with me throughout all my moves, I always took it with me wherever I went next - I am very attached to it and its many memories."



DENSIFICATION

O lived in Bothnia House and was moved locally before its demolition; overall he feels things are much the same, this is his story...
“The main change was that Bothnia was heavily overcrowded inside many of the individual flats. Overcrowding has gone down but now there are just too many flats. They knocked the old buildings down and built many more new blocks, new roads. The new flats are all more compact; each one is on top of each other, crowded in a different way. It’s the same as was before.”



NEW WINDOWS

J lived on the Ocean Estate, initially with his parents then eventually securing his own accommodation on the estate. Both parents and J continue to live on the estate to this day, this is his story... “The regeneration was not a bad thing overall, it brought a lot of improvements. The community centre used to have single glazed, often broken windows and it allowed damp to spread, the pensioners did not like the draft and would not take their coats off. After the regeneration there were new windows and other improvements, like new central heating, and the place became much more pleasant. There are a lot more people using the centre now, it looks nice, better attended, and generally improved. I have lived on the estate since the 1970s, originally with my parents in Bengal House before getting my own place. Bengal House was one of the buildings demolished along with Bothnia House, Malacca House, Tunis House and Searle House. They were among the worst buildings in the borough. The council had spent £5m on trying to fix the flats but they still had cockroaches and the insulation foam did not work and the flats were still cold and damp. There was not really an option but to demolish and begin again. My parents moved to the yellow brick houses over there (pointing) and they are happy. Originally people were told all the new places would be houses like them but it was realised these take up too much space - it was a time when the Mayor of London said no to more tall buildings. In 2009, it was time to demolish the old gas works, which were empty for years. East Thames got the contract and then sub-contracted it out to sub-contractors - everyone was taking a slice. Leaseholders got a good deal, mainly because of the New Deal money. The work on their places were capped at £10,000, so regardless of the overall cost, they only needed to find up to £10k towards repairs. Many residents left completely, some moved to places like Redbridge and Essex, some decided to stay where they were, others returned when the new buildings were complete. Generally most people wanted to get out and were pleased with their new places. I like where I live.”