

London: Evictions at Sweets Way estate

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19 October 2015

In the early hours of September 23, bailiffs and police officers in riot gear invaded the north London Sweets Way Estate and used sledgehammers and battering rams to smash their way into the flat occupied by disabled council tenant Mostafa Aliverdipour and his family. Aliverdipour, his wife and four children became the last of 140 private and social housing tenants to be evicted.

The eviction brought to a close a six-month standoff with residents and social housing campaigners. On August 10, more than 100 protesters had stopped two bailiffs trying to evict the family. To date, the family remains without suitable housing to accommodate 49-year-old Aliverdipour and his wheelchair.

Campaigners from the “Sweets Way Resist” organisation helped Aliverdipour’s son obtain a letter from his National Health Service (NHS) general practitioner confirming that he needs a fully wheelchair-accessible home.

The campaigners appealed to Barnet Homes, run by the local authority, Barnet Council, to accept this evidence and give him a more suitable residence than the one they have offered that does not accommodate his disability. Last week, Barnet Homes formally discharged their duty to house the Aliverdipour family, leaving them to fend for themselves.

Sweets Way Resists consists of residents and their supporters opposed to social cleansing in north London. In the course of their campaign, they occupied one of the empty flats on the estate that was vacated by an eviction and opened it as a “social centre” in order to “highlight the quality of homes that will be destroyed, simply because Annington [Property] doesn’t think they are profitable enough.”

The campaign notes, “At a time when residents are being told there are no truly affordable homes left in Barnet, Annington should not be allowed to bulldoze our homes to make way for luxury flats!”

Aliverdipour told about the operation to evict him. “I was asleep at 7:30 a.m. There was smashing and banging and three or four big guys in black dress came in, shouting through where I was sleeping. They smashed the big window and the glass went over my bed and feet. I was shocked. I couldn’t imagine it would end like this.”

Earlier High Court bailiffs, using a cherry picker, physically removed 16 Sweets Way supporters who took to the roof of Aliverdipour’s home to resist his eviction. Another three protesters were arrested the following day. Twelve people were formally charged. Two campaigners were held on remand by police, due to their wish to remain anonymous. This week they were finally released on bail.

Campaigner Cat Denby, who spoke to the press from inside one of the barricaded homes during the eviction, said, “They’re smashing into the houses with a battering ram through the front window to drive us out. It’s chaos. It’s tension. They have hard hats and shields.”

Footage of the eviction can be viewed [here](#).

Aliverdipour told the *Independent*, “The poor are being made to move out so the rich can move in. It’s not human.”

One of those who tried to stop his eviction, Samir Dathi, said, “When you evict an entire housing estate, it’s social cleansing: what else can you call it?”

Annington Property, the company that purchased the estate from Barnet Council, claims that 229 new homes will be created, with 59 affordable homes replacing 149 homes. The new homes will be priced up to £700,000 and the affordable category rate is set at 80 percent of that figure—or £560,000.

In addition to a dwindling supply of council housing for the most vulnerable in society, disabled housing is sorely lacking in the United Kingdom. The latest UK government housing survey reveals a serious shortage

of disabled-friendly homes, with only 5 percent of homes accessible enough for disabled people to visit. According to the disability charity Livability, an estimated 40 percent of disabled people aged 16-24 do not live in suitable accommodation for their disability.

The Sweets Way homes had been used as Ministry of Defence (MoD) accommodation until 2011, when Annington let them out on a temporary basis before gaining planning permission in December 2014 to redevelop the site.

In 1996, Annington became one of the largest private owners of residential property in the UK. It bought 55,060 homes, known as the Married Quarters Estate, on a 999-year lease from the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It also bought from them the freehold on another 2,374 homes. The total cost of these properties was £1.67 billion.

The majority of the homes were leased back to the MoD to be rented out to families from the Armed Forces. Under the deal, when the MoD terminates a lease Annington makes the properties available for private rent or sells them on the open market, reaping huge profits. Annington's annual report shows that it makes £162 million in annual rent on properties leased to the MoD. The group also made £74.1 million in sales income from sold properties.

Annington notes that the total carrying value of its investment properties was £6.1 billion, a rise in value of 13 percent from the previous year.

An investment fund managed by Terra Firma Capital Partners Ltd owns Annington. Annington's principal investor, Guy Hands—a tax exile and one of the UK's wealthiest private equity investors—has emerged as the controlling interest behind a property business that has evicted dozens of families in recent years, many of whom were previously homeless.

In 2012, Hands' purchase of the former RAF Coltishall Badersfield estate in Norfolk, England led to mass evictions, with many families given less than two months notice to move out.

The Sweets Way eviction of Aliverdipour follows mass evictions of residents last February. Reporting on the aftermath of the evictions, the *Barnet Times* said February 11, "[T]he once-busy street is now eerily quiet. Furniture, children's toys, fridges, freezers and other household appliances have been abandoned in front of the boarded-up homes."

One resident interviewed said, "It's been a real, traumatic experience. I couldn't find anywhere to live in my price range and so I was panicking. I am lucky I found somewhere in the end—others are still searching. Yesterday, we saw furniture out on lawns and people getting ready to leave but some had nowhere to go. It's just horrible because people are being made homeless."

Another former resident wrote, "It was not until Xmas of 2014 we received our eviction notice. Barnet homes did not give us a lot of nominations for viewing properties—and half of us have been placed in emergency accommodation in such far [away] places..."

The resident added, "[S]ocial services were called on a few families as they were being offered [a home in] Birmingham and Coventry when their children attend school in LBB [London Borough of Barnet] and they work here also!"

He added that he had "been placed in a one-bed emergency with two children, no heating or hot water!"



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