

Notes on London's housing crisis

Thomas Scripps
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London third most expensive city in the world

A report by London-based real estate firm Knight Frank found London the third most expensive property market in the world, behind Monaco and Hong Kong, ahead of New York, Geneva and Singapore.

Property web site Find Properly has constructed a map showing average one-bedroom rent prices by tube station. Central locations like Hyde Park Corner, Knightsbridge and Green Park all came in at over £2,300 a month—the first two at over £2,800.

London remains the favourite city of the global super rich, many of whom own one of the 80,000 homes currently sitting empty in the capital—either for occasional visits or as an investment in a superheating market. In the Central London borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the surrounding area, the average home now costs £1.4 million.

Charity gives out bus tickets to homeless young people

The New Horizon Day Centre in Camden has been forced to buy night bus tickets for homeless young people, as they struggle to keep pace with the rising numbers without a home or place to sleep.

Charity workers hand out the tickets along with advice on which routes to take to get a night's ride and sleep. Buses are safer than spending the night on the streets. The Centre's Director, Shelagh O'Connor, said the charity had been able to provide a bed for everyone

who asked for their help in 2010, but now it can only manage to deal with around 50 percent of demand. She cited rising rents, a reduction in hostel places and benefits cuts as key drivers behind the housing crisis.

According to government statistics, 55,090 households were accepted as homeless by their local council over the last year, a 40 percent rise over the last five years. The number of families in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation is up 25 percent over the last year alone.

The problem is so vast that London councils have begun to move homeless households outside of the city and into the surrounding counties—over 3,000 in the past two years. Mandy Maguire, head of Slough Homeless Our Concern, told the *Guardian* that the charity had seen a 70 percent rise in its cases since 2012. This is putting pressure on non-London districts' ability to deal with their own homeless. Some Berkshire councils have considered taking legal action to stop the moves.

Evictions rise across London

This month, a single mother of three, Aminata, and her disabled mother were evicted from their home on Benhill Road in southeast London.

Bailiffs and police forced their way through a crowd of 40 protesting fellow residents to remove the family. Aminata and her children had spent the last six years being moved from one place of temporary accommodation to another, after they were originally evicted from a privately rented house in 2009.

Across England, the number of evictions has reached its highest total in a quarter since 2009—11,307 tenants and families between January and March this year. A

significant proportion of evictions have taken place in London and most have been carried out by social landlords.

A series of evictions in east London this August removed 55 people, including children, from three overcrowded houses in Dagenham. Statistics from the Office of National Statistics last year gave evidence to show that 3 million people now live in households with at least five other individuals.

Luxury developments slash social housing stock

Houses at the new Elephant Park development in Elephant and Castle have gone on sale for prices well over half a million pounds. The average studio apartment will cost £569,000 and the average two-bedroom flat £801,000. The luxury apartments are being built on the site of the demolished Heygate Estate, which provided 3,000 homes, 1,194 of them socially rented. The new £1.2 billion Elephant Park site contains just 74 socially rented houses among its 2,500 homes.

The Abbey Tower development in Greenwich—a council with more than 11,000 families on the waiting list for social housing—specifically advertised itself as a location with “no social housing” to wealthy potential buyers. The cheapest of flats will cost £275,000.

At the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, a deal between the local council and Notting Hill Housing will see the site rebuilt with the loss of 934 social homes. The borough currently has 18,000 people on its lists awaiting housing. The “regeneration” is particularly devastating for residents who recently bought their homes under the government’s right to buy scheme. The council has used an in-house surveyor to value the properties for Compulsory Purchase Orders, providing significant underestimates and cheating the homeowners out of tens (and sometimes hundreds) of thousands of pounds.

Social polarisation in student accommodation

Fountain Block, overlooking Hyde Park on Park Lane, is advertising accommodation to students at prices ranging between £9,000 and £21,000 per month. The students will have access to 24-hour concierge service and rooms are between 1,600 square feet and 2,000 square feet in size. Luxury student living has become big business over the past few years. Over £4.2 billion has been invested in accommodation this year alone.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of students are forced to pay extortionate rents for substandard accommodation. A recent National Union of Students (NUS) report found that 95 percent of student maintenance grants were swallowed up by rents. Three-quarters of students are forced into debt by the sky-high costs.

The NUS reported in 2014 that three-quarters of students in private rented accommodation had experienced problems of some kind, half of them had mould in their homes and over a quarter had vermin. A joint survey by the NUS and Electrical Safety First in August this year revealed that 27 percent of students had experienced dangerous electrical problems and that landlords had been reluctant to have them fixed.



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