

UK: Tottenham residents speak on plans to demolish Broadwater Farm estate

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to residents on a high street in the Tottenham area of north east London about the housing crisis in the city and the government's plan to demolish the nearby Broadwater Farm council estate. The demolition of the estate is part of the Conservative government's plans to demolish 100 council estates throughout England and Wales.

Tottenham suffers from immense levels of social inequality and was the place where Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old father of six, was shot dead by police in 2011. His killing sparked a protest march to the main police station. When the protesters were attacked by police, riots were unleashed across London's impoverished boroughs. Broadwater Farm was also the location for sustained rioting in 1985 against police harassment and brutality and mass unemployment.

WSWS reporters spoke to Nick, a Broadwater Farm resident for 12 years.

Asked about the plans to demolish the estate, Nick said, "It's cleansing, isn't it, cleansing of the poor, the needy. It is down to greed and control of society, because then all of these people get moved out, and they don't have a lot of choice. It's like it or lump it, and that's not right; that is not fair. There is no equality.

"I am lucky, I am in housing association accommodation, but if I had to move, I couldn't afford somewhere in London. Even though I'm self-employed and I work really hard, I still could not do it."

A WSWS reporter noted a recent statistic, showing the deposit required to acquire a mortgage to purchase a house in London's less affluent districts is up to £80,000.

Nick said, "It is crazy, you cannot get that. So imagine people who are on the poverty line. It's just impossible. It's all for self-benefit, isn't it? Keep it in

the circle. It's part of the club. Forget the rest of the people, the people who really matter and make the country function. It's not them at the top, it's the everyday man."

Outside the Broadwater Farm estate, a 31-year-old mother who wished to remain anonymous said, "I don't agree with it. They need to find somewhere to put these people. You are just going to increase the housing crisis if you knock somewhere down without housing them somewhere that is affordable to live."

In London, many working class people live in private accommodation, often handing over virtually all their income as rent, with little or nothing to live on after it is paid. For council tenants in public housing, such as Broadwater Farm, the relatively low rent set by local authorities means that they are able to work, pay rent and usually still have some disposable income left.

She explained, "I have only ever privately rented. All my income is taken up on private rent." She said her friend lived in a council property on Broadwater Farm and "her rent is considerably less, so she can afford to go back to work, because her rent is so low. She has gone back to work, she has managed to do all those things and she is very comfortable and happy where she is. She does not have a problem living in a housing estate, never had a problem. If it isn't broken, why are they trying to fix it?"

"My rent has been quite consistent right now. It's the same as it was for the last seven years, but that's because very little work has been done on the property. My rent is about 70 percent of my wages, so on top of that I claim housing benefit, because I can't afford to pay the whole thing and bills."

Asked what she thought of the government's housing policy, she said, "I don't know what they are doing. I see some housing association properties going up, but

they're not council. I see new [housing] builds all the time. I don't know where the council houses are. I can only get somewhere if I am homeless ... and then after five years of being on a bidding scheme if I have enough points."

Floren said, "In the 1980s, one of the working members in the family could sustain the family and you could still go out and enjoy yourselves and were able to save some money as well. But now, even if a number of family members work today it just covers the bills. There is more tax; travel is expensive, it costs £21 just for the bus for one week, and to find work, I travel as far as Reading.

"Today I am off work and I am planning to go shopping, but I am scared to go because of what we have to spend on food. I remember 11 years ago, you could spend £35 at a supermarket and have a full basket. Today that is not possible."

As with millions of people in London, Floren pays over a large proportion of his income in rent. "I pay £600 a month just for a large bedroom plus bills, heating and everything", he said. "It's about £680 per month in a private rented house. We can't survive without both of us working. My partner has to pay £160 a month on travel, as she has to use the trains. She is on £6.20 an hour and earns £750 a month. We live in a large room in a house with many rooms and have to share the toilet, bathroom and kitchen. Heating is also very expensive, and the house is old and damp."

Floren added, "There is no one to help in this situation. The council will not help, the government is not interested, so we have to do it ourselves, and the place I have is the cheapest we could find. When we looked around for alternative cheaper places in this area, the houses were messy and you could see rats."

On Tottenham High Street, Steven Lee said of the threat to demolish Broadwater Farm, "For people supporting entire families on low-wage jobs it is terrible, and they [the government] are pushing them out and giving them up.

"I have heard of places in Peckham [south London] where they have knocked down council homes and put up high-rise apartments and people are not even living in them. But they have been paid for by someone."

Asked his opinion of the government's condemnation of housing estates as "magnets for poverty", Steven said, "I think it's absurd. You can't have a magnet for

poverty. Poverty is where it is because it has to go there, that is always the way. And we have to look at the reason they are poor, why anyone is poor or unhappy. Rather than push them away, give them support! That is surely always the way.

"I mean, where are they going to go? Onto the street? Out of London? What do we want London to be, one culture? A boring place again? The whole beauty of it is that it is multicultural.

"What I see with myself and my friends, is when our parents would have been buying places of their own, or renting, but not having to work every moment of the day, that is the biggest change for someone like me. We cannot find stability. We are going to have to work and pay rent unless we can find a large sum of money from somewhere to ever buy a house, and buying a house was always a given thing."



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