

Notes on the London housing crisis

One third of London renters sinking into debt

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Over the past five years, London rents have risen by 20 percent, while average pay has risen by just two percent. This is forcing many London renters to borrow money from friends, family, banks, credit cards or payday loan firms to cover housing costs.

Nearly 55 percent of 739 households surveyed by *YouGov* for housing charity Shelter said they struggled to pay their rent from “time to time” or constantly.

Campbell Robb, chief executive of Shelter, said, “With rents rising relentlessly, far too many Londoners are having to fight hard to keep their heads above water. Tens of thousands of people are being pushed out of the city, or are spiralling into debt just to be able to keep a roof over their heads.”

London’s private renters are more than twice as likely to have to move home than private renters in the rest of the country. Last year, one in five families was forced to move, creating a nomadic culture for many in the capital.

Map shows unaffordability of rent in London

Housing charity Shelter has published a London Underground Tube map showing how unaffordable most of London is for the average private renters.

The report, which breaks down affordability by the percentage of affordability relative to the average income for a two-person household, shows that only 15 of London’s 270 Underground Stations have affordable private rental housing.

In zone three of the Shelter affordability map, “the average cost of a two-bed private rental property is between 35 percent and 50 percent of the combined take home pay of a two-wage household.”

Last month, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron announced government plans to demolish England’s worst council estates, many of which are located in and around London. Two of the worst affected London boroughs under the plans will be Hackney Council, which expects to lose more than 915 social homes and Southwark, which is set to lose 2,051 social rented homes. The destruction of council housing coupled with planning policies favouring private developers have left fewer and fewer truly affordable units.

Growing evidence of slum conditions in east London

In the latest incident confirming slum conditions in parts of east London are worsening, Labour Party-run Newham Borough Council recently issued a probation notice to a Manor Park landlord who was found illegally renting an unsanitary and unsafe apartment to a family of four for £700 per month.

The property was dirty throughout and has no hot water at the kitchen sink, exposed electrical wires at risk of fire, no ceiling, and no supporting beams around the missing chimney breast in the bedrooms, threatening collapse.

Former prison inmates provided with tents after

A new report reveals that female prisoners with no fixed address on their release from London's HMP Bronzefield prison were given tents to live in because officials were not able to secure permanent accommodation.

As a direct result of the lack of social housing in 2014, the percentage of inmates lacking housing on release was 4.5 percent in 2014 and 16.3 percent in 2015, almost quadrupling.

A Women in Prison charity spokesperson explained, "The fact that Bronzefield is resorting to issuing tents to women leaving prison with nowhere to live does not highlight a problem evident within that one prison. Instead it is a reflection of how chronic the housing crisis has become..."

London railway arches to be converted to private housing

The dire shortage of new housing completions in London is driving property prices sky high, sending developers and property investors scrambling to find commercial spaces to convert into housing.

Near the Elephant & Castle area in Central London, estate developers have been granted permission to convert two railway arches into homes. The railway arches, currently being used as storage, are unsuitable for housing as the sound from passing trains overhead are more than double the current standard for noise levels. Twelve trains per hour for 19 hours per day pass overhead. Additionally, natural light will be very poor because of the inability to fit windows around all sides of the "property".

The government has made it much easier to convert commercial buildings to residential use. But according to most estimates, levels of house building are far behind what is needed to meet demand. Converting commercial properties into homes will not keep pace with the vast number of properties needed to address the crisis.

London public toilets for sale and rent

A London estate agent is selling a former public toilet facility for £1 million in the east London Spitalfields neighbourhood, marketing the facility as perfect for a new nightclub or other trendy establishment.

Spitalfields, once a working class district, now boasts some of the highest home prices in England as social landlords sell off valuable properties to private developers.

In 2015, Brick Lane residents learned that social landlord EastendHomes are planning to sell off a former council estate, leaving more than 600 residents fearing eviction because the new homes will likely be too expensive to buy or to rent. The landlord has already torn down some of the estate's tower blocks at Denning Point and the new build units are selling for £600,000 for a one-bedroom flat.

In Highgate, north London, a local builder is renting a public toilet for £3,000 per month, saying that it would be perfect for bus drivers needing a loo to relieve themselves during their break time.

Referring to the Council's plans to close the only public toilet in the area, the builder told *Camden New Journal*, "I hope they don't shut the public toilets in Pond Square because they are needed, but it would be good news for me in a business sense."



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