

What's the Future for Social Housing in Hastings?

Southern Housing (SH) have announced they plan to demolish nearly 400 flats in the Four Courts in Hollington. They argue that the blocks cannot be 'future-proofed' so they need to be replaced.

But what kind of future do SH want to see? Will there be any homes left in Hastings that people can really afford?

Tenants in the Four Courts pay a *social rent*, but in the new SH development in Holmhurst Gardens half the properties are for sale as shared ownership (two bed £340,000+) and the rest are for rent at the Local Housing Allowance rate, which is 40% higher than the social rent in the Four Courts (two bed £748pm).

Why would the SH redevelopment of the Four courts site be any different? How can we believe them when they say they'll replace the flats with homes for social rent, when demolition and rebuilding costs so much more than a refurb, and they admit they haven't got any funding agreed from anywhere yet to pay for it!?

If SH refuses to maintain and retain the Four Courts as social housing, how many other older social rented properties in the town will also face a wrecking ball? What will replace them?

Will we have a safe, clean environment for future generations?

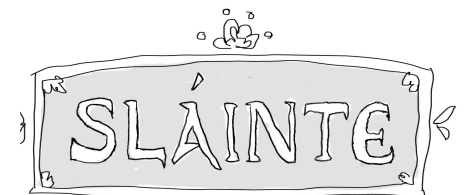
Demolition and new construction are terrible for the environment - not just air and noise pollution but also huge carbon emissions and waste of natural resources for all the new steel, glass and concrete they require. Upgrading the blocks would be much better for the environment and architects say they could even extend

them to create larger new external lift shafts and additional flats, and add energy saving measures like heat pumps and solar panels to make them a model of sustainable social housing.

Will local residents have any say?

Why have SH not even considered any alternatives to demolition or given tenants a voice in what option they would prefer? The experience of tenants in other areas is that regeneration schemes lead to gentrification - social housing replaced by 'mixed communities' with private investors or private homeowners in overpriced, poorly-constructed new-builds, alongside a few remaining social tenants who get hit with steep increases in their rents and service charges.

But Four Courts tenants can still refuse to move out if they are not offered an appropriate alternative home, so SH cannot simply bulldoze through their plans. SH needs to start genuinely engaging with tenants as well as the wider community about their plans because we all have a stake in the outcome.



Interesting housing scheme..



Nichelle Kelleher is running a half marathon, 6 April, 11am, from Rock-a-Nore to Cooden Beach and back, to raise awareness of her housing co-op Hastings Rental Health, which is partnering with Hastings Commons to create 13 new affordable secure homes. Funds raised will be split with Black Butterfly that has supported her and many others in countless ways over the years. Follow @kneeshell_k @hastingsrentalhealthcoop @hastingscommons and @blk_butterfly

THE
HASTINGS EXAMINER

Voices of Southern Housing Tenants

Southern Housing (SH) own and manage all the homes in Hastings that were originally built by the council. Now its chief exec Paul Hackett earns over £300,000 per year and it is one of the biggest housing associations in the country.

Hex asked SH tenants to share their experiences. You can read the full article written by each tenant on our website: hastings-examiner.uk.

Joanne Davidson, writes about trying to get SH to tackle problems with damp and mould in houses like her own, which have been badly maintained for decades.

"The problems started with my kitchen as far back as 2006 [...] You could see damp issues when they took out the old kitchen and I raised my concerns then, but instead of addressing them they just fitted the new kitchen"...

"In 2018 after going backwards and forwards with Optivo (it's name after 1066 and before it became Southern Housing) for some time, they decided to address the damp problem by taking out the kitchen, removing the plaster, and damp proofing the wall. This did not work, and ever since I have had issues with rising damp. Several contractors have offered solutions to the damp problem but are ignored.

"At the zoom meeting with Southern Housing in April 2024 these issues were raised and we were told it would be looked into. This didn't happen. A new damp and mould team was set up off the back of this meeting – supposedly to fix these issues quickly – and instead they have stated they will not complete the work to the kitchen. Many of these damp issues are problems that could and should have been fixed 19 years ago, but version after version of the same company has utterly failed in its basic duty to its tenants, and utterly failed me."

A tenant at Royal Terrace, a block in St Leonards for over 55s, wanted to write anonymously.

"Apparently it all went downhill here when they started to 'let the young ones in' [...] bringing with them drug takers, unwanted guests and large dogs. Having had my time here blighted by someone banging on my door at 3am and on one occasion trying to get in, it would seem age has nothing to do with it. [...]"

"[In fact] the true culprit and reason for decline was Southern Housing. Without security cameras, secured doors or concerned staff (and no night staff at all), the residents who'd been promised an added level of care originally, are now scared, unhappy and unable to leave. I count myself as one of them.

There are four washing machines for 150+ flats [...] Meanwhile] the broken exterior door remained that way for four months, and it still doesn't close and lock automatically as it should. Some of the aforementioned drug takers have now taken to sleeping in the communal lounge. They are not residents, they're unpaying guests, setting off the fire alarm with their crack pipes.

Talking of unpaying, unwelcome guests, you can't say Southern Housing without thinking of bedbugs. At no time since I've lived here has the building been free of them, and the latest party line is that it's the residents' fault."

Simon Lee lives in the Four Courts. He writes about his experience living there after being made homeless by his private landlord:

"there's the gaggle of friends that gather around the foyer [...], helping carry shopping bags, bantering with the taxi driver. And beyond the Courts where the daffodils bloom, and wild garlic scents the woodlands,

across the stream with the plaque commemorating a lost soul, the torrent that gushes along through the weirs, even the abandoned shopping trolleys have a certain charm and familiarity! It may not be picture perfect, but it is home, and home is where we want to be. Safe, warm, protected.

And then the news comes unexpectedly and unforeseen. Like a bolt from beyond. 'Four Courts to be demolished' reads the headline. There's shock and fear. These are our homes? How can they decide this for us? With no consultation, no hint this was being planned? No-one spoke to me about it? Don't I get a say?"

Andrea Cowhig, who is the treasurer of the Hastings Area Southern Housing Tenants Association (HASHTA) writes about how she got involved in setting it up last year:

"I started to think - what if we started our own tenants association? Then we have an independent voice but we would be able to liaise with SH about what's not working and work together to create solutions, rather than going around in circles. And also, a tenants association is not a panel who SH has cherry picked, but an independent voice of tenants that want to be heard."

To read the full articles visit hastings-examiner.uk.

Picture below: Protest by Southern Housing tenants at the Four Courts in Hollington June 2024 organised by HASHTA (To contact HASHTA email hashta.action@gmail.com)

