Chapter Four – The Five Estates

The previous chapter has described the fieldsite, using basic quantitative data – Peckham by numbers – historical and policy reviews of social housing, the most dominant housing type in the area, and finally through residents' voices. The aim was to give readers a feeling of what it was like to live in different parts of the area, and a sense of the substantial changes that have taken place during the lifetimes of some of the respondents. This chapter will now turn to a detailed example of urban regeneration in practice, focussing on the regeneration of an area of north Peckham called the Five Estates, or sometimes referred to as simply North Peckham. Within the thesis as a whole, this chapter shows how value and values work in practice by literally, physically reshaping an urban landscape. It is obvious that different individuals and groups would value different things, and be prepared to waste others.

What the chapter shows, however, is that the way these differences play out depends on who is in a position to make decisions as to what can be wasted and what should be valued. Some residents showed a strong attachment to their previous houses, for example, which they valued as the place they lived, the place they were, their homes in the deepest sense. However this value they attributed to them was either ignored or misrepresented (as selfish tenants 'holding out' for a better deal, for example) and was not enough to stop demolitions. On the other hand the values of community and neighbourliness that some of the officials thought they were bestowing upon the area through the new housing were strong enough, or rather used by people who were able to 'make them stick', even if it was clear some of those values were by no-means new to the area, unclaimed or uncontested.

For the purposes of clarity, I shall refer to the regenerated area as the Five Estates from now on, but as it will become clear in the course of the chapter, the naming of this area was part of the regeneration strategy itself. By doing so, the area was created by the council as uniform and identifiable, which is something that some residents disputed when they highlighted the heterogeneity of the estates that made up the area interested by the regeneration programme. I will begin with a brief summary of the original Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding application itself, followed by a detailed background of the area interested by this regeneration project, based on

documents produced by the council to support their bid for SRB funding. This is the description the council wrote in order to attract funds into the area, and as such it is a narrative worthy of attention in and of itself. It is not, however, to be taken as a neutral background but as 'part of the story'(Allen 2008), to be analysed, compared and contrasted with other descriptions of the place, by residents and officers, in the course of the chapter and the thesis as a whole.

The rest of the chapter is dedicated to the voices of people who have been involved in the project, divided into three sections: councillors, council officers and residents. I am aware that these three categories can be seen as arbitrary and potentially ambiguous: councillors often live in the area they represent and so do council officers at times. Moreover, my highlighting of official, employment categories, obscures other categories, such as ethnic belonging. This is problematic in an extremely mixed area where tensions between different groups are sometimes inevitable, as it has been shown in the previous chapter (three). For example, I was told many times in a rather hushed tone that people – the rumour was kept vague – were often resentful and concerned over the alleged corruption of council officers who, supposedly, only handed in flats to their 'Nigerian, African, Caribbean or white' friends. However, I still find these 'official' categories useful, and I have chosen to use them, because they highlight the main structural role of the individuals involved in the project.

Councillors, officers and residents were not the only players involved, of course. Architects, building firms and housing associations, to name but a few, also played their part in the regeneration of the area, but they left when the buildings were completed, meaning that whilst they experienced the process at the time, they have not lived with the results, making them less interesting subjects for this project. A separate case has to be made for Housing Associations, who did play a part in the regeneration of the Five Estates and are still involved with them as they now own and let many of the newly built flats and houses. Their absence from the story is not casual, but symptomatic of the difficulties of reaching them and establishing a dialogue with them, a problem not just for me as a researcher but, more importantly, for most, if not all, of the residents I have spoken to who live in their properties.

I have left a considerable amount of space to the voices of my informants, be they councillors, residents or officers: this is evident by the size of the original transcripts present in all sections. The reason behind this choice is that, as it will become clear in the course of the chapter, these voices do not fit with each other. It is not just details such as numbers of flats and households that vary, but significant things such as the reasons behind the regeneration process itself, whether it was 'driven from the top' or demanded by the residents themselves. Given the impossibility of establishing a single, coherent narrative, I have therefore chosen to give as much space as possible to my informants' voices and explanations, reproducing the complexity rather than forcing an orderly, unilineal narrative that did not exist in reality (Bourdieu 1999).

A potential drawback of this approach is the risk of repetition, as different informants framed the situation as they saw it at the beginning of their interviews. I have decided to take this risk, because this initial 'framing' is extremely telling, and a certain amount of reiteration may help readers navigate what was without a doubt a rather long and complex process. The conclusion will bring together and examine some of the inconsistencies and contradictions brought to light by the different voices that make up this chapter, and suggest possible alternative explanations for some of the more puzzling contradictions of this regeneration programme. Beyond this, and referring back to the general framework of the thesis, on transmutations of value and waste, the conclusion will highlight some themes that readers should pay attention to in the course of the following chapters, to do with the ways in which processes of regeneration, recycling, wasting and gentrification come together in the examined material.

Image 4: Regeneration of the Five Estates. Demolitions. Photograph by Stacey.

Image 5: Regeneration of the Five Estates. Foundations for the new houses. Photograph by Stacey.

4.1 The Peckham Partnership Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) bid

In 1994, the London Borough of Southwark (LBS) submitted a bid to the then Conservative central government for funds to regenerate Peckham, through a financial scheme called the Single Regeneration Budget. According to the bid, LBS believed that the key to regenerating Peckham was the radical transformation of the Five Estates, its most densely populated area. However, while improvements in housing formed the main part of the regeneration, LBS also recognised that what they defined as sustainable regeneration could not be achieved through changes in housing alone, and developed a broad regeneration strategy based around seven objectives: employment, education, housing, community safety, enterprise, health culture and sport, and finally accessibility. The SRB bid itself consisted of a 40 page document which 'made the case' for funding the regeneration. First of all, it introduced its readers to the Peckham Partnership: even though it did not define this body as such, or its remit and role in the proposed projects, it listed its members, or 'key players':

- London Borough of Southwark
- Countryside Properties plc
- Liang Group (builders)
- United House Limited
- Family Housing Association
- Hyde Housing Association
- Presentation Housing Association
- SoLFeD for small housing associations
- South Thames Training and Enterprise Council
- Sumner Estate tenants
- Camden Estate tenants
- Gloucester Grove Estate tenants
- North Peckham Estate tenants
- Willowbrook Estate tenants
- Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Commission
- Metropolitan Police
- Peckham Traders Association
- Voluntary Sector Consultative Committee

- Routeways Housing Association
- Hummingbird Housing Association

The Five Estates were defined in the bid as 'an area of unquestionable social need'. Regeneration, it was claimed, will 'reverse this cycle of decline, building a desirable residential area, a stable and prosperous community and a competitive and thriving commercial area' (p.3). The bid continued by sketching out the 'vision' for Peckham (p.5) at the end of the regeneration: first in line were a reduction in density (from 4,532 units to 3,694 units, with a net loss of 838 units, approximately 2000 people) followed by diversification of tenure (from 4,314 LA units to 2,154 local authority, 915 housing association and 625 privately owned, meaning a net loss of approximately half of all council units) and remodeling of the Five Estates. It continued by focusing on employment growth, improved standards of education and reduced crime and fear of crime. On page 7 the bid listed the 'problems' of the area: the 'key facts' were high density, high percentage of BME people and the young age of the population. It then focused on various statistics that list Liddle ward's poor performance against many deprivation scores, pointing especially to long term unemployment. Finally page 9 turned to the 'opportunities' that were there for the area, stating that "While land and property is available, the potential cannot be realised without increased confidence in the area and its future. That confidence can only be achieved through the joint commitment of the Government and the Peckham Partnership".

The scale of what the Peckham Partnership wanted to achieve on the 5 Estates can be difficult to grasp, but the tables below, detailing their proposed changes in housing tenure and type, may be of help. I am not able to explain the difference in data between the 'housing tenure changes' (1st set of data) and the 'ownership changes' (last set of data), which should read the same, but do not. I can only speculate that the PP, which normally used and quoted data from the Census, may have used data from a different source and failed to mention it. Regardless of this inconsistency, amongst the most striking data from these set were those regarding changes in owner occupation, which was projected to rise from 3.6% (or 1.1%) to 22.7%, while council rentals were planned to drop from 86.8% (or 99%, according to PP data elsewhere in the bid) to just

above 60%. Also worthy of note is the fact that the proposed density reduction was expected to mean a loss of 1,363 homes, which even by a very conservative estimate would mean that at least around 2,000 people would have had to leave the area for good.

Tenure	Liddle	Proposed five estates
Council rented	86.8	61.5
HA rented	5.9	15.8
Other rented	3.7	0.0
Owner occupied	3.6	22.7

Figure 9: Changes in housing tenure on the 5 Estates proposed by the Peckham Partnership (data based on the 1991 Census) . Source: A Bid for Single Regeneration Budget Funding, London: Southwark Council.

The tenure figures in Table 1 may have underestimated council tenants, as the five estates were 99% council and 1% privately owned in 1995, according to data produced by the Peckham Partnership.

	Initial		Final		Change	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total units	4385		3022		-1363	-31.1
Bedsits	57	1.3	0	0	-57	-100%
1 bed flats	1316	30	695	23	-621	-47.2
2 bed flats	1495	34.1	620	20.5	-875	-58.5
2 bed houses	0	0	448	14.8	448	n/a
3 bed flats	1263	28.8	351	11.6	-912	-72.2
3 bed houses	0	0	574	19	574	n/a
4 bed flats	228	5.2	92	3	-136	-59.7
4 bed houses	0	0	148	4.9	148	
5/6 bed flats	26	0.6	46	1.5	20	76.9

5/6 bed houses	0	0	48	1.6	48	n/a
Ownership changes						
Council	4335	98.9	1857	61.5	-2478	-57.2
Housing Association	0	0	478	15.8	478	n/a
Private	50	1.1	687	22.7	637	1274

Figure 10: Changes in housing stock in Liddle Ward planned by the Peckham Partnership. Source: A Bid for Single Regeneration Budget Funding, London: Southwark Council.

4.2 The Five Estates: physical and socio-economic background

This background has been put together using different documents compiled or commissioned by the London Borough of Southwark's (LBS) in 1993-4 in order to support their bid for Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) to regenerate the Five Estates. The estates were described as "a continuous area of 60 hectares of local authority (LA) housing containing over 4600 dwellings with a population of around 11,000 people (LBS Brief for Development Partner Selection, April 1994)". The estates involved, which were only four in the beginning, were Gloucester Grove, North Peckham, Camden, Sumner and Willowbrook.

Gloucester Grove Estate was built by the Greater London Council (GLC) and completed in 1972, and consisted of 1,210 flats and maisonettes distributed in 29 blocks from three to ten storeys high. The North Peckham Estate, whose name often came to stand for the whole project, was built in the late 1960s and only completed in 1973; it consisted of 1,444 dwellings, mainly in five-storey blocks, arranged around squares. The main and most controversial feature of this estate was the 'decking', which meant that there was a continuous pedestrian deck on the second floor level running and connecting the length of the entire estate, a prime example of the 'streets in the sky' concept introduced by Le Corbusier (Towers 2000).

The Camden Estate was built in the early 70s, but included Monkland House, which was built in the early 1950s. With 874 dwellings in total, it was a traditional construction with brickwork external walls, concrete floors, timber windows and monopitched metal roofs. The Sumner Estate consisted of blocks dating partly from

the interwar period (13 blocks, 535 dwellings) and partly from the early 1950s (nine blocks, 247 dwellings) containing a total of 782 dwellings over 22 blocks, from four to six storeys high. The interwar blocks were of traditional construction with pitched roofs and concrete floors. The 1950s blocks were of three types – all traditional, some with flat roofs, some with lifts. The inter-war blocks faced onto the streets which passed through the estates whilst the 1950s blocks were reached by small access roads off these. Both types of blocks were generally arranged around communal parking and play areas. Finally, the Willowbrook Estate would have been the 'fifth' estate, but it was only partially included in the programme, and had previously been heavily refurbished under another regeneration scheme called Estate Action Plan (EAP). Gloucester Grove and North Peckham had also had works carried out on them under EAP, starting in 1987.

From a socio-economic perspective, the data used here to describe the area refer to Liddle ward, which coincided with the five estates area at the time, and contained 99% LA properties. Liddle Ward does not exist anymore, and so it is impossible to compare data (from the Census of 1991 and 2001, for example) in a like-for-like fashion, with contemporary data about Peckham such as those included in the previous chapter (three). The data have been extracted from LBS sources, mainly the report called Housing and Health, commissioned by the council in 1994 to provide a baseline to evaluate the impact of the planned regeneration. Most of the report's data come from the 1991 census, but the authors themselves warned that traditionally census tend to undercount, and only 85% of households in Southwark filled out their census forms that year. A turnover of tenancies of 25% per year is also to be considered when assessing the figures. Data from the LRC (London Research Centre), the authors of the report noted, may be more accurate but still tend to undercount. For example, the 1991 Census for Liddle ward counted 10,991 residents living in 4,337 households in Liddle ward, while the LRC estimated 11,600.

In terms of age, proportionally the population of Liddle ward was very young, which was characteristic of Southwark as a whole. In terms of ethnicity, according to the census there were 43% white, 47% black and 10% other minority ethnic groups, mainly Chinese. According to a MORI survey commissioned by the council there were 27% white, 65% black and 10% Asian. The figures add up to more than 100%,

showing people ticked more than one category and were counted as two people in the totals, making interpretation of the figures rather difficult. With regard to household composition, the 1991 census found the average household in Liddle size to be 2.52, the second highest in Southwark. In percentage terms, 32% were single person households, 40% had dependent children, 15% were made up of lone pensioners and 16% of lone parents, the third highest proportion of lone parents families in London.

Deprivation data showed that Liddle was the second most deprived ward in Southwark at the time, and scored extremely high on a wide number of deprivation indexes. An average of 38% pupils in the schools serving Liddle Ward spoke English as a second language. This figure went as high as 61% and 59% at two local primary schools, 90% of whose intake was from Liddle ward. Employment figures according to the1991 census showed that only 7.6% of males and 7.2% of females were from professional/managerial/technical social classes. Unemployment was at 24%, while the average in Southwark was 16.5%, and England and Wales 9%. In June 1994, according to a Mori survey, 57% of children in Liddle ward lived in non-earning households.

4.3 Councillors's views

Having looked at the regeneration plans and the area they referred to, it is now time to give space to the voices of those who were involved with the project, starting with two local councillors, Steve and Brandon. While Steve was still living in the area at the time fieldwork took place, Brandon had moved out of the area by then. As I have explained in the introduction to the chapter, I have chosen to present long quotes from my respondents to allow their voices, and their framing of the issues, to come through as clearly as possible.

Steve

> It just seemed as though the whole estate, those big estates were just...you know, *completely collapsing into crime and anarchy, really. Ehm…I suspect now, looking at it now, with the experience I've had over the years I suspect now that it was* probably

exaggerated in…to the extent of the problem. But there were clearly, clearly serious safety problems.

Steve lives on the Ledbury estate, only a few minutes away from where the Five Estates used to stand. He is white and middle aged, proud to be a working class person and an 'old Labour' supporter, even though he is still enough of a politician not to criticise the party openly, at least at first. He was already a resident in Peckham, and a Labour councillor, at the time of the regeneration, although he never lived on the Five Estates. Southwark council was Labour-led when the Five Estates were regenerated, and Steve remembers those days very clearly.

There was (sic) various solutions, Willowbrook got a refurbishment, complete refurbishment, and became a tenant management organization, the North Peckham, a *large part of the North Peckham then got refurbished as well, and that's still here today,* the Sumner was completely knocked down, the Camden was completely knocked down, and then a large *part of the North Peckham was completely knocked down…half knocked down half kept…maybe even more than half knocked down. And the Gloucester Grove* was completely refurbished.

Steve agreed to speak to me for the first time in his kitchen, which was homely and tidy: he sat me down with a coffee and prepared himself for a long conversation. In fact, that initial chat we had continued throughout my fieldwork; the more I got involved in the area, the more often I'd bump into him, realising every time how closely involved he was in his community, how much work he put in. We chatted at tea-breaks in meetings, on our way back from local events, and he let me back into his kitchen every few months, to touch base and allow me to ask him a bit more, clarify a few points, always willing to help and introduce me to others whom I may want to speak to.

The deal was, it was ..was a unique scheme at its time, it was under Conservative government actually, the deal was that if Southwark agreed to knock the estates down and rebuild them the government would give them money towards this, was that Southwark would have to build properties in mixed tenure, basically it was envisioned by a central government at that time that the problem was you had large, large numbers of council *tenants..ehm…who they believed were generally less educated, and their children…you know…were less…you know...inclined to to to…study or, you know…hang about in the*

streets, and what the solution was by the government was to say that, you would have to *have mixed tenure, and therefore the deal was that…there would be a reduction in* density, which is incredible now when you think about it, because now everybody is *saying we need more density to to…for city living. But that was the agreement at the* time, there was a reduction in density, there would be a lot more low rise properties, *houses with gardens, and…there would be housing associations properties, council properties and private sector properties. And my view is…it's changed the area* massively, i*t's made it much much better, is a much…it's a much more pleasant…visually area, it feels safer, and in some ways I think…a lot more interesting than it used to be, yeah…that's not to say that some of the…you know the decked properties that, you know…council blocks… add to the area, I mean I think the ones that've been kept..it's added to the area cause it gives it an interesting mix.*

The only bad memories that Steve had about that process were about a terrible event that occurred in Peckham during the regeneration of the Five Estates: the murder of 11-year-old schoolboy Damilola Taylor in 2000, a crime that threw Peckham in the national media spotlight, as I described in the introduction (Chapter One). At the time, there were serious criticisms and allegations of council's responsibilities towards the murder, to do with the fact that the block where Damilola died, on a dirty, dark stairwell, should not have been there, it should have been knocked down by the council months before. This still haunts Steve, who does not feel very well inclined towards residents who, in his view, were slowing down the demolition process at the time.

There were some serious hiccups at the time… you will recall the…the big publicity about the Damilola Taylor murder, would*n't you? I mean wherever you were at the time, but it* was nation-*wide, and actually across the world about it, you know….11 year old boy come to Peckham and ends up getting stabbed to death, is….a horrendous story, and it happened…so happened that he was* living in a block at that time, that we *were…partly…you know, on its way to being decanted, you know, that's the expression that used to be used…they ..they'd empty people from the blocks…before the block went to be demolished, and …he was living in a half maintained block, and he…it was an area that at that time somehow they weren't…the electrics, the lights were going out, and they were getting water, and there were squatters…and it was…it was…it all added to a feeling of…of …of… of complete decay, when i*n fact, that was one of the last bits that *was actually gonna be changed, but you know people.. "oh the North Peckham Estate, how horrendous it is" but actually it was…it was being in the process of being renewed, and so…that was a very bad point…and and ….at that stage, which was…I can't remember exactly when it was…it was about 1999-2000…and at that stage a lot of people*

were saying 'oh, the Peckham Programme has just been a disaster, people have been really treated really badly, they've been forced out of their homes and…it was…it was…it was a very difficult time, because the national media were…the spotlight was on Peckham, and they didn't wanna know about the successes of the programme, they just wanted to know about that…that issue and to exaggerate you know the…the plight of everybody.

The 'plight of everybody' that Steve referred to had to do with the fact that, as a result of the decrease in density, a number of people were being relocated from the area. For many, he maintained, it was a positive move, out of somewhere they had never wanted to go back to, while for others it was not quite so rosy. Some tenants, in fact, did not want to move out of their homes, which resulted in the 'decanting' process being slowed down.

*They were… they were …of*fered properties around Southwark. I mean at the time. A lot *of people it was a good deal…for a lot of people, who moved out of the north Peckham…or the five estates…people were offered good deals, to move out…people were* offered houses with gardens and th*ings like that…ehm….a lot…some people kind of tried* to hang on, to try and get the best possible deal, and it meant that blocks were not *knocked down as quickly as they should have been…'cause people were holding out to try and get…you know…a better deal t*han perhaps they deserved. But yeah, everybody that *moved out was given…I think a reasonably good offer. But there was…there was…at the time there was quite a lot of rancour about…different people that had problems about it…*

The changes in the ethnic make up of the area also stirred up controversy and provoked accusation of racism and ethnic cleansing (of both white and BME groups at different times).

It also…kind of…quite dramatically changed the ethnic mix in the area…the area was always multiracial, *you know, well, it has been since the '70s, but I think that…I don't know if it shows up in this report but I've…I remember hearing at the time a lot of the* white people wanted to move out and not come back, whereas a lot of the ethnic minority people were*..were happy to stay. And consequently now, it's got a very…large majority* of ethnic minority people in the area.

The feeling of his, and the council's, work going unrecognised because of a tragic fatality, together with disillusion in the face of tenants who held out to get "a better deal" mars Steve's memory of a process that he seemed to remember in an otherwise very positive light. Without jumping ahead of ourselves too much, it will be useful to bear in mind while reading other people's voices and opinions that he believed that 'the extent of the problem' of the Five Estates was somehow exaggerated, and that in fact the Five Estates themselves had 'various solutions', such as refurbishment as well as demolition, pointing to a heterogeneous area. It is also worth remembering how, as Steve spelled out, the entire project was financed and to a large extent led by a Conservative government at national level, with the explicit aim to reduce the amount of council housing across the country (Jones and Murie, 2006). The decrease in density, meaning people had to leave, and the ways in which councillors and council officers framed some residents' resistance to being moved as just being uncooperative, if not selfish, is also something to keep following throughout the chapter (Allen 2008, Baeten 2009).

Brandon

Brandon is a Southwark resident who used to live on the Five Estates and was a Labour councillor in the early '90s, when the regeneration of the Five Estates took place. He is black and younger than Steve, very energetic and motivated, and conveys a sense of the opportunities and chances that the Peckham Partnership (PP) brought to the area, even though some people, he said, failed to take full advantage of them. While the initial impetus of the programme was to address the housing situation, the physical landscape of the area, the main idea was to rebalance its demographic profile and draw in young professionals, to change the dynamics of the area. He acknowledged that this was not an easy task to achieve:

> Although of course decanting is always a very very fraught issue for a lot of people, who are of course attached to an area, and a community goes around an area, and of course, *they don't necessarily understand the reasons why the council are r*egenerating the area. That creates a lot of resentment. In the process communities were destroyed, a number of local facilities that did exist were taken out as part of the regeneration process, with the understanding that they were going to be replaced, *new. And that wasn't always the* case.

For two years Brandon was part of of the Peckham Partnership Board, the group that was meant to steer the regeneration process according to the wishes of the local community:

> *The Partnership…it actually was a bod*y bringing together the local community groups in the area meant to go on and be the voice of the community; the problem was that the *local groups, the local community groups, they couldn't really agree amongst themselves. And there's always issues as to* who should represent the community. In the beginning, *each estate would have individual TR groups, so you'd have the North Peckham group, on the Sumner estate you'd have the Sumner group, so each part of the five estates had* their own TRA. They would the*n elect reps, they'd nominate a representative to sit on the* PP forum, who in turn would elect two reps, to represent them on the PP board.
>
> *L: OK, so you'd have five and then two?*
>
> B: Five and two, yes,
>
> L: I could see how that could be a difficulty
>
> B: And often there were questions between the reps on the board itself, and of course for some individuals it was an opportunity to promote their individual agenda, rather than *the wider tenants' agenda, and that was an issue.*

Understandably, a project on this scale would put to the test the idea of 'community' and 'common' good. It wasn't just that, in Brandon's opinion, some tenants' representatives abused their position to make personal gains. They also could not seem to agree with one another, let alone the council. When it was decided to bring in an external, independent consultant to improve "capacity building" and smooth out differences, tenants' representatives managed to fall out with the consultant as well. This, Brandon says, was down to personal relationships, and was very frustrating for councillors who were doing all they could to keep this massive project going. His words are fraught with the difficulty of balancing his understanding of tenants' arguments, and the difficulties he faced at the time as a councillor.

> B: Tenants were involved in the consultation on the scheme, and one thing the tenants *were told, was that they'd have the right to return, to the new development. I don't* actually know the wording exactly, but it was that kind of token commitment, and of course, given that a lot of properties had been built, and that they were reducing the *density, of course they couldn't…the council couldn't make a commitment…with everyone who'd signed a right to return. There were going to be* some winners and losers. And of course there were concerns around that, and of course there *were…individuals weren't necessarily given the choice they wanted. Of course*

*after…that brought a lot of resentment, so the tenants refused to leave their proper*ty, *and of course they weren't meant…the council needed to go to court, to seek possession* of the property, in order to remain with the decanting process, we had to take possession and start the demolition programme. Of course there were complaints cases.

L: So the council knew that if everyone had exercised their right…numerically speaking it couldn't have worked?

B: it would have been very difficult, it would have been very difficult, difficult in the sense, due to the fact that the area before was predominantly social housing, and if every *one of the tenants had exercised their right to return to social housing, it wouldn't have worked. 'Cause of course, the reason why the council won the funding from the* government at the time, and it was a Conservative government, the actual government who approved this SRB scheme, was that the council was to reduce its stock of council housing in the area. That was the aim. Southwark still remains I think one of the largest landlords, biggest housing assets, and the key reason to get SRB funding was to reduce that. In the bid for funding that was one of the reasons, to regenerate the area, and to reduce the council housing stock in order to attract inward investment from developers.

An interesting point that Brandon made was the way in which the five estates were portrayed in the funding application for SRB (Single Regeneration Budget). While he agreed that the statistics looked really bad on paper, he was keen to stress that they had to make them look that way in order to get the funds. Nothing of course was made up as such, but there was a clear agenda when compiling those figures, which was to make the area look as desperate, needy and dilapidated as possible. His own ideas about the place he grew up in are rather different, and worth listening to in full.

B: It wasn't as if the area was all a sink estate, although, when you read the big document, you'd imagine this area was sort of beyond repair, sinking sinking, you know there were some social problems, but you know maybe in some respect some bits of that document blow your head off, even though there were figures and analysis, yes, there were some problems, there were problems with crime, low level crime, educational achievement, single parents, family breakdown, quite some indicators, you could argue, *put together a compelling case. I am from the area, and I've got a friend who succeeded and left the area, went to university, so it wasn't as if the area was falling to pieces, really* really bad and dire, it was just that maybe certain components of the housing stock was (sic) in disrepair, and had encouraged some behaviour, in terms of concentrating population, and in terms of concentrating certain problem families, with some kind of issues. And those issues expanded, and what happened, then maybe they kind of spread. So I think as an assessment, sometimes to do with that concentration, concentration of

social cases, poor families, and because of that concentration we needed to mix up the demographics of the area, the profile.

Of course if you are a social commentator with a liberal perspective you would say *'this is gentrification' you move the poor, bring in some more educated, affluent individuals, and that's how you transform the area. So then, if you're mixing the tenure, trying to create a more mixed community, hard to say explicitly, in your policies, it's implicit. The ministers say we wanna mix up the tenure of the area, in fact the area's demographic profile doesn't lend itself to generati*ng urban growth. What it does is foster dependency on welfare.

L: But then what do you think happens to the ones that are moved out? Because I *understand what you're saying, you want to make it more mixed, but what happens to* them, what do they do?

B: well, they are just...a new problem. The problem of individuals excluded from *mainstream society, not empowered, they're lacking maybe the skills, the knowledge to* really take part in the community, so what we do is we have displaced the problem down to other areas in other communities.

Brandon's words are useful in understanding the ways in which this project worked from his perspective, and need very little in terms of explanation. It remains to point out a few issues that are worth bearing in mind as we read on: communities, in Brandon's own words, were destroyed as, for example, facilities – such as common rooms and tenants' halls – were taken out and never replaced. Community groups, put together to communicate with the council through the Peckham Partnership, did not seem able to agree with each other or, indeed, with a capacity building consultant brought in to help them smooth out their differences. This description seems to contradict the narrative of the estates as places of anti-social behaviour, which would imply individuals who do not care about their areas and communities. Indeed what Brandon describes shows there were many community groups, meaning committed people that wanted to be involved in a project that was significantly changing the shape of their area.

The conflicts between the groups were due to, in Brandon's opinion, selfish individual tenants with their own agenda, which is similar to how Steve described tenants who refused to move out during the decanting process. In fact, Brandon explains how the council had made a 'token commitment' to give tenants a right to return to the area, knowing full well this could not have happened because the 'deal'

with central government was that the council had to reduce its stock of council housing. The conflicts between local groups may well have had to do with the fact that it was not possible for them all to stay in the area and not lose out somehow: as Brandon put it, there were going to be some winners and losers. The position of the council was clearly a difficult one, and it is not surprising that straight after the regeneration was completed Labour lost the elections at local level.

It was also interesting to hear Brandon's take on how the bid put together by the council 'made the case' for the regeneration by drawing a picture that he himself does not recognise – as Steve said, the extent of the problem was 'exaggerated' – portraying the area as one large sink estate, which is not how he thought of it. In the context of the thesis, this is a fine example of symbolic devaluation, where texts produced by powerfully positioned others produce the area as valueless, paving the way for 'development' and demolitions. This is similar to what Allen (2008) describes in Liverpool, for example, where his field-site was also represented as valueless, specifically as backward and working class, and therefore ripe for investment through redevelopment. Finally, Brandon's explanation of moving 'problem' or 'difficult' tenants along as a practice that simply displaces them to other communities echoes decades, if not centuries, of standard urban development practice: 'slum' clearances of various sorts usually resulted in the worse off tenants being shifted along to accommodation of even lower standards, often more expensive because of the higher demand that the slum clearance itself generated (Power 1993).

4.4 Officers' views

Having considered local politicianss' perspectives, this section looks at how council officers involved in the regeneration of the Five Estates talked about their involvement in that process. Two of the officers interviewed, Daniel and Florence, still worked for the council at the time of fieldwork: Daniel was still in a similar role as he had had at the time of the regeneration, while Florence had clearly gone up the ladder in her career. Celia, on the other hand, may have felt freer to speak her mind because she spoke to me shortly before retiring from her job, which did not seem to have progressed upwards in the same way as Florence's had.

Daniel

Daniel is a planner by trade; a white man in his sixties, he lives in Southwark, not in Peckham as such, but is fiercely defensive of the area. He has worked for Southwark Council and the Peckham Partnership since almost the beginning of the regeneration process. While he was not involved in drawing up the master plan itself, which was the main document guiding the implementation of the regeneration, he has worked with it and been part of each successive modification. In fact he still works for the council, in Peckham, and is involved in the very final stages of the regeneration that are still happening today.

> D: ok, so as you know it was a seven years programme, and we had £64m of government money. It was the biggest award a*t the time, ehm…for a regeneration programme in this* country, and as part of the award of that grant we had to do, obviously an evaluation at the end. So at the end we hired Wave Hill consultancy to look at what we had achieved, and they evaluated it across the eight objectives that we set out. So when we won the *award it was based on the comprehensive…sort of interlocked set of objectives, so we'd achieve proper regeneration. 'Cause every one else before had done demolition work, or* estate improvement, environment improvement, but nobody had taken all the aspects of a regeneration and weaved them all together. So we had an objective around health, education and crime and..enterprise, based around the town centre. So you create a *community that's proper*ly rounded, rather than just knocking down houses and building some new ones.
>
> Having said that, the bulk of the money was for knocking down houses and building *new ones….so…and that's relatively kind of easy to achieve, cause you just set a* programme going and..away you go, you do it. While some of the others, more social, challenges are not so easy, so by the time we got half way through, we realised that we were on target to achieve, at the time we were anyway, all that rebuild, but we were way behind on social stuff, so we geared up, we hired in more people to do the community development work, and then when Wave Hill [consultants who wrote an evaluation on the programme] looked at it at the end, they echoed that and done..pretty much what we said we *were gonna do in…you know, rebuilding of the area, but in terms of developing or bringing the community forward, we failed miserably, and we hadn't done very good on our health targets, and education is still a long way to go…*

As we have seen in the previous section, the body leading the regeneration was the Peckham Partnership. When I asked him what was it like as a council employee to

work for such an heterogeneous group, Daniel gave an interesting answer on the nature of the Partnership.

> D: We had a board, that was the Peckahm Partnership board, which was a partnership in the true sense of the word, the way it was, the council officers, representative from the *umbrella group for tenants and residents, the police, the builders…ehm….the traders* from t*he community all sit together and…steer the kind of work of the Peckham Partnership. But, as it's obvious the reality of that really means the council is still kind of leading …as it's the council body for delivering the works, so we had to kinda…you* know*, you can't have a board saying, 'no, not doing that, forget it' we're already tied in to an agreement, with the funders. […] So if people talk about Peckham Partnership they tend to mean the council, and if it's a local resident and they will have and 'us and them' feeling or whatever, so…cause some of the people felt they were done out, or not done in as well, which is inevitable in any big scheme, isn't it? Some things we did extremely* well..they got houses and three or four years later they were selling them, pulling the profits you know?

One of the main aim of the programme, as Daniel explained, was to diversify the tenure in the area covered by the five estates. This is sometimes referred to as 'pepper-potting', meaning mixing up private, council and housing association properties in the same street, in the same estate, even in the same block, to achieve a balanced community and, crucially, fight the stigma often attached to social housing. In practice however this is not often easy to achieve:

> D*: that was another tension we had, because we always said…these groups are tenants* and residents, cause there was such a mixture of private weaved in with the social *stuff…that we wanted to keep that…with the groups. And that is so difficult. Because…I* me*an, yeah, people with money…showed different level of interest in their properties to someone who's just renting it…*

The financial aspects of the programme were obviously important, but it is interesting to realise how they changed throughout its development. Literally each completed house, feature, or park in this example, contributed to 'creating value', making the land more expensive and in turn funding the next stages:

> *D: yeah, yeah…timing didn't help us, sure, the phasing of it…cause we had to fini*sh that *one, in order to…it's all part of a process really, it's raising the land value…by having*

*that park virtually completed, the first phase of the private…for sale stuff around it was then…so much more sellable, which raised the value of land, which m*eant that we could *ask for more money for other plots of land, which would give us more money to do it…*

Talking to Daniel it was impossible to miss how strongly he believed in this programme, not just in the building and demolition, which he said were relatively easy, but the Peckham Partnership intended aims to weave together social, economic, health and educational objectives to improve the community in a rounded way. He took quite personally the Programme's failures, in his own opinion, to achieve many of the objectives in this area, which is remarkable considering how Steve and Brandon acknowledged, as well as the literature on housing policy discussed in the previous chapter confirm, that the main point of the project was to decrease the size of council housing. It is also useful to consider how he explained the Peckham Partnership effectively represented the council as the body that was tied in to agreements with developers, and the board really could not make decisions that went against those agreements, which again is something that Allen (2008) found in his study of Liverpool Housing Market Renewal projects. Finally, Daniel's description of demolitions and completions literally increasing land value every step of the way is a poignant reminder of one of the thesis's perspectives to do with waste and value and flows of capital through the landscape, as Harvey would argue (1989).

Florence

Florence is a white woman in her fifties, working for the housing department of Southwark Council in a managerial position. Clearly a busy professional, she was involved with the Five Estates from the beginning, managing a team involved with decanting tenants out of their old properties, and was clearly proud of what the council had achieved there.

F: if you look back on it was, in some ways it was a very successful scheme if you look at, in terms of numbers, how many people got rehoused within a defined period of time. But *obviously a decant process, we don't call it decant now we call it rehousing process,* is actually a very disruptive process, and yes it was successful in terms of people rehoused but obviously during the period not only the rehousing process but the whole of the redevelopment there were quite strong issues you know in terms of people being moved, and the pressures on people to move, because there was external funding, with the Single

Regeneration Budget (SRB), which was for over a period of..was it five years? Five or seven years. And basically you had outputs to actually reach, in relation to it, so it had..like lots of schemes it was quite clearly financially led, so the decant programme over a set period of time, normally about a year or so, for a decant process in terms of getting people moving. [...] Everybody realised, I think, that something needed to happen *in Peckham, in terms of what…was called Five Estates but was in fact four estates, but* there was a lot of opposition in terms of what was going to happen. And Gloucester Grove actually tried to get a judicial review in terms of stopping the process.

But again I think that was actually down to personalities**.** So, ehm, what actually happened was we started the process, we had a year to eighteen months to move probably *about two..was it two or three thousands households…I can't re*member, and we moved..in total moved three thousands households. And those people needed to move out *of the area, to start the rolling programme. So for them I think it was probably… in two ways it was the most difficult period because we were saying "it's going to be this, you know brave new world, this utopia, and nobody'd actually seen, so all it was it was* obvious on paper, so in terms of people who were moving out of the area, the majority of *them did not want to come back, so what would actually… i*n some ways it was negative because obviously, the commitment to Peckham of the residents, but you can understand from their perspective nothing has been built, but from our perspective as well, cause we were starting a rolling programme, and if you took more out of the first step of that *programme, it actually made life easier for the…For the phases coming on. So, you know…that's what actually happened.*

Keeping people moving was not easy, and she is clearly aware that it was stressful not just for her officers, but also for the tenants involved. In the end, she explained, it was the courts who would decide on where they would need to move.

We also…emh…so there're lots of meetings, there was…because of the time scaling, we had a legal process which was *actually…we were very upfront about but it basically meant that, we had a timescale to meet, and if people hadn't got...ehm..accepted offers* that were suitable alternative accommodation, that basically the court would decide whether or not this offer was suitable or not. We all just [inaudible] you know moving is one of the most stressful things in life anyway, and we were actually telling people how to move, it was even more stressful, we accepted that, but again is a process in terms of *getting people…*what I had working under me, three housing officers and an admin person, and they did the actual work in terms of have a patch, and take through people in terms of the whole phasing.

Interestingly enough, while one of the main goals of the regeneration was to increase tenure diversification, many tenants she worked with wanted to remain with the council rather than move to housing association properties. This may have had to do with rents, or security of tenure or, as she explained, with the fact that there was a strong tenants movement at the time that was politicised and preferred local authority housing over housing association properties.

> F: and at the end, you know people, cause they saw what actually happened, people actually wanted to move to th*e new properties, and… I think the majority as I said wanted to go to the local authority accommodation, and if they didn't get that they were given a* housing association property, but quite a lot of people said actually I want to stay with the council, and moved out of the area because of the security of tenure.
>
> L: OK
>
> *F: So, yes, I think people had…I think only about 30 or 40 people who at the end of the* day could not remain in the area, I am not saying they could all have a council property because they *couldn't, but they could have, you know if they've turned down a housing association they've been given the option to remain in the area.*
>
> L: Really? Only 30-40?
>
> F: Because people were offered a housing association, so they had the choice to remain, and th*ey said no, I don't want that, I want to actually move on*
>
> L: Were the rents very different?
>
> *F: ehm…. I don't think so, no I don't' think they were at all, can't remember…*
>
> L: So it was about less security?
>
> F: And just understanding of what the difference be*tween the council and…and there was…was a strong tenants' movement down there, and they also had a lot of access to their councillors, and think that moving to an RSL it doesn't have that same…accountability, sort of political angle. You know, it's differe*nt as well.

Florence's memories of the regeneration are clearly very positive. She was particularly happy to have helped people come together as a 'community': changing their physical environment was, for her, a way to restore 'normal' interactions between people, which had been made impossible by the architecture of the buildings in which they lived before.

> *F: …saying that it does change lives, it does change lives big time, it was the ..ehm…I* always remember it was a sunny day and I was just chatting to some lady and it was a typical sort of street scene, you know two ladies over the garden fence, chatting to each

> *other, and I sort of said "oh, how is it all and whatever" and they said " you know, God, it's amazing," and this woman said that she li*ved on Gloucester Grove, for 26 years, she basically she closed the door at night and she never came out again, and then somebody *had been living next to her for two years, and she'd met them twice, whereas this, you* know, it was just like, you know this social inter-*relationship hadn't been happening in* the same way, as it had been happening down there.

It is interesting that she chose to depict this idyllic scene amongst residents of Gloucester Grove as an example of 'new' sociability, considering that earlier on in her interview she mentioned how Gloucester Grove 'tried to get a judicial review in terms of stopping the process', something that they did together as a Tenants and Residents Association, a sociable action that she, instead, put down to 'personalities'. In a similar way, the veneer of a council that listened to residents appears thin as Florence explained that the process was financially led and in the end it was the courts that decided if people had to move or not. One of the most telling points in the interview was the casualness with which she responded to the question about rent, which was clearly important for residents. Finally, her recollection of only 30 to 40 people being unable to remain in the area is unique amongst my respondents or archival evidence.

Celia

Celia is a white woman in her sixties, who has worked in the housing department of Southwark council for a number of years. When we met she worked in a tenants' resource room, a council run room with computers, printers and laminators where tenants' reps do their TRA's work, network or sometimes simply hang out (see Chapter Six). As I mentioned earlier, she retired during my fieldwork, which may have something to do with the rather nostalgic, if somehow outspoken tone of the last interview she gave me, when we finally managed to sit down together instead of just talking over the photocopy machine. Unfortunately I was unable to record her voice, but what I have compiled here is a summary of what we talked about, which I have as much as possible left in her own words, beginning with her framing of the issue.

Celia was involved with decanting and tenants' support at the time of the Five Estates. It all started, she explained, with a consultation, which was a bad one, that her team wasn't involved with at the time. The council offered the tenants four options on the way the estates should be regenerated, but eventually chose a different one from

what the tenants had chosen, which created a conflictual situation to begin with. On the Sumner estate there were 2 nurseries and an active community, which all went. There were actually 4 and a half estates there were regenerated; half of the North Peckham is still standing. The promises from the developers to compensate tenants for the loss of public/community spaces were never fulfilled. The way they did it was taking away bits and saying "but we will give you this", then take that away and say "we'll give you that" but it just never happened. Tenants didn't realise that 'community space' could be a doctor's surgery, or shops, not necessarily a community hall. Also, "earmarked" meant nothing, the last remaining earmarked space had been taken over by the tram and that was it. Tenants' needs were not prioritised at all. They were promised at some point a big community centre in Burgess Park but that never happened.

She was in no doubt that communities had been destroyed during regeneration. In fact, she argued, there was not much of a lively community in the area any more; there are no community centres, and TAs are in trouble because they don't have spaces to do things in. North Peckham, for example, did have a rather close knit community; a bit boisterous but lively. Taking away the community centres was pivotal. Opposite from where the Peckham Academy now was, the Camden Estate had once stood, a newish estate, only about 20 years old when it was demolished. They had two halls on two different levels and the community itself was quite new and mixed, instead of being the usual all white over 50s, it was more 18-80 of all colours, and that was destroyed.

With regard to the decanting process that had taken place, Celia said that some tenants chose not to return at all, and were tempted away with better flats. Some said they wanted to return, but the new builds didn't look anything like the old ones. The sizes were different and the density lower, it went from 5000 council units to 800 council, 800 HA and 800 private. People with one bedroom flats were unlikely to be able to return because there weren't going to be any properties of that size, it was mainly going to be houses. Therefore, she thought, there had been no real right to return. Her feeling was that the consultation at the beginning was done badly because the council didn't want the tenants' opinion, and they knew they couldn't rehouse them all: in fact 2000 households were moved out and disappeared completely.

Out of those 2000, Celia explained that there was some natural wastage, i.e. death; some people got settled were they were and opted out, not wanting to move their kids again. The council were accused of ethnic and social cleansing but it was not true, they were not sophisticated enough to do that. She believed that two categories of tenants were better off: those with better resources (education and class), and those who could shout 'you're not doing this to us' in a louder voice. Those with no energy to fight just went. Her final thoughts about regeneration were that most housing and social workers could be either agents of change, or be there to keep people quiet. Most of the time, your boss wants you to keep people quiet. Her team was put on the job after the 'bad' consultation had already happened to try and pacify the tenants. There were fears from the council that the tenants would make so much noise and involve the government, who would then question why so much money was being spent in a particular way if tenants weren't happy or had not been consulted at all.

Again, Celia's words are clear and articulate, but it may be worth just focusing on how, for example, she mentioned that buildings that were only twenty years old were demolished, and how some types of accommodation – bedsits and one bed flats, for example – were never replaced in the new estates, meaning that those residents effectively were unable to return even if they had wanted to. More interesting still is the fact that her team was brought in, according to her, to pacify the tenants, which seem to imply that both local and central government were keen to at least maintain an impression that regeneration was something done for the tenants, as opposed to something done to, or even against them.

Regardless of their positions on various issues to do with the regeneration, Daniel, Florence and Celia's views are important and distinct from the councillors' voices, Steve and Brandon, because they worked with the tenants and implemented, in practice, what local and national politicians had thought out. Their perspectives are clearly diverse and impossible to synthesise into one 'official' line, which is telling in itself: while this project is not an anthropological study of the state or of bureaucratic institutions as such, but it is obvious that we cannot speak of 'the council', let alone the state at neither national nor local level, as a united monolith intent on pursuing a single, coherent course of action through its uncritical employees. Even amongst three

officers is possible to find substantially different positions. It may have been clear to all of them, for example, that there was a bottom line that the council had signed up to with central government, which had to do with reducing the number of council housing and council tenants in the area. However, this did not mean that they all agreed with this line, or with how to go about achieving this objective, or even how to prioritise it amongst other objectives – see Daniel's concerns for social, health and educational targets, or Celia's anger at the loss of community spaces and community spirit as a result of the regeneration, for example, and how they can be contrasted with Florence's enthusiasm towards the building of a new type of community embodied in the low density houses with gardens she was so proud to see 'her' residents in.

This is not to say simply that things are 'more complicated' than they initially appeared, a tricky cliche to avoid that must, nonetheless, be resisted and not substituted for analysis. Yes, officers' positions were diverse, but it is also clear that there was an objective pursued by central government, which was the reduction of council housing. This was to be achieved through various projects and funds administered by local governments, who had – together with their officers – a rather limited amount of choice when it came to implement them, whichever way they chose to sell them to their residents and voters. Having said that, the next section in the chapter, which is devoted to the voices of residents themselves, shows how the effects of these policies and choices worked out on the ground, which was not always how one would expect. Even more so, the next chapter will show how plans can be altered, by chance or by conscious effort or any combination of these two, and more, factors. It will become clear that human agency in all its forms refuses to be reduced to numbers and factors that can be deduced from a purely structural analysis, or by simply imagining that objectives set out at the top – central government, in our case – will materialise on the ground as they were initially thought out. Not to mention that if one were to look in detail at how those objectives were set 'at the top', which is not within the remit of this project, it is likely that they would stop looking quite so clearcut and straightforward, but that is for a different thesis to consider.

4.5 Residents' voices

Tina, North Peckham Estate

Tina is a black woman, in her sixties; we met in her office in central Peckham, where she works for a Christian charity helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds, as she put it. Their work at the time of fieldwork involved reskilling and building up self esteem in people who wouldn't necessarily think of themselves as employable. During the regeneration of the Five Estates, however, her charity's role was to help people cope with the changes involved in moving out of their homes in the old estates and into their new 'regenerated' homes. I have heard many stories of people being helped by this organisation, and wanted to hear what the process had been like from their perspectives. However, it turned out that Tina could give an even more insightful opinion. In fact she did not just help people who were being moved out at the time: she lived on the North Peckham Estate herself, and went through the process personally, as well as helping many other residents as clients of her charity.

> Yes, people were scared to move. They feared the rents would go up in the new properties; would they have water meters? Would they get less space? Would they be moved somewhere else with even more crime?

However, she explains, the demand for regeneration and, crucially, demolitions, had come from the people. It was so bad that taxis wouldn't take you home, so unless you had a car, or a friend with a car, you could only shop for small amounts of things, whatever you could carry, often while minding your children as well. The North Peckham estate was a maze, she assured me, with high crime, lots of trouble; it was hell. It was all connected up with walkways, and that made it scary: even ambulances wouldn't come in for fear of getting lost in there and not finding their patient anyway, as maps of the area were less than useless because of all the different levels the estate was on.

But her flat, she remembers, oh, her flat was beautiful. It was split over five levels, huge, with a big patio at the top. There were rooms for all her children, and the kitchen was so big they had a sofa and a telly in it, her children could play there, so they could keep the livingroom spotless for when family and visitors came along. She didn't have a garden but the patio was big enough to have a paddling pool for her children in the summer, and a table to have dinner outside, so she didn't really miss it. There was lots of storage space; she loved her old flat.

After the regeneration began she moved out to Crystal Palace, to a nice Victorian house with a big garden, a leafy area with good schools for her children. When I asked her if she thought people were happy with having been moved out of their homes, or if they'd have wanted to stay, or even return, she looked at me in amazement. No, definitely they wouldn't, and in fact she herself could not understand why people would ever want to go back. She assured me many of her neighbours who moved didn't even want to hear the name 'North Peckham' any more, let alone go back and live there. She even remembered impromptu celebrations when the diggers came and knocked bits of the estate down.

Tina's experience and memories are by no means atypical, and the fact that she worked to help people negotiate the changes that regeneration brought to the area make her words even more meaningful and representative. It is interesting for example to compare Tina's recollections of people's fears about moving and rents going up with Florence's casualness about rents, as rent levels clearly were not something she thought of as significant. On the other hand, for all the evidence from literature and respondents about how the regeneration was financially led and motivated by a Conservative central government's desire to decrease the size of the social housing sector, Tina and many others I have spoken to were adamant that regeneration was needed and wanted by the people who lived there. This belief, this perception should not be underestimated or swept under the carpet, even though it contradicts much of what we have reviewed so far: it is precisely these sorts of contradictions that make this story worth telling in the first place. The next section of the chapter tells the story of two women who could not have had a more different experience from Tina's own: Doreen and Stacey.

Doreen and Stacey, Sumner estate

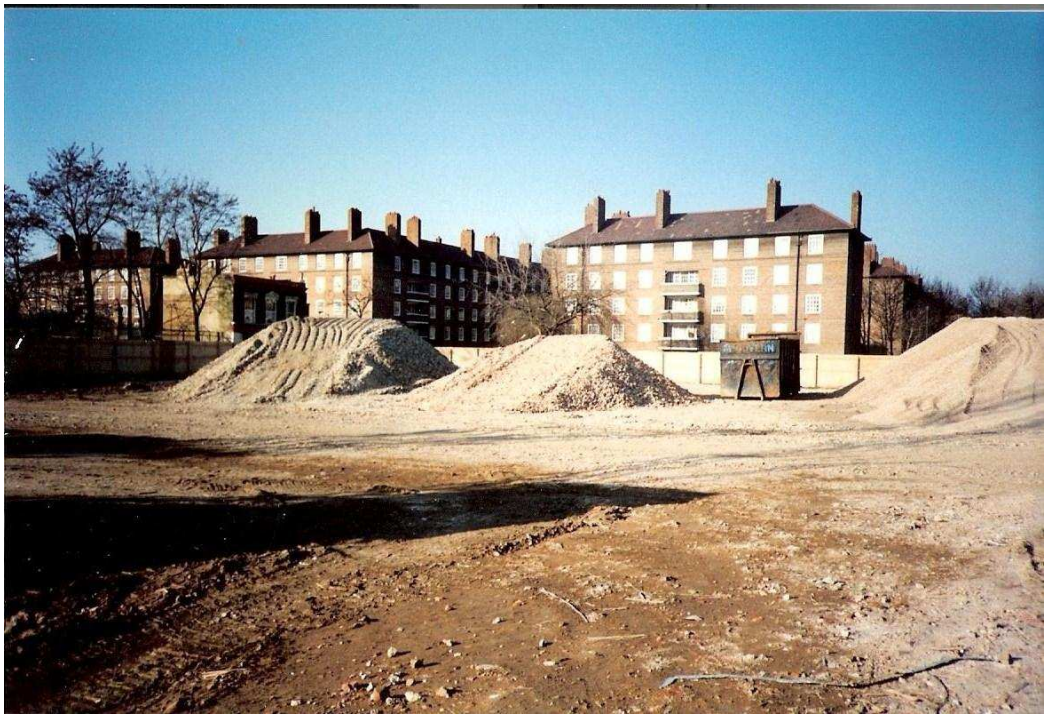

Image 6: The Old Sumner Estate, prior to demolition. Photograph by Stacey.

Doreen is a white woman in her sixties; she had lived on the Old (now gone) Sumner estate since she was one year old. Proud of her respectable working class background, she was on the TA (Tenants' Association) of her estate when the regeneration project was introduced to the tenants. Her story, and that of her daughter, is worth telling in full, as she framed it, because it is a valuable statement of what going through regeneration means for the people who live in the blocks, beyond the numbers and figures and tables showing how the project went at an aggregate level, which is mainly where the officers and councillors we have listened to so far were working at. In his ethnography of landfills, Reno (2009) shows how people involved in a general activity, in his case dealing with materials in a landfill site – at different levels, i.e. managers and workers, for example, showed a different attitude towards 'waste' because of how they engaged with it, whether in terms of large and specific quantities of materials – literally tons of compressed stuff – or as individual bits and pieces that one can mess about with in the garage, for example, or kick around with co-workers, or as smells that linger on their clothes and on their person. There is a similarity here in the ways in which regeneration from the council offices, whether of councillors or officers, is a different thing from the lived experience of Doreen and Stacey, their shame of having to go through the courts, the personal upheaval of undoing a home, the constant efforts

to create a habitable place to live in. This difference justifies the amount of space devoted to this story, which deserves to be heard and remembered as part of the process, just as the council bid for funding or their evaluation documents.

When the project began Doreen became the spokesperson of the Project Team for the Old Sumner, which is how tenants' groups were called by the Peckham Partnership. Stacey is her daughter. She is in her forties and has lived on the Sumner (Old and New) her whole life. Both of them now live on the 'New', regenerated Sumner Estate, also known as Sumner One. They have been involved right from the start of the project, but they have rather different memories than Tina of how the process began, how the regeneration came about, and how tenants were consulted.

S: They were meant to refurbish some of the blocks, they never said anything

D: Oh yes that was it, I forgot to tell you about that, they were meant to refurbish

S: Some of the blocks they was not gonna knock down, they was gonna refurbish, cause *the tenants didn't want them knocked down,*

D: Yes, tenants didn't want them knocked down, but they decided it'd be more expensive to refurbish than to rebuild.

[Both of them speaking at once, inaudible but generally labouring the point that the decision to demolish rather than refurbish had already been taken]

D: The council decided that

S: We had a vote, and we wanted to refurbish them, but they decided, and then in the end, somehow, they got round that they did knock them down,

D: We had..all together there was..near enough was eight hundred and something *tenants on our estate, all together, so we thought…the old ones, the big square, was that* was going to..*???? there was six blocks, and a lot of the tenants went for that, they'd rather be refurbished, stay where they are, than move out. But then…they got the thing* that they called the master plan, apparently every year they can alter different things that the*y want to do, and that's when it came in, on the master plan, on the year they started to do that…they changed it.*

S: They made them phase two, and then they said oh, they were gonna demolish the whole lot, and there were nothing that we could do about it, was it? And somebody made *the decision without..support of the tenants, they'd done it themselves.*

D: They'd done it themselves, we didn't get any consultation over that bit..but going back…that was what was meant to happen: we moved out, phase one, and then phase two Southwark had emptied it out, would come into Phase One,

S: Phase One just had to go off, we had nowhere to go.

D: But, the problem with that being, Phase Two, there were six blocks, would not have *been enough properties that they'd bui*lt there, to come into phase one anyway. So that *would have been a problem. So that's why it would have been better for them to re…refurbished*

S: We had 212 on phase one, 212 properties on Phase One

D: Yes

S: six blocks we had as well, and that was 212 houses, so that…that was 212 families out, you know, for the Phase One.

The phasing that Doreen and Stacey are referring to here was the mechanism devised by the council at the time to organise the demolition, decanting and re-building of the old estates. Sumner residents were divided in various groups, or phases, according to which block they lived in, and the theory was that as residents of the Phase One blocks would move out, their blocks would be demolished and rebuilt, and the residents of Phase Two would move in them, leaving their blocks free to be demolished and rebuilt and so on. The obvious snags, as Doreen and Stacey point out, is that there was nowhere to go for the residents of Phase One, not to mention the fact that the properties that were being built were not big enough to house the residents that were there in the first place. We know that was part of the plan to start with, the council had received funds from central government to reduce the size of its housing stock, but this does not seem to have been clear to Doreen and Stacey, and many other residents, at the time. In fact, the prospect of having to move away for good was not very well received, and some residents decided to contact the Southwark Law Project and put together what became known as the 'Right to Return'. This was a document guaranteeing tenants the right to return to where they had lived before, and crucially return as council, not Housing Associations (HA), tenants. In Stacey's words:

*S: but it wasn't easy, we did have to fight for it. There was lots of meetings, when we went to the first meeting, she said 'it's a rolling programme, you is moving off, that is it, you're gone.' She said you haven't got…*but I was born, I said I was born there, I am *like, nearly 30 years old, 20 something years old now, like late twenties at the time, I've lived there all my life, I want to go back there, she said 'but there's nowhere to go back'* and then it started, other people said they wanted to come back, and then we started, *saying, and then they actually tells you 'oh you have to have a temporary move' I thought well I don't care, you know?*

The story of their temporary move was rather long and complicated. Some of the properties were not suitable at all, for example they were offered properties that had squatters in, and told to go to court to get them out:

> *D: they changed the keys, apparently they'd had squatters in it…two properties that they'd offered me had that, and they said 'what you gotta do is, you'll have to go to court, so we can get them out', I said 'no, I am not the one who wants to move, you wanna move me!' you know, 'you do that' , I am not getting involved in that, which I wasn't, and I weren't i*nterested in the properties anyway, they was worse than what I was living in.

They eventually managed to get a temporary move to a three-bedroom ground floor flat on the Camden Estate, also due to be demolished at a later date, but the process of getting that transfer was far from easy. At the time Doreen was on jury service, which kept her busy during the day. It was September, and it got dark pretty early in the evenings, which made it difficult for her to go and look at properties, especially since the electricity and lights had been disconnected in a lot of the flats she was meant to view. This, however, didn't stop the council from taking her to court, to serve a possession order on their property, so they could go on with the demolitions. Stacey was somehow uncomfortable with Doreen telling me this part of the story, and 'barged in' to specify that it was not only 'them two' who were taken to court, but the entire block. There was clearly an element of shame in her mother being taken to court, which is where criminals belong, which makes sense if you spend your entire life having to prove that you are respectable and not a criminal (Skeggs 1997). Specifying that it was the entire block that was taken to court diffused the implication that they themselves were 'non respectable', criminal-like, and turned it explicitly into a political action by the council against them as tenants, something that Stacey felt more comfortable with.

> *D: They were trying to make out that I was…not accepting the prope*rty, but how could I *accept it if I couldn't get in and view it? I got to see…see it first, so..you had to say to the* judge, you had to explain to him. She [officer representing the council] *said…she turned around and said 'well you can go in with a candle'..had all those metal grids up, no electricity on in the flat, it's pitch dark in there, it's a maisonette it's got stairs, you'd have gone flying, we'd take a candle in there we'd get torched I said, I am not going to view a property like that! I can't see…and in the day time I am not in, during the day*
> *L: The judge told you…*

D: No, this was the council woman, this is what she was saying, like to me and to the court. And she [Stacey, her daughter] *turned around and said 'my mum is on jury service'* she *goes 'oh' and he* [the judge] *said to the council 'do you realise how tiring that is, after you've come home being on jury service?' so he…he blocked it,*
S: Adjourned it for another six weeks, he said come back in six weeks time, and try again. To the council!
Laughter and satisfaction from both of them

Doreen did, in the end, manage to go and see this particular property, and in daylight it became evident that substantial repairs needed to be done before anyone could move in, as there was no kitchen floor or kitchen door, (which, as she pointed out to me, was a fire hazard) and there were nails sticking up all over the place. The council agreed to fix the property and gave her some money to improve it, so she employed someone to decorate the kitchen and hang wallpaper in the living room. She put her lights up, bought a new door knocker and a number on the door. They were quite happy with the flat after that, and lived there from October 95 to July 97, almost two years, until their new home was ready.

The moving process, which they had to go through twice, first to their temporary accommodation and then to their new home, was quite stressful in itself, as it meant getting rid of things and getting used to new people as well as a new home, however temporary. Two weeks after they had moved in, for example, their next door neighbour stole a curtain from Doreen's washing line and a vase from their garden: a big argument followed, the curtain was never recovered and on top of that the neighbour hung it, upside down, from her own window, thus annoying Doreen even more. This story was told in a cheerful, joking way, but it was obvious that at the time it had caused a lot of stress to them, and was just the beginning of a difficult year and a half with their new neighbour.

They also remember well the sheer upheaval caused by moving. Stacey had never moved before, and Doreen realised pretty soon that the stuff she had accumulated over a lifetime would not fit in her new home. Moving from a four bedroom flat to three bedrooms in temporary accommodation, and then two bedrooms in their permanent new home meant she had to get rid of a lot of her things, including objects that had belonged to her family for a long time, or things she had developed an

attachment to. In the end, however, they were quite happy to be in a two bedroom property, as they thought the rent on a three bedroom flat would have been too much for them to afford.

> *D: and stuff…because we were going…moving into a smaller property, we had to g*et rid *of a lot of stuff anyway, cause we couldn't get it in there. Into the temporary move.*
> L: So what did you do? Did you give it away?
> *S: We had to chuck a lot away, didn't we?*
> D: Throw it out, we had to throw it out. I mean, things like her old chopper bike, and *that's worth some money now*
> S: You chucked it out?
> [Some inaudible noise when they're talking at the same time]
> *D: I had a cocktail cabinet and that was my mum's, it looked like a Rolls Royce, probably* worth a few bob, but we had to throw it *out, ehm…get rid of a load of stuff, but we couldn't …get it into the temporary move, and then we'd have to move it all back…and* we was going back into a smaller place, you know what I mean?

It is interesting here to notice how a large scale regeneration process arguably involving 'ridding' of tenants and houses also triggered much smaller processes inside people's homes, which become themselves sites of 'ridding' and wasting. What was given up, however, as Doreen pointed out to me, were objects embodying family memories, like her daughter's bike and her mother's cabinet. Her words echo Gregson's work (2007) in showing how fraught these processes can be, how the dismantling of homes and ridding of personal possessions can often be a difficult and stressful process. At this personal level the value that was destroyed during regeneration was also that of a home, a personal space that a family had lived in and been in for decades, as well as an 'infrastructure for consumption' that needed to be demolished to allow a faster capital flow through the landscape (Harvey 1989). Taussig's (2003) description of a bog and the complex meanings it contains and embodies and evokes comes to mind here, in the ways in which value and waste intermingle and turn into one another.

Image 7: The rubble of the Old Sumner Estate. Photograph by Stacey.

This is what remained of Stacey's old house after it was demolished. She pointed out, and was adamant I should write it down, that the blue bits that were visible were from her bedroom, the green ones from another bedroom next door, and the pink ones were from the passage. This was her home, and look at what they had done to it. If anyone thought nobody could be emotionally attached to a flat, in a block, in the notorious North Peckham, they should go and speak to Stacey. She went round taking the photos, surveying what remained of her home, taking snaps of it before it was pulled down. These photos, the way she handled them carefully, the details she wanted me to note down, spoke of her love and affection for this place, and her painful loss, even more than her words could.

Doreen and Stacey's experience of the regeneration of the Five Estates is radically different from Tina's one, and the possible reasons for such different accounts will be explored in more depth later on in the chapter. It is worth however focusing our attention on the ways in which Doreen and Stacey framed the regeneration as something top-down, that was done 'to' them, how they felt cheated by a masterplan that kept changing and a consultation the council did not want to listen to, which

sounds similar to what Celia described as the 'bad consultation' after which her team at the time had to go in to 'pacify' tenants. What is more, Doreen and Stacey could see how the numbers did not add up, in the sense that it was obvious to them that not all would be able to return, and this mattered to them, they did not want to leave or lose their community. This caused them to work against the plans and secure a 'right to return', even if only for a few residents, an example of how individual and communal agency spurred on by a different view, one could say led by different values, could change and influence situations that might have seemed already set. The difficulties that Doreen and Stacey faced in order to stay with the regeneration programme until the end, the moving process and going through court, again resonate with how Celia described those who stayed on as the ones with the energy and determination required to fight for their homes. The next section will look instead at those who did not manage to stay the course and moved out of the area, without leaving many traces behind them.

4.6 Silences that speak

Celia identified three types of tenants affected by the regeneration: those with better resources (education andclass), those who could shout louder 'you're not doing this to us', and those with no energy to fight, who 'just went'. In the course of my fieldwork I have tried to find residents belonging to the third category, or information relating to them: how many where there, where did they move to, were they supported in their move, how did they cope in their new homes? I must admit I have not managed to find much about them, and not through lack of trying, which may be telling in itself. Out of the 2000 people who moved away I cannot say how many moved because they wanted to, like Tina, or because they could not do anything about it. Tarlo (2003) has shown how detailed archival research – of a scope that was beyond that of this project – can lead to very interesting data that can be extracted from what the records do not say, extrapolated from what is not there. Silences in the archives are part of the process of historical production (Trouillot 1995: 26). The fact that some data were deemed not important enough to be kept, as in the case of those who moved out of the Five Estates, can be data in itself, as Trundle and Kaplonski (2011) argue.

It is however possible to try and piece together some information about them, by extrapolating from the demographic data presented in section 4.1. To begin with, the Five Estates had a high proportion of lone pensioners and single persons, which was reflected in the high percentage of bedsits and one bedroom flats on the estates. After the regeneration these types of accommodation disappeared almost completely, which raises questions as to how feasible was it for such residents to return, if the housing they were entitled to by the council was not there any more? Also, the unemployment figures produced by Mori in 1994 showed that 57% of children in Liddle ward lived in non-earning households. It is reasonable to presume that many of these households were in receipt of housing benefits, which are paid in arrears, making tenants structurally in arrears with their rent. We also know that the local primary schools (90% intake from Liddle ward) had an average of 60% of pupils who did not speak English as a first language. After reading what Doreen and Stacey's demand to return to their homes entailed in terms of assertiveness, willingness and ability to fight a system, including standing up in a court of law, it is at least reasonable to question whether tenants who were constantly in arrears with their rent, and for whom English was not the first language, would have been in a position to do the same.

4.7 Regeneration in practice: national constraints and policy changes

The text has moved from the most abstract level of a regeneration project, looking at the background documents and the successful bid that made it possible, trying to follow some of the politics involved in it and the operational difficulties involved in making it all happen. It then turned towards the realities of experiencing it as a tenant, from the perspective of one who happily moved away from the area and that of others who fought as hard as they could to remain in it. Tentatively, it also tried to speculate on those who did move out, whether they wanted to or not. I would now like to take a step back and reconsider what we have just heard from tenants, councillors and officers and frame it in the context of the housing policies at the time, which will be useful to make sense of at least some of the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the story.

To begin with, it is important to remember, as discussed in the previous chapter (three) that the local government at the time of the regeneration of the Five Estates

was acting under a central, Conservative government that had clear plans for the reduction of its expenditure on social housing. From the Housing Act of 1980, which gave tenants statutory rights to buy their own homes from the council, and forced council to sell their properties, whilst before this process – which had started under a Labour government – was at the discretion of the local authorities, Conservative housing policy did not allow local government much room to manoeuvre, certainly not on housing issues. Jones and Murie (2006) argue that savings on housing costs were to be the most substantial reduction in public expenditure planned by the newly elected Conservative government: housing share of expenditure fell from 7% in 1978/79 to 3% in 1980/81 and 2% in 1985/86. Housing was to decline from a major to a minor programme. By 1994, when Southwark council wrote the bid for SRB funds, the government was firmly on course to reduce council housing expenditure as much as possible, and funds such as SRB were designed to incentivise councils to decrease the amount of properties they owned.

With this understanding it then becomes apparent that the local council had to follow central government policies while at the same time trying get hold of some funds to maintain the housing it already had. This might explain the differences between the regeneration objectives, as stated in the SRB bid summarised earlier on in the chapter, and both councillors' understanding of the council's 'deal' with central government. While the official objectives point to a need to regenerate the area to reverse its 'cycle of decline', Steve and Brandon both speak of a trade off between money to regenerate old housing and the shedding of a considerable amount of social housing, which Brandon said was seen by the then-Conservative government as fostering dependence on the welfare state.. Similarly, the SRB bid lists all the members of the Peckham Partnership, the body that was supposed, through its board, to steer the regeneration. Yet Daniel, the council officer who had to work with whatever decisions came out of this board, stated in a matter-of-fact way that the board may meet and make decisions, but the council was already tied into agreements with its funders that would not be broken. This echoes what Celia said with regard of the 'bad' consultation that happened at the beginning of the process, which her team was then called in to 'sort out'. It is in this context that the 'deals' mentioned by councillors and officers start to make sense, the reasons why 'consultation' exercises could only really go so far, and why some voices had to be silenced or mis-represented (selfish tenants

and adversarial communities) so that the works could go ahead as planned. Of course appointing 'blame' or discovering what 'really' happened is not what this thesis is about, but it is nonetheless important to bear in mind the context in which the professionals – councillors and officers – involved in this project were working, to help us make sense of their actions at the time.

It is also useful to point out how quickly policies change, and how some of the things that were done on the Five Estates in the nineties could never happen now. As Daniel put it, "we wouldn't be able to do that now!". The reason is that the London Plan (2008), the Mayor's spatial development strategy for London, which regulates planning in London, states that housing policy's objectives should be to increase housing supply, to "achieve an urban renaissance through higher density and intensification in line with public transport capacity" (London Plan 2008, page 22); the target for additional homes for Southwark until 2016/17 is set at 1630 new homes each year, making up a ten year target of 16,300 additional homes in the borough. A regeneration plan that decreased density would not be allowed to go ahead nowadays, as the plans to increase the density on the nearby Aylesbury estate (chapter five), still in Southwark, by two or three times, according to different proposals, clearly demonstrate. In terms of tenure diversification, and specifically loss of council housing, again the London Plan states:

> In view of the magnitude of the gap between current provision of affordable housing (7,000 to 8,000 a year) and estimated need, and the serious potential consequences for *London's sustainable development and economic competitiveness, the Mayor has* concluded that the planning system should make the maximum reasonable contribution to the *provision of affordable housing" including "stemming losses from the exist*ing stock of affordable *homes" (London Plan* 2008, page 74-75)

Again, a program planning the loss of more than half of its social housing component, like the regeneration of the Five Estates, would not be possible under current planning policies.

The reason why the policy context at the time matters is that it shows how policies that seem set in stone at the time can change in the space of a few years, showing how they reflected particular political positions whilst trying to portray

themselves as rational, even commonsensical. A good example in this respect was the concept of density, which was almost demonised in the nineties, with insistent calls that density on the five estates had to come down, and the SRB bid stating clearly that density and overcrowding were major problems impacting on people's life chances. This concern with density matched a Conservative desire to reduce number of social housing units, not just in terms of relative density but overall. When a new government came in and a new set of priorities were established, suddenly high density was not an important issue anymore, and the 2008 London Plan is much more concerned with increasing availability of housing rather than reducing density. On the other hand, the lives of people who used to live on the Five Estates were seriously affected, disrupted even, by these attempts to bring density down, which explains why, in the next chapter (five) residents were so incredulous when shown plans for a new, tall tower block in their area.