

# HACKNEY ISN'T CRAP!



A walking tour  
of gentrification  
from Dalston to  
London Fields



On the 28th of September 2008 there was a walking tour of Dalston and Hackney Central to examine gentrification in these areas, and this is a booklet produced to accompany it. The idea for the tour was born when Dalston resident and Poet Michael Rosen attacked the way Dalston is being "regenerated" with an article in the paper Socialist Worker on the 6th of May 2008.

Rosen said;

"But it hasn't been "regenerated" for the people living and working there. They've been shoved out. The only thing that's been regenerated are the profits of the property companies and it's the Labour council tipping our money into their pockets that has enabled them to do it.

Regeneration? Degeneration, more like. "

Jules Pipe, Mayor of Hackney responded by accusing Michael Rosen of being part of a 'far left contingent' that wanted to "keep Hackney crap ", to which Rosen responded:

"The point is, I don't think Hackney is crap. I've never thought Hackney is crap. I've never thought that the wrong people were living in Hackney. However, I do think the council is crap. The accusation arcs back to Pipe himself. Perhaps he thinks Hackney and its people are crap and it's his job to see it bulldozed, replanned and the people moved on. A different matter altogether. "



*Burnt houses on Ashwin st, Dalston*

On the walking tour we will go to see and hear for ourselves and ask what is happening in this area. Who is in control of the changes and who are they for? Who is being hurt by them? Is this somewhere we are going to be able to live in a few years time, if we sit back and watch things 'develop', or will we be 'regenerated' out of the area?

This booklet aims to give a space to let a few of the voices we will hear on the tour tell us what they see happening to their locality.

## DALSTON SQUARE:

Barratt homes is working on the Dalston Square development site that will be "over 550 new homes, shops, a library and archive, plus a brand new station for the East London line extension at Dalston Junction." Alastair Baird of Barratt homes has said: "In my view, Dalston Square is the next big piece of the London jigsaw – the regeneration project that will finally lift Hackney into another league. Judging by the amount of advance interest, the market seems to think so, too."

Two of the authors of this booklet visited the marketing suite to check out what was on offer and it became obvious that local and low income people were not the ones being catered for. The saleswoman told us 77% of phase one had been sold; half to buy to let investors and the other half to first time buyers from the City; "living in zone two, working in zone one". She pointed to the tube map blown up on the wall to show that the new line would connect Dalston to Shadwell, just a couple of stops from Canary

Wharf. She also reassured us that the shop units around 'Dalston Square' had been "restricted" and that there wouldn't be any "smelly fast food" outlets like in the rest of Dalston, the shops would be boutiques and a small Marks and Spencer "for when you run out of milk". Barrett Homes had "aspirations" for Dalston she said, pointing at pictures of Shoreditch, Hoxton and Broadway Market. The new residents of Dalston Square can purchase secure underground parking for a mere 20,000 and jump on the tube without leaving the 'Square'. It seems they will be effectively insulated from interaction with the other residents, the ones for whom affordable does not begin at 250,000 for a one bedroom.

Now demolished and under the coming development is the historic Four Aces club which was occupied as a protest for over a year. The Four Aces and Cubies were important socializing places for the black community. A letter to the Hackney Gazette on the 30th of March 2006 said "These days we are under attack again, not from racists with baseball bats, but from developers, middle class property

owners and the New Labour council that supports them."



## Juan's story of The Sound and Music Shop at 66 Dalston Lane.

I had rented my shop for thirty years from Hackney council when in 2002 they told us that this row of sixteen shops was up for sale. After the Council ran out of money to pay for essential services the Government told them they had to sell their commercial properties, including these sixteen shops. They gave us a rough price guide for the properties and they told us we had to go to auction.

I rang a Mr Scott, in the council to ask why I had to go to the auction to buy my shop. He said that they had to get the best price so they could pay for more services. I asked if I paid more then the estimate could I keep it out of the auction, and he told me to add £20,000 to the asking price, and put that offer in writing, which I did, believing him when he said he would sort it out with the auctioneer.

After I sent the letter I couldn't get him on the phone again, he was either on leave or he was in a meeting. I went to the auction and when our lot came up the auctioneer said "We'll try to sell it as one lot". We had been told our shops would be sold as individual lots. There was someone there talking to Dubai on a mobile phone who bought all sixteen for £1.8 million. We were conned out of our shops because we didn't have a chance to club together and buy them.

The buildings are listed and so the owners have not been able to get planning permission for the flats they want to build. In the six years since the sale there have been four or five mysterious fires. There was a massive fire next door that took three buildings down and burnt half our roof. There were 35 firemen who saved my shop and two squatters had to jump out of the window to escape the fire.

The bakers that were on this stretch for over 45 years were made to

leave when the owners got planning permission to do work, but since then the shop has sat empty and no work has been done.



*Dalston Lane shops after the fires*

The whole stretch has deteriorated. Now the council says they are negotiating to buy the properties back but that after that we will still have to leave.

If they had sold them to us individually then all the shops would have been open because it doesn't pay you, as a small business, to keep your shop empty. At the moment we still feel insecure because we don't know what is going to happen. It doesn't look like we are part of the Council's plans for the future. It is not good to throw out your local shops.





*Juan in the the Sound and Music Shop on Dalston Lane*

## The battle of Broadway Market.

Broadway Market runs picturesquely from London Fields down to the Regent's canal. A short stroll from the trendy bars of Hoxton and Shoreditch, over the last few years it has developed its own rash of middle-class boutiques, delis and gastro - pubs. While some celebrate the gentrification-fuelled 'rebirth' of Broadway Market and the consolidation of its 'brand identity' with the advent of an organic farmer's market catering to inhabitants of the area's mushrooming yuppie apartments, less affluent residents have mainly been victims, not beneficiaries, of this striking transformation.

The locals, however, have not taken the process lying down. In November 2005 members of the local community occupied Francesca's Cafe on Broadway market and held many protests and public meetings. The focus was on Tony Platia who was evicted from the

cafe he has run for 31 years and Lowell 'Spirit' Grant who has been threatened with the same treatment. Tony & Spirit are popular local figures who run shops used



Francesca's cafe occupied! by local working people who can't afford to use the new boutiques and up market cafes that have sprung up in Broadway Market.

What has been achieved has demonstrated the power of independent action. The astonishing re-building

of the cafe on Boxing Day 2005 after the developer evicted protesters and tore it apart demonstrated the power of collective action. This defiant act strengthened the resolve of those involved and made them more confident.

"This is where I was born, I've seen the changes going around. People have come in and taken over everything and local people are moving out right and left. What those people did to Tony & Spirit is totally out of order. If all of us had got together in the first place this would never have happened. If you don't like what's happening around you have to stand up and be counted. It's been nice to see those responsible having to look over their shoulders as everyday people take over"

Floyd, Broadway Market

[thanks to Mute and Hackney independent]

## A statement from Sprit:

"In 1993 I realized that I could no longer operate on the streets serving food to dances and on street corners where the black community would gather. Laws were changing regarding street trading so I took the opportunity to find a base where I could operate a business. I found 71 Broadway Market – although it was a totally derelict building I thought it was worth the sacrifice to put it into good use and I was unable to actually afford any other property.

It took me six years from 1993 to renovate the property. Hackney council gave me a 10 year lease dating from 1995 to 2005. After renovating the property I began trading in 2000 selling fresh vegetables and fish and Tropical food and

lived above the shop.

But in 2001 the Council decided to sell off the property. I was notified one month prior to the date of sale, without any information about who to contact to purchase the property. I was advised by residents in the community how to purchase the property and told to contact Nelson Bakewell who were the estate agents acting on behalf of Hackney Council. I was told that I could attend their offices on the 13th of December and submit my deposit of 10% of the cost of the property- £100,000. I attended their offices, signed a document and handed over my cheque of £10,000 with the belief that I had secured the purchase of my property. I left the offices and went to the auction rooms to observe the auction. Surprisingly my home

was offered again and sold for £85,000! I was ejected from the auction rooms because I tried to raise objections to this. Six days later my cheque was returned without explanation.

I began writing numerous letters to the different departments of Hackney Council to try and find out who my new landlords actually were – but I couldn't find out. But a year and a half later the landlord's agent decided to start harassing me with bailiffs and a large backdated increase in rent – up by 1200%. Because I wasn't sure who I was supposed to be paying the rent to and the increase was so high I was withholding the rent – you can't give money to people you don't know and it was too much money.

The case has been to court and the landlord has claimed that I owe him over £30,000 in backdated rent. The court decided that this money has to be paid to the new landlord otherwise I would be evicted. I have now no choice but to pay back some of the arrears in rent which I've contested all along as unfair. In the meantime I am making the best of efforts to pay off the arrears with the help of a fundraising campaign from the local community who have been very sympathetic to my quest for Justice. I am presently trying to take Hackney Council to court for their mishandling of the sale of my home and business.

I would like to invite one and all who acknowledge my taste for good food from the late 70s until now to come along to my shop at: 71 Broadway Market E8, The



*Spirit in the Nutritious Food Gallery*



## Homeless in Hackney:

With affordable places to rent becoming more and more scarce and Council housing being sold off as quickly as possible, we're fortunate to have Hackney's "Housing Needs Centre" on Wilton Way housing homeless and inadequately housed people. After queuing up for the day you might get an out of date list of landlords that once upon a time took housing benefit, or be offered a council flat if you agree to move to the North of England. If you meet all the criteria for Hackney Council to have an obligation to immediately house you, they'll offer you help with a rent deposit on a private flat, provided you can find one yourself.

When a homeless person with children, or a disability, or who is more vulnerable than average approaches the council, they have a duty to immediately house them. Unfortunately, that's not what happens. In 2004, local authorities were given a government mandate to reduce homelessness. Instead of reducing homelessness by housing people, councils have instead been discouraging as many people as possible from making homelessness applications. If they don't take an application, the statistics don't get recorded, and the number of homeless people is magically reduced. It's been a very effective strategy – between September 2004 and December 2007, the number of successful homeless applicants in England has dropped from

32,220 to 15,240, a decline of 53 percent.

People dealing with homelessness and in dire straits come to the centre every day to be turned away and told by the council that there's nothing they can do. Mostly people don't know that they have a legal right to housing, and even if they do and have a good solicitor behind them, the council still does everything in its power to stop anyone from getting housed. For the last year the London Coalition Against Poverty has been supporting people through "direct action casework" to make sure they don't get turned away onto the streets. This means demanding your rights with loads of people standing behind you refusing to leave, which can be much more effective than doing it on your own!



*Hostel residents and London Coalition Against Poverty demonstrate at Hackney town hall*

### Alexandra Court Hostel

When the Council does accept their duty to house homeless people they are most likely to find themselves living in a council managed hostel like Alexandra Court off Kingsland High St while they wait for the council to make a decision on their case. Decisions should be made in around six weeks, but often people receive no decision for a year, or are trapped in lengthy review and appeal processes. In April 2008 residents of Alexandra Court temporary accommodation and the London Coalition Against Poverty demonstrated for improvements because:

"Residents have to pay up to £350 per week for dirty corridors used by addicts and prostitutes, and rooms infested with mice and bed bugs. The heating and hot water hardly ever works, there's no lock on the building gate, and only flimsy ones on individual rooms. The fire alarm frequently goes off in the middle of the night for hours at a time. Children

are scared, and their education is suffering."

For residents of temporary accommodation sky high rents only gets you one bedroom, no matter how many people are in your family. Conditions are bad; with windows falling off in people's rooms, pipes gushing water onto corridors and broken cookers and lifts going unfixed for months. Alexandra Court residents got some things – like a security door – sorted out when they demonstrated, but the struggle for better conditions continues and some other hostels are even worse. Hostel residents feel that the level of rent is not just a way for the Council to make money, it also keeps them in poverty, making them reliant on benefits even if they work. Often the Council miscalculates residents housing benefit and then moves to evict the homeless family because they themselves have not paid the rent. Hostel residents across the borough are paying luxury rent for poverty conditions – where else but 'temporary' accom-

modation would you pay over £300 a week to share one bathroom with several families?



*Pipe leaking onto corridor in Alexandra Court*



*Pidgeon egg laid in fire extinguisher box in corridor*

## Gentrification in Hackney

*Gentrification is a process in which low-cost, physically deteriorated neighborhoods experience physical renovation and an increase in property values, along with an influx of wealthier residents who displace the neighborhood's original inhabitants.*

Ruth Glass 1963

In the 1960's London was a city with a large manufacturing base and a large working class population who lived in large areas of poor quality rented terraced housing in the Inner City. This traditional London began to change dramatically in the 1960s and early 1970s as manufacturing industry declined and new council estates replaced poor quality private renting.

In 1961 about a third of the population worked in manufacturing and distribution. About ten per cent of the population worked in finance and business services. Today, as a result of the growth in importance of the City of London as a command and control centre for multinational companies operating in the global economy, about 40% of

London's daytime working population is employed in finance, business services and the creative industries with about 10% left working in light industries.

This has entailed huge changes in the residential occupancy of large swathes of the Inner City. Young professionals who had access to deposits and could meet mortgage repayments have been replacing and displacing working class families. The supply of cheap period houses for conversion to single family residences in the more attractive parts of the inner city dried up rapidly, aided by the four house price booms of the early and late 1970s, the second half of the 1980s and the second half of the 1990s. As a consequence, potential gentrifiers had to look further afield within London and the conversion of old warehouses, factories, offices and churches have pushed the process into City fringe areas.

The price escalation of the recent years of cheap credit combined with government encouragement of high density new builds has produced the latest phase of gentrification. This is apparent in the rash of high rise blocks appearing along Stratford High Street and in the pressure upon Council Estate

residents to defer to infill schemes like 'Estates Plus' in Hackney. Price escalation and pressure for new builds is accelerated by urban infrastructure improvements brought forward by the Olympics project and the Stratford City developments

Unfortunately the deepening recession, brought on by the 'credit crunch', may eventually bring about a 25% drop in property prices which may well not return to former levels until 2010. We are already seeing a number of recent gentrifiers sliding into mortgage defaults. Whatever meager numbers of new-build 'affordable' homes were planned as part of the Olympic and Stratford City developments are now very unlikely to be built.

Gentrifiers now live predominantly in Victorian terraces, often alongside remnants of the original poor still in rented flats and middle class renters in recent 'buy-to-let' conversions. With the loss of skilled working class residents rich middle class gentrifiers are closely intermingled with council estates of the underemployed poor. This intermingling can be seen by looking at the streets between Dalston and London Fields.

## People, Places and Campaigns:

Please shop at and support:

Juan at The Sound and Music Shop 66 Dalston lane and other small businesses on Dalston lane

Spirit at The Nutritious Food Gallery, 71 Broadway Market E8

Community Organisations:

Hackney Independent:

Working class community activism in the London borough of Hackney

[www.hackneyindependent.org](http://www.hackneyindependent.org)

Hackney Solidarity Network:

The Hackney Solidarity Network (HSN) was launched in January 2008 as a space where commu-

nity activists and campaigners can meet each other, let each other know what they are doing, share skills and information and network and get to know each other socially.

[www.hackneysolidarity.info](http://www.hackneysolidarity.info)

Games Monitor:

Games Monitor is a network of people raising awareness about issues within the 2012 London Olympic development processes.

[www.gamesmonitor.org.uk](http://www.gamesmonitor.org.uk)

London Coalition Against Poverty:

LCAP is an active, open-membership organisation for all those who want to fight for their rights, and the rights of other working class people in London.  
[www.lcap.org.uk](http://www.lcap.org.uk)

Open Dalston:

a not for profit membership company limited by guarantee. OPEN's objects are to promote excellence in the quality of the built environment, the provision of transportation and the provision of amenities, and to ensure that changes to these have proper regard to the needs of residents and businesses and the maintenance of a sustainable residential and business community.

[www.opendalston.blogspot.com](http://www.opendalston.blogspot.com)

Thanks to Spirit, Juan, Mishka, Ben, Dave, Anja, Nic, LCAP and Martin and everyone else who makes Hackney a good place to live and who fights for justice in it.