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NEWS



■ Tenants Catherine Williams, Josie Burke, Joan Elsley, Beverley Phillips, Dan Stranescu and John McGovern

Picture: Nigel Sutton

Elderly battling to save their homes cry: 'Put tenants first'

Threatened estate's residents protest against plans to demolish houses

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Vulnerable and elderly residents have staged a belligerent protest against early plans to knock down their homes.

A handful of tenants from a threatened Highgate estate waved signs in a peaceful demonstration outside the headquarters of Hornsey Housing Trust in Crouch End.

They fear people will become ill or even die if they are temporarily re-housed while the Goldsmiths Court estate is redeveloped under the trust's draft proposals.

Tenant Joan Elsby, 62, who suffers from brittle bone disease, said:

"I think their behaviour is horrible. There will be people dying if they take them out of their flats."

Neighbour Josephine Burke, 84, said: "It's a terrible worry. I've been here for 20 years, and I thought they would carry me out in a box."

Following the demonstration, the Goldsmiths Court protesters were invited to a hastily-arranged meeting with chief executive Alwyn Lewis to look at draft plans for the estate. But they declined the offer, arguing all tenants should be at meetings with the trust.

It was then agreed a public meeting will be held later this month at a date and venue to be decided by the estate's tenants.

All 16 Goldsmiths Court residents were sent a letter from Mr Lewis in February, informing them that their homes were in desperate need of modernisation and redevelopment.

They claim they have heard nothing about the plans since then, and have not been consulted.

And last week, the *Broadway* revealed whistleblowers have been silenced with a legal warning after the estate's residents were supplied with confidential information about the proposals.

The trust pledged tenants would be moved into "suitable accommodation" during redevelopment, and all moving costs would be covered.

But the residents fear a house move will put them at serious risk of harm, as nearly all are elderly or have debilitating medical conditions – and some are terminally ill.

The trust promised that no tenant would be moved if it would expose them to "unnecessary risk".

A spokesman from Hornsey Housing Trust said: "We repeat that no formal decision has been made about any development of Goldsmiths Court, and prior to any such decision there will be full consultation with residents."

"We regret that those involved did not take this opportunity to discuss the proposals, but our door remains open."



■ Athlone House

Iconic house spared the wrecking ball

Historic Athlone House has been saved from demolition in what has been hailed a landmark victory for 5,000 campaigners – including Monty Python legend Terry Gilliam, who fought for years to stop it from being turned into an £80million mega-mansion.

The mysterious foreign billionaire owners of the Victorian house in Highgate sought to knock it down and replace it with an opulent neo-classical eight-bedroom family home with basement car park, swimming pool and ballroom.

But on Monday, Camden planning inspector Colin Ball rejected an appeal to demolish the building, describing proposals as "inappropriate" and "harmful", in a jubilant end to a six-year battle to stop the house's demolition.

A victorious Michael Hammerston, head of the Athlone House Working Group, said: "This is a hammer blow against the developers. The relief is enormous. It has been a shadow over our heads for many years."

Haringey's Highgate councillor Liz Morris said: "This is a decision with national implications that will strengthen section 106 agreements across the country, so heritage assets cannot be torn down by greedy developers who renege on their legal obligations."

A spokesman for Athlone House said: "This is a very disappointing decision. We will be looking carefully at the inspector's decision before deciding the next steps."



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