

# South London opinion

**southlondonpress**

THE SPIRIT OF SOUTH LONDON

**OUR COMMENT**

## Cash payout is coward's way out

It's all very well Southwark council paying off traders after forcibly booting them from the Elephant and Castle shopping centre, but what are they doing to protect our communities from its cultural erosion?

Nothing, is the short answer.

Elephant and Castle has long been a stalwart for Latin communities to congregate and bring their culture to this small part of London, but in this day and age money always trumps culture.

And with a Government famous for creating a "hostile environment," in a post-Brexit world these parts of London are likely to be less diverse, losing one of the best assets it has.

Stumping up a pot of £200,000 for the 130 or so traders to divide among themselves, some of whom have been in that shopping centre for decades, is the coward's way out – caving in to property developer's demands.

Delancey, the property developers, have offered three times what the council has.

But they and the council stand to earn a substantial amount more.

This is all so that the rest of us are left looking skywards at the identikit grey towers that now loom in South London, instead of the colourful variety of culinary and social delights that traders at the Elephant and Castle shopping centre provided us for decades.

The shopping centre has long been in a dilapidated state and of course there is a housing crisis that needs to be addressed, and the council have pledged to build more homes there.

But you can guarantee the people who are making way for this redevelopment will not be able to live in the new properties, no matter how "affordable" they are.

It's a sad day for everyone in South London when historically and culturally important parts of the city are cast aside for the profiteering of multimillion-pound companies.



**in my view**

**Harriet Harman, MP for Camberwell and Peckham**

After a decade of Tory government there are twice as many people sleeping on the streets in 2020 compared to 2010. This is scandalous.

What makes it even worse is that the Conservatives took over in 2010 after the Labour government had made great efforts to tackle the problem.

Labour had made this a priority issue, led by the Prime Minister and this had resulted in the number of people rough sleeping falling by 75 per cent and homelessness being cut by two thirds. So, we know it doesn't have to be like this.

There are many complex reasons people become homeless and end up on the streets, in-

cluding family breakdown, fleeing a violent partner, soaring private rents which mean people's housing benefits no longer cover their rent, let alone their bills, and government failure to let councils build the new council homes we need.

Housing problems are the most common issues people in Camberwell and Peckham seek my help with and there is a worrying rise in what's known as 'hidden homelessness'.

That is when people are not actually on the streets but they don't have a permanent, decent home and have to live in a hostels or B'n'B or in buildings in such poor condition they are marked for demolition, or forced to rely on family and friends' sofas or floors.

A single mother from Peckham with a four month old baby recently asked for my help after becoming homeless due to a family breakdown.

She was staying in a single bed in a windowless kitchen. I contacted Southwark council who allocated her a flat instead.

'Sofa-surfing' is now the most common form of homelessness in the UK. It might sound harmless, but in reality it means long periods of going from place to place and sleeping in unsuitable, sometimes even unsafe places.

People lose their privacy and independence, live in cramped, overcrowded conditions and face prejudice for being dependent on others.

It is particularly bad for elderly people, dis-

abled people and parents with young children. The charity Crisis found more than a third of people 'sofa surf' not for short periods, but for up to three years before they get back on their feet and a home of their own.

The new Prime Minister Boris Johnson who says he wants to lead 'a people's government' and to 'unleash the potential of the whole country' must tackle the problem of poor housing holding 100s of thousands of people back.

Southwark council are pressing forward with their ambitious target of building 11,000 new council homes by 2043, and 2,500 by 2022.

This month they are setting out 21 new sites for hundreds of new council homes, including Cheltenham Road/Stuart Road in Peckham Rye and the old Peckham library site in partnership with Pecan. These new homes, which will be for local people, will be developed together with tenants and residents' associations and local councillors.

In the midst of a housing crisis it is more important than ever to have a compassionate and innovative Labour council stepping up to deliver genuinely affordable, secure, high-quality homes for local people.

Labour are leading a debate in the House of Commons this week to push this up the Government's agenda. We will not allow homelessness to be a hidden problem, swept under the carpet.

## £1bn cut in capital's policing

Last week, the latest funding announcement from the Home Office left the Met significantly short-changed once again.

Over the last few years, the Mayor of London has invested hundreds of millions of pounds into the Met to try and plug the gaps left by a decade of Government austerity – the total of which is almost £1 billion.

Efforts taken by City Hall have meant police officer numbers have started to recover, with 31,000 now in place across our capital.

Policing operations have also been bolstered by the establishment of the Violent Crime Taskforce which has been successful in taking some of the most dangerous criminals off our streets.

Alongside implementing tough enforcement measures, such as the GPS tagging of offenders, City Hall is also focusing on tackling the causes of violent crime, with the Mayor launching the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in 2018, as a public health approach model.

Since this time, the VRU has facilitated the investment of millions of pounds into the work of community groups, schools and the health sector to clamp down on youth and domestic violence.

**Len Duvall AM**  
London Assembly Member for Greenwich and Lewisham

## 'We'll meet again...'

To our dear friends in the EU...

Today will see news reports of fireworks and street parties held around the UK, but at least half of us would rather not be leaving at all.

We voted to Remain in the 2016 Referendum because we appreciate all that EU membership has granted us.

It is hard to overestimate the value of the four freedoms that we in the UK have enjoyed as EU citizens; so many of us have travelled, worked, loved and lived in many of the member states.

We have enjoyed the extraordinary access to products and foods that were able to be imported tariff free.

Our lives and culture have been enriched by the free flow of people from 27 other countries.

Few of us have made it across all 27 of those borders, but millions from these countries chose to move to the UK and we have benefited and grown from the interactions, both chance and planned.

# jameshaddrell

One of my favourite periods here at Greenwich Theatre is the school holidays. It is so important, at a time when entertainment is becoming ever more dominated by and delivered via small screens, that people still come together to share stories and live experiences, and that matters for children most of all.

With streaming, on-demand and catch-up services, people don't even watch the same TV programmes at the same time any more.

Broad access to culture is a brilliant thing, but only if it complements live performance, not replaces it.

Therefore, every school holiday we present a mixed programme of shows for families, so that the experience of seeing a story unfold or experiencing a cultural event can be shared.

The programme launches on Sunday,

February 16 with a tale by Michael Morpurgo.

This season we welcome Skewbald Theatre with their version of *Mimi and the Mountain Dragon*. Set high up in the snowy mountains of Switzerland, the story follows Mimi as she discovers a baby dragon asleep in the woodshed and has to brave the journey to the Dragon's castle to return it to its home.

Packed with music, live performance and detailed puppetry the acclaimed show is perfect for ages 3+.

Another major name in children's literature is also set to be celebrated when Chiff Chaff Theatre brings Jill Murphy's *Peace At Last and Whatever Next* to the theatre studio.

Murphy's gentle tales for younger children follow a daddy bear who can't find a place to sleep, and a baby bear who wants to fly to the moon.

For the many millions of Europhiles in the UK, we appreciate that our rights as citizens have been strengthened as EU members. Whether it is security, employment, welfare, human rights or simply ongoing peace, we have benefited.

The European Social Fund has been the backbone of many support services to the less privileged members of our society, particularly women in low paid jobs.

On the climate crisis, where co-operation is key to achieve global emission reductions, the EU has led the way in setting goals and standards.

We feel that this removal of our EU citizenship is a crime against everything we have fought for, and we will never 'just get over it'.

So no bell ringing, Champagne or street parties for us on January 31.

Just a steely determination to uphold the values we imbibed as EU citizens, and a promise to our extended family across the EU:

We'll be back!  
Our best wishes from members of the European Movement

**Barbara Callender**  
Incoming chairwoman, European Movement in Wandsworth & Merton



**James Haddrell is**  
the artistic and executive director of Greenwich Theatre

For something completely different, we are proud to present *How Does This Politics Thing Work Then?* Using stand-up comedy for ages 7+ the show will explain what an election is.

The week is rounded off by Action Transport Theatre who come to Greenwich with *Adrift*, a show about two children in a boat, laughing, arguing, dreaming – and hoping to find a land which will be happy and safe.

When children grow up, I am convinced that it is not the films that they watched on repeat that they will remember – it is the live performances that they saw once with their families or friends, that they talked about on the way home and the next day, that sowed the seeds of new ideas in their minds.

● For the full programme and to book tickets, visit [www.greenwichtheatre.org.uk](http://www.greenwichtheatre.org.uk) or call 020 8858 7755