



HARRIET HARMAN QC MP MP for Camberwell & Peckham



Harriet with Henry & Margaret Quennell, Cllr Paul Bates, Cllr Lorraine Lauder & Cllr Abdul Mohamed

Walworth Church Commissioners' Estate

Harriet has written to the Archbishop of Canterbury urging his support for Walworth tenants. Here is the text of her letter.

Dear Archbishop,

I am writing to you to protest in the strongest terms about the sale of the Church Commissioners' properties in Walworth, in my constituency in South London, and to ask you to use your position as head of the Church of England to step in to protect the individuals, families and communities in this area.

I know that you understand this area as you recently visited St Peters Church in Walworth and know about the thriving inner city working class community in the area based around the Church.

I am aware that the Church Commissioners have taken the decision to withdraw from the provision of social housing in this area of South London.

However, I am determined that we should all do what we can to ensure that the planned sale does not threaten the people living on these estates and or undermine their communities. The only way to ensure this is for the Church Commissioners to sell to a housing association or other registered social landlord (RSL) rather than to a private property developer.

Although the Church Commissioners are selling their housing assets in our area, we feel that after hundreds of years as the landlord they ought to have more concern about the people they leave behind. If these homes must be sold, they must go to a Registered Social Landlord and not to a private developer. This is no small issue. There are 619 tenancies in Walworth, with a further 230 in Vauxhall and 145 in Waterloo. I understand that the Church Commissioners have received at least two reasonable offers from Housing Associations. I urge you to ensure that these bids, rather than those from property developers, are accepted.

These homes are very near the centre of London. If there is a sale to a private landlord it is inevitable that the rent increases will price the current tenants out of their homes.

The tenants have been told that their homes must go to a private property developer to ensure the future pension provision for the Church of England clergy.

Whilst I recognise the need to safeguard the clergy's pensions, it is invidious that the homes and communities of my constituents should be sacrificed for the sake of a potentially tiny percentage increase in the amount that is already in the clergy pension fund.

The difference in the sale of these properties to a registered social landlord rather than a private developer, (I estimate at most a few hundred thousand pounds) would be insignificant in comparison to the £4.3 billion worth of assets that the Church Commissioners manage, and the Church of England pensions assets of over £500 million.

For over a hundred years the Church of England has played a key role in providing social housing to low income families as an expression of its commitment to social justice. Where is that commitment now if homes are to be sold to a private landlord rather than a perfectly acceptable social landlord?

The Church always says it wants to stand up for low income people in inner cities. Please do what you can to ensure that the Church Commissioners do not blight the future of so many individuals and families and, at the same time, tarnish the reputation of the Church.

Yours sincerely,

Harriet Harman MP for Camberwell & Peckham

Supported by the Faraday Ward Councillors Paul Bates, Lorraine Lauder and Abdul Mohamed, I have been working with the Tenants' Association and Southwark Law Centre to urge the Church Commissioners, Sir Stuart Bell MP, the Parliamentary representative of the Church Commissioners, the Church Commissioners' Assets Committee and now the Archbishop of Canterbury to preserve the Walworth Church Commissioners' Estate.

Advice Surgery Times January, February & March 2006

*Southwark Town Hall, Peckham
Road, London SE5 8UB*

Friday 13th Jan 10.00am

Friday 20th Jan 10.00am

Tuesday 31st Jan 6:00pm

Friday 10th Feb 10.00am

Friday 17th Feb 10.00am

Tuesday 28th Feb 6.00pm

Friday 10th March 10.00am

Friday 24th March 10:00am

Tuesday 28th March 6.00pm

If you've got a problem and you haven't been to see me before, you can come to one of my regular surgeries at the Town Hall. Or you can email me on harmanh@parliament.uk or write to me at The House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. There are about 60 people at every surgery. They tell me - and my team - what the problem is and we tell them what I am able to do to help. I then write and keep them informed of the progress on their case. I know my surgeries are important for those I can help - with problems on housing, benefits or immigration, but they also help me meet and keep in touch with the concerns of my constituents.

My House of Commons Action team - Dora Dixon-Fyle, Fiona Brenner and Charlotte Montague are well-known in Westminster as really dedicated and hard-working.



Harriet & team at an advice surgery in the Town Hall



Prime Minister Tony Blair, London Mayor Ken Livingstone & Harriet Harman MP meet Southwark residents to talk about Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is an important issue in Southwark. So, Tony Blair the Prime Minister came to Southwark to talk to local residents.

Residents raised issues about personal safety, concerns about mini -motorbikes and about police presence on estates. It's vital that our local community is given the powers we need to tackle anti-social behaviour. While in Southwark, Tony Blair announced the London Respect Action Plan. It's the Government's commitment to take tough action to make sure our community doesn't have to tolerate the bad behaviour of the few individuals and families that think the rules don't apply to them. This will be a major programme, with ministers from across Government working with police, councils and local communities to make sure each community gets the powers they need to build a culture of respect.

Southwark Police 1000 Campaign

Latest figures show that there are now in Southwark 890 police, with 165 civilian staff & 36 Community Support Officers to back them up; up by 115 since the Southwark Police 1000 campaign started.

More police, especially patrolling the streets and estates, is one of the top demands people in my constituency make. So I set up the Southwark Police 1,000 campaign in 2002. 1,000 is the number of officers that the Southwark Police say they need to carry out all their duties. The campaign, which I chair, includes local councillors, Tessa Jowell MP and Simon Hughes MP, Val Shawcross, our GLA member, the Police Sector working parties and the Southwark Police Consultative Committee. We meet regularly to take stock of our progress and to work out next steps. So far we've put pressure on the Metropolitan Police Authority, the Mayor of London, the Metropolitan Commissioner, and the Home Secretary. We're making progress, but still have a long way to go.



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Harriet talks to two police officers in Camberwell

A new Children's Centre for Peckham

It looks as though the new children's centre is on track for opening in mid 2006. When it's finished it will provide 24 much needed nursery places for babies, a parents' room, training room and a crèche. Most mothers now work, as well as caring for their children. Few have relatives living nearby who can help. So high quality, affordable childcare with flexible hours is really important – through nurseries and after-school clubs.

Whilst there will be new services for babies at the new children's centre, older children will be able to play, encouraged by youth workers at the new adventure playground that will soon be opening in Kelly Avenue. A constant complaint I hear is that there's not enough for young people to do, to keep them safe and out of trouble. So it will be a great step forward when the ugly barriers around the site come down and the playground is open.

Wooddene - urgent action needed

It's right that the Council are going to pull down Wooddene to make way for better housing. And now most of the tenants have been found alternative homes. But the Council really must move swiftly to move out the remaining tenants and leaseholders. The estate is 80% empty and boarded up. It's nearly impossible for the police to make the residents left in the block and in the surrounding estate feel safe. The target date for the estate to be empty is summer 2007. Local residents are telling me that that is far, far too long. I'm backing them up by pressing the council to complete the "decant" and start the demolition much sooner.

Harriet Harman MP Advice Surgeries

Southwark Town Hall, Peckham Road,
London SE5 8UB

Friday 7th Oct	10.00am
Friday 14th Oct	10.00am
Tuesday 25th Oct	6:00pm
Friday 4th Nov	10.00am
Friday 11th Nov	10.00am
Tuesday 22nd Nov	6.00pm
Friday 2nd Dec	10.00am
Friday 9th Dec	10:00am
Tuesday 13th Dec	6.00pm

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Harriet visits Grosvenor Park Sheltered Housing Unit

How "sheltered" is Southwark's Sheltered Housing?

Sheltered housing is mostly for elderly people who live on their own. They want to remain independent, but they are just a bit frail and sheltered housing means they can have their own little flat but supported by a warden service. The wardens not only keep an eye on the residents and help them sort out things such as hospital appointments, but many of them organise bingo, coffee mornings, fish and chip suppers and other social activities. In the summer sheltered housing residents can sit in peaceful communal gardens. There's always someone there to check who's coming in and out and to lock the front door if one of the residents leaves it open. Over the 20 years I've been an MP sheltered housing has always been really popular. As young couples move out of the borough, they are reassured that their elderly parent is in good hands. And over those years I've seen the average age of the residents increase and the level of frailty increase. So the people in sheltered housing now are more vulnerable than those who used to be in sheltered units. That's why I was concerned when, in April this year, the Council cut back the warden service so that the wardens are no longer there overnight. The Council are reviewing how this is working out. But I have had complaints from residents - and their families. The whole point of putting elderly residents together is to make them less vulnerable than they would be on their own. But that's only if they are properly looked after. I'm pressing the council to re-instate the overnight warden cover. It's just not the same to have an emergency alarm system routed through a call centre in Yorkshire. Sheltered Housing Units have flats which the duty warden can sleep in. It will give elderly residents, and their families, peace of mind if the wardens are on site again.