

# Save Little London Campaign News

A coalition of council tenants, residents and supporters fighting Leeds City Council's plans to sell off and demolish 435 council homes under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

savelittlelondon@gmail.com  
Tel: 217-8608 / 07745449396

www.savelittlelondon.org.uk  
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## Council goes ahead with PFI - but tenants fight back



On 17 May, after more than five years of bogus consulting, wasting £100,000s of taxpayers' money on consultants' fees and glossy leaflets, Leeds City Council finally pushed through its £90m PFI regeneration scheme for Little London.

"Is that it? Is that our homes gone?" shouted an angry tenant at the councillors. "See you in court," said another. Like 100s others, they will be forced to leave Little London as 435 homes are either demolished or sold off in the next three years.

Hours earlier in front of TV cameras, the Little London Tenants and Residents Association had presented a 500 strong petition to Council Leader, Cllr Les Carter, opposing plans to force people out of their own homes so others can benefit.

"We want decent homes for everyone in Little London, not just some," LLTRA chair, Laurean Slattie, told Cllr Carter. He replied that his "hands were tied". Another lie.

### Six years of lies

The Council's decision to go ahead with Comprehensive Regeneration in preference to the government-funded Decent Homes scheme was deeply disappointing but hardly surprising.

Since late 2000, it has been intent on using the much criticised Private Finance Initiative (see box) to fund overdue improvements to housing and environment in Little London.

### What is PFI and why is it so bad?

PFI is a really bad way of paying for public services. Instead of government or council using our taxes or borrowing money to build and run new schools, hospitals, or council homes, a private consortium of banks, developers, accountants and firms does so instead...for up to 35 years!

The problem is that not only do these companies make huge profits, it also costs them far more to borrow than a government or council. These profits and extra costs are then paid for by us through government subsidies. PFI thus transfers wealth from poor tenants to rich shareholders!

The fraud doesn't stop there. Because PFI schemes are so expensive - about 30% more than normal - the government won't give local councils all the money they need to pay the private company. So councils are often forced to sell off land or property to raise the money themselves - this is exactly what's happening in Little London.

PFI schemes are infamous for their poor standards, huge costs and years of delays - just ask the tenants in Swarcliffe.

It wasted £100,000 trying to con tenants into backing the original 'PFI for Little London & Woodhouse' in 2002. After a strong campaign against, tenants rejected it in a ballot by 54% to 46% on a huge turnout of 67%.

However, the Council then broke its promise to respect the ballot, claiming anti-PFI campaigners "misled" the public. Using a detailed breakdown of the results across the area, it removed Woodhouse from the proposed scheme, promised not to demolish Carlton Towers and re-balloted council tenants in Little London.

This time, it got the YES vote it wanted, but almost half the tenants didn't vote, giving the PFI scheme no real democratic mandate.

Fortunately, the government then rejected the Council's business plan as unworkable and declared a lack of confidence in its ability to deliver the PFI scheme to Little London, given the complete mess it was making in Swarcliffe.

It was only when the Swarcliffe PFI contract was signed in March 2005 - after a 5 year wait - that Leeds City Council was allowed to resume the Little London scheme in May last year.

Because of the delay, the Council was forced to consult residents again. This time there were more options available but the Council insisted on a straight choice between a revised PFI scheme – now estimated at £90m – or a more modest £20m repair programme to get all council homes up to the government's minimum Decency standard by 2010.

### **A plan to kick out the poorest**

The PFI scheme sounded great on paper but when we looked at the small print, we realised it wasn't intended to benefit all of us (see losers box). Work would not start until at least late 2008 and major rebuilding would not be completed until at least 2013 with the Council unable to guarantee an end date.

Worse, 435 council homes would be demolished or sold off to private developers. Only 125 new council homes would be built in their place. Instead, 400 private homes would be created on the estate. The Council promised they would be "affordable" but who in Little London can afford to buy a new home for between £55,000 and £110,000?

In other words, anywhere between 500 and 1000 people would have to leave their homes. The aim was clear: to kick out some of the poorest people in Little London and bring in middle class city workers and students.

### **Biased consultation**

During February's "consultation", Leeds City Council buried all the bad news about PFI under an avalanche of spin. Tenants were repeatedly shown only negative aspects of Decent Homes and only the good aspects of PFI.

The Council's own survey findings show just how confused tenants were. Many people who will be kicked out of their homes under PFI strangely chose this option, but also stated they wanted to stay in the area.

Tenants have since complained that council officers pushed the PFI scheme like a dodgy door to door salesman when they were supposed to remain "neutral".

### **Huge opposition**

It was no surprise that in the face of the Council's propaganda a majority said they preferred the PFI scheme. Having denied tenants a proper ballot, the Council then spun the outcome as a "vote" in the local press, stating that 66% of residents backed its plans.

In reality, 63% of tenants either wanted Decent Homes or had no preference, leaving only 37% in favour of PFI. In the Lovells, a clear majority wanted the Decent Homes option.

And many of those who ticked the Comprehensive Regeneration box did so in the mistaken belief they would be able to stay in their present flat or even buy it after refurbishment under 'right to buy'.

### **What happens now?**

Although the Council wants to go ahead with the PFI Option, the government will make the final decision in September. A strong campaign to this 'get rich quick' demolition and removal scheme could force the government to stop the PFI. Individual tenants can also block the PFI by taking legal action against Leeds City Council (see page 3).

If the PFI scheme is stopped, Little London would still qualify for £20m to bring homes up to the Decency standard by 2010. There's now a strong possibility that Leeds' six ALMOs, including Leeds North West Homes, will soon be merged into one, meaning that more money could be available to invest in Little London without requiring people to leave their own homes. We could also pursue alternative regeneration schemes such as tenant self-management.

For all of this to happen, however, we need to keep the campaign going and make it bigger and stronger. The next page sets out what we can do now. The Council wants us to believe that there is nothing we can do – don't be fooled!

### **The big losers from the Comprehensive Regeneration/PFI**

- Up to 800 Little Londoners will almost certainly lose their home due to the demolition of Carlton Towers and Carlton Carr/Gate maisonettes, and the sale of the three Lovell blocks
- Little London to lose 310 council homes; 10,000 to go city-wide
- Council refuses to guarantee that tenants wanting to return to Little London after building work is finished can do so
- Some tenants have lived on the estate for over 40 years – for that they get a disgusting £3,800 compensation minus arrears
- Tenants who remain in Little London will have to put up with the shoddy building work and services of the PFI consortium

# 5 Ways to Fight Leeds City Council and PFI

## 1. Get your elected representatives to “represent” you!

They may be next to useless, but YOU pay their wages, they’re supposed to represent YOU! Write to your **local MP and councillors**. Tell them the Council misled you about the planned Comprehensive Regeneration of the estate. Ask them to complain on your behalf to both **Leeds City Council** and the **Department for Communities and Local Government**.

### CONTACT DETAILS

Hilary Benn MP  
2 Blenheim Terrace, Leeds,  
LS2 9JG, [BennH@parliament.uk](mailto:BennH@parliament.uk)

Cllr Kabeer Hussain  
4 Beck Rd, Leeds, LS8 4EJ,  
[kabeer.hussain@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:kabeer.hussain@leeds.gov.uk)

Cllr Linda Rhodes-Clayton  
237 St Wilfrid’s Avenue  
Leeds, LS8 3PS  
[linda.rhodes-clayton@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:linda.rhodes-clayton@leeds.gov.uk)

Cllr Penny Ewens  
3 Holmwood Drive  
Leeds, LS6 4NF  
[penny.ewens@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:penny.ewens@leeds.gov.uk)

## 2. Lodge a formal complaint against Leeds City Council

First of all, make an official complaint to **Leeds City Council** about the way they have treated you – they are obliged to investigate the issue and respond. While you’re at it also complain directly to the **government**.

Leeds City Council  
Freepost RLZR-ELTX-RUEH  
PO BOX 657, LS1 9BS  
[complaints@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@leeds.gov.uk)

Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House, Bressenden Place  
London, SW1E 5DU  
[ha.pf@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ha.pf@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

If this doesn’t get you anywhere, then take your complaint to both the **Local Government Ombudsman** (who investigates if the council has treated you unjustly) and the **District Audit Office** (which investigates whether the Council has mispent taxpayers’ money – YOUR MONEY).

Local Government Ombudsman  
Anne Seex  
Beverley House, 17 Shipton Road  
York YO30 5FZ  
01904 380200, [enquiries@lgo.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lgo.org.uk)  
Advice line: 0845 602 1983  
[www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

District Auditor  
Adrian Lythgo  
KPMG, St James Building  
St James Square, Manchester, M2 6DS  
0161 838 4000, [adrian.lythgo@kpmg.co.uk](mailto:adrian.lythgo@kpmg.co.uk)  
[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

## 3. Take legal action against the Council

We’ve been advised by solicitors that Leeds City Council may have broken the law over the way it misled tenants over the PFI scheme. Your human rights may have been violated. **Contact Save Little London Campaign** (see our contact details overleaf) for more details. If you have a low income or on benefits, you might be entitled to legal aid.

## 4. Use the Media

The British press loves a scandal, especially involving politicians and corrupt local councils. Hostile media coverage often forces decision-makers to change their minds. Write letters to the local and national press, ring radio phone-ins, invite journalists to investigate Leeds City Council’s behaviour. Use our **list of media contacts** inside this newsletter.

## 5. Join the Save Little London Campaign

We can achieve far more working with each other than we can by ourselves. Our regular meetings are a source of solidarity and support. Over the next few months, we plan to hold public meetings with other tenants’ groups, lobbies, demonstrations, community events and film nights as part of a high-profile campaign. Joining the Save Little London Campaign is FREE. We meet **every first and third Monday of the month, 7pm, in The Rifleman Pub**. We’re all a friendly bunch and aim to make these meetings a social occasion. Why not fill out a membership form overleaf?

## Merchandise

Show your neighbours, friends, passers by and the Council what you really think of PFI

T-shirts - all sizes just £2.50



*Or choose your own personal slogan!*

Posters...50p

Oi! Leeds City Council...  
**HANDS OFF OUR HOMES!**



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

*Or choose your own personal slogan!*

Badges...10p

Stickers...free



*Place your order now - see contact details*



## Next public meeting details

'Our Housing is not for Sale!'

Invited speakers:

Frank Dobson MP

Ray Jones, Amicus

Polly Toynbee, Guardian

Liam Murphy, Leeds City Council Housing

Plus tenants' groups from across Leeds

When? 19 July, 7-9pm

Where? 'Space@' Little London Primary School

All welcome - free coffee and cakes served

Come along to our regular meetings!

Next meeting, 13 June

We normally meet at 7pm, every first and third Monday of the month in The Rifleman Pub

*Tea, coffee, snacks provided*

*Friendly atmosphere*

Campaign contact details

Ring Steve on 217-8608

Email us: [savelittlelondon@gmail.com](mailto:savelittlelondon@gmail.com)

Check out the website:

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

*Get in touch!*

Membership form: I wish to become a member of the Save Little London Campaign

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Email:

Postcode:

Date:

Please return completed forms to: Save Little London Campaign, c/o 96 Lovell Park Towers, LS7 1DR