

Owners to get Council's houses

A big crowd of De Beauvoir residents turned up for the first day of the two-day inquiry into Hackney's application to cancel the Southern Area General Improvement Area in March. Thirty-five Southern Area residents had also sent in written statements of evidence to the inquiry; one only gave unqualified support to the Council's case.

Frank Fletcher, Southern Area Action Group secretary, has telephoned the Department of the Environment to hurry the decision up. He mentioned particularly that some local people were getting worried about their chances of being rehoused locally.

SAAG will let all residents know by circular when the decision is available. A few big points from the inquiry:

1. Alderman Martin Ottolangui, leader of the Council, gave a firm commitment in the witness box that the Council would try and give owner-occupiers who lost their homes by demolition the chance of taking over Council-owned properties in the area.

2. The Council unveiled a new plan - Proposal 5 - for the area at the inquiry. This plan shifts the public open space from the east to the west side of De Beauvoir Road, allegedly in response to local criticism of its siting. As most criticism was that play space should not be on a busy road like De Beauvoir Rd, they obviously did not listen carefully to the criticism!

3. Ald Ottolangui said he was confident that the Council would adopt Proposal 5 as a "reasonably firm" commitment. But there would be further consultation with local people about details. But when weaknesses in the planning consultants' case were later shown up, Council witnesses excused them by saying the proposals were "only a planning exercise."

4. SAAG was concerned about the continuing lack of certainty in the area which would follow the cancelling of the GIA if people had no more than the proposals of the planning consultants to go by. SAAG argued that the Council should investigate the proposals properly (including asking local people what they thought) and put forward a firm plan. SAAG asked the inspector to adjourn the inquiry to give Hackney time to do so.

5. Both the Council and SAAG are committed to a "mixed" policy of redevelopment and rehabilitation of existing houses. The Council has agreed to try & rehouse Southern Area residents locally if their homes are knocked down.

Final report on GIA plan

The final report on environmental improvements for the 'central area' of De Beauvoir is to be presented to local residents at an important public meeting on Wednesday, June 21, at 8pm in the crypt of St Peter's Church. If the report - by the central area De Beauvoir GIA steering committee - is approved at the meeting it will go to the Council. But if the Council are to act on the report, the meeting must be well attended, fully representative, and willing to show local people will back the plan.

The report recommends road closures to cut out dangerous through traffic. Local people & visitors would benefit and would soon get used to using adjusted motor routes. But, the report says, the rat run over Whitmore Bridge & down De Beauvoir Rd must be controlled if the plan is to work satisfactorily. The report recommends that the Council should re-examine the possibility of diverting traffic via De Beauvoir Crescent and bottom of Hertford Rd into Kingsland Road.

The Council should "actively discourage" parking in front gardens - and help provide access roads for parking at the backs of houses where neighbouring owners are willing to transfer parts of their back gardens to the Council for such a road at no charge. Residents in Englefield Rd have asked for such a scheme, but will require modifications to the Council's plan for the Ardleigh Rd pre-fab site if it is to go ahead.

The report still favours local play spaces for

BONANZA BOOMS ON

The latest trick in De Beauvoir by landlords and speculators is to convert houses into small flats and bed-sits. Mrs. Doris Kibblewhite, Secretary of the De Beauvoir Association, has been asked for the DBA's comments on three new planning applications for conversions in only eleven days. She is worried that they represent a new trend in the local property market.

Naturally the tenants don't get asked - not by the Council, and not by their landlords. The Council asks for the views of the De Beauvoir Association, but this is on planning grounds only. The dangers to tenants don't come into it. Nor does the dismal prospect of De Beauvoir being turned into a bed-sit desert. The attraction for the owners is the grants of up to £1,200 which they get for every flat.

Tenants are affected in three of the houses now up for planning permission: two in Buckingham Road, the other in Ardleigh. Two elderly ladies live at 17 Buckingham Road - Mrs Manning has been there for over 30 years, and Mrs Sullivan for seven. It is a typical case of old established tenants who are quite content and don't want "improvements" anyway. Their landlord, who they say is not a bad landlord, has kept the house in a fairly good state. But now he has applied to convert it into four flats. The two ladies obviously can't live there while the work is going on, and he has not told them what will happen.

2 HOUSES INTO 12 FLATS

Two families live in 18 Ardleigh Rd which has been acquired by our old friends, Prebble and Co, for Rosebery Properties. The house was formerly in the hands of Brown and Brown. The property company has applied to the Council to turn 18 and 20 Ardleigh Rd into 12 flats. Other owners have applied to the Council to convert 90 and 92 Buckingham Rd together into six flats and 78 Mortimer Rd into three flats.

Mr Merritt, the tenant of 92 Buckingham Rd, asked Coun Ken Wilson, chairman of housing management, what was being done about these conversions at the tenants' meeting in March. Coun Wilson replied that

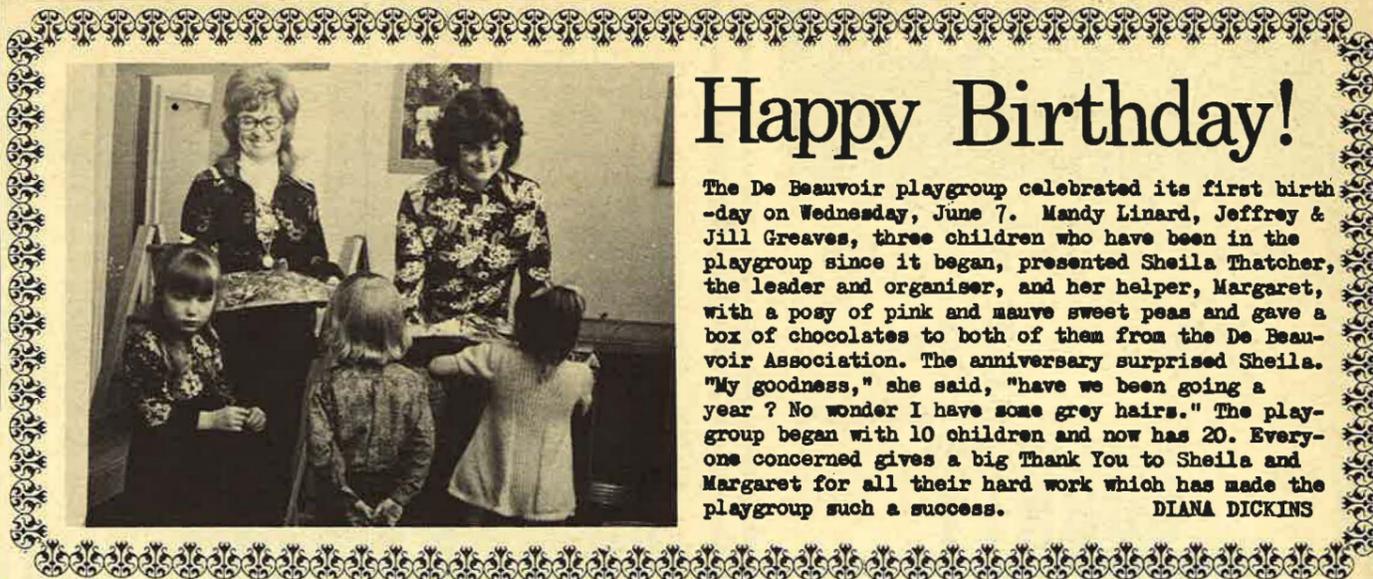
the Council did not want De Beauvoir (or any of Hackney) to become bed-sit land. This was not the sort of accommodation the Council was encouraging. Mr Merritt came to the DBA Advice Centre and the Association wrote to the Borough Planning Officer for him (on April 5 with a reminder on May 17). So far no reply. The Council also has not asked the Association for its views on the double Buckingham Rd conversion!

PROTECTION

What protection do the tenants have? First, an unfurnished tenant has an almost absolute right to stay on in his home. The landlord cannot evict him, usually, unless he is in rent arrears, has been annoying neighbours, or using the flat for immoral purposes. The tenant may also object to the conversion work being done. The landlord must then go to county court to ask for an order for the work to be done; but the tenant has a right to state his objections at the court hearing; and the court must consider the inconvenience the tenant is likely to suffer from debris and noise while the work is being done and what difference the conversion will make to the tenant's home (ie, it may rob him of a bedroom or living space which he needs). The court is not bound to make the order.

The owner may offer the tenant a new flat - either permanently, or while the work is being done. In both cases, the new flat must qualify as "suitable alternative accommodation" which the tenant is quite entitled to refuse if it is too small, damp, far from his work or relatives, furnished and not unfurnished, etc. The landlord must again go to the county court for an order, and the tenant again has a right to state his case. The court also hears the landlord and decides if the new flat is suitable or not. The same holds good for a converted flat in the tenant's present home.

The De Beauvoir Association is ready to advise tenants in these or any other difficulties and can arrange for a solicitor to advise or represent tenants.



Happy Birthday!

The De Beauvoir playgroup celebrated its first birthday on Wednesday, June 7. Mandy Linard, Jeffrey & Jill Greaves, three children who have been in the playgroup since it began, presented Sheila Thatcher, the leader and organiser, and her helper, Margaret, with a posy of pink and mauve sweet peas and gave a box of chocolates to both of them from the De Beauvoir Association. The anniversary surprised Sheila. "My goodness," she said, "have we been going a year? No wonder I have some grey hairs." The playgroup began with 10 children and now has 20. Everyone concerned gives a big Thank You to Sheila and Margaret for all their hard work which has made the playgroup such a success. DIANA DICKINS

informal games in the areas provided by closing street junctions. However, the Council have now approved a plan for housing on one intended play space - the pre-fab site in Hertford Rd. Other play spaces would be sited & enclosed to minimise any nuisance. The report recommends a "tree for tree" scheme with the Council planting a tree for every tree a local resident is willing to pay for.

The Greater London Council have said they will pay towards the cost of providing standard designs of iron railings for front gardens. The report calls on Hackney Council to help with the cost as well.

The report is the result of much hard work - it's based on no fewer than six separate surveys of conditions and needs in the area and has involved local people on the steering committee in a lot of detailed debate & argument with Council officers about what is, and what isn't, possible.

Another job at the meeting on June 21 will be to elect 12 representatives of local people to serve on the new steering committee. Some of the present committee, who have prepared this report, will be offering themselves for re-election, but there will also be vacancies to be filled. ROBIN YOUNG

Have you noticed that more heavy lorries now park regularly in the area at night? We need your help to stop the area becoming a lorry park. Every time a lorry parks in your street without lights, ring the police, report the details & ask them to note your complaint. Then tell us (at 45 Buckingham Rd or any friend on the DBA committee).

Our apologies to Mr Blankfield, of Stainless Steel Equipment, for missing his generous donation of £7.50 for the old people's Music Hall evening out of the last De Beaver.

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MUST THEIR HEYDAY PASS?

by JEREMY HAMMOND

London's only remaining hay and straw merchants, who started up in Whitechapel in 1784, are likely to be put out of business by the GLC bulldozer.

Along with certain other occupiers of property in Buckingham Road and De Beauvoir Road, Gardner & Gardner, whose barn at 161a De Beauvoir Road brings the sweet smell of the farmyard to Hackney, have received a curt duplicated letter from the Greater London Council warning them that their premises are to be compulsorily purchased. They are to be demolished for the second stage of the rebuilding of the Kingsland R.C. infants' & junior school (which we think should be extended over Tottenham Rd and not over badly needed houses).

Gardner & Gardner have survived two previous compulsory moves. Their original premises on the Whitechapel haymarket were closed down when the trams came to the Whitechapel Road. Then they went to Naval Row, Blackwall, staying there until they were bombed out in 1940. That was when they bought the lease of 157-161 De Beauvoir Road and the stables, barn and office which they still occupy.

But Mr L A Hadden, one of the firm's directors, thinks that if the CPO is confirmed Gardner & Gardner will either have to move out of London or close down. "I doubt whether the authorities are interested in encouraging a business of our kind to stay in London", he told me. "But I don't know who will serve our customers if we close down."

Local Steptoes

A few minutes later, one of his customers called in, paying cash for "half a hundredweight of mixture". "That was one of the local Steptoes", said Mr Hadden. "We get dozens of them coming in for fodder for the horses." The "mixture", he explained, was a special blend, made on the premises, of oats, molasses and chaff, the latter manufactured and bagged by a museum-piece of a machine. "It may look Heath Robinson", said Mr Hadden, "but it still works well enough, and you won't find another chaff-cutter in the whole of Greater London."

Mr Hadden admits that the remaining Steptoes, the riding schools, and other horse owners in North London don't provide enough business to keep the firm going. "We started diversifying 15 years ago", he told me. "Now one of our main lines is supplying wood wool for packing purposes to factories, stores and removers. Another is providing fodder for livestock being exported." And Mr Hadden showed me order no. 4468: provisions and equipment for a load of pigs being shipped to China!

Pigs to China, sheep, cattle, rabbits to the four corners of the earth - all is grist to Gardners' chaff-cutter.

But if Gardners go, De Beauvoir - and probably North London - will lose a link not only with Steptoe and his followers, but also with the age of Galsworthy: the Gardner family, who survived until the 1930s, conducted their business very much in the way described in "The Forsyte Saga", with transactions negotiated at leisure over a glass of port or sherry instead of over the telephone. And the last Gardner to head the firm - he retired just before the Second World War - was actually called Soames.

Today, Gardner & Gardner are on the telephone. But Mr Hadden, and his fellow director Mr R J Mead still retain some of the firm's old-world, gentlemanly traditions.

INSULT TO TENANTS

Among the tenants of Gardner & Gardner, who have also received notice of the CPO application, are Mollie, Violet and Wendy Bunce, whose parents moved to 161 De Beauvoir Road with Gardners in 1940.

The family moved to the area because their father was appointed despatch manager for the "Hackney Gazette", and the three sisters have lived happily in the house ever since. All three have jobs locally - Mollie in Stoke Newington, Violet in Highbury and



Wendy in the Maurice Jay Dance Studios, Hackney, where she is instructress and proprietor.

The house they live in is one of the prettiest in De Beauvoir Town and, with its neighbour 159A, were to have been recommended by the GLC for listing in the Department of the Environment's lists of "buildings of architectural and historic interest". Under the house there are still big cellars where horses used to be taken down wooden ramps to a manger.

In recent years, the sisters have spent a good deal of money improving the house. Four years ago they put in a bath, and only a few months ago they modernised the kitchen and put in a proper sink with hot and cold running water. Hackney Council refused to give a grant, and the GLC led them to believe that it would be many years before the property would be demolished. Now they are angry because the GLC has written to them as occupiers ("Dear Sir or Madam") to say that "in the Council's opinion the dwelling which you occupy is one of a number which are unfit".

They think that to tell them, after having lived in the house, looked after it and improved it for 30 years, that it is "unfit" is an insult. And they are right.

School over road?

The De Beauvoir Association never wanted to delay the much-needed expansion of Kingsland RC School - on amenity or any other grounds.

But we did think that a better solution - for the school and the community - would have been for Tottenham Road to be closed between Culford Road and De Beauvoir Road, and the school extended over it to the little-used industrial land to the north. This would have had the added advantage of preventing the present use of Tottenham Road as a rush hour rat-run for commuters, making it safer for both Kingsland and De Beauvoir schools.

ILEA did consider this alternative - but (we feel) considered it too little and too late. The Authority declined to give us reasons for its decision and we felt that it simply refused to be swayed from its original plan by the arguments of what it referred to as "a local amenity group".

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COUNCIL TO ACT?

Eight tenants, living in 5 houses in De Beauvoir, have applied to the Council to make their landlords put in modern amenities (baths, inside toilets, hot water, etc) and to repair their homes and get rid of damp. Health inspectors have been round the houses & talks have been held with the owners.

The Council's officers are (we are told) likely to serve two types of notices on the houses — repair notices to make landlords bring them up to a decent state and improvement notices to make them put in baths, inside toilets, hot water, etc. Coun Ken Wilson, who is in charge of GIAs in Hackney, has officially welcomed the tenants' move.

Tenants living anywhere in De Beauvoir may apply to the Council to serve repair and improvement notices on their landlords. In most cases, the Council will be bound to take action. Anyone who wants backing, can come to the De Beauvoir Association advice centre in the crypt of St Peters Church any Saturday morning. But all you need do is send a request in writing to the Town Clerk.

It is worrying that in the cases of multi-occupation among the tenants who came forward the Council had not already insisted on proper fire precautions! Which it is supposed to have done throughout the GIA! Does this mean that the Council has not been insisting on fire precautions in houses with absent landlords — the types of houses in which fires are most likely? Perhaps our councillors could ask.

£5000 for 2 owners

As we warned in March, Hackney Council has given the owners of two neglected houses in the area profits of over £5,000 on their properties. The Council put closing orders on 18 De Beauvoir Square and 49 Buckingham Rd — which means the houses are not fit to live in. The Council rehouses the tenants & leaves the houses to be sold with the bonus of vacant possession. Which they have been.

Thanks to the Council, 49 Buckingham Rd sold at £7,500 — which gave the owner, a speculator, a cool £5,000 profit in just over a year. Thanks to the Council, 18 De Beauvoir Square, for so long damp & multi-occupied, had buyers queuing for an 18 year lease at over £8,000. Tenanted, the owner could find no buyers at £3,000 recently.

The Council's only answer to our charges of rank incompetence is that they have to rehouse tenants quickly if they are living in unfit houses. That's a laugh. We know of dozens of tenants in damp and bad conditions in houses in the area which could as easily have been declared unfit. In some cases the tenants themselves have just been driven to action (see above). In both houses, the Council neglected to use repair notices; in 18 De Beauvoir Square, they could have insisted on modern amenities (as it was multi-occupied) & imposed management standards. Had the owners not cooperated, they could have gone for compulsory purchase & improved the houses for local people badly in need of homes.

Trust rehouses 16 local families



The De Beauvoir Trust now owns 26 houses in the area — all bought at fair prices, mostly in the open market, and some at public auction. The Trust will eventually provide 60 low-rent homes for local people and families from the Council waiting lists. 17 modernized flats are already occupied — all but one by people from the immediate neighbourhood.

But the Councils which lend the money for the work of the Trust demand the right to nominate tenants for at least half the homes provided. And the Trust has, of course, to rehouse tenants from properties it has bought with part-possession before they can be improved.

This means that the Trust cannot help many local applicants for flats unless either (i) it can negotiate the purchase of the house they at present occupy or (ii) the tenants are high on either the Hackney or the GLC waiting list, in which case the Trust may be able to persuade the Council to nominate them to a Trust flat. Tenants who are in the most urgent categories on the Council waiting list, and who would like to continue living locally in a Trust flat should write to Robin Young, the unpaid secretary of the Trust, at 135 Balls Pond Road, N.1 or phone him during the day at 236 8862.

Despite the rapid rise in property prices the Trust is still successfully negotiating more purchases.



Betty Berry has worked hard for 44 years, working her way up at Lyons from waitress to manageress. She made her contribution, while she was able to, both in conscientious work and in taxes and insurance stamps.

But in 1962 she began to suffer from Parkinson's Disease — which is usually brought on by severe shock. She had collapsed with shock in her flat in Downham Rd after finding a dead rat in her bed while stripping it for the Rat Man. She did not get a Council flat for another 8 years after the incident, living all the time with a constant stream of rats.

By the time she moved into her Kingsgate Estate flat she needed a walking frame and soon after could not move without a wheel-chair. She has since had an endlessly wearying struggle to get around. To go to the newsagents down the road she has to squeeze through awkward double doors (usually bruising her elbows), hang on to a gate to get the wheel-chair over the high kerb — which has cost her several bad accidents — and wheel herself along in traffic to avoid other kerbs. She has long badly needed an invalid car & garage — which she is now getting, but only after three years of pestering officialdom, a huge pile of nerve-fraying correspondence, tedious telephoning and constant humiliation. She is frequently made to feel what expensive demands she is making of the Council!

Her MP, Stanley Clinton Davis, has been to great pains to ease matters — a shining exception to a sorry story of official delays & buck-passing. Practical changes in administration could help. One person should have the job of helping her: she should not have to deal with 5 Council departments, a Ministry and a dozen other individuals. Luckily she is persistent and capable. How many others with similar problems have given in before the end?

Even now, her garage is next door to the refuse shed which attracts all the local rats. WILLIAM VERITY

De Beaver 137 BALLS POND ROAD N1 is a FREE community newspaper for the people of De Beauvoir — old & new towns. We are sponsored by the De Beauvoir Association, a registered charity, but are here to help everyone and not just Association members. We're pleased to print your letters, news, pictures, ideas & answer questions. Please send contributions for the September issue in by September 18 latest to Doffy Weir, 137 Balls Pond Road, N1. Thanks to those who helped with this De Beaver.



BEFORE & AFTER: The Trust at work

Owners who cannot themselves afford improvements to their homes are guaranteed a fully modernized home with complete security and rents fixed at the lowest possible level. This is itself worth thousands of pounds, as the lady who accepted £9,000 for her house from someone who would not rehouse her, and then unsuccessfully applied to the Trust for a flat because she could find nowhere nice to live would probably agree.

The Trust is about to start work on 60 Culford Road which has been derelict for 2 years because Hackney Council would not give planning permission for its conversion while there was "uncertainty" about the Southern Area. The Trust has persuaded the GLC to finance its improvement as a single family house — which means Hackney's long awaited planning permission is no longer needed.

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