Now the elections are out of the way and Hackney Labour have power until 2010, they are turning on our estates. The council want to knock down over 500 homes and build on open spaces and car parks. Surprise, surprise, the new homes will be for housing associations or for private sale.

Estates targeted so far are Suffolk, Fellows Court, Wenlock Barn, St John’s, St Leonards, De Beauvoir and Haberdashers. But this is only the beginning - the council want to build on 13 sites on Wenlock Barn alone. Expect more estates to be included later.

Instead of focussing on the task of spending our rents and service charges on cleaning and repairing our homes the Council’s main push is to hand over sites to developers. Most estates are already overcrowded and we need green spaces, playgrounds and parking. Hackney independent sees these spaces as being vital to our community. Labour sees them as an opportunity to bring in their developer friends.

The council plans will bring chaos to estates that are already overcrowded. Even the council admit that Hackney has the third highest level of over-crowding in England. How will these plans help matters? Worse still, the plan is for at least 3 out of every 10 new homes built on our estates to be private - for homeowners or High renters. You can bet that the end result will be more than 3 out of 10.

A council report states that extra funds will be put into the targeted estates to “assist residents to consent.” – in other words they are trying to bribe residents into going along with their privatisation agenda! Of course this also means less money for other estates. The report also states that “Shoreditch Trust representatives have been involved in the development of this strategy.” We need to keep the elected residents and the plans are news to them! Worse still the Council claim they are carrying out “early consultation” for the proposals but a council insider has told Hackney independent that the decisions have already been made.

Any new building in Hackney should be council housing for overcrowded tenants, and young people needing a place of their own - and shouldn’t take away space on existing estates. We need to campaign against these plans and stop Hackney Council from flattening council flats and destroying play areas and replacing them with private homes. This isn’t just an issue for those already targeted by the council. Your estate could be next!

For more information on the council’s plans go to www.hackneyindependent.org.

Council Jargon Explained

“We aim to continue tenure diversification” This means they want fewer council tenants and more private renters and home owners.

“Selective demolition” This means knocking council houses down.

“Land assembly and decanting” Dividing up any open space into packages for developers and getting the tenants out.

“Infill opportunities” This means building on any available open space.

I simply do not believe that there is sufficient ‘undervalued’ land on these 28 estates to fit in 550 homes, so the Council must be defining areas as ‘undervalued’ which residents do in fact use. To the Council and the developers, ‘undervalued’ probably means ‘not making money’. – Janine Booth, Marcon Estate TRA

“Hackney Council won’t be happy until they’ve sold the entire estate off” Harry, Wenlock Barn

“I don’t want local green spaces used for development” Ian, Wenlock Barn

“Have you seen Hackney Today recently? An article states ‘I love Hackney because of its green spaces’” Tony Butler, Hackney Independent

Who loves Hackney?

A big debate has kicked off following the announcement by a Channel 4 Property Show that Hackney is ‘the worst place to live in Britain’.

The young professionals who have been buying houses in the area have used their privileged positions in the media to jump to Hackney’s defence. This article from the BBC’s website is a hilarious example: “As a resident of the borough - albeit for only the last four months - let me tell you one thing: the findings are rubbish. For many of us, this pearl of cultural diversity and tolerance in north-east London is little short of an earthly Eden. Bars, restaurants, parks, canals reminiscent of the great days of Venice - we have it all on our doorstep”.

Middle class mayor Jules Pipe has been publicly defending Hackney, criticising the programme and claiming that “their survey takes no account of the things that really make a place great; people, architecture, culture, nightlife, parks”. He has asked everyone in the borough to “wear your I love Hackney badge with pride” in protest at the TV show.

Unfortunately for the Mayor, many residents seem to have taken a rather different view. “Where are all the letters of love for Hackney?” asked the Gazette as it printed a page full of angry letters attacking Pipe and complaining about “rotting windows, cockroaches, rats, burnt out cars, no playgrounds for children” and pointing out the levels of crime in the area. “The worst place to live, how on earth are you are” wrote a resident from Haggarston Estate.

These very different reactions clearly show that there are now two very different realities in Hackney - one for those who can afford to enjoy the bars, boutiques and ‘architecture’ and another where basic needs like decent housing are not being met. The angry letters in the Gazette have exposed Pipe’s pathetic ‘I love Hackney’ campaign as a classic piece of New Labour spin. Rather than tackling any of the real problems faced by most working people all the council have to offer is an empty slogan.

Despite Jules Pipe’s attempts to present himself as a man of the people, defending “poorer people” against the “middle class snobs” at Channel 4, it’s clear that the council seem far more interested in attracting profiteering developers and pushing professionals into the area with ‘culture’ and ‘nightlife’ than sorting out conditions on council estates.

The real truth of what New Labour have planned for Hackney was written in council letters of love for Hackney?” asked a resident from Haggerston Estate.

For those already targeted by the council, your estate could be next. For more information on the council’s plans go to www.hackneyindependent.org.
Bad Sports

Recent report suggest the original £2.4 billion budget for the 2012 Olympics has gone up to nearly £5 billion. Since London Council Tax payers will be helping to foot the bill here’s a guide to what you can expect for your money:

• House prices pushed up further fuelling housing crisis
• Rent increases for private tenants as landlords cash in
• Local people driven out of their homes and businesses
• Loss of playing fields, allotments and areas of local beauty
• Huge expenditure on security and police crackdowns
• Field day for developers to make a profit
• Local tax payers counting the cost for years to come
• Lottery money diverted from children’s sports projects.

Promises about “regeneration” and “long term local jobs” were made for the Millennium Year in Greenwich, but failed to materialise. If an area of a city deserves regeneration then it deserves to happen without the Olympic Games.

If you would like to know more about local opposition to London 2012 please see www.gamesmonitor.org.

Plague of mice hits Laburnum Street

After the demolition of the Laburnum Primary school to make way for yet another ‘City Academy’, residents of Haggerston have suffered an invasion of mice fecking the wreckage left by Hackney Council.

Hackney Council’s policy to curb the infestation, a supply of mouse traps, is actually encouraging the mice to breed their way into homes. One family in Laburnum Court have already caught twenty mice since the school was demolished.

One resident has told us “you can hear them at night when you’re trying to sleep...it’s not nice at all especially if there’s young children in the house”.

It seems that the infestation is spreading further after a resident on the York Row estate has also complained to the council about an infestation in her flat.

Although disabled she was left to hunt down the mice herself after getting no response from the local housing office. “I caught two live ones on one occasion and left them outside the housing office in a plastic bag. It was the only way I could think to get them to make themselves seriously” she told Hackney Independent.

A Laburnum Street resident puts it perfectly: “we are always getting propaganda about Hackney Future Today. Is this what they mean?”

In the last issue we started a debate around CCTV and ASBOs and asked you for your views. Haggerston resident James Ballhatchet has responded with this piece about how Hackney Council’s anti-social behaviour is hitting teenagers hardest.

Britain’s Teenagers have now been labelled the worst in Europe for alcohol consumption, drug taking and promiscuity. Speaking as a 17 year old ‘hoodie’, I see many teenagers being excluded from society and lacking social status in the community in which they live. As a consequence, crime is on the increase and involvement in community life (including the democratic process) is low because teenagers feel they don’t have a significant role to play in society.

What the council has failed to do is to tackle the route of the problem; the breakdown in community relationships. Things like fully operational and affordable community leisure centres would be beneficial to teenagers, so why has Hackney Council decided to close down these amenities?

Things like ASBOs (anti-social behaviour orders) are not even fit for purpose, much like the Council’s policy handing out ASBOs to hoodie wearing teenagers is just like handing out confetti at a wedding. All ASBOs do is to shift the offender into another community and the scheme even lacks the resources needed to check them up. An ASBO is considered to be ‘a badge of honour’ by many teenagers. Instead of being a deterrent to prevent crime they are often seen as an incentive to commit it. On the streets of Hackney an ASBO often confers street cred.

But there will be no need for teenagers to be anti-social if social exclusion is tackled head on. But how is this possible if the Council is taking a coercive approach to the problem?

Deliberately criminalising a whole generation is only storing up more trouble for the future. While politicians may find it convenient to scapegoat today’s youth, policing is not a long term solution to these problems.

On October 1st on the Holly Street Estate, a father of two was stabbed to death on his doorstep by a group of young people. The victim had complained about the noise they were making outside his home. The incident has finally forced the powers that be to ask serious questions about the regeneration of Holly Street.

Five years ago as Tony Blair visited the ‘Flag Ship’ project on Holly Street, Hackney Independent’s Peter Subbon went on record saying that knocking down a problem estate, rebuilding and privatising it would not solve the problems of unemployment, drugs and poverty in the area. Today even the Evening Standard is writing about how Labour’s vision of regeneration is in trouble.

Solving social problems on estates like Holly Street takes a very different approach to the one championed by New Labour. Their vision of mixed communities involves bringing in rich people to the area to solve its problems – this is why over a third of the new homes on the estate were sold at high cost private dwellings. Of course this does nothing to tackle inner-city deprivation and the consequences of poor schools, lack of affordable amenities and unemployment. Solving these inequalities is something that Labour are not prepared to commit themselves to. In fact the divide between rich and poor has grown wider since they came to power in 1997.

Those in power seem oblivious to the real problems faced by people in Hackney. They desperately want to change the facts so that ‘regeneration’ looks like a success story. In March 2006, after the arrest of some drug-dealers on Holly Street estate, Labour’s Minister Hazel Blears claimed that the problems on the Holly Street Estate could now be removed for the long term.

In October 2006, Cllr Eric Ollernshaw, leader of Hackney’s Tory Group asked helplessly in the Hackney Gazette, ‘what has gone wrong?’

The Pique-’er of Hackney - leading mice onto our estates?

Most readers already know about the Broadway Market traders who faced imminent eviction after their properties were sold to property developers. The daily threat of eviction faced by Lowell Grant (aka: Spentieth Century Caribbnd) at 71 Broadway Market is still drawing press attention and the campaign to support him has run several successful reggae dance nights.

Spirit is now facing a showdown with his landlord in the Court of Appeal. At the time of going to press this will be in December.

The Cityzen project have talked to young people on Holly Street to ask them what they think is wrong. The main reason they gave was the lack of money, the complaint of the majority of young people was that there is little for them to do: “They enjoyed doing your homework and did not even tell us why”, said one.

Their report tells a story of mistrust fostered by broken promises, boredom, and no access to local facilities. Anger is especially directed at the Queensbridge School and Community Centre which is not very welcoming to young people. This centre, which looks like a community hall in the centre of Holly Street tends to give priority to private organisations for functions. When Ciyzen arranged to meet up with youths there they were even refused entry.

It would be naive to believe that investing millions will solve all Holly Street’s or Hackney’s problems. But it would be a start. While Hackney’s politicians might blame their hands at the prospect of the Olympic and other high-profile developments, they ignore the very people they say ‘regeneration’ is supposed to help.

Meanwhile, innocent people die and potentially good kids get sucked further and further into trouble.

The tragedy of Holly Street