

Residents fight to protect historic square near Euston



Current Tolmers Square residents say the square is once again under threat

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Camden, London

6 hours ago

The past few years have not been easy for the residents living in Tolmers Village near Euston station.

They have lived next to the constant hammering and drilling of the planned **high speed rail network HS2**, for what seems like forever.

The Tolmers Square council estate offers a peaceful escape from both the noise of the work and the busy Euston Road, shielded from it on one side as it is by a large mirrored building opposite University College Hospital called 250 Euston Rd.

All that might now change.

Last December residents found out that the **Euston Area Plan (EAP)** had been updated to include the possible redevelopment of the office block, its attached pub and café, and therefore one side of the estate.



Lorraine Hayward has lived on the Tolmers estate for 30 years

Camden Council, like other London councils, is under pressure to provide more homes and more affordable housing, and this often comes as part of large scale regeneration projects.

In Camden's case, the plans around HS2 keep changing, and therefore so does the Euston Area Plan and what the next 10 years might look like in this part of central London.

And that means uncertainty for people living on working-class central London estates like this one.

"They've knocked down half of this community," said Lorraine Hayward who lives here and works locally in the NHS.

She has been to many community meetings over the past 30 years as governments have come and gone and plans over HS2 have changed.

It is not lost on her and the other residents of this estate that the current prime minister is this community's local MP.

"Keir Starmer, this is his constituency and I've never seen him walk round here, never seen him come down here and see the plight of people who are actually trying to live and work in central London."



A photo from same spot in the 1970s of protesters who campaigned for Tolmers Square to remain as central London housing

Fifty years ago Tolmers Square was in the news for similar reasons.

Back then it was made up of a horseshoe-shaped row of Victorian houses and a small green common. Developers had their eye on it for office and retail space.

Nick Wates was an architecture and planning student at the Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London at the time.

"In our final year we did a project on Tolmers Square. We'd heard it was threatened by redevelopment by the same people who have since built the Euston Tower.

"We decided to squat it. There were about 80 of us at one point. The fight was really about keeping a civilised urban environment.

"It was a very diverse and mixed inner city area. There were lots of other campaigns going on at the same time in the square, food campaigns and communal living.

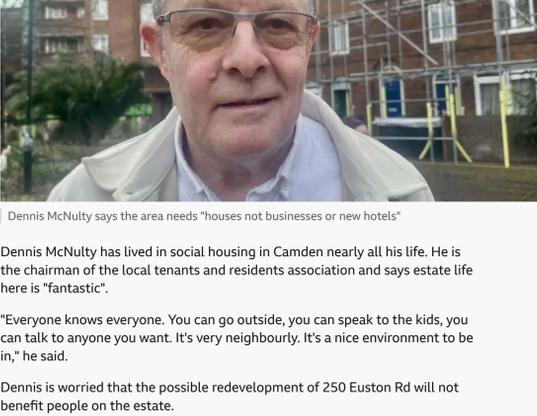
"We were there for six years."

In the end, the last remaining squatters were evicted in 1979 and the Victorian terrace was replaced with a council estate, with the futuristic-looking 250 Euston Rd built along one side of it.

Nick believes the current housing estate, as well as North Gower Street and Drummond Street would not exist if it was not for the 70s campaign.

He sees the same threat now.

"How is London supposed to keep going if no one is living in it?" he said.



Dennis McNulty says the area needs "houses not businesses or new hotels"

Dennis McNulty has lived in social housing in Camden nearly all his life. He is the chairman of the local tenants and residents association and says estate life here is "fantastic".

"Everyone knows everyone. You can go outside, you can speak to the kids, you can talk to anyone you want. It's very neighbourly. It's a nice environment to be in," he said.

Dennis is worried that the possible redevelopment of 250 Euston Rd will not benefit people on the estate.

"We need houses not businesses or new hotels. That's why the local residents are up in arms about this."



Xiao-yue Chen and her son Alex do not want any more disruption on the estate

Xiao-yue Chen agrees.

She lives on the estate with her 17 year-old-son Alex. The 13 years they have lived here have been blighted by the noise and dust and uncertainty of work on HS2.

"HS2 was supposed to be finished in two years. Since we moved here, 13 years now it is still (ongoing).

"If this plan comes into being, we don't know when it's going to be finished," she said.



Alice Brown campaigns to preserve buildings rather than knock them down

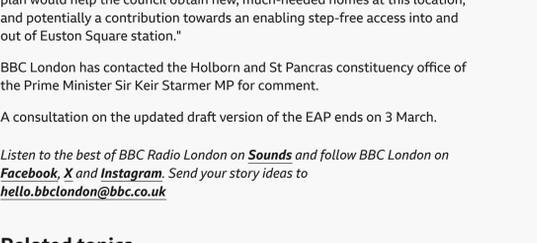
Architect Alice Brown found out about the changes to the EAP while attending a Camden Council planning meeting last December and she does not believe local people have been properly consulted.

She is planning to stand for the Green Party in the next local election.

"What Camden does with a planning framework like this it makes site allocations, which are a way of telling developers that they think this site can be redeveloped.

"Once it is enshrined in a site allocation, a developer can bring this allocation to a planning committee and it will be passed.

"It is a very alarming prospect," she said.



Alice has a photo of the Euston Tower and map of the local area which she is using to compare past and present

A Camden Council spokesperson said: "The Euston Area Plan aims to guide future development to ensure the local community benefits when plans do come forward.

"There are no detailed plans known about for this site at the moment, but if the owners were to bring proposals forward, then the 'site allocation' in the plan would help the council obtain new, much-needed homes at this location, and potentially a contribution towards an enabling step-free access into and out of Euston Square station."

BBC London has contacted the Holborn and St Pancras constituency office of the Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer MP for comment.

A consultation on the updated draft version of the EAP ends on 3 March.

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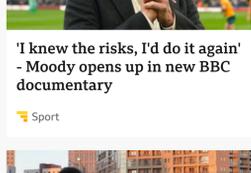
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