

I'm a celebrity, don't sell off housing



PROTESTERS: Residents are joined by celebrities to complain about the town hall sell-off of short term housing

43318QV12

HIGH-profile supporters of short life housing have rounded on a town hall over its sell-off policy.

The campaigning group Lambeth United Cooperative staged a demonstration in Lillieshall Road, Clapham, this week where homes have been flogged off for more than £885,000, after long-term residents were evicted.

For the first time, high-profile supporters such as fashion designer Dame Vivienne Westwood, comedian Mark Thomas and artist Maggi Hambling publicly voiced their anger at the Labour-run Lambeth council.

Ms Westwood said: "No council with any sense of real value [of people] would be selling off houses for money and break down a community. It's disgusting."

Lambeth is adamant the cash from the sales will fund more social housing in the borough, but admit the cash is not ring fenced.

It claims 200 affordable rented properties are to be built this year – "far more" than the number of short life homes being sold.

Lambeth's short life properties were handed over to people on the housing

By BEN MORGAN

waiting list during the 1970s and 1980s, when it could not afford to maintain the houses.

Instead of paying rent to the council, money was pooled by housing co-ops to improve the properties. As a result, some residents have been in their homes for 30 years.

Julian Hall, from Lambeth United Cooperative, has put forward a "pragmatic plan" where they could stay in their homes, pay social rent but not ask the council or Lambeth Living to carry out repairs, which they would continue to do themselves.

But he said that the council is not listening.

"The council needs to respect long-term residents and the solutions that are coming out of our community.

"Otherwise, their reputation as a cooperative council will be forever tarnished," he said.

Vauxhall's Labour MP Kate Hoey, whose constituency covers Clapham, has been a vocal critic of the council's policy.

She attended the rally this week, alongside out-going Clapham Town

Labour councillor Helen O'Malley, who has been deselected by her party.

They remain the only Labour politicians to raise their heads above the parapet.

Ms Hoey said: "Now is the time for the council to recognise there are so few of these long co-ops left, that each one should be looked at individually and given tenancies where they want."

Those who leave their homes are placed on the Choice Based Lettings register to find a new property and are not made homeless, the council said.

Cllr Pete Robbins, cabinet member for housing, has been strident in his defence of the policy and hit out at the "celebrity" supporters.

He said: "The remaining short life properties are dilapidated Victorian-era buildings, in many cases listed by English Heritage.

"It would cost hundreds of thousands of public money to be restored and turned into council housing as the celebrities are demanding.

"I have to say I find it incredible that a celebrity fashion designer who has made millions by selling dresses to the super rich should be trying to lecture Labour councillors about affordable housing."

ben.morgan@slp.co.uk



FRONT LINE: Vivienne Westwood, Kate Hoey MP and painter and sculptor Maggi Hambling

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