

Behind the Façade Gentrification as a Strategy of Displacement

Kateena Creary

Process

Transient
of People

Trauma

Fragments Disappearance



Fig 1: Charcole sketch by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Ossulston estate site sketch

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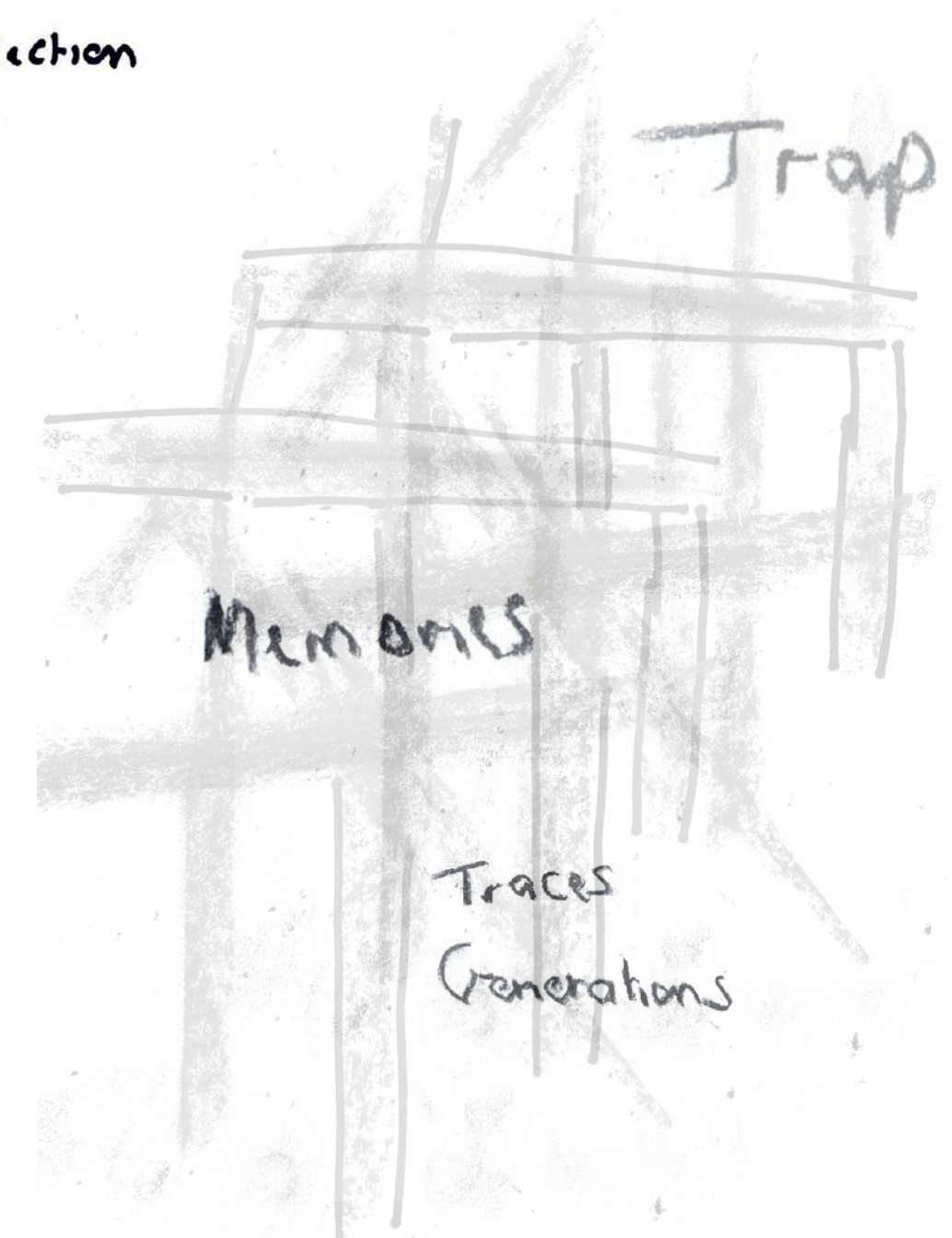


Fig 2: Charcole sketch by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Scaffolding

“The streets have seen it all, change in decay, destruction and rebuilding and through it all, the people drift like ghosts, coming into the light.”¹

¹ Gerry. (2012) 'The mean streets of Somers Town'. WordPress, 05 October. Available at: <https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2012/10/25/the-mean-streets-of-somers-town/> (Accessed: 01 November 2024).

Fig 3: Charcole sketch by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Ossulston estate tracing

Behind the facade

Lost
Empathy
Conflicting
Neglect
Isolation
Health is
wealth

This Journal focuses on gentrification as a process of displacement, impacting social housing, individual's physical and psychological health, and trauma within the environment. It is important to understand that gentrification has us as its victims. It's now a reoccurring theme that happens around us everyday, leading to our towns, neighbourhood and community to quietly vanish without our knowledge. As areas become too expensive for people to stay, buildings, neighbourhoods, and communities are evicted from their refuges.

This process eliminates memories, histories, and generations, leading to displacement, loss of identity, and isolation for both people and the city. "Research on gentrification suggests that displaced individuals often experience dislocation and alienation, contributing to their mental health deterioration."² (Atkinson, 2000). Understanding gentrification as a displacement process is critical because it exposes structural disparities that drive long-term inhabitants out of their homes, affecting community cohesiveness and access to resources.

² Smith, G.S., Breakstone, H., Dean, L.T. et al. (2020) 'Impacts of Gentrification on Health in the US: a Systematic Review of the Literature', J Urban Health 97, pp. 845–856.

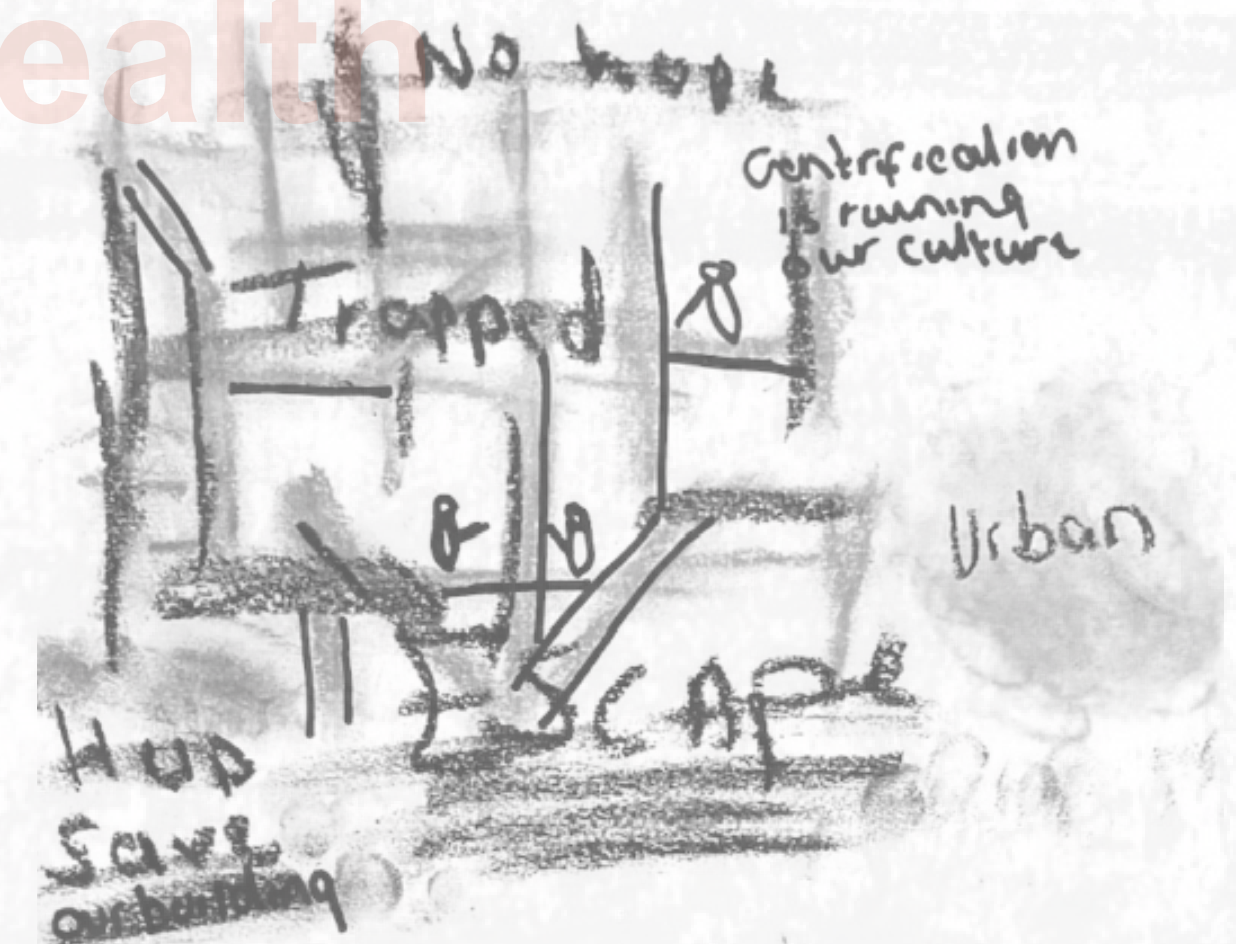


Fig 4: Charcole sketch done by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- the effects of gentrification

Gentrification's true face Of Displacement

My personal displacement journey has led to me to discover the true face of gentrification. Walthamstow became a location I once adored due to its diversity, inexpensive housing, and richness in cultural tradition. However, as it undergoes gentrification, it is becoming a trendier location with growing property values, upmarket facilities, and a demographic shift. High-rise residential buildings and upscale retail establishments have been constructed where playgrounds I once played in formerly stood. Buildings that brought back memories of my early years, such as The Mall, Walthamstow, were now replaced with opulent structures. Whereas this is good for the local economy, I no longer recognise the neighbourhood where I once called home. Neighbours who I grew up with are being forced out because they can no longer afford sky-high rents. I learnt more about this subject when I visited Somers Town and saw how the neighbourhood was transitioning and becoming more unwelcoming, individualistic, and dull due to the scaffolding covering social estates, and shops that were deemed outdated and vandalised with graffiti.



Fig 5: Neighbours house engulfed by scaffolding photograph done by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- gentrifying neighbours

Through my experience, this then led to the questioning of: how does the loss of social housing affect displaced residents access to community resources and necessary services? What causes displacement in neighbourhoods that are gentrifying? How do newcomers and existing inhabitants view gentrification and the preservation of cultural heritage differently? What consequences does displacement have over time on one's physical and emotional well being?

Trauma

Shift

Truth

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unrecognisable

Abstract

"Gentrification is defined as a void in the neighbourhood, a city, or a culture. In this sense, gentrification is a trauma created by the entrance of huge sums of capital into a place and the resulting damage."³ Gentrification has forced people, buildings, communities and neighbourhoods out of their refuge. This has caused the communities within society whose homes and livelihood are directly affected by the process of gentrification to become more displaced and because of this, buildings, individuals, communities and the environment are losing their identity and becoming more isolated. Out with the old, in with the new is how we now see and define gentrification. "Housing is not enough but it needs to come first"⁴ and so as designers, we need to question how the loss and availability of social housing influence access to essential services and community resources for displaced residents? What are the primary factors driving displacement of long term residents in gentrifying neighbourhoods? How can we mitigate these risks? How can the design celebrate and preserve the cultural heritage of the neighbourhood? All of these questions that I will examine within this journal, will lead to an understanding of how and why gentrification is a process of displacement. Although gentrification does not always result in displacement, it has a negative impact on the poor and those who depend on welfare.

Throughout this paper, I will talk about gentrification as a process of displacement and how it impacts social housing, individuals physical and psychological health and how it manifests as trauma in the environment both invisibly and physically.

³ Moskowitz, P. (2017) *How to kill a city: gentrification, inequality, and the fight for the neighborhood*. New York: Nation Books. pp. 5.

⁴ Celeghin, G. (2024) 'Housing Is Not Enough / Not Enough Housing – How we are making a difference in Camden, Levitt-berstein, 26 June. Available at: <https://www.levittberstein.co.uk/nowhousing-is-not-enough-not-enough-housing-how-we-are-making-a-difference-in-camden/> (Accessed: 17 October 2024).

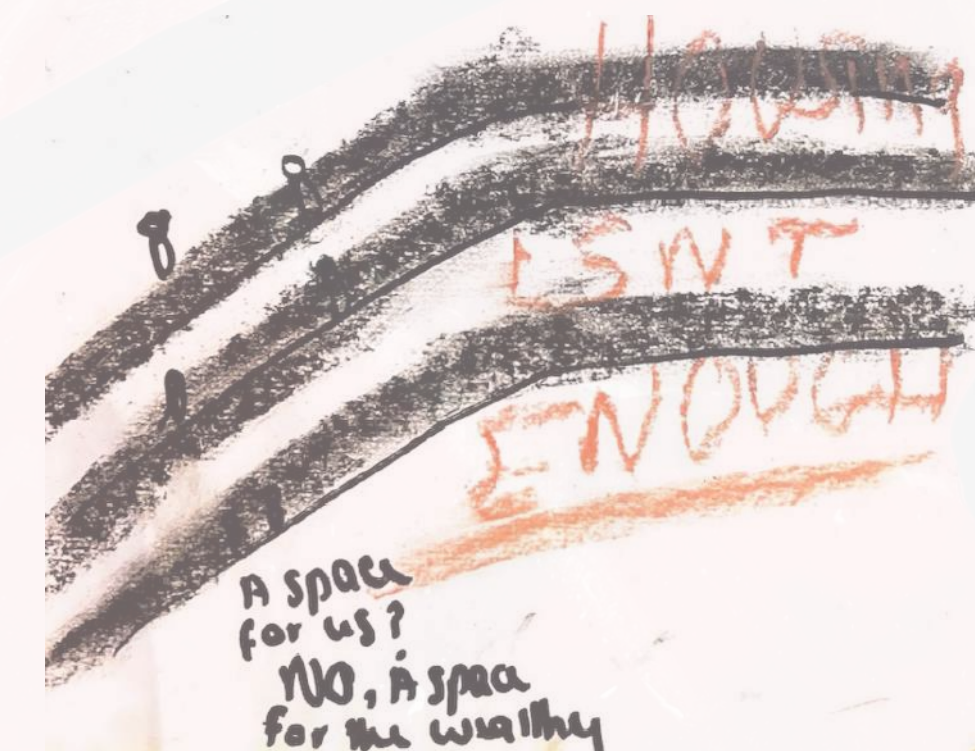


Figure 6: Charcole sketch done by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024) - Housing isnt enough

Void Trauma Damage

Research Strand: Health through empathy & lost communities

My investigation began by visiting the depths of Somers town with an observation of the scaffolding that engulfed the remaining structures, notably the council blocks. St Mary's Church, a place where many long-term residents grew up and had been a part of its story, are witnessing their refuge, safe space, and "home" decimated due to gentrification. The displacement is a result of an inflow of rich residents and rising rents, causing long-term residents to feel uprooted, "People in Somers Town have poorer mental and physical health and die earlier than people in many other parts of Camden... 18% of people over 18 have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression."⁵ The dilapidated structures do not represent the government's empathy for the people who created their communities.

5 Somers Town Community Association (2023). Somers town area based strategy. Available at: <https://www.somersetown.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/STFN-2030-Area-Based-Strategy-final-1-1.pdf> (Accessed: 11 November 2024).

London city's gentrification may improve infrastructure but also makes residents feel isolated and lose their identity. Those affected have recieved no support due to the crumbling housing facilities and neighbourhood sanctuaries. The dismantling of support places and the inability of GPs to treat patients due to heavy workloads further exacerbate the issue of gentrification, leading to the displacement of long term residents. Behind the facade, this is gentrification's true face of displacement.



Figure 7: Somers Town medical centre by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)
Figure 8: Writing done by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024), Health is wealth)
Figure 9: Collage of scaffolding buildings by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Somers Town.

Lost communities
Lack of empathy
Conflicting
Neglect
Isolation

Collection of findings



Figure 10: Ossulston estate by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Somers Town.
Figure 11: Estate by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024), Health is wealth)
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Figure 13: High-rise building by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Somers Town.
Figure 14: Health poster Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Somers Town.

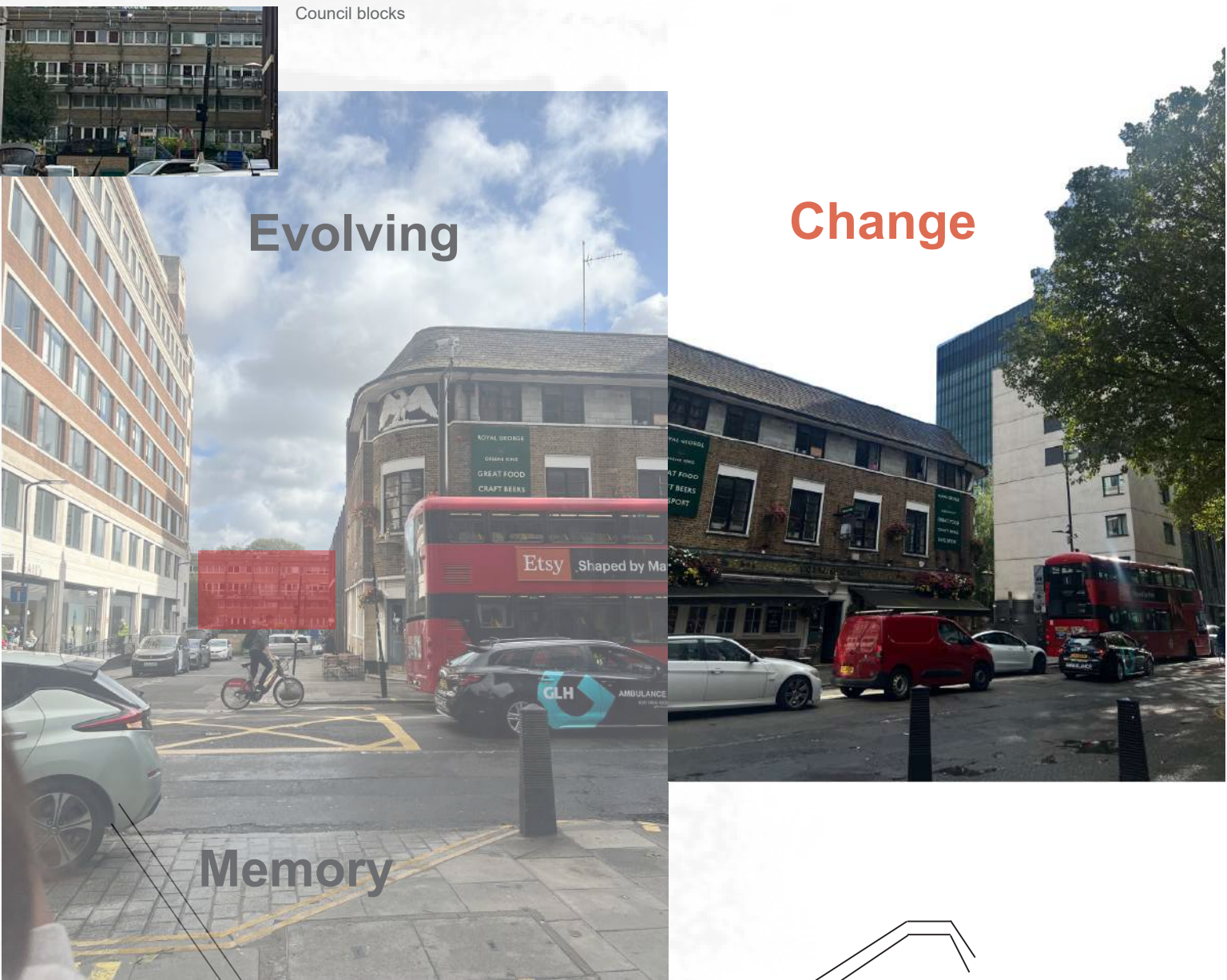


Figure 15: Collage of Eversholt Street by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Somers Town.

Council blocks in Euston, Kings Cross, and Somers Town are being demolished and rebuilt with high-rise flats. This is a problem since it causes the community to separate and move on, leaving behind memories.

Loss of identity
Memories upbrining
Erase
isolation

Key themes

I will investigate the topic by looking at the three themes gentrification, displacement and trauma.

Gentrification is the process of “transforming working-class or vacant areas into middle-class residential or commercial areas, often displacing long-term residents and altering the social and cultural landscape.”⁶ Displacement occurs when “individuals are forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, or disasters.”⁷ It disrupts people's lives and erodes the cultural and social fabric of communities, leading to a loss of heritage and identity. Displacement is a symptom of social justice, economic inequality, and the need for inclusive urban planning that prioritises the well-being of all residents.

Gentrification causes trauma in the environment, both physically and silently. In Loretta Lees book; gentrification, “It erodes community bonds and cultural identity, leaving displaced residents with feelings of loss, anxiety, and alienation.”⁸ Physically, it transforms the environment by demolishing familiar locations, introducing new projects, and changing local culture, contributing to a sense of seperation and loss among uprooted individuals. This twofold effect highlights the long lasting damage caused by gentrification, both physically and emotionally.

Gentrification

By looking at these key terms, I will examine three social housing case studies that address gentrification as a process of displacement and its effects on the environment, community, and overall health. The first case study's aim is to examine how and why The Balfcon Tower, a once-affordable building that was converted into luxurious flats, is seen as gentrified. My second case study will focus on the Ossulston Estate, a social housing program that is separated into many buildings and offers a variety of apartments for individuals and families. It will also examine how and why this program is classified as ungentrified. The last case study I'll cover is the Brunswick Centre, which was originally designed to have residential apartments, commercial spaces, and common areas, but is now surrounded by significant investment and renovation, resulting in higher property values and greater demand for homes. I will ask if we can classify it as gentrified, whether gentrification is a process that has occurred there, or whether it has resisted gentrification. This essay will examine the detrimental effects of gentrification on our society while also speculating about its potential benefits.

Trauma

6 Lees, L., Slater, T. and Wyly, E.K. (2008) *Gentrification*. 1st Edition. New York: Routledge. pp. XV.
7 GNDP (2024). Displacement terminology. Available at: <https://www.gndp.org/displacement-terminology/> (Accessed: 17 October 2024).
8 Co-Pilot (2024) Co-Pilot response to Kaleena Creary's prompt 'how does gentrification manifests trauma in the environment invisibly'. 20th October. Available at: <https://copilot.micromsft.com/?msocid=0800c475b79b62d2371ed646b65063e4> [Accessed 20 Oct.2024].

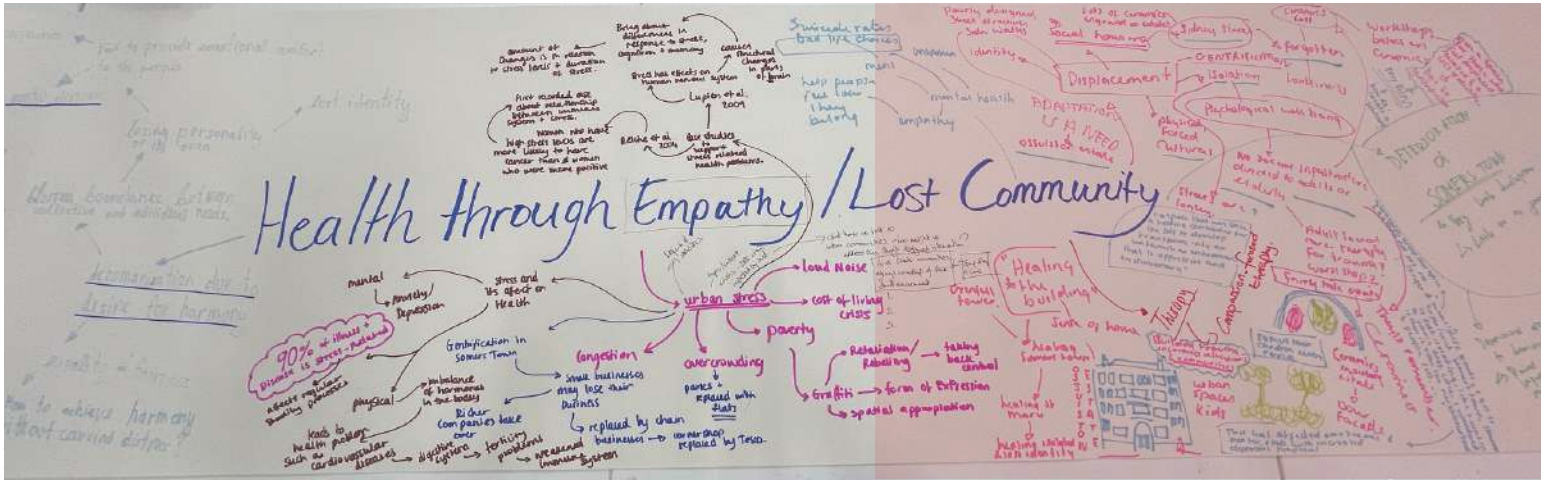


Figure 16: Mind map done by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024) - Health through empathy/lost community.

The Balfcon Tower :The high rise of Displacement

Gentrification has played a significant role in transforming London's urban landscape over the last several decades. This phenomenon, which was once seen as a solution to urban decline, has now become a way of pushing out many working-class residents from their neighbourhood.

Balfcon Tower, located in Tower Hamlets, “a predominantly working class area that suffered from over crowding and poor living conditions”⁹ is a dramatic illustration of how gentrification causes the physical, social and economic displacement of long-term inhabitants. “Originally constructed as a part of a postwar social housing experiment”¹⁰, the tower's metamorphosis into a luxury building provides a critical prism through which we may study the negative consequences of gentrification of marginalised populations.

This case study will explore the reasons why the Balfcon Tower is a symbol of displacement, investigating its history, physical transformation and social consequences, both for residents and the broader urban landscape.



Figure 17: David Roberts, BalfconTower, Rowlett Street,London, 1971 (Photographed) (RIBA Library Photographs Collection).

9 Tower Hamlets Council (2015). Deprivation in Tower Hamlets. Available at: https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/income_poverty_and_welfare/Indices_of_Deprivation_Low_resolution.pdf (Accessed 6 November 2024).
10 Roberts, D. (2017) 'Make Public: Performing Public Housing in Erno Goldfinger's Balfcon Tower', The Journal of Architecture, 22(1), pp. 125. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2016.1276096>

Erno Goldfinger designed the Balfcon Tower in the 1960s, at a period when “council housing reaches new peaks in provision and height, but the towers were often system-built and engineer designed”¹¹

The 27 story residential skyscraper was designed as a progressive solution to urban overpopulation, focusing on high-rise, high-density living to accommodate the growing population. It was one of several Brutalist structures designed to “address housing shortages and provide modern living spaces for working-class families, as part of a broader brutalist strategy.”¹²

However, from the start, Balfcon Tower encountered enormous problems. Balfcon Tower, initially occupied by Greater London council residents, faced significant challenges due to maintenance issues and societal deterioration. “Known as the “tower of terror” due to its dramatic architecture and harsh life style, the tower was unsuitable for families and socialisation in high-density areas.”¹³ Its architecture divided families by floor level and included antiseptic corridors, which did not promote community. Maintenance issues, inadequate insulation, and issues with heating and elevators contributed to the tower's failure as a housing concept.



Figure 18: Georgi P. (1979), Nova Britanska Arhitektura, Arhitektonska Edizija, Novoselo.

11 Roberts, D. (2015) *Balfcon Tower: a building archive*. Available at: <https://www.balfcontower.org/> (Accessed: 02 November 2024).
12 Braghieri, N. (2019) 'The Towers of Terror': A Critical Analysis of Erno Goldfinger's Balfcon and Trelick Towers. *Urban Planning*, 4(3), pp. 226. Availbale at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2300258365/fulltextPDF/F662E-A749345E7PQ/1?accountid=12441&source=Scholarly%20Journals> (Accessed 02 November 2024).
13 Roberts, D. (2017) 'Making public: performing publichousing in Erno Goldfinger's Balfcon Tower' The journal of architecture, 22(1), pp 123-150. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.1080/13602365.2016.1276096?needAccess=true>.

Fragments



Figure 19: Justin Tallis, Borough of tower hamlets, London, 2016 (photographed), (AFP photo) independent

Balfon's height and style was seen in films as dangerous and aggressive, and its neglect was highlighted through graffiti and abandoned cars. Phil Mitchell, a character from the British Television series Eastenders commented "Look at this place, how do people live in this filth?... This whole estate is a disgrace."¹⁴ which reflects the a common theme of social criticism within the shows of working class communities. "Graffiti, vandalism, litter and decay may not affect our safety but they do combine to make an area feel insecure."¹⁵ This shows how the estate wanted change physically but invisibly, the impact lead to displacement and trauma on the residents.

¹⁴ Roberts, D. (2017) 'Making public: performing publichousing in Erno Goldfinger's Balfon Tower' The Journal of architecture, 22(1), pp 123-150. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline-com.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/doi/epdf/10.1080/13602365.2016.1276096?needAccess=true>.

¹⁵ Nash, V. and Christie, I. (2003). *Making Sense of Community*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research. pp.1.



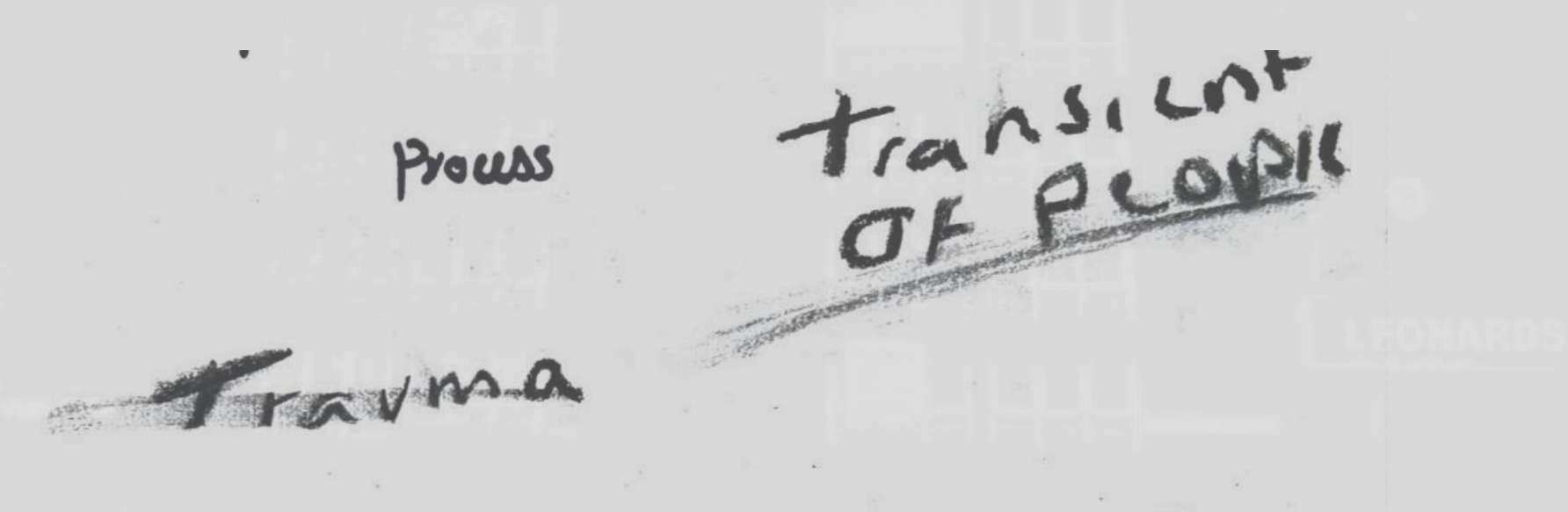
Figure 20: Balfon Social club, Borough of tower hamlets, London, 2016 (photographed)

To resolve the displacement and trauma within and around the estate, Goldfinger designed towers with "fluid movement, connecting services shafts with suspended walkways to create a romantic image of moving relationships and neighbourliness...his towers, which are shaped like an ordered shellm are essential to the human drama because they convey the emotional impact of architecture and the relationship between people and space."¹⁶ As a designer, this is significant because it maintains the architectural significance of the building while also enchancing living conditions and social areas.

However, the original attempt to sell the apartments privately also failed, leaving "139 empty units and prompting the decsion to turn them into rented homes."¹⁷ These issues exposed the limitations of high-rise social housing and laid the groundwork for the gentrification process that would unfold.

¹⁶ Chan, L. (2012) 'Building of the month', c20society, October. Available at: <https://c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/balfon-tower> (Accessed: 02 November 2024).

¹⁷ Jessel, E. (2023) 'It's a Scandal: How Property Developers Failed to Sell a Single Flat in Balfon Tower' Novaramedia, 04 August. Available at: <https://novaramedia.com/2023/08/04/its-a-scandal-how-property-developers-failed-to-sell-a-single-flat-in-balfon-tower/> (Accessed 06 November 2024).



The term gentrification refers to “transforming working-class or vacant areas into middle-class residential or commercial areas, often displacing long-term residents and altering the social and cultural landscape.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Lees, L., Slater, T. and Wyly, E.K. (2008) *Gentrification*. 1st Edotoon. New York: Routledge. pp. XV.

Balfon Tower, once part of a social housing initiative, was “sold off to private developers in 2015 as part of a broader regeneration strategy for the area”.¹⁹ The refurbishment involved modernising the interiors with contemporary designs and high-quality materials, making the flats more appealing to wealthier residents. The surrounding areas were gentrified with upscale amnenities and services, further attracting a new, affluent population. “The majority of us desire to live in an area where neighbours are a source of terror.”²⁰ However, I believe this leads to displacement of long term residents and manifests physical trauma as the referbishment, while preserving brutalist architecture, has altered the character of the neighbourhood, therefore, the cultural heritage of the area is being erased due to the influx of wealthy residents turning it into their new playground.

¹⁹ Roberts, D. (2015) *Balfon Tower: a building archive*. Available at: <https://www.balfrontower.org/document/96/press-cuttings-2015/> (Accessed: 02 November 2024).

²⁰ Nash, V. and Christie, I. (2003). *Making Sense of Community*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research. pp.1.

The gentrification process led to the displacement of the original residents, who could no longer afford the increased costs associated with living in Balfon Tower. The loss of social housing significantly impacted the community, disrupting social networks and support systems. Having social networks and supporting systems is important because it eliminates the feelings of isolation and gives individuals a feeling of belonging and support. The shift from public to private ownership led to rising rents and property values in the area, pushing out many of the former residents. British government Tony Blair (1997-2010) claimed in the new labour period that “bringing the middle class back to cities can reduce socio-spatial segregation and strengthen disadvantaged neighbourhoods' social tissue.”²¹ However, this potrayal of gentrification as positive leads to long-term displacement of lower-income residents due to the influx of wealthier residents and rising housing rent costs. The changes to the physical space, including the towers conversion from social housing into exclusive apartments, are a clear reflection of broader gentrification trends in East London.

²¹ Lees, L., Slater, T. and Wyly, E.K. (2008) *Gentrification*. 1st Edition. New York: Routledge. pp. 199.



Figure 21: Rab Harling, Balfon Tower's fenestration: before & after, 2017.

Figure 22: Balfon apartment, BalfonTower, Rowlett Street, London, 2006 (photographed)

Terror
Erased
Segregation
Influx of wealthy

“Poor housing costs the NHS in England £1.4 billion per year, which excludes “exported” and social expenditures owing to days off work or out of school.”²² This amount is definitely an underestimate since it does not take into consideration the consequences of substandard housing on mental health and well-being. The Tower of terror caused significant physical and psychological health issues for its residents. The poor design and maintenance of the tower, including poor heating, dampness, and air circulation, contributed to respiratory illnesses and discomfort. The utilitarian design of the tower, characterised by cold concrete and limited natural light, further exacerbated these issues. “Our surroundings have a huge impact on our emotions and mental states”²³ and so as designers, we must take into consideration “well-designed house with plenty of room, natural light, and soothing hues because it impacts individuals mental health being for the better.”²⁴ As the tower became home to wealthier residents, the social housing units were converted into high-end apartments with modern amenities. However, this causes long term residents to move to less affordable housing causing “increased stress, mental health problems, and physical health deterioration.”²⁵ (Marcuse, 1985). The psychological impact of displacement was also significant, as Balforn Tower represented a place of identity and community for many residents. Losing this connection can lead to feelings of loss, social isolation, and anxiety.

Residents Of Balforn Tower are divided on the gentrification process. While some appreciate the improved living conditions and safety, “a completely different environment, maybe somewhere with a garden”²⁶ others mourn the loss of their community and sense of belonging. One resident expressed “I am writing to ask you to reassure me about my home and our community”²⁷ indicating that financial gain is prioritised over long-term residents’ well-being.

This psychological trauma can show as invisible displacement, in which peoples’ emotional and social relocation is less evident than physical displacement but just as detrimental.

22 Battersby, S. and Pointing, J. (2019) *Statutory Nuisance and Residential Property*. 1st Edition. England: Routledge. pp. 2.

23 Bedford, D. (2024) ‘Design For Well-Being: The Importance Of Healthy Homes’ , Pettyson, no date. Available at: <https://www.pettyson.co.uk/about-us/our-blog/975-healthy-homes> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

24 Bedford, D. (2024) ‘Design For Well-Being: The Importance Of Healthy Homes’ , Pettyson, no date. Available at: <https://www.pettyson.co.uk/about-us/our-blog/975-healthy-homes> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

25 Slater, T. (2009) ‘Missing Marcuse: On gentrification and displacement’, City, 13(2-3), pp.292–311. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810902982250>

26 ELL Audio. (2014) ‘How did people take the news that they were being evicted and what do you think about the situation’. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/ell-audio/how-did-people-take-the-news-that-they-were-being-evicted-and-what-do-you-think-about-the-situation> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

27 Roberts, D. (2015) *Balforn Tower: a building archive*. Available at: <https://www.balfrontower.org/document/96/press-cuttings-2015/> (Accessed: 02 November 2024).



Figure 23: Balfron apartment, BalfronTower, Rowlett Street, London, 2006 (photographed).



Figure 24: Balfron apartment, BalfronTower, Rowlett Street, London, 2022.

The Balfron Tower case highlights the intricate and frequently negative elements of gentrification as a displacement process. The structure has undergone noticeable physical improvements, but there is a substantial cost. Long-term inhabitants’ relocation affects their physical and emotional well-being, upends social networks, and destroys cultural legacy. Although there are some positive aspects to Balfron Tower’s gentrification, the most disadvantaged communities eventually suffer as a result. This case study underscores the need for policies that balance urban development with the preservation of community and cultural legacy.

Shift

Ossulston Estate: The last refuge from Gentrification



Fig 25: Kaleena Creary, Ossulston estate, Phoneix Rd, London, 2024 (photographed).



Fig 26: Kaleena Creary, Ossulston estate clothes hanging on balconies, Phoneix Rd, London, 2024 (photographed).

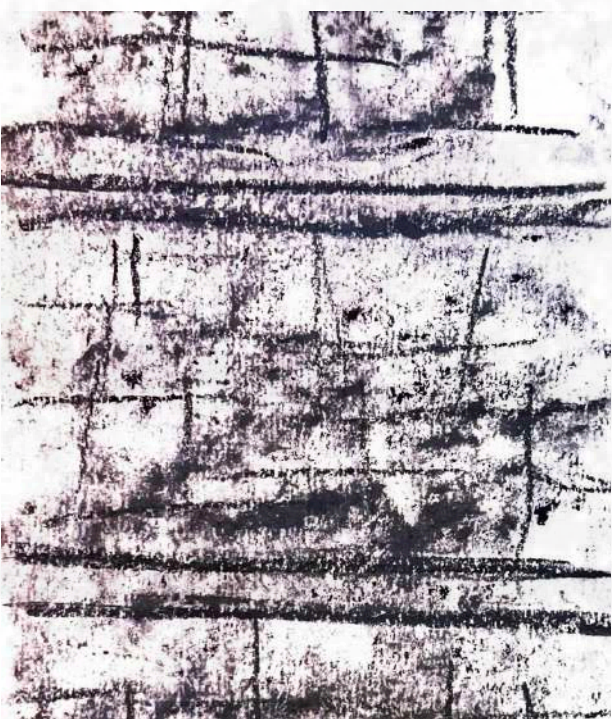


Fig 27: Charcole sketch by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Ossulston estate tracing

The Ossulston Estate, although located in a rapidly gentrifying area, remains a relatively untouched example of social housing. By examining its history, physical conditions, and social context, this study seeks to understand how gentrification leads to displacement even in places that are not yet physically gentrified.

The social housing scheme offers affordable housing but has substandard living conditions. The scheme features archways, courts and gallery entrances that create a sense of identity among residents. “It uses a serpentine planning strategy, allowing for complex interactions between spaces and the city. The gallery also features a bow that doubles as a pram parking place, demonstrating how the galleries serve as extensions of residences.”²⁸

When visiting the estate, I found that utilitarian facade, with its brick construction and symmetrical layouts gave a bleak and uninviting appearance. The lack of decorative elements and the visible wear and tear over the years contribute to the preception of neglect and drabness. Whilst it has a huge court yard, there was a lack of green spaces which is important within a residential area as they “improve air quality and mitigate the effects of heatwaves by lowering urban temperatures”²⁹ which improves our mental health well-being. This stark, functional design, whilst historically significant, I find often lacks the aesthetic appeal that might be found in more modern or well-maintained buildings such as its physical deterioration internally and externally which shows the trauma in the environment, but its the worn out exterior that makes it stand out from the surrounding modernised estates. The estate highlights the neighbourhood’s distinctive features by showcasing inexpensive housing alternatives and the preservation of historical character as a social housing complex.

I would view the Ossulston estate as ungentrified because it remains a social housing area, resisting the gentrification forces observed in its surrounding neighbourhoods. Gentrification is reffered as “...mass evictions, about violence, about the decimation of decades-old cultures”³⁰ however, I find that these trends have yet to affect the estate. In a time when gentrification causes people to forget this, the sights of clothes hanging on balconies symbolises communal life, resiliency, and a sense of home which is good for individuals mental well-being as they don’t feel isolated or displaced. That’s what makes this estate so special in a time of gentrification.

28 ComingHome. (2017) ‘Ossulston Estate 1927-31 G. Topham Forrest’, WordPress, 16 November. Available at: <https://acgthoesibh.wordpress.com/2017/11/16/ossulston-estate-1927-31-g-topham-forrest-london/> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

29 Scott, C. (2015) A brief guide to the benefits of urban green spaces. Available at: https://leaf.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/86/2015/10/LEAF_benefits_of_urban_green_space_2015_upd.pdf (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

30 Moskowitz, P. (2017) *How to kill a city : gentrification, inequality, and the fight for the neighborhood*. New York: Nation Books. pp. 4.

Ossulston Estate, is situated in the London Borough of Camden, a central area that has experienced considerable gentrification over the past few decades. The estate, built between 1927 and 1931 by the London Country Council, is a multi-storey council estate located in Chaltan Street in Somers Town. Described as a “remarkable council estate designed to provide inexpensive housing.”³¹ It was designed as part of a broader initiative to “provide social housing for working-class families, particularly those displaced by wartime bombings and urban renewal.”³² The estate was designed with the “functionalist ideals of post-war public housing”³³, characterised by utilitarian concrete buildings and open spaces intended to accommodate large numbers of residents. A modified version of Topham Forrest’s initial ideas, the estate’s “final layout called for the construction of five storeys of working-class apartments above two floors of better apartments with offices and stores at the base.”³⁴ By constructing distinct entrances, he intended to segregate the working and non-working classes. “The working-class housing would be managed by the LLC, while the other housing would be privately owned”³⁵ which is a similar model to much newly built housing today, where there is often a requirment to include a percentage of social housing. However, these ideas were rejected, and the six-storey buildings were to house exclusively working-class residents. The now Grade II listed estate has experienced long years of neglect. In the 1980s, the Camden Journal and St Pancras Chronical reported on “renters’ displeasure with their residences, which included drainage concerns, decaying stores, and vacant apartments. Squatters moved into vacant flats, and eviction orders were issued after obtaining rehabilitation funding in 1984.”³⁶ This led to tenants protesting against the inhuman living conditions.

Over time, however, Ossulston Estate has come to symbolise the challenges facing social housing in London, especially with the rising property values around Camden. Despite the broader gentrification of surrounding areas, the estate itself has not undergone significant redevelopment or investment, which has contributed to its classification as ungentrified, which I will be exploring more within this case study.

31 Dreams, M. (2013) ‘The Ossulston Estate, St Pancras: the English Karl Marx-Hof?’, WordPress, 05 February. Available at: <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2013/02/05/the-ossulston-estate-st-pancras-the-english-karl-marx-hof/> (Accessed: 03 November 2024).

32 Dreams, M. (2013) ‘The Ossulston Estate, St Pancras: the English Karl Marx-Hof?’, WordPress, 05 February. Available at: <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2013/02/05/the-ossulston-estate-st-pancras-the-english-karl-marx-hof/> (Accessed: 03 November 2024).

33 Dreams, M. (2013) ‘The Ossulston Estate, St Pancras: the English Karl Marx-Hof?’, WordPress, 05 February. Available at: <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2013/02/05/the-ossulston-estate-st-pancras-the-english-karl-marx-hof/> (Accessed: 03 November 2024).

34 London Metropolitan Archives (no date) *Ossulston Estate, 1930*, [online] Available at: <https://www.layersoflondon.org/map/records/ossulston-estate-1930> (Accessed: 05 November 2024).

35 London Metropolitan Archives (no date) *Ossulston Estate, 1930*, [online] Available at: <https://www.layersoflondon.org/map/records/ossulston-estate-1930> (Accessed: 05 November 2024).

36 Leslie, E. (2024) ‘Social Housing-lost/Found: Somers Town’. A space for us, no date. Available at: <https://lostfound.aspaceforus.club/sample-page/un-common-people/social-housing/> (Accessed: 08 November 2024).

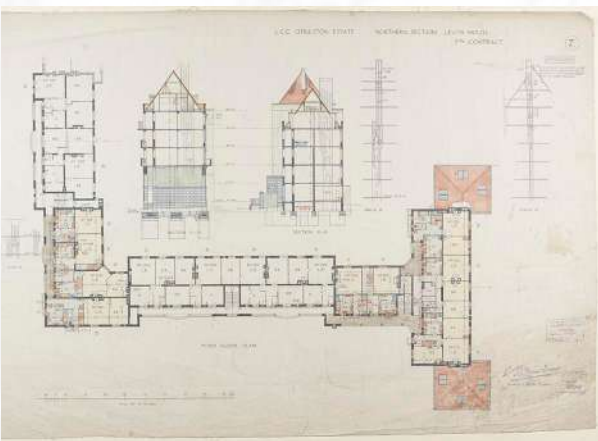


Figure 28: Levita House, Ossulston Estate, St Pancras London, 1934 (drawing) (London County Council collections).

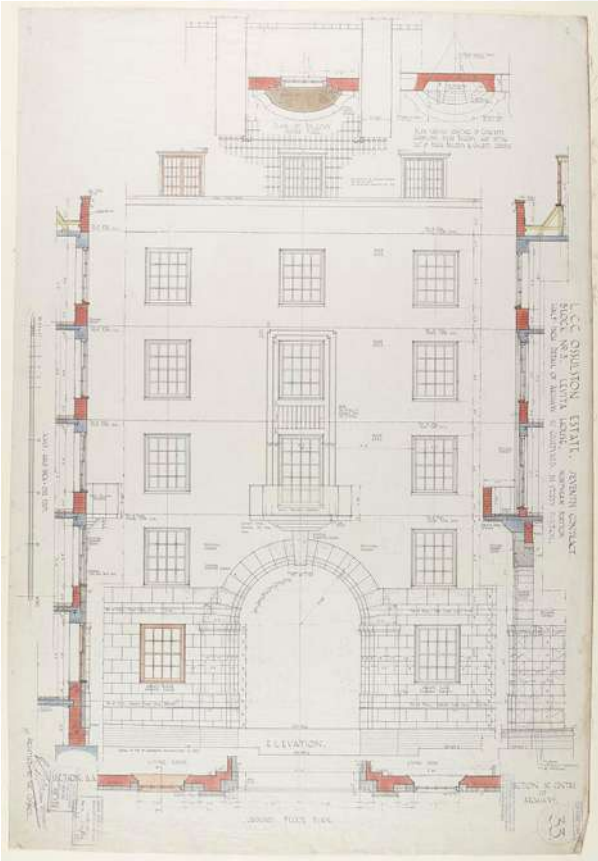


Figure 29: Levita House, Ossulston Estate, St Pancras London, 1934 (drawing) (London County Council collections).

The flats within Ossulston estate are often overcrowded, small and poorly maintained, with issues like “dampness, poor insulation, and outdated heating systems.”³⁷ The concrete facades and poorly maintained communal areas reinforce social stigma associating the estate with poverty and neglect. “These conditions contribute to physical health problems, particularly respiratory issues, and exacerbate psychological stress.”³⁸ This stigma, paired with the physical surroudings, perpetuates a cycle of trauma within the environment and marginalisation from which many people struggle to escape. The external and internal conditions of the estate reflect a larger narrative of neglect from both local government and broader market forces. “Local communities must be consulted regarding their area’s regeneration, and this must go beyond participatory tokenism. However, low income communities rarely have the education, networks, or funds to play a prominent role in such involvement.”³⁹ This suggests that developers and private investors arent interested in investing in the Ossulston estate because its physical state doesn’t meet society’s expectations. As a result, in this case, the community is taking the lead in territorial decision-making instead of the local government, preserving the identity of their neighbourhood.

37 Cherry, B. and Pevsner, N. (2002) *London 4: North Pevsner Architectural Guides: Buildings of England*. Reprint edition. New Haven London: Yale University Press. pp. 381.

38 Kulakiewicz, A. (2022) *Housing and health: a reading list*. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9414/>.

39 Lees, L., Slater, T. and Wyly, E.K. (2008) *Gentrification*. 1st Edition. New York: Routledge. pp. xxiv.

The estate’s physical status, which includes ageing buildings, inadequate upkeep, and a lack of contemporary services, makes it unappealing to developers and private investors. This is beneficial invisibly for the environment as it doesn’t take away the identity of the buildings the community built. However “deteriorating buildings, neglected public spaces, and visible signs of poverty such as litter, graffiti, and vandalism manifests trauma physically”⁴⁰ as it reflects the underlying social and economic challenges faced by the community. This is evident with Ossulston’s appearance, where the residents experience health issues related to poor living conditions. It could also be argued that invisibly, the stress and anxiety of potential displacement can lead to mental problems and a sense of insecurity.

I believe the Ossulston Estate is experiencing progressive displacement as a result of social, economic, and environmental degradation, rather than the dramatic changes associated with gentrification. Despite being disregarded in Camden’s greater gentrification, the estate is nonetheless ungentrified due to its physical status and unnoticed character.

40 Prendiville, L. (2024). ‘Understanding 17 symptoms of C-PTSD: Frameworks and healing’, Counselling-directory.org.uk, 03 January. Available at: <https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/articles/understanding-17-symptoms-of-c-ptsd-frameworks-and-healing> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

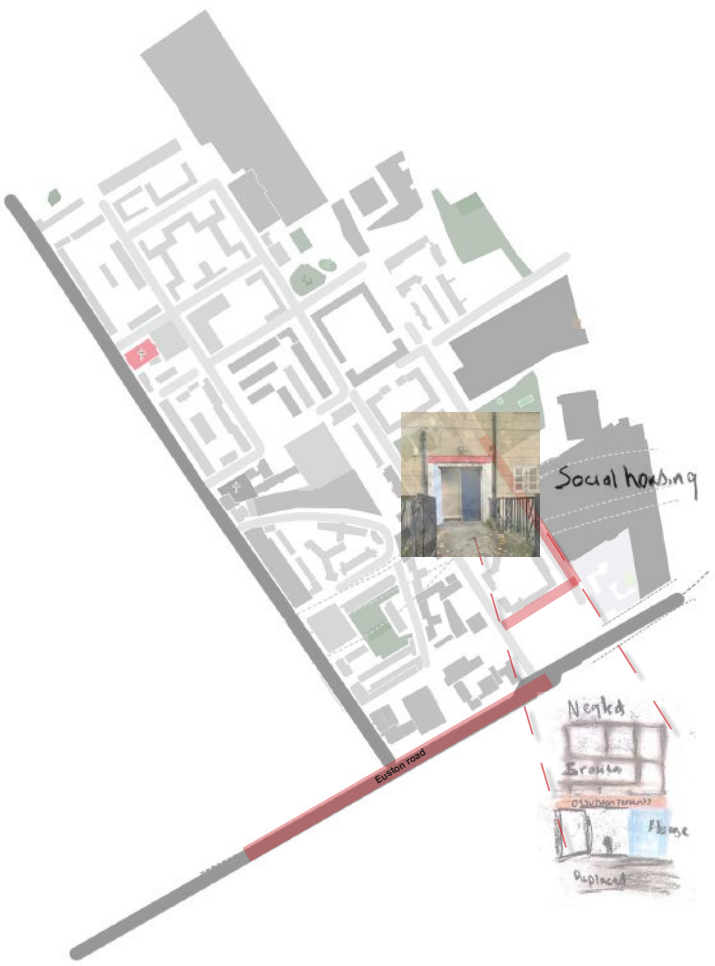


Fig 30: Site map by Kaleena creary, (Creary, K (2024)- Somers Town.

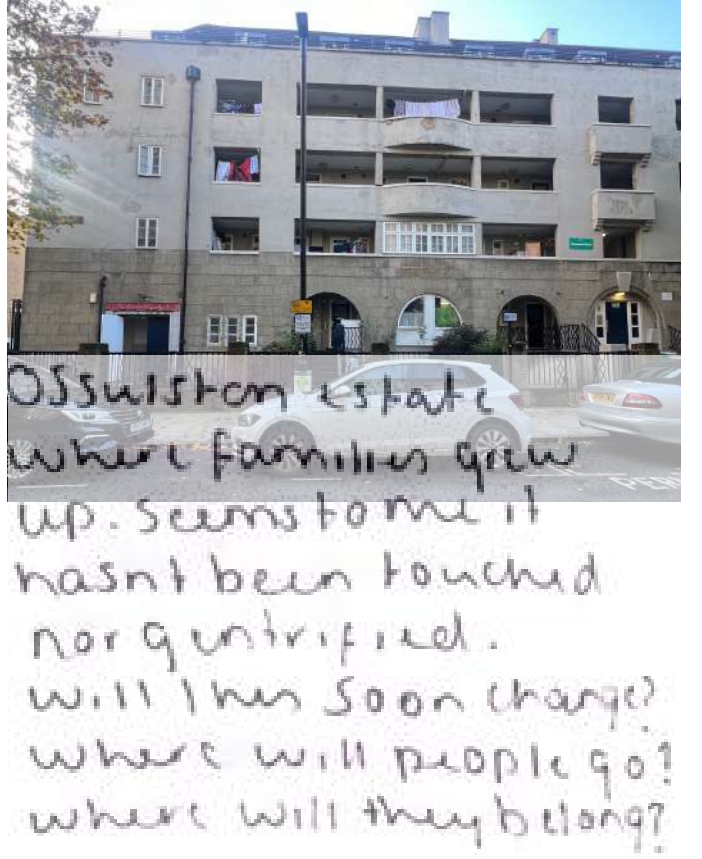


Fig 31: Kaleena Creary, Ossulston estate, Phoneix Rd, London,2024 (photographed).

Fig 32: Site writing by Kaleena creary, (Creary, K (2024)- Ossulston estate.

Brunswick centre Resisting gentrification?

The Brunswick Centre is a resilient social housing development that has defied gentrification pressures despite being situated in a rapidly gentrifying region.

The Brunswick Centre, “a distinctive Brutalist style with exposed concrete, angular lines, and large open spaces.”⁴¹ has sparked mixed opinions. Whilst some may view it as an “architectural masterpiece, others find it harsh or imposing.”⁴² When visiting the site, I observed clear signs of both trauma and gentrification. The courtyards and walkways showed wear and tear, with cracked paving surfaces that suggests history of neglect or underinvestment. I became overwhelmed by the sheer number of flats in front of me. The dreary grey tones expressed the city’s physical wellness in the surroundings. I observed that certain sections of the complex were less maintained compared to newer furbish parts and this was evident on the facade of the housing complexes, showing physical trauma within the environment. This made me question is the Brunswick Centre being gentrified or resisiting gentrification?

⁴¹ Dekker, D.T. (2019) ‘The Brunswick Model of social housing provision’, Urban strategy lab, 04 January. Available at: <https://urbanstrategylab.com/the-brunswick-model-of-social-housing-provision/> (Accessed 06 November 2024).

⁴² Dekker, D.T. (2019) ‘The Brunswick Model of social housing provision’, Urban strategy lab, 04 January. Available at: <https://urbanstrategylab.com/the-brunswick-model-of-social-housing-provision/> (Accessed 06 November 2024).



Questioning is the Brunswick centre gentrified? Is it in the process of being gentrified? Or has it not been gentrified at all? What is the impact of the shopping centre?

Fig 34: Sketch by (Creary, K (2024)- Brunsiwck centre drawing.

Currently at the Brunswick centre I feel a bit strange being here not sure why. I think its the huge brutalist style. I dont like it. Im walking through the centre. Just went to eat a waffle. Very cheap. Now outside. Still see old stores. Some new. Dont have these in my town. Lots of parks around. Visiting one right now. I can focus. Dont really get this feeling of relaxation nowadays. I like it.

Fig 33: Site writing by (Creary, K (2024)- Brunsiwck centre impression.



Fig 35: Kaleena Creary, Brunswick Centre, Bernard Street, London,2024 (photographed).

The long, open-ended shopping corridor was a bold urban experiment. The modernist mixed-use development in Camden, London, was designed by architect Patrick Hodgkinson in the mid 1960s, where he created it as a “low rise substitute for high-density housing, posing a creative challenge to the then dominant high rise building regulations.”⁴³ Located between Brunswick Square and Russell Square, it aimed to provide affordable housing with retail spacesand leisure facilities. Initially, it replaced dilapidated Georgian-era terrace housing and aimed to offer a modern, mixed-use development that included residential flats and commercial units, with a shopping street running through the middle. Some of the concepts that would be carried over to the Brunswick Centre were set by this unbuilt low-rise development: “no social segregation, a search for low-cost, high-density building types, an open space for each unit, and a synthesis of scale with the surroundings.”⁴⁴

Above a retail strip, the building was first a private construction with 19 different kinds of apartments. However, “the project’s finanacial viability disappeared after the 1964 Labour government changed it to council flats.”⁴⁵ In an uncommon long-term agreement with the Center’s owners, the London Borough of Camden agreed to lease all of the apartments for 99 years at below-market rates. Camden then rents the apartments out as affordable housing. “This arrangement, known as the Brunswick Model, has helped preserve a balanced neighbourhood while avoiding gentrification.”⁴⁶ As a result, upscale stores left the property. “A significant renovation project was undertaken in 2006, restoring the buildings to their originally planned cream colour and revitalising the commercial areas.”⁴⁷ The complex, characterised by exposed concrete and large public areas, stands in contrast to the more traditionally styled buildings surrounding it.

Despite the gentrification happening around Camden, the Brunswick Centre remains primarily a social housing development, with no significant redevelopment or market driven transformation.

⁴³ Melhuish, C. (2005) ‘Towards a Phenomenology of the Concrete Megastructure: Space and Perception at the Brunswick Centre, London’, Journal of material culture, 10(1), pp. 5-29. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183505050092>

⁴⁴ Tappin, S. (2003) ‘The Brunswick Centre, London WC1’, c20society, May. Available at: <https://c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/the-brunswick-centre-london-wc1>. (Accessed: 05 Novmeber 2024).

⁴⁵ Tappin, S. (2007) ‘Living in the Brunswick Centre: A Personal Account’, Journal of architectural conservation, 13(2), pp. 175-190. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556207.2007.10785004>.

⁴⁶ Brunswick Centre named Best Place in UK & Ireland (2017) Available at: <https://www.alliedlondon.com/brunswick-centre-named-best-place-in-uk-ireland/> (Accessed 06 November 2024).

⁴⁷ Dekker, D.T. (2019) ‘The Brunswick Model of social housing provision’, Urban strategy lab, 04 January. Available at: <https://urbanstrategylab.com/the-brunswick-model-of-social-housing-provision/> (Accessed 06 November 2024).

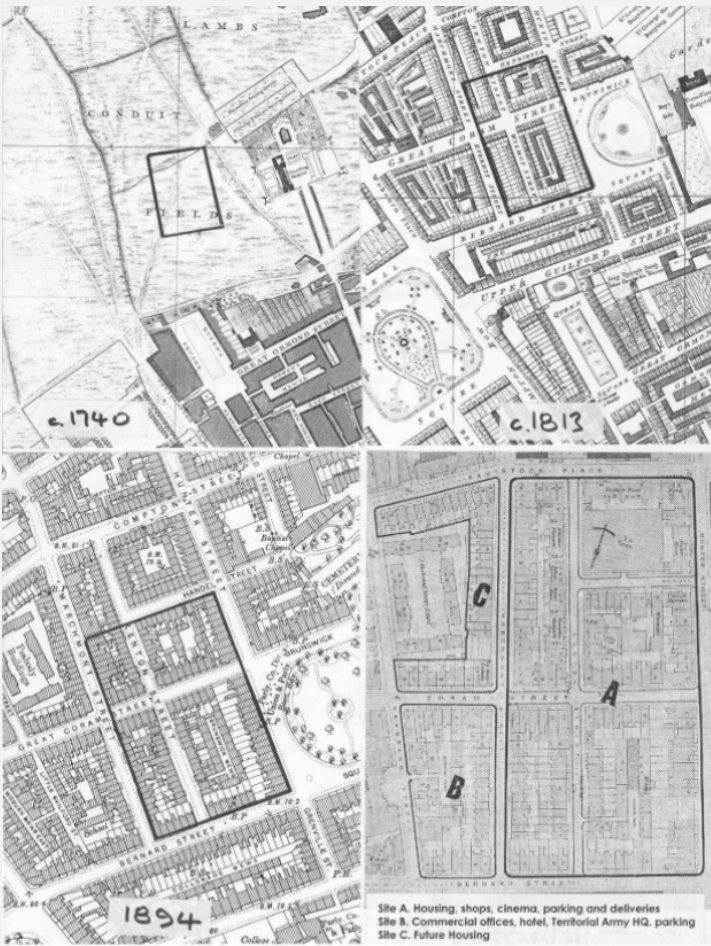


Figure 36: Historic development of the area, Brunswick Centre, London, 1934 (photographed) (London County Council collections).



Figure 37: Levita House, Brunswick Centre, London, 1934 (photographed) (London County Council collections).

The Centre provides modest, utilitarian living areas, with some restored flats and many retaining their original features such as the open-plan layouts, large windows, exposed concrete, built-in storage, and tiered terraces, which is significant since it “maintains the building’s historical and architectural integrity, which can increase its aesthetic and cultural value.”⁴⁸ “The complex’s huge social rooms are typically underutilised or in despair, making it less appealing for redevelopment.”⁴⁹

The residential component consists of 406 apartments, comprising studios and apartments with one or two bedrooms. Every unit has a combined heating and electricity system, a private balcony and two aspects. “Upgrades have been made to the windows and glass to comply with environmental regulations. The apartments are in great demand and well-liked by council renters. The concrete structure effectively attenuates noise, and the tiered layout makes maximises both lighting and noise reduction.”⁵⁰ This shows how the provision of safe and inexpensive living circumstances can result in major health advantages. Residents are less likely to have health difficulties caused by poor living conditions, including moisture, cold, and mold. Affordable housing provides stability, which decreases the stress and anxiety associated with financial insecurity, therefore improving mental health. A sense of community and support among inhabitants “improves psychological well-being, providing an atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable and connected.”⁵¹

Despite its physical age, the Centre provides cheap living in a central location, attracting long-term residents. “Camden’s resistance to market-driven gentrification is reflected in its capacity to provide a practical and cheap living environment”⁵² resulting in less displacement compared to other regions.

Residents of the Brunswick Centre generally have positive views on the area’s resistance to gentrification. Many “appreciate the continued affordability and the preservation of community character.”⁵³ These feelings are indicative of a community that prefers stability and the advantages of social housing over the frequently upsetting changes brought about by gentrification,

Unlike places undergoing fast gentrification, the Brunswick centre does not show substantial signs of trauma in its setting. The physical infrastructure, while frequently upgraded, lacks the sharp contrasts sometimes associated with gentrification. Invisibly, the stability given by sustaining social housing mitigates the psychological distress of displacement. “Residents have fewer disruptions in their social networks and cultural links, giving to a sense of continuity and stability.”⁵⁴ When I visited the shopping centre, I had a strong feeling of belonging since the locals there were quite friendly. The shopping centre contained stores that I haven’t seen in years due to it being closed down because of gentrification. They were more inexpensive than where I lived, which suggests that gentrification isn’t happening as quickly as in other areas. The Brunswick Centre retains a feeling of stability and belonging as well as decreases trauma within the environment because of its community-oriented architecture, communal spaces and affordable housing options which mitigates gentrification. It promotes physical and mental health by providing green spaces for exercise and relaxation, “access to green spaces improve our mental well-being... green areas encourage physical activity by providing a pleasant environment in which to exercise”⁵⁵, as well as communal areas for social interaction and community belonging.

⁵³ Newton, F. (2018) ‘Brunswick Centre | London | The Academy of Urbanism’, 05 March. Available at: <https://www.academyofurbanism.org.uk/brunswick-centre-london/> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

⁵⁴ Dekker, D.T. (2019) ‘The Brunswick Model of social housing provision’, Urban strategy lab, 04 January. Available at: <https://urbanstrategylab.com/the-brunswick-model-of-social-housing-provision/> (Accessed 06 November 2024).

⁵⁵ Scott, C. (2015) A brief guide to the benefits of urban green spaces. Available at: https://leaf.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/86/2015/10/LEAF_benefits_of_urban_green_space_2015_upd.pdf (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

The Brunswick Centre is an excellent example of urban resistance against gentrification. Its social housing, local businesses, and communal balance have kept long-term inhabitants from being displaced. The Centre’s stability and affordability, as well as its distinctive brutalist design, have all contributed to its endurance. This resilience not only protects the community’s cultural and social fabric, but it also highlights the possibility of sustainable, inclusive urban growth.

Journey through Brunswick Centre



Figure 38: Kaleena Creary, Brunswick centre flats, Bernard st, London, 2024 (photographed).



Figure 39: Kaleena Creary, Inside the Brunswick centre, Bernard st, London, 2024 (photographed).



Figure 40: Kaleena Creary, Long corridor of the Brunswick centre, Bernard st, London, 2024 (photographed).



Figure 41: Kaleena Creary, NHS in the Brunswick centre, Bernard st, London, 2024 (photographed).



Figure 42: Kaleena Creary, outside the Brunswick centre, Bernard st, London, 2024 (photographed).



Figure 43: Kaleena Creary, Long corridor of the Brunswick centre, Bernard st, London, 2024 (photographed).

⁴⁸ Darlow, K. (2024) ‘6 original features you should never replace and the ones you maybe should’, Homes and Gardens, 05 August. Available at: <https://www.homesand-gardens.com/interior-design/original-features-you-should-never-replace> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

⁴⁹ London on the ground. (2024). ‘The Brunswick Centre, a pioneer in 20th century architecture’. London On The Ground, 29 April. Available at: <https://www.londonontheground.com/post/the-brunswick-centre-a-pioneer-in-20th-century-architecture> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

⁵⁰ Newton, F. (2018) ‘Brunswick Centre | London | The Academy of Urbanism’, 05 March. Available at: <https://www.academyofurbanism.org.uk/brunswick-centre-london/> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

⁵¹ WHO Housing and health guidelines (2018) *Housing impacts health: New WHO guidelines on housing and health*. WHO Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/26-11-2018-housing-impacts-health-new-who-guidelines-on-housing-and-health>.

⁵² Jensen, Z. (2019) ‘How is gentrification impacting contemporary London?’, LSE London, 17th April. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseolondon/how-is-gentrification-impacting-contemporary-london/> (Accessed: 06 November 2024).

Gentrification as process of displacement

Scaffold holding

Conclusion & reflection

Unhoused Minds

My research was concerned with gentrification as a process of displacement, examining how social housing, people's physical and mental health are affected by relocation and trauma. I explored this topic by looking at the research questions: how does the loss of social housing affect displaced residents access to community resources and necessary services? What causes displacement in neighbourhoods that are gentrifying? How do newcomers and existing inhabitants view gentrification and the preservation of cultural heritage differently? What consequences does displacement have over time on one's physical and emotional well being?

Through the findings, the study reveals that gentrification is a displacement process, causing cultural erasure and increasing inequality within communities. Despite this, it also leads to economic progress, improved infrastructure, and revitalised neighbourhoods. There are ways out of the displacement process and as designers, we can find solutions by showcasing empathy within spaces.

These findings have helped shape my design proposal, which aims to create a talking space that embodies care and serves as a "2nd home" for the residents struggling to come to terms with gentrification. This is a project I want to do because it addresses the psychological health of displaced individuals, providing a sanctuary for them to feel heard, understood and create close-knit bonds that they may have lost due to this process. While it won't reduce rents, it will restore trust and optimism, ultimately helping to rebuild the community that is slowly disappearing. The words of the community that I saw placed around Somers town as well as the scaffolding inspired by design, letting the residents voices be heard.

The forces of displacement are already at work, and it is only a matter of time until they appear in more visible ways.



Figure 44: Sample of scaffold structure post done by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024)- Unhoused minds.

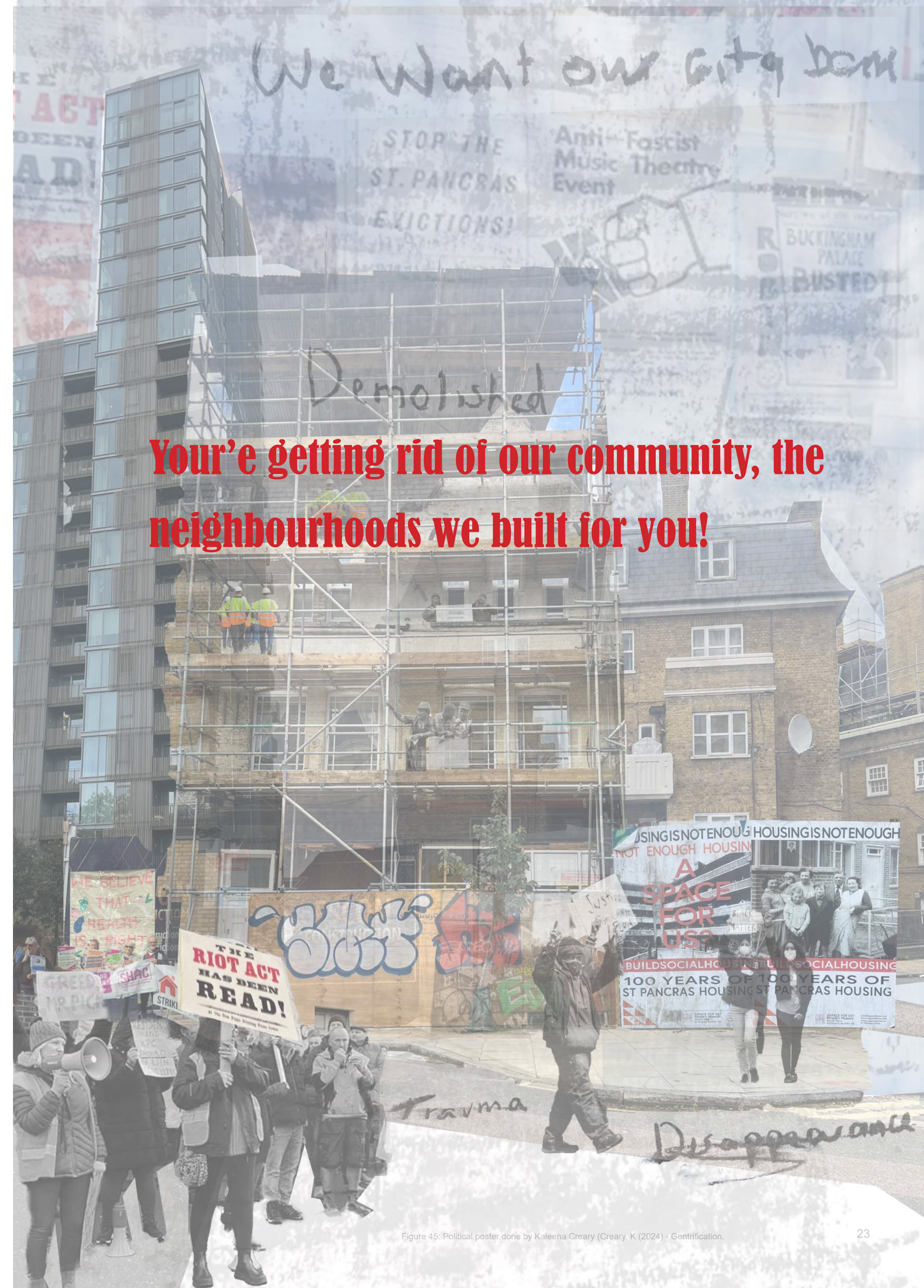


Figure 45: Political poster done by Kaleena Creary (Creary, K (2024) - Gentrification.

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