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Heritage in and of the Housing Crisis: the Case of the Aylesbury Estate

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ABSTRACT

The UK's housing crisis is at breaking point, caused primarily by deregulation, the diminished provision of public housing and the marketing of housing as property assets rather than homes. Yet the role of the heritage industry within these processes has been insufficiently analysed. This paper outlines multiple intersections between heritage and the housing crisis by examining the regeneration of one of London's post-World War II public housing estates, the Aylesbury. It will illustrate how heritage methods and discourse have been instrumentalised by property developers and estate residents and discuss the implications this has for the heritage sector.

Résumé: La crise du logement au Royaume-Uni est proche du point de rupture, résultant essentiellement de la déréglementation, d'une offre amoindrie de logement social et d'un marketing du logement axé sur les actifs de propriété plutôt que sur des lieux de vie. Cependant, le rôle de l'industrie du patrimoine au sein de ces processus a été analysé de manière insuffisante. Cet article met en exergue les intersections multiples entre le patrimoine et la crise du logement en examinant la réhabilitation de Aylesbury, l'un des ensembles de logements sociaux à Londres, postérieurs à la Seconde guerre mondiale. Il démontrera la manière dont les méthodes et le discours du patrimoine ont été instrumentalisés par les promoteurs immobiliers et les résidents des logements et s'intéressera aux implications en résultant pour le secteur du patrimoine.

Resumen: La crisis inmobiliaria del Reino Unido está en un punto crítico, causada principalmente por la desregulación, la disminución de la oferta de vivienda pública y la comercialización de la vivienda como activos inmobiliarios en lugar de viviendas. Sin embargo, el papel de la industria del patrimonio dentro de estos procesos no ha sido suficientemente

analizado. Este artículo describe múltiples intersecciones entre el patrimonio y la crisis de la vivienda al examinar la regeneración de, Aylesbury, una de las urbanizaciones públicas de Londres posteriores a la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Ilustrará cómo los promotores inmobiliarios y los residentes de las propiedades han instrumentalizado los métodos y el discurso sobre el patrimonio y discutirá las implicaciones que esto tiene para el sector del patrimonio.

KEY WORDS

Heritage sector, Housing crisis, Critical discourse analysis, Council housing

Introduction

Housing is a basic necessity to an adequate standard of living, yet the dismantlement of the post-1945 Welfare State and the financialisation of land in the United Kingdom has created a huge crisis in the provision and quality of homes available for lower-income households, severely depleting public housing stocks and creating a deregulated rental market for private landlords (Spratt 2022, p. 11). This situation is not unique to the UK, but it is illustrative of wider transnational flows of capital into property assets, transforming homes into investment opportunities and leaving working-class communities in a constant state of precarity (Minton 2017, p. 7). This neoliberal approach to housing has had a significant effect on the urban landscape of London, with 20th-century public housing estates systematically demolished to be replaced or 'regenerated' into 'luxury' high-rise apartments, which are sold or rented out at inflated prices (Minton 2017, p. 9).

Within this context of the housing crisis, there has been an increasing entanglement between the UK's heritage and development sectors due to political and economic pressures to align with the priorities and strategies of the market (Dicks 2003, p. 32). Since the early 2000s, public heritage bodies such as Historic England have reconfigured their role within urban redevelopment towards a 'change management' approach, aiming to support regeneration rather than impede new development (Sterling 2020, pp. 68–69). Museums have likewise benefitted from developer sponsorship of exhibitions and engaged in property speculation of their own, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum's (V&A) venture into the newly regenerated Olympic Park site of Stratford with V&A East, a new museum set to open

in 2025 (Victoria and Albert Museum 2023). Alongside these bodies, commercial archaeology has been established in the UK since the 1990 *PPG16* legislation, requiring developers to pay for archaeological assessments of their proposed sites prior to construction, resulting in the archaeological industry's dependence on developer funding (Davies and Parker 2016, p. 56; Gardner 2017, p. 15). With the growing interest in the archaeology and heritage of the twentieth century and the destruction of many post-war public housing estates in London, the heritage sector has been increasingly involved in the production of Welfare State heritage, in particular that of public housing (Pendlebury et al. 2016, p. 179). This has included listing buildings, a statutory process that confers heritage value and conservation status to sites, as well as museum exhibitions, archives, standing building assessments and archaeological excavations. The 'heritage sector', in this case, can be understood as an assemblage of disparate industries, methods, agents and interests, each engaging in the production and stewardship of heritage within the context of contemporary neoliberalism (Sterling 2020, p. 73).

Despite these shifts in the heritage sector over the past 40 years, there are relatively few explorations into the social, political and economic consequences of these relationships between heritage interventions and urban development, not least the sector's impact on the legacy and provision of public housing. This paper therefore sets out to explore how heritage interventions have affected the regeneration trajectory of the Aylesbury Estate in London. By examining the heritage impact report of the estate, as well as archaeological assessments and exhibitions, this paper will discuss how council housing heritage discourses have been instrumentalised within wider redevelopment discourses. This will include exploring the idea of 'anti-heritage', whereby a site is reconceptualised as *actively harmful* to its historic environment. It will suggest that the UK heritage sector needs to re-evaluate its role within the housing crisis to consider the ethical implications of its interventions and impact. The article will also briefly explore potential avenues through which heritage and archaeology can be used to champion the legacies of the Welfare State and the homes of lower-income communities.

This article is a synthesis of preliminary research into the Aylesbury Estate, as part of an ongoing PhD project on heritage interactions at Welfare State sites in the local area of Walworth, South London. Whilst the research is still at a preliminary stage, it highlights the different influences involved in heritage production processes and ways in which the production (or omission) of heritage value can affect the trajectories of these Welfare State sites.

Context: Council Housing

Council housing was first created during the late nineteenth century as a public health response to overcrowding and the spread of infectious diseases (Boughton 2018, pp. 11–12). With the rise of the Labour Party in the early twentieth century, there was political pressure to improve the housing of the working classes and provide greater social provisions for all in an increasingly urbanised Britain (Boughton 2018, pp. 33–34). After the Second World War in 1945, a systematic programme of reforms constituted what is known as the Welfare State, a comprehensive replanning of social welfare in Britain which included the significant public ownership of housing, healthcare and infrastructure as well as greater universal social security (Boughton 2018, p. 69). The *Town and Country Planning Act* (1947) required councils to form their own comprehensive redevelopment plans of areas that had suffered significant wartime bomb damage or were considered 'slums', whilst the *Housing Act* of 1949 contended that this public housing would not just be for the working classes but would serve the needs of all (Dwyer 2015, pp. 6–7; Boughton 2018, pp. 69–70, 97; Romyn 2020, p. 43). These Acts instigated a programme of slum clearances and estate construction which lasted into the late 1970s; however, the course of the council estate-building boom was subject to the changing political climate of the subsequent decades. The Conservative government's *Housing Act* of 1954, for example, changed the role of council housing from a general provision for everyone to a temporary provision for the poor (Boughton 2018, p. 106; Hanley 2007, p. 92). In doing so, the ideological belief was formed that renting a council home was *'a means to an end rather than an end in itself'* (Hanley 2007, p. 89), initiating the beginning of council housing's diminishing reputation. This was exacerbated by post-war material and labour shortages and political pressure to build quickly, which entailed that council housing became increasingly distinct from privately developed homes, with new approaches focused on high-rise living using new construction techniques such as system-building and the use of concrete (Boughton 2018, p. 125; Hanley 2007, pp. 93–94; Hornsey 2008).

Public perceptions of council housing were also influenced by racism (Jacobs 1985, pp. 11–12; Shilliam 2018, pp. 3–11). Migrants (especially from Commonwealth countries) could not initially access council housing due to rules on duration of residence and councils' discriminatory housing allocation (Carter 2008, pp. 156–157). In 1968, the *Race Relations Act* made it illegal for councils to discriminate according to race, which lead to a greater proportion of Black and minority ethnic people living in council housing (Jacobs 1985, p. 20; Romyn 2020, p. 39). Despite this *Act*, however, Black and ethnic minority housing applicants were systematically allo-

cated onto the 'worst' estates and were simultaneously blamed for their low quality (Jacobs 1985, p. 22; Carter 2008, p. 173).

From the 1970s, cuts to council funding, deindustrialisation, unemployment and the vilification of the working class, especially from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, led to the politically expedient troupe of 'sink estates', perpetuating the myth that Welfare State architecture was to blame for social malaise and purported crime, whilst obscuring the roles of poverty and deindustrialisation (Slater 2018, p. 882; Romyn 2023, p. 110). This vilification was instrumentalised in the 1980s by Margaret Thatcher's neoliberalisation project, through the introduction of the 1980 *Right to Buy* scheme which enabled council tenants to buy their homes at discounted rates but blocked councils from replenishing their stock, leading to a reduction of thousands of public homes (Boughton , pp. 170–171).

Instead of reversing this trajectory, the election of New Labour in the 1990s continued to condemn council estates for so-called social exclusion, focusing not on the causes of poverty but its visibility to the rest of society (Boughton 2018, p. 217; Romyn 2020, p. 227). Since then, and accelerated with the Conservative government from 2010, there has been a significant political and economic push to 'regenerate' council housing estates, which in practice involves the transfer of estates from council ownership to pri-

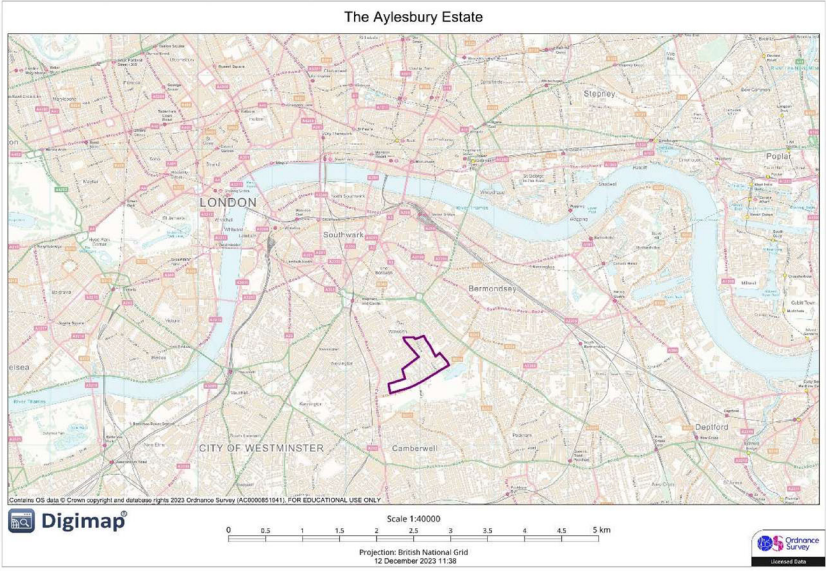

Figure 1. Map outlining the location of the Aylesbury Estate in London. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 (AC0000851941).

Figure 2. Part of the remaining Aylesbury Estate in August 2023. Author's photograph.

vate–public partnerships, housing associations or to private developers (Boughton 2018, pp. 228–229). In each case, the regeneration of estates most often results in the reduction of council housing on offer (as private homes are sold or rented out to subsidise the cost of social housing) and the subsequent displacement of lower-income residents (Elliott Cooper et al. 2020, p. 1355).

The Aylesbury Estate

The Aylesbury Estate, built between 1967 and 1977, was first opened in 1969 at the turning point of high-rise popularity (Campkin 2013, pp. 16, 80; Lees 2014, p. 923). With a planned capacity of 10,000 residents within 2700 dwellings, it was one of the largest housing complexes in western Europe when completed (Baxter 2017, p. 338; Lees 2014, pp. 923–924; see Figures 1 and 2). It was designed by London Borough of Southwark architects and built by John Laing Construction to significant time and budget constraints (Baxter 2017, p. 340; Campkin 2013, p. 80; Lees 2014, pp. 922–923; Romyn 2020, p. 61). The estate covers 24.3 hectares, with residential blocks ranging from four to 14 storeys originally connected by raised walkways, many of which were removed in the 1990s (Baxter 2017, p. 340). The room sizes are large compared to current UK standards, whilst the blocks themselves are constructed of prefabricated concrete panels (Baxter 2017, pp. 338–340).

Figure 3. New-builds in construction on Site 1a of the Aylesbury Estate redevelopment in August 2023. Author's photograph.

Since its construction, the Aylesbury has been held as an archetype of the so-called sink estate (Campkin 2013, p. 103; Lees 2014, p. 928; Romyn 2020, p. 122; Slater 2018, p. 882). From its denunciation by urban theorist Oscar Newman on the BBC in 1974 and Alice Coleman's policy-influencing 1985 report *Utopia On Trial*, to its setting for Tony Blair's inaugural 'forgotten people' speech in 1997 (Romyn 2020, pp. 206–207; Romyn 2023, p. 105), the Aylesbury has been described as '*a microcosm through which we can trace the diminishing value UK governments have attached to the state provision of housing*'; its history reflecting '*successive waves of privatisation*' (Campkin 2013, p. 78).

The estate has been under plans for regeneration since 1998, with an initial £56m granted by the New Labour government to help achieve this (Lees 2014, p. 926; Romyn 2020, p. 232). In 2001, however, the balloted residents voted overwhelmingly against a stock transfer from Southwark Council, rejecting the New Labour 'Urban Renaissance' strategy that would have resulted in a public–private ownership of the estate and its complete redevelopment (Campkin 2013, p. 16; Rendell 2017, p. 12; Romyn 2020, pp. 240–241; Lees 2014, p. 926). Despite this, in 2005 Southwark Council decided to go ahead with these privatisation plans, without consulting the residents, citing the restrictive cost of its refurbishment (Rendell 2017, p. 9; Romyn 2020, p. 245). Since then, the estate has experienced a long-drawn-out process of regeneration, not without residential resistance, that is forecast to continue until at least 2036 (AylesburyNow 2023; Hubbard and Lees 2018, pp. 16–17). L&Q, the first developers, have so far replaced two areas of the estate, whilst the current developers Notting Hill Genesis are undergoing their second regeneration phase out of four, with plans to den-

sify these housing 'units' from 2,700 to 4,200 (AylesburyNow 2023; Southwark Council 2022; Romyn 2020: 256, 275; see Figure 3).

Methodology

This paper aims to illustrate several heritage interventions that have taken place at the Aylesbury Estate during the most recent Conservative government (2010-present), to explore the discursive and material effects these interventions have had on the trajectory of its convoluted regeneration. Whilst the focus of this paper will be on the heritage *sector*, as a multifaceted and (at times) disarticulated network of heritage agencies and actors, examples of heritage discourse and methods being appropriated by those outside of the sector will also be explored in order to analyse how archaeology and heritage are both formed and formative of wider networks of discourse and action.

The predominant method employed throughout this study will be Critical Discourse Analysis (following Waterton 2010). Discourse is understood here in the Foucauldian sense of '*practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak*' (Foucault 1972: 49). In this way, the process of council housing heritagisation can be understood as a method of contesting power and creating legitimacy within the politics and economics of redevelopment trajectories. It is also recognised here that heritage has a materially affective role within these processes of estate regenerations. This research is based on archival material from online sources and the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) archaeological archive as well as site visits conducted by the author between 2022 and 2023. The aim of this preliminary work is to demonstrate how the construction of heritage values and practices have been influenced by a variety of different actors and interests, with tangible consequences for contemporary urban development. It is hoped that this will encourage a critical awareness of the heritage sector within the context of globalised urban development.

Heritage Impact Reports

Heritage value in the UK is officially assessed based on Historic England's criteria of '*archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic*' interest (Historic England 2019, p. 3), inclined towards a Western hegemonic Authorised Heritage Discourse, identified by Smith (2006), which in general prioritises physicality and white, upper-class aesthetics (Smith 2006, p. 3). To comply with national planning requirements of the Aylesbury regeneration, a heritage impact report was produced by the developers to determine its effect

on designated and undesignated 'heritage assets' (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 2023, p. 56) in relation to '*strategic and local views and the character and setting of listed buildings and/or conservation areas*' (Head of Development Management [HDM] 2015, pp. 188–208). Rather than considering the Aylesbury's potential local and national significance, however, the estate did not receive *any* recognition as a possible 'asset' itself. Instead, discourse was directed away from the Aylesbury as heritage (making it liable to greater planning restrictions), to represent the estate as an *impediment* to its historic environment. This is evident in the report's numerous negative descriptions of the site:

> '*The existing slab-block buildings of the Aylesbury Estate are visible from a number of vantage points within the Conservation Area. By virtue of their monolithic and unbroken appearance, strong horizontal emphasis, insensitive scale and unrelieved use of grey concrete they are considered to create a harmful backdrop to the conservation area that does not respond sensitively to the heritage asset and its setting*'. (HDM 2015, p. 192)
> '*The existing concrete slab buildings of the Aylesbury Estate represent a stark contrast to the traditional domestic scale and materiality of these buildings, and from certain vantage points are considered to dominate their settings*'. (HDM 2015, p. 199)
> '*The concrete slab blocks of the Aylesbury Estate currently form an intrusive and insensitive backdrop to this important historic structure*'. (HDM 2015, p. 202)
> '*As a result of their unbroken appearance, horizontal emphasis and grey concrete finish, they are not considered to represent a sensitive backdrop to the setting of these heritage assets*' (HDM 2015, p. 203)
> '… the large scale and unapologetic design of the existing estate buildings' (HDM 2015, p. 204)
> '…the insensitive, monolithic, concrete slab-block buildings on the existing estate' (HDM 2015, p. 207).

The repetition of explicitly hostile descriptions demonstrates how heritage legislation and discourse have been used to support the developer's redevelopment plans. The concrete blocks are not only deemed '*insensitive*' to the estate's surroundings, but '*harmful*' and an intrusive threat to the 'traditional domestic scale' of its surroundings. Not only does this overlook the Aylesbury's potential significance to locals and residents, but it also frames it as an active blight, a mistake and an uncomfortably visible reminder of the working class. The Aylesbury is thus discursively positioned as the *antithesis* of heritage; not simply a site without heritage value but a site that *actively diminishes* the heritage value of its surroundings.

The report claims that the new development will rectify this by, for instance, finishing the development '*in brick and therefore create a warmer setting than the grey concrete […]* and a more recognisable 'London' town-

scape typology' (HDM: 195). Despite only being cladding that is not exclusive to the city, this superficial brick aesthetic has been labelled the 'New London Vernacular' by former London Mayor Boris Johnson (Hatherley 2020 p. 181; see Figure 3). Michela Pace (2018) has argued that the use of codified heritage signifiers such as 'warm bricks' have been invoked by developers to promote a particular London heritage 'brand' that appeals on a globalised market as a form of 'nostalgic credit' (Pace 2018. p. 252). By perpetuating this narrow redefinition of the 'London look', the report divorces the Aylesbury from London's Authorised Heritage, in favour of an idealised, class-cleansed and marketable vision of the past.

An additional statement provided by English Heritage (now Historic England) similarly omits an assessment of the estate's own heritage significance and agrees that *'the demolition of the slab blocks of the Aylesbury Estate provides opportunity for enhanced views from various heritage assets'* (HDM 2015, Appendix 2). The complete absence of opposition to the developer's one-sided discourse, regardless of whether the Aylesbury fits into Historic England's heritage significance criteria, suggests that Historic England did not want to be perceived as an obstruction to these redevelopment plans. This indicates the entangled nature of Authorised Heritage production with wider interests and economic pressures. With the approval of Historic England, the developers have framed the Aylesbury as 'anti-heritage' to justify its demolition, requiring erasure to protect the surrounding authorised heritage. This example illustrates the need for greater ethical and democratic scrutiny of these assessment processes in order to challenge the appropriation of heritage discourses by developer interests (Belcher et al. 2019, pp. 409–410).

Archaeology

Under the *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)* in the UK, archaeological assessments are required to take place prior to any new development (Gardner 2017: 15; Watson and Fredheim 2022, p. 3053). This is normally carried out by a commercial archaeological unit which bids to undertake work within a 'polluter pays' system whereby the developer is responsible for funding archaeological work before it can satisfy planning regulations (Gardner 2017, p. 16 and Watson 2019, p. 1645). Archaeological assessments encompass a different range of interventions depending on the probability of archaeology at the site. These include desk-based assessments, which use archival sources to estimate the likelihood of archaeological remains; watching briefs, which monitor groundworks undertaken during construction to record any low-potential archaeology; evaluation trenches, which target possible archaeological features; and open-area exca-

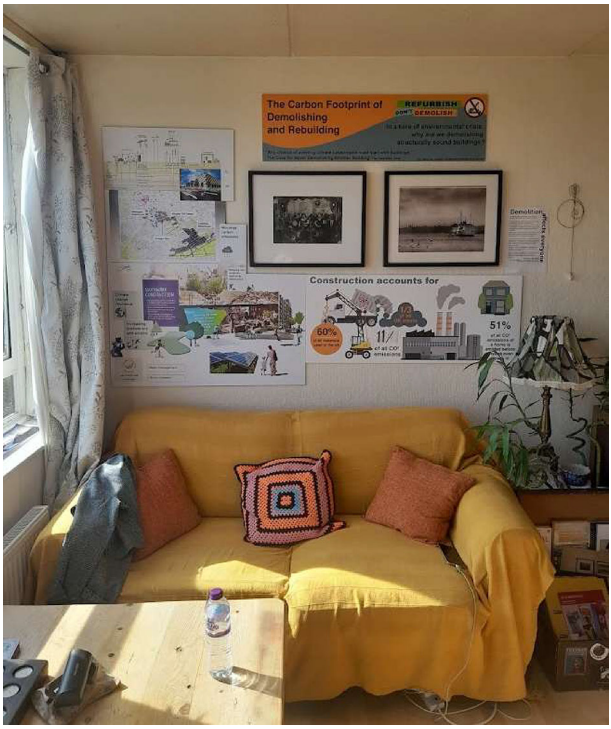

Figure 4. Fight4Aylesbury exhibition in Aysen Dennis' flat in May 2023. Author's photograph.

vations, which take place when a large amount of archaeology is expected (Gardner 2017, pp. 16–17).

At least two commercial archaeological investigations have taken place at the Aylesbury Estate since plans for its redevelopment began (Figures 4, 5 and 6). Research at the MOLA archive indicate that an initial desk-based assessment was undertaken in 2006 (Dawson 2006), followed by a watching brief in 2014 (Knight 2014; see Figures 7 and 8) and another in 2020 (Mackinder 2020). Despite the 2015 planning application of the estate also recommending that an archaeological building recording programme should be undertaken '*whilst it is still occupied to provide a record of the use of the buildings, not simply sterile photography*' (HDM 2015, pp. 373–383), no archaeological building report has been produced. This suggests that pressure to redevelop the site quickly outweighed the value of recording its current and historic use; another instance of the Aylesbury's working-class heritage being overlooked, and in the process, removing planning impediments for the developer.

Figure 5. Entrance into the exhibition/Aysen Dennis' home. Author's photograph.

Both watching brief reports used vague terms such as 'made ground' and 'modern features' to refer to material associated with the Aylesbury Estate, which were treated as 'modern disturbances', and as such were not recorded as archaeological material (Knight 2014, p. 9; Mackinder 2020, p. 15). This attitude towards more recent material is common within archaeological approaches in the UK, which conventionally place less value on post-mediaeval contexts, despite growing recognition of the value of 20th-century archaeology (Davies and Parker 2016, p. 56). Historic England's (2010) *Thematic Strategy for the Urban Historic Environment*, for instance, sets out nine priority research programmes for the urban historic environment that include '*the twentieth century; understanding the recent past*' and '*providing the evidence base for regeneration and renewal*' (Historic England 2010, p. 3). It further recommends that '*threatened or vulnerable building types*', such as '*public and institutional buildings (especially those in local authority ownership) […]* and twentieth-century housing' are prioritised (Historic England 2010, p. 18). Despite this official research priority, how-

ever, in practice these types of buildings are frequently treated as intrusive modern truncations, especially within the time- and resource-restricted context of developer-led archaeology. This disregard for twentieth century archaeology, however, risks forfeiting evidence of these sites' social heritage, including, for example, how estates have been inhabited by generations of residents (Harrison 2009, p. 239).

By treating the archaeology of the Aylesbury Estate as not only expendable, but a 'disturbance' to "real" archaeology, the site is yet again discursively reconfigured as 'anti-heritage'. Its presence is conceived as an impediment to both the past and future value of the site. Jonathan Gardner (2020), writing on the excavations that took place prior to the London 2012 Olympic Games, has argued that this disregard for the archaeology of recent communities has been used legitimise urban redevelopment by creating a '*material and human absence* […], in order to produce space for 'regeneration' to occur' (Gardner 2020, p. 50). The absence of archaeological investigation into the Aylesbury, likewise, provides justification for the redevelopment of the estate by denying its recent heritage *and* enables development through the fulfilment of planning requirements (Gardner 2017, p. 21). Without greater sensitivities to the ways in which archaeological practice and discourse can affect development, archaeologists will continue to be complicit with contemporary displacements and the demolition of working-class housing.

Exhibitions

As a relatively high-profile council estate in the UK, due to its drawn-out and unsettled regeneration trajectory, the Aylesbury has been a subject of several art and heritage exhibitions within the past twenty years. The examples outlined here, identified during preliminary research, illustrate a renewed interest in council housing heritages and futures in the context of the growing housing crisis.

The Aylesbury Estate as Home exhibit was curated by geographer Richard Baxter with accompanying artwork by Nadège Mériau at the Geffrye Museum (now the Museum of the Home) in 2016. The exhibition was based on oral history interviews and photographic research conducted between 2012 and 2015, affiliated with the Centre for Studies of Home (a Queen Mary University and Geffrye Museum partnership) and funded by the Leverhulme Trust, AHRC, Creativeworks London and Queen Mary University of London (Baxter 2013, 2017, p. 338). Unlike the heritage impact report's approach, this exhibition focused specifically on the residents' heritage '*from its utopian beginning in the late 1960s, to its emergence as a more ambiguous place in the 1980s, and current demolition and regener-*

ation' (Mériau 2023). Interviews were conducted with residents as well as home tours and autophotography, accompanied by oral histories and semi-structured interviews with eight past and present workers from the estate, including a number of original architects (Baxter 2017, pp. 338–339). Baxter's personal approach, focusing on the lived experience of the estate, highlights museums' potential to platform alternative heritage perspectives and encourage public discourse around post-war public housing (Baxter 2017, p. 341).

The Royal Academy's 2017 exhibition *Futures Found: The Real and Imagined Cityscapes of Post-war Britain* also explored changing public perceptions of post-war architecture and included discussions on the Aylesbury (Hopkins 2017; Royal Academy 2017). Whilst its focus was on the architectural form of the estate, the contributions of academics Victor Buchli, Owen Hopkins, Helen Ikla, Penny Lewis, Jules Lubbock and Tom Wilkinson aimed '*to explore the complex and frequently contested narratives that have developed around Britain's post-war cityscapes in the years since their creation*' (Hopkins 2017). This more critical approach suggests that exhibitions are potential spaces for challenging the hegemony of developer discourses by examining Authorised Heritage narratives of council estates and encouraging public scrutiny. The extent to which museums choose to platform these alternative perspectives, however, ultimately depends on their sources of funding and sponsorship by developers.

In the summer of 2023, Aysen Dennis, a resident of the Aylesbury for 30 years, took museum representation into her own hands by opening an exhibition inside her flat, entitled *Fight4Aylesbury,* to display twenty-four years' worth of residential resistance to estate demolition and to contest

Figure 6. View from the corridor outside Dennis' flat. Author's photograph.

Figure 7. Photograph from the 2014 watching brief at the Aylesbury. Reproduced with permission from © MOLA.

Figure 8. Photograph from the 2014 watching brief at the Aylesbury. Reproduced with permission from © MOLA.

the estate's constant negative portrayals in the media (Miklaszewicz 2023; Robson 2023; Russell 2023; see Figure 4). The exhibition was funded by the Raymond Williams Foundation and Goldsmiths University, but also received a significant amount through crowdfunding (Fight4Aylesbury 2023). The use of social media and interviews with the press was effective in the promotion and fundraising of this event and spread awareness of

the regeneration plans. Each room of Dennis' flat was themed according to different aspects of her experience defending her home, including political organising, squatting, mental health, her relationship with the council and the estate's history (Fight4Aylsebury 2023; see Figure 5). The exhibition was a powerful celebration of a history of residential resistance at the Aylesbury and highlighted how, for all the hyperbolic denouncements of the estate, it had been, for Dennis, a place of refuge and home (see Figures 4, 5 and 6). Through the *Fight4Aylesbury* exhibition, Dennis was able to publicly contest the Authorised Heritage Discourse of the estate, exhibiting its history of community organising and rebutting decades of architectural and social vilification. The way in which Dennis appropriated a museum methodology can therefore be seen as a way of claiming agency and resisting displacement within a process that systematically disenfranchises (De la Concha Montes 2023; Watt 2021: 339).

Discussion

The regeneration and subsequent reduction of council housing estates have become a prevalent fixture of urban development in the UK, with equivalent processes occurring across the globe. Unrelenting financial and political pressure has resulted in the systematic destruction of public housing in pursuit of greater rent and profit extraction (Minton 2017, p. 68). These examples of heritage and archaeological interventions at the Aylesbury Estate demonstrate the malleability of the sector and its methods and discourses within these regeneration processes. By exploring how different actors have engaged with the estate's heritage and archaeology, this paper demonstrates how the creation and omission of heritage value within the context of urban redevelopment has been instrumentalised to justify and contest contemporary demolition plans.

Historic England's reluctance to confer authorised heritage significance to the Aylesbury Estate indicates an aversion to being perceived as an obstruction to capitalist development (Belcher et al. 2019: 408–9; Sterling 2020: 69). By doing so, however, it is implicated in a form of 'covert erasure', following Sterling (2020), helping to obscure the destructive effects of the redevelopment by denying the estate heritage value. Through this authorised status of the Aylesbury as 'non-heritage', the developer has been able to discursively reconfigure the estate as 'anti-heritage' – as a dissonant and atemporal blight on the landscape that requires redevelopment in order to safeguard the surrounding historic environment. In this way, Authorised Heritage Discourse can be seen to be subject to forces of capital and politics that structure the context in which the heritage sector works (Pendlebury 2013: 710). Greater transparency is therefore required of these

heritage value production processes, in order to challenge the hegemony of developer-constructed discourses.

Similarly, the influence of developer interests on what was chosen to be archaeologically investigated can be seen to have a discursive and material effect on the site's redevelopment. By choosing not to conduct an archaeological buildings assessment of the Aylesbury and instead referring to the remains of the site as 'modern disturbance' within the archaeological reports, the estate is again transformed into 'anti-heritage', unworthy of archaeological investigation and obstructive to earlier deposits. This obscures an understanding of the site as palimpsest, overlooking the social and physical changes that have taken place here over the recent past, and enables development to proceed without archaeological objection. Whilst archaeological organisations generally depend upon good developer relations, this should not come at the complete expense of contemporary working-class communities. Archaeologists therefore need to re-evaluate their position within development and planning processes to address gaps in their research and the impact this has on local communities (Watson and Fredheim 2022, p. 3052).

Fight4Aylesbury's recent exhibition has shown, however, that there is power in resident appropriation of heritage methods, values and discourses as a means of contesting estate demolition and foregrounding the lives of the contemporary community. It demonstrates that politically engaged public heritage discourses have the potential to subvert neoliberal hegemonic narratives. The control of heritage knowledge and values therefore has important implications for the trajectories of regenerations, as a means of claiming autonomy and self-determination within a process that often feels uncontrollable.

Conclusion

This paper has used critical discourse analysis to explore how different agents and interests have shaped heritage production at the Aylesbury Estate, and the implications this has for the site's redevelopment. From this preliminary research, the concept of 'anti-heritage' has been proposed to describe the way in which heritage legislation and discourse have, in the case of the Aylesbury, been used to justify the estate's demolition by framing the site as an impediment to the heritage value of the surrounding area. The heritage interventions explored here demonstrate the need for a more democratic and transparent heritage sector that is willing to problematise its relationship to contemporary neoliberal development *and* delegate discursive power to working-class communities. This requires that the

sector recognises the impact of the heritage values and discourses it perpetuates in the context of rising housing inequality and demunicipalisation.

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