

## Impact case study (REF3)

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| <b>Institution:</b> University of Leicester                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 14 Geography                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <b>Title of case study:</b> Securing ‘the right to stay put’ for those being displaced by state-led gentrification                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013 – 2020                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <b>Name(s):</b><br>Professor Loretta Lees                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b><br>Professor of Human Geography | <b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b><br>September 2013 – Present |
| <b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 – 2020                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <b>1. Summary of the impact</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <p>University of Leicester research has helped secure the rights of those threatened with displacement from their homes in state-led programmes of urban redevelopment and gentrification. Research has raised wider public awareness of the negative impacts of redevelopment on pre-existing residents and built the capacity of campaigners in London and across Europe to evidence displacement and resist gentrification. Leicester research directly supported a precedent-setting legal decision by the Secretary of State on the rights of leaseholders in England and inspired wider shifts in policy shaping multi-billion pound programmes to redevelop English council estates.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <b>2. Underpinning research</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                  |                                                                          |
| <p>Since moving to the University of Leicester in 2013, Professor Loretta Lees has conducted several competitively funded studies evidencing the impacts of government efforts to redevelop run-down public housing estates and gentrify inner city neighbourhoods both in London and across Europe more widely.</p> <p>Funded by an <i>Antipode Scholar-Activist Award (2013-14)</i> and a <i>University of Leicester Impact Award (2015)</i> [G1, G3], Lees worked with community groups to begin documenting resident displacement from council estates undergoing redevelopment in London. Beyond peer-reviewed publications [e.g. R1], this action research also co-produced a ‘<i>Staying Put</i>’ handbook [R2], providing advice to council estate residents on their rights and a toolkit of organising strategies to resist demolition and redevelopment of their homes. This handbook published the first maps to show the patterns and magnitude of resident displacement by demolition of the 1,214 unit Heygate Estate as part of the GBP1,500,000,000 redevelopment of Elephant and Castle in London. Displacement maps were also submitted in evidence, along with interviews and other findings, to the Public Inquiry into the demolition of the neighbouring Aylesbury Estate, once the largest social housing estate in Europe, to make way for a new ‘mixed community’ of 4,800 new-build units on the same site [R3].</p> <p>The significance and reach of this Leicester research was extended through two further tranches of competitively awarded research funding. First, an ESRC grant [G4] quantified the extent and</p> |                                                                  |                                                                          |

impacts of such council estate redevelopment across London. Government austerity has forced cash-strapped councils to capitalise on, what the then Mayor Boris Johnson's (2014) Housing Strategy called "the vast development potential" of urban council estates, by turning them over to private developers for redevelopment at higher densities. Furthermore, planning gain levies on the construction of housing for the private market financed a smaller portion of 'affordable' housing (defined by Government as units rented at 80% of the market rate) in the place of traditional council housing at lower 'social rents' set by national formula. Based on Freedom of Information requests and a systematic review of planning consents, this research counted 140 completed or still-ongoing redevelopment projects on London council estates, with 100 or more units involving the demolition of an estimated 55,000 homes and the direct displacement of ~140,000 people [R4]. Research also documented residents' 'experiences' of displacement and showed its disproportionate impacts on Black and Minority Ethnic populations for whom relocation to other areas of London, or out of London altogether, not only meant the loss of home but also disrupted long-standing ties to local religious, cultural, and community apparatus [R5].

Second, insights from London were extended internationally through an *EU grant* [G2] and an *ESRC Impact Acceleration Award* [G5] that funded research on similar processes of austerity-driven gentrification and resident displacement in southern European cities. This research evidenced the variegated forms of gentrification in Rome, Madrid, Lisbon and Athens, refuting longstanding assertions that it was not happening in southern Europe [e.g. R6]; and working with social movements on co-produced local versions of *Staying Put: An anti-gentrification toolkit for Southern Europe* in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek.

### 3. References to the research

[R1] LEES, L. and White, H. (2019) The social cleansing of London council estates: contemporary experiences of 'accumulative dispossession', *Housing Studies*  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2019.1680814>

[R2] The London Tenants Federation, LEES, L. Just Space and Southwark Notes Archive Group (2014). *Staying Put: An Anti-Gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London*.  
<https://justspace.org.uk/2014/06/19/staying-put-an-anti-gentrification-handbook-for-council-estates-in-london/>

[R3] LEES, L. (2015) Public Inquiry, Aylesbury Estate, London, Witness Statement, Professor Loretta Lees, 29th April.  
<https://southwarknotes.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/aylesbury-estate-public-inquiry-witness-statement-of-loretta-lees-29-april-2015.pdf>

[R4] ESRC Project Website <https://estatewatch.london/>

[R5] Elliot-Cooper, A., Hubbard, P. and LEES, L. (2020) Sold Out? The Right to Buy, Gentrification and Working Class Displacements in London, *Sociological Review*  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120906790>

[R6] Annunziata, S. and LEES, L. (2016) Resisting 'Austerity Gentrification' and Displacement in Southern Europe, *Sociological Research Online*, 21 (3), 5 <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.4033>

### Relevant Grants

**[G1] PI: LEES, L.** CoIs: London Tenants Federation, Just Space and Southwark Notes Archive Group, **Antipode Scholar-Activist Award** (*transferred to Leicester 2013*) ‘Challenging “the New Urban Renewal”: gathering the tools necessary to halt the social cleansing of council estates and developing community-led alternatives for sustaining existing communities’.

**[G2] PI: LEES, L.** Col: Annunziata, S. **EU FP7-PEOPLE-2013 Marie Curie Action Fellowship** 2014-2016 ‘AGAPE: Exploring anti-gentrification practices and policies in Southern European Cities’.

### 4. Details of the impact

Government efforts to promote urban development can sometimes displace pre-existing populations, whether through direct expropriation, such as the £1.03 billion Land Assembly Fund pledged by the May Government’s (2018) *Homes England Strategic Plan* to “acquire challenging sites” and “release surplus public land” for redevelopment, or more indirectly, through market forces and knock-on effects on community composition and place identity.

Leicester research has helped secure the rights of those threatened by such state-led gentrification in several ways. First, Professor Lees has **raised wider public awareness** of displacement and other gentrification impacts. Her 2014 *TEDx Brixton* talk on ‘Gentrification and what can be done to stop it’, has more than 57,000 YouTube views, and was incorporated as a key resource for the 2016 WJEC A-level Geography, which has now been taken by 5,415 students **[E1]**. Since 2014, Lees’s research has featured in 35 newspapers, in all the major UK broadsheets as well as newspapers in the USA, Germany, India, Costa Rica, and Chile. She has done broadcast interviews for BBC Radio4 four times, BBC World Service, and the CBC National News, Canada. Her interview discussing displacement for the 2018 BBC documentary *The death of the council home?* was viewed more than 4,000,000 times in September 2018. It was clipped for the BBC London News prior to initial broadcast on *London Inside Out* on 3 September 2018, which “proved so popular” that the BBC aired the piece twice more on a nationwide basis over the BBC News Channel **[E2]**.

The Antipode project displacement maps also featured prominently in *Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle* a documentary screened nationally in cinemas over 150 times (June 2017 – August 2018) **[E12]**. The ESRC research on London is available through **[R4]**: since its launch in June 2020 to October 2020, it had 3,480 users (71% UK, 22% USA, 4% China, 3% rest of Europe). Lees received invitations to present the research to the UK Industry and Parliament Trust (September 2020), and the UN-Habitat Global Future Cities Programme (October 2020), knowledge-sharing with more than 400 participants from the Global South and East, including governments and providers. In recognition of her work with communities across London, Lees was made Chair of the London Housing Panel (GLA/Trust for London) in September 2020, enabling her to raise awareness directly with government and policy makers.

Second, Leicester research also **built the capacity of campaigners** to evidence displacement and resist gentrification. With more than 3,000 downloads alone in 2019 **[E3]**, approximately five years after initial release, “The *Staying Put* booklet **[R2]** became an invaluable resource” for campaigners **[E4]**. Its displacement maps and organising toolkit have informed campaigns

against at least eight estate demolition proposals across London, e.g., the Carpenters Estate and Cressingham Gardens [E5]. In the context of the demolition of 1,006,000 Miljonprogrammet public housing units, it also “served as a crucial model” for a Swedish version—*Rätt att bo kvar* (Right to stay put)—which helped activists “change the course of the events positively for some collectives of tenants in Göteborg and in Stockholm” [E6]. *Staying Put! An anti-gentrification toolkit for Southern Europe*, the key output from the EU and ESRC IAA research, “stimulated connections between local communities, social movements and university networks” which “led to positive and hardly calculable effects on social networks and groups” across southern European cities, such as Rome, Lisbon, Madrid and Athens [E7].

Lees provided evidence that **led to changes in law, policy, and guidance**, shaping multi-billion pound commitments by the UK Government to redevelop urban council estates across England. Pointing to negative impacts highlighted by Professor Lees in a testimony to the 2015 Aylesbury Public Inquiry [R3], the Secretary of State quashed Southwark Council’s Compulsory Purchase Order for leaseholders’ right-to-buy homes on the Aylesbury Estate for disproportionately “interfering with the human rights of the lessees” [E8]. By highlighting the “likelihood that leaseholders will have to move away from the area” and the “consequential impacts” of doing so, particularly for Black and Ethnic Minority populations facing “dislocation from their cultural heritage”, this precedent-setting decision “raises the weight to be given to residents’ expectations that they will be able to remain in their community . . . [which] will clearly be a significant factor in future CPO decisions” [E9].

Lees’ research informed two policy changes: her “detailed analysis” for the Haringey Council Scrutiny Panel Session on the GBP2,000,000,000 proposals for the Haringey Development Vehicle, “had a huge impact on our committee and contributed to our overall view that this project should not proceed” [E4]. Her 2018 evidence to the revised Aylesbury Public Inquiry on “the trauma and inconvenience caused to displaced homeowners affected by regeneration” led to a new rehousing policy by Southwark Council: a rehousing assistance scheme for homeowners affected by regeneration that goes beyond their statutory rehousing duty under the 1973 Land Compensation Act (amended) [E10].

Finally, Lees’ calls for obligatory resident balloting on estate redevelopment proposals, influenced the Mayor of London’s *Good Practice Guide for Estate Regeneration*. Its final version “now includes this essential principle of democracy in planning” thanks to “a strong campaign working with academics including Professor Lees” to strengthen the provisions for resident consultation outlined in the 2016 *Estate Regeneration National Strategy*. Whereas the national strategy only recommends estate residents be given “the option to return to the estate”, “both the Mayor’s *Good Practice Guide* and his new draft London Plan documents, also now include a strong requirement for the replacement of any demolished social housing on ‘identical’ terms with a right of return for all social housing residents”. This is in response to the demands of Professor Lees, the London Tenants Federation, and Just Space, who cited University of Leicester evidence about the hardships and scale of displacement caused by estate renewal [E11].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1. Welsh Joint Education Committee (2016) WJEC GCE AS/A Level in GEOGRAPHY: Guidance for Teaching (Cardiff) p. 54. <https://www.wjec.co.uk/media/lx4f5grr/wjec-as-a->

[geography-guidance-for-teaching.pdf](#)

**E2.** Email to Loretta Lees from producer for BBC Inside Out London, 15 June 2020 and pinned tweet by @zackdesina, 6 September 2018.

<https://twitter.com/zackadesina/status/1037830252511281152>

**E3.** Emails to Loretta Lees from Just Space, 17 June 2020; and SNAG 18, June 2020.

**E4.** Testimony: Cllr, Haringey Ward, Haringey Council.

**E5.** Sendra, Pablo, and Daniel Fitzpatrick (2020) *Community-Led Regeneration: A Toolkit for Residents and Planners* (London: UCL Press).

**E6.** Email to Loretta Lees from Professor in Human Geography, Uppsala University, Sweden, 24 June 2020.

**E7.** Testimony ETICity, Rome Italy. <http://www.eticity.it/w/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Toolkit-Staying-Put-English.pdf>

**E8.** Letter to Southwark Council, from Senior Planner, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, 16 September 2016. Ref: NPCU/CPO/A5840/74092.

[http://35percent.org/img/Decision\\_Letter\\_Final.pdf](http://35percent.org/img/Decision_Letter_Final.pdf)

**E9.** Matthew White, Partner and Head of Planning and Real Estate (London) and Lucy Morton, Professional Support Lawyer, Planning and Real Estate (London): 'A new "right to a community"? Decision by the Secretary of State not to confirm the CPO for Aylesbury Estate' *Real Estate Development Notes*. Herbert Smith Freehills.

<https://hsfnotes.com/realestatedevelopment/2016/09/28/a-new-right-to-a-community-decision-by-the-secretary-of-state-not-to-confirm-the-cpo-for-aylesbury-estate/#Anchor3>

**E10.** Testimony: Barrister, Landmark Chambers, London.

**E11.** Testimony: Sian Berry, GLA, Co-Leader Green Party.

**E12.** Documentary: *Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle*.

<https://www.dispossessionfilm.com>