

File: Melanie Briggs 5

It was almost a year to do the day after we moved in, we just got this letter from the local council saying that 214 properties and a lot of green space and community areas is being raised to the ground and in its place they would be building 400 high-density flats. We had to surrender our house and the council said, 'We'll give you the full market value for your house' and it was like ... but I don't want to sell my house to you. So I was quite cross about that. <Laughs> If you're solvent, you're a home owner, you've paid your mortgage on time, you think you're safe. Not even you're safe. They quoted us a price for around £300,000 more than they offered us for our house so there's no way we can stay. We weren't the worst off. Neighbours in social housing and women who'd come out of abusive relationships and been given refuge, then being torn out of that community, moved out to Basildon, and when you've got your children at the local schools it's really hard. A guy called Alfred, he's 79 years old, he was very, very clear that he was not going voluntarily. Before New Year's Eve he was gone. That to me is quite simply social cleansing. My next-door neighbour went a couple of months ago. He's about 80. He's lived in that house since it was built, he's raised his family there, and his son turned up on my doorstep two months ago. This big, gruff man just in tears on my doorstep. I saw this wonderful, diverse community that I live in just suddenly being ripped out, and I thought I'm going to use my voice about this. So that's how I became an activist. That's how we started campaigning. I stopped feeling like a victim. So I did my research, I did my freedom of information request and was able to evidence that the consultation was unlawful. They scrutinised it to the nth degree, and very, very quickly a group of local people produced a leafletting campaign, and we got some press coverage from the local newspaper, and I wrote a very personal piece for the *Huffington Post*. It got enormous attention. The council were forced to respond to it and since then, that's what I've used is used words, and when you're really passionate about something it just flows. And it shocked me, 'cause I suddenly saw wow, it's powerful, people are actually responding. Social media has been very, very powerful in getting that message across.

For my family we need to move on, we've accepted a price, we will go, but if there's one lasting thing I've done, it's I've raised awareness about Marlow Road, and things have changed as a result. The children have somewhere to play, the people that hung on and are moving at the same time as me are getting decent prices for the property, we got a decent price for our property. The positives that come out of it is I made so many good friends. I was walking my daughter to school about three weeks ago and suddenly a woman pulled up, wound down here window and went, 'Oy, you Melanie Briggs?' And I was like, 'Erm... yes.' And she went, 'Loving your work!' I guess that means I've become known! <Laughs>

<End of transcript>