

View from the Estate:

Mary



Can you tell us a bit about yourself; your interests, hopes and ambitions?

I'm Mary. I have lived in the Alton Estate for over 15 years — schooled here, laughed here, cried here, and everything in between. I've always had a passion for poetry, technology, equality of opportunity, environment and dancing.

What has been your experience of growing up on the Alton Estate?

When I first came to the estate I couldn't speak English, my family made very little money and we didn't really know anyone. 15 years later, I'm working in tech and my sister attends one of the best schools in the country. This isn't by accident.

Having a home was a constant anchor of stability in a sea of chaos. No matter how bad things got, I always had a home, so I could study, and I could get a job.

Without social housing, I couldn't have thrived.

My experience has made me passionate about equality of opportunity and making sure disadvantaged people can realise their potential. But it's also made me realise how lucky I am to have entered the social housing market years ago, it's so much harder now.

We are currently living through a global pandemic; do you feel this has brought the community together, or is there a sense of crisis?

The estate is slowly recovering its spirit — but at a cost. Truth is, the estate struggled before the pandemic, with many youth centres closed, reduced essential services (i.e., police, transport) and the decay of the buildings.

As the people who fought for quality services moved on, the people who remained carried on with their lives as these problems persisted. And so, the neglect washed away the sense of community that existed before. Lockdown has been lonely but I'm one of the luckier ones. It's the older people I feel most sorry for.

For the older people who live alone in the estate, loneliness is almost as bad as the disease. One of our longest-serving neighbours died but we only found out a few months later. Another neighbour rarely leaves the house anymore. Another has lost so much weight since the pandemic she is almost too weak to walk down the stairs. It's so heart-breaking to see.



However, the pandemic has forced the estate to finally pay attention to its problems.

The creation of a People's Plan for Alton Estate is the first time I've seen the community fighting for its future in years.

We have an abundance of green space on the estate, but it is rarely utilised by residents due to imposed limitations on its use. How do you feel about this?

We have beautiful green space in Roehampton. During several walks around the estate between July 2018 and November 2020, I took pictures when these green spaces were not being respected and turned it into a song called "It's my Land".

This song is a response to the social and environmental degradation of the estate. The lyrics go:

It's my land
Oh, it's my home
I don't understand
There's nowhere to roam

You infiltrate my zone
With your lovely empty smiles
You tear away my throne
And throw it in the pile

My brother's lost his limbs
All that's left is bone
He never once sinned
Innocence etched in stone

It's my land
Oh, it's my home
I don't understand
There's nowhere to roam

What impact would you say the closures of youth centres and community spaces has had on Alton Estate residents?

It's been devastating. There is almost nothing to do as a young person here. Where are the jobs, sports clubs and activity centres? I do worry that the young people are turning to crime to feel like they belong. As they say in Africa, "A child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth."

What would you like to see more of, to positively engage and strengthen the community?

The estate has guts, spirit and fountains of hope — but we need to get the basics right first.

We need quality services, we need community facilities, we need our residents' voices championed in council meetings.

What positive changes would you like to bring to the estate (whether this is better facilities for residents, or redesign of housing)?

We need quality community, youth, sports and mental health services. We need to fix problems with existing residents' homes regarding damp and boilers not working. Disabled residents, young people and older people need to have better access to facilities.

How would you describe the Alton Estate to someone who has never heard of it / visited it before?

It has its flaws but has been a sanctuary for some of the poorest in our society. And like a child, the estate needs to be valued, supported and nurtured to realise its potential.

I don't know where I'd be without the estate.

NO TO FAILED PIPEDREAMS SOLELY FOR PRIVATE PROFITS, YES TO INVESTMENT IN THE COMMUNITY'S PLAN

Alton ACTION

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Saturday
September 4th

OPEN CITY

Join the architectural walks at 11am and 2pm starting at Cafe Joy SW15 4DQ

Lunchtime informal discussion Question & Answer at Cafe Joy 49 Danebury Ave, SW15 4DQ



Sunday
September 5th

People's Plan Launch

All Alton Estate residents are welcome!
3pm at St Joseph's Church 218 Roehampton Ln, SW15 4LE



Hello fellow Alton residents!

Over the last year the Alton Action campaign has created an exciting community-led vision for the future of the Alton Estate; a Community Plan based on what current residents actually need.

Thank you to everyone who has given their thoughts and ideas so far. Now that there are fewer Covid restrictions we would love to hear from more residents.

On Sunday 5th September at 3.00pm at St Joseph's Church we will launch the Community Plan. Please come and see the ideas and give your thoughts. We hope you enjoy this newsletter.

If you want to get in touch please email us at altonaction2020@gmail.com, visit our website or see our social media.

The Alton Action team

@ALTONACTION INSTAGRAM.COM/ALTON_ACTION FACEBOOK.COM/ALTONACTION ALTONACTION.ORG

Insect Safari / Bug Hunt / Mystery of the Minibeasts...

Roehampton is rich in biodiversity and is home to some amazing insects and minibeasts!

Insects have six legs and three body parts (a head, thorax and abdomen). They are beneficial to our environment as they pollinate the flowers of the foods we eat as well as decomposing logs and leaf litter to maintain healthy soil.

We are lucky on the Alton Estate to be close to Richmond Park, Putney Heath and Wimbledon Common, as well as having our own green spaces with plants and trees.

Which insects have you seen this summer? We'd love to see your artwork or photos of any insects have seen when you have been out and about! Send them to altonaction2020@gmail.com



Sunday CookOut

last Sunday of each month



Bring food and drinks to share with the community. This month's CookOut will have a carnival theme!

Sun 29 August from 2pm
Roehampton R.O.C.K.S
Alton Activity Centre
Ellisfield Drive
SW15 4DR
Contact: 07492 501791





Resist! Reclaim! Refurbish!

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Alton ACTION

**A PEOPLE'S PLAN – FOR THE COMMUNITY,
BY THE COMMUNITY!**

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