

Everybody needs to live in a place they can call home

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

Keith Fernet

A HOME is more than just a roof over one's head. It provides warmth, stability and a sanctuary away from the hassles of everyday life. Everyone needs a home, but unfortunately it is unobtainable for many.

I am the chief executive of Caritas Anchor House, a Catholic charity for single homeless adults, based in Newham, east London. Each year, we provide a home to 210 homeless people and support for many more, helping them to develop the skills they need to change their lives.

Over the past few years we have seen Newham's housing landscape change dramatically. Despite being one of the most deprived areas in England, it has seen the highest rise in the costs of buying and renting a home than anywhere else in the country.

In 2015, Newham experienced the biggest rise in property values, increasing by a staggering 22 per cent. By contrast, Kensington and Chelsea saw a property growth of just one per cent.

For renters, the average monthly cost for a one bedroom flat in Newham is now £966 – £242 more than the Local Housing Allowance of £724 for a property of the same size.

It is increasingly difficult for the low paid and unemployed to secure or extend a tenancy, and all too easy for them to end up homeless.

Meanwhile, how can those who are currently homeless ever hope to secure a home with soaring rental prices and a lack of social housing?

The housing crisis in Newham is mirrored across the capital, and homelessness has increased as a result. New figures reveal 2,561 people slept rough between January and March 2016 –

nine per cent more than in 2015. At Caritas Anchor House, the demand on our homelessness services is now over

five times our capacity.

Ultimately, the solution to homelessness and the housing crisis is to build more affordable homes.

The provision of housing needs to be increased throughout the social housing sector, the private rented sector and in the privately owned sector. Just 4,880 affordable homes were built last year, but I am pleased to see Sadiq Khan's plans to build four times as many. However, it is vitally important that affordable homes are just that – affordable. This currently means up to 80 per cent of the market value, which for households with an income under

£50,000, is not affordable at all.

We must work together to create change, and I have seen first-hand how powerful this can be.

Following 12 months of campaigning by Caritas Anchor House and local organisations, it has been announced that the development on the former West Ham football ground will invest £90 million in affordable housing. Initial plans submitted showed that only six per cent would be affordable and none would be social housing. Now, the developers have committed to at least 25 per cent affordable homes. Newham Council have also announced their intention to invest an additional £18 million for affordable homes on the site, taking to the total to 35 per cent.

I am shocked that the developers thought that only six per cent affordable housing was acceptable. The provision of affordable and social housing is clearly not a priority for them, but this is a paradigm that must change.

We need the government and developers to take action, create fair access to housing, and help us to ensure that everyone has a place to call home.

■ Keith Fernet is chief executive of

Caritas Anchor House, which is part of CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network)

■ For more information about Caritas Anchor House, please visit: www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk

FACTFILE

Newham:

■ Is one of the most deprived areas in England;

■ Has seen the highest rise in property values and rents than anywhere else in the country;

■ Has the worst low pay rate in London, with 35 per cent of its residents in jobs below the Living Wage – an increase of ten per cent in the past four years;

■ Has the third highest unemployment rate in London, with 8.6 per cent of its residents out of work.





Investing in the future – Caritas Anchor House residents taking part in the former West Ham football stadium affordable housing campaign