

news

It is not the present she hoped for but Maureen Walsh is determined not to let a High Court defeat mar her 70th birthday.

As chair of Derker Action Group (DAG), the great-grandmother – who has just celebrated her 70th birthday – led a six-year campaign against the demolition of almost 400 terraced homes under Oldham's £53 million, taxpayer-funded Housing Market Renewal programme.

DAG, which argues that renovation would be cheaper and greener than clearance and new build, fought a public inquiry and three High Court hearings – the last of which they lost earlier this month.

They don't rule out the possibility of further legal challenges – the compulsory purchase order does not cover the whole clearance area and misses off Walsh's home – but members may now agree to sell and focus instead on fighting for a fairer compensation deal. Walsh and her husband Terry, 71, have vowed to find a home in their own time.

“The council has in effect ruined our lives.”

She said: “We're having a party and then we're going away for a week and then we're going to have Christmas with the family. We'll just plod along and do things in our time and not be pushed, shoved, manipulated and threatened by anybody.

“The council has in effect ruined our lives at a time when we should be really enjoying life. But they aren't bothered.”

The Walshes have lived in their current house for 37 years. When regeneration was mooted in about 2002, most homes in Derker were occupied. Today the streets are lined with tinned-up terraces, and eerily deserted.

Opponents of the scheme complain they are being chased away to make way for “a better class of people” and are angry that after the wrecking crews have finished, land is simply

Residents' legal blow



The Walshes could be forced to leave their home after 37 years. Photo: Ciara Leeming

being scattered with grass and wild flower seeds and left empty for future development.

Oldham Borough Council sees Derker as a failing community that can only be rescued through demolition and new build, with some renovation.

DAG enjoyed huge support before people moved out of the area, leaving a hardcore of about 20 households.

Walsh is adamant that residents should get a property of similar size to their old one at no added cost. Their mortgage was paid off in 1985 and, both retired, they now live on a fixed income. But the compensation people are being offered for their properties is not enough to buy a similar house outright.

She said: “There are maintenance charges, high ground rents and they won't tell us what council tax bands the properties are in. We worked out that we would have to pay out an extra £80 a week – and that's probably gone up since then. Where are we meant to get that from? We don't get benefits.

“We don't want to rent or to go down the shared ownership route, and we don't want the £35,000 bridging loan that's on offer – we don't want to be beholden to Oldham Council, and for them to own a percentage of our home. If you take that any family member can

be asked to leave if you pass away, and we would have to ask their permission if we wanted to do things or sell the house. We've always been independent. I don't see why we should change now.”

Cllr John McCann, spokesman for housing, said: “The very large majority of local residents are desperate to see the conclusion of demolition work

and more building work to start on new homes in the area.

“We have an enormous amount of respect and sympathy for the handful of residents who have supported another appeal, but hope that we can now sit down together to discuss their individual circumstances and help them find new homes.”

CIARA LEEMING

‘The truth is that there

A historic protocol between Armenia and Turkey to develop diplomatic ties has driven fears it will wash away responsibility for a “forgotten” genocide.

The treaty, ratified last month, will re-open the Armenian-Turkish border for the first time since 1993 – if progress is made in talks over the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Turkey closed the border during a conflict 16 years ago that saw ethnic Armenian rebels fighting for the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan – a close ally of Turkey. The fighting ended in 1994 with some 30,000 dead and Armenia occupying parts of Azerbaijan, intensifying the century-old animosity with Turkey.

Armenia was a former colony of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. In 1915, deportation of ethnic Armenians from Turkish soil ended in an estimated 1.5 million Armenian deaths – now widely recognised as an act of genocide. This bloody history has led to nationalists on both sides opposing the protocol.

One Armenian historian in London said: “Many people are using this protocol to invoke the passionate distaste these nations often have for each other. The truth is that there was a genocide, and Turkey does not accept this, but this protocol is a separate document.”

Dr Lars Berger, an expert in politics and contemporary history of the Middle East at