

We lost our home and ended up owing money thanks to 'regeneration'

By **Ciara Leeming**
and **David Paul**

PENSIONERS Pat and Walter Gowenlock were forced to leave their house and take a huge loan for a new home when their street was scheduled for demolition.

The couple in their 70s received just £10,000 compensation and had to borrow £25,000 to fund the move as part of a regeneration project.

But once the properties were empty the plans were changed by developers and the same houses are being sold to other people for 10 times the price.

"We went to a lawyer who told us if we didn't sell up the council would just put a compulsory purchase order on our house," Mr Gowenlock said. "It was heartbreaking, but we decided the best thing would be to take the swap and get on with it."

Communities Secretary Hazel Blears was under attack last night for backing the project in her Salford constituency. More than £88million in taxpayers' cash and private funding has been spent.

Locals are angry and upset they have been moved out of their homes so that people with more money can move into the revamped area close to where the BBC plans to set up its multi-million pound northern base.

Mr and Mrs Gowenlock had lived in their three-bedroom terraced home for 40 years. The house they had bought for £1,000 in the early Sixties was fully paid for.

They were told they would have to enter a scheme called Homeswap, where they could buy a nearby house, but would have to take out a new loan despite being in their 70s.

"Our new house was priced at £35,000, so we had to borrow the difference from Salford Council," Mr



HEARTBREAK: Pat and Walter Gowenlock outside the house that they were forced to leave

Gowenlock, 76, said. Months later the council said that the regeneration plans had been changed. There was to be no demolition. The houses were to be refurbished instead.

However, the couple were told they had no right to return and now a two-bedroom house around the corner from their old, larger one, is on the market for £90,000.

"The council say they are doing these good things for Salford, but aren't telling people about the heartbreak they are causing," said 74-year-old Mrs Gowenlock. "Our house was paid for, but now we're in debt. We feel as though we've been conned. We

haven't been shown any respect, this is all about money to them.

"It wasn't just a house, it was our home and we thought we'd be there for life. Two of our four children have died, so all our memories were there.

"I can't bring myself to look at the place now. I cross the road and turn my head away when I pass it.

"We wrote to Hazel Blears, but we never got an answer. We went to a couple of meetings which she attended, but they were dominated by other people. We could never get a word in." Ms Blears, who chaired the regeneration partnership board seeking to improve life for residents has said

House and g £25,000 neration'

Picture: MAGI HAROUN



are forced to leave after 40 years

that securing £25million of Government funding for the area was her proudest achievement in Parliament since 1997.

Yards from the couple's old home, advertising hoardings have been put up to promote Chimney Pot Park, the new development of 349 "contemporary and affordable" homes being created by property firm Urban Splash.

Few, if any, of the existing residents - where the average annual wage is £13,000 - will find the Urban Splash converted Victorian terraced homes affordable at £120,000 each, with an extra £5,000 for a car parking space. The £40million bill for the Chimney

Pot Park homes includes £15 million of taxpayers' cash. Once again, the former residents are furious they have been forced out.

Susan Copeland got just £9,000 for her home "I was never given the option to go back to the area, I was ousted out," she said. "It doesn't seem fair."

Another at risk of losing her home, Karen Ainsworth, said: "We think this is all about making money for developers."

Last night Ms Blears told the Sunday Express: "While specific decisions about individual local projects are a matter for Salford City Council, they have a clear responsibility to act in the best interests of local people.

"I understand in this instance the plans were changed in response to concerns of local residents.

"It's important to remember the benefits of regeneration. It has transformed the area with houses in need of repair, demolished or refurbished, house prices steadily rising, and there is now a real sense of optimism."

John Merry, leader of Salford City Council, admitted there had been "difficult issues" but said: "I think most people who live there accept the fact that the council is doing the best it can to improve the social conditions in this area."

Urban Splash spokesman Nathan Cornish denied long-term residents had been ousted from the area unfairly and said the firm was legally obliged to sell its homes at the market value.

The scheme is part of the controversial Pathfinder project set up by former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott that will see 400,000 terraced houses flattened across nine areas of northern England and the Midlands.

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