

THE PEOPLE'S REGENERATION SHOW-HOME:

YOU CAN DO IT TOO



SPACIOUS 3 BDR HOME SET FOR DEMOLITION

Happy family cruelly evicted. London's leafy Whetstone.

Garden, parking, lovely neighbours, schools.

£400 to developers, £800,000 to buyers

Ask about our 'affordable' options - you'll cry!

The power to regenerate housing doesn't rest in the hands of the government and landlords. We; the people, and the communities to which we belong, have all the power necessary to create and protect the homes we need.

At Sweets Way in London N20, a group of evicted families and supporters came together to prove that regeneration can happen from the bottom up. Using donated materials, tools, skills, and a small budget (£370), a group of hard-working and devoted volunteers restored a house that had been destroyed by private contractors who wanted to make it uninhabitable. The landlords – Annington Homes – had smashed up the piping, the toilet, the bath, the sink. They had removed the kitchen, the white goods and the flooring. They'd left holes in the roof and walls, and cracks everywhere.

The People's Regeneration Show Home – as we called it – was brought back to life within a week. We transformed it into a beautiful family home, built with love, solidarity and conviction.

We proved that the power to regenerate is in OUR hands, not THEIRS. We urge everyone whose communities are under threat to do the same. Don't wait for private landlords, or the local council, to take action on your behalf. Organise. Roll up your sleeves. Housing is a human right, and WE can safeguard it.

This pdf outlines exactly what we did, and how. Please download it, print it out, and regenerate your own homes in your own communities. Remember, though, that this is not a one-size-fits-all solution. The beauty of our communities is in their diversity. Your campaign, your project, will have its own possibilities and limitations, shaped both by the people involved and the homes you've got to work with. The homes you regenerate will bear their own unique stamp, their own inimitable style; each a testimony to the love and power of the people who breathed new life into them.

If you'd like to get in touch for more advice, tips or solidarity you can tweet us at @SweetsWayN20 .

HERE'S WHAT TO DO

1. Remember WHY you're there, and WHO you're there for:

Housing is a human right. This is the foundation that unites all housing campaigns. Yet each community's housing struggle is different; each must be shaped according to the needs and wishes of the residents most affected by the crisis, both nationally and locally. Keep this foremost in your mind at all times. In particular, if you're an activist supporting a community campaign, you should always refer to residents before making decisions. The life-blood and power of every housing campaign comes from the residents who are suffering as a result of the cruel vagaries of housing policy in their neighbourhoods. Activism is about solidarity, not political piggy-backing.

2. Finding the ideal home: location, location, location

Look for a house that has the ideal balance of visibility and subtlety. You want the house to be easy to access, and easy to see. Creating a

People's Show Home is a public statement, so there's no point in hiding out of sight. You want to prove to everyone that passes by that grassroots regeneration is not just possible, but beautiful. However, it's also important to consider security issues. A house facing a main road may not be ideal. We chose 153 Sweets Way because, while the house itself is easily accessible and visible, its exact positioning allows for subtle access.

3. Accessing the House

One of the reasons why we chose 153 Sweets Way was because it had open windows, allowing for easy and legal access. Other groups who have not found open windows (or doors), have used resources such as this one for guidance: <http://freegan.info/what-is-a-freegan/freegan-practices/squat-links/how-to-squat-a-building/>

4. Make your (grand) entrance and do a cursory survey

At night, enter through an open window or door (or other route), without causing criminal damage, to assess the current state of the property. Note any damage that has been done, any critical repairs, decoration required, and take a short inventory of the furniture/fittings (if any). You'll need a torch, and you'll have to stay quiet, to avoid raising suspicion at this crucial recce stage.

5. Draw up a to-do list and get ready

Using information gathered in point 4, draw up a detailed to-do list (sand walls, remove old lineoleum, etc). Write down everything that needs to be done, and in what order. Use this list to begin making preparations and sourcing materials and skilled labour help.

6. Get the community on your side

Community support is vital – it can make or break your project. While we were doing the show home, we held a weekly stall on the local high street, which helped us to make links with the local community of N20. Local people understood what we were doing, and why. It's important that everyone in the area understands that you're not a bunch of willful vandals, but that you're regenerating this home on behalf of everyone in the community. If you don't know your neighbours, you may want to pay them a friendly visit, explaining what you intend to do, and why. If this is the case, you might want to make this visit after you've secured the building, and just before you begin work, in the unlikely event that you meet with opposition.

7. Is it safe? Ask an expert

Take advice from an architect or structural engineer to confirm that the building is safe to work in. You could try contacting Architects for Social Housing for help with this. [@ASH_housing](https://twitter.com/ash_housing)

8. Seek funding

In total, we spent £370 on turning 153 Sweets Way into a beautiful family home. Of this, £350 was donated by Barnet Unison, and the Radical Housing Network. There are individuals and groups across the country who would be very pleased to support your regeneration project. We advise seeking them out at least two weeks before you plan to begin work. Consider contacting local and national activist groups, supportive neighbours, community groups and trade unions.

9. Get inspired

Look online for ideas of how to do up a house on a shoestring. It's been done countless times before. Browse pinterest, search for blogs. It's fun!

10. Keep your eyes peeled

Ask everyone involved in the project to keep their eyes peeled wherever they go. We've found the most amazing materials and furniture lying in skips and on pavements around Sweets Way. Rubbish to some-

one, treasure to you.

11. Make a call-out for skills and materials

Begin by contacting trusted people within your own networks. Then, once you know you're securely inside the future show-home, make your call-outs public. Your goal is to find out which materials and skills you can access free of charge (or on the cheap). You should also start scanning freecycle, freegle and Gumtree, as well as watching local skips like a hawk.

Materials list:

- a. Paint/brushes/rollers
- b. Tools:
- i. Screwdrivers, electric drills, sanders, (electric) saws/jigsaws, workbenches, grouting pumps, trowels
- c. Plaster and filler
- d. Pallets (often given away for free on Gumtree, or at the back of large shops, who are often keen to get rid of them)
- e. Tiles
- f. Carpeting
- g. Lino
- h. Cleaning materials (including broom and vacuum cleaner)
- i. Furniture
- j. Bath, toilet, sink
- k. Kitchen fittings/equipment
- l. Bedding
- m. Piping and plumbing fixtures

Skills

- n. Plumbing (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/supply/legislation.htm> / <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/consum-erissues/rightsresponsibilities/plumbing/>)
- o. Electrics (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/electricity/information/law.htm>)
- p. Carpentry and cabinet-making
- q. Roofing (if necessary)
- r. People with transport (cars/vans)
- s. Lawyers/legal advisors (if necessary)

Miscellaneous: call your friendly local tree surgeon

Tree surgeons often need to get rid of tree offcuts, including very useful chunks. We used logs/stumps for stools and a coffee table. Some tree surgeons may be prepared to slice their offcuts into boards or planks for you.

Above all, don't be afraid to ask friends, family and other contacts for help. So many people out there feel so desperate about what's happening in our society, but aren't sure where to start, or how to help. We've found that people are generally supportive of our attempts to protect our homes, and are very glad of an opportunity to help. Go through your contact list and invite people to get involved. You'll find that many are glad to be given the opportunity of doing something constructive to help others in their community, as well as themselves. More and more people are just a payday or two away from mortgage or rent default, and homelessness.

12. Find secure local storage for your materials

Locate a suitable nearby place to store materials discretely and securely in the run up to project, as well as while it's in progress.

13. Don't overlook 'soft' skills

Don't underestimate the importance of other skills such as cooking, cleaning and childcare – these are vital for morale and health, and therefore critical to the success of your regeneration project. Providing healthy cooked meals will save valuable time that might otherwise be wasted making sandwich runs at mealtimes. Creating a safe place for children to play in will make it easy for parents to devote their labour to the project. Valuing these skills also means that those who are not confident with DIY, or those who are unable to work due to ill-health, disability, or work and caring commitments can contribute to the project in a valuable way. To each according to their need; from each according to their ability.

14. Make your project accessible

It's not a community project if some community members are prevented from taking part. This follows on partly from point 14, but goes further. Make your project, and the house you're working on, a safe space for all. Outlaw all discrimination – racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, ableism, ageism. There should be no misuse of alcohol or drugs, and a no-tolerance attitude to any kind of violence, whether physical or verbal. The house should be made as physically accessible as possible. Do everything in your power to remove all barriers, both physical and mental, that prevent everyone from taking part. Any campaign materials should be written in plain English, and printed in a large, easy-to-read font.

15. Listen to the quiet voices among you

If you have people in your network who are shy or, for whatever reason (e.g. language barriers), don't speak up in community meetings, make a special effort to connect with them. Community regeneration is about skill-sharing, and confidence itself is a skill. If you have it, share it generously. Gently initiate conversations with quiet community members. Find out what's important to them, what they feel comfortable with contributing – but don't pressure anyone to get involved. Everyone should contribute in a way that feels comfortable. As well as being a matter of justice and true democracy, if you help people to feel safe and valued, the project as a whole gains in reach in breadth. You may be surprised by what someone who has never said a word can bring to the project. Inclusion benefits everyone.

16. Draw up a rota

It may feel weirdly over-regimented for a community or activist project, but drawing up a rota or spreadsheet is a really useful way to stay organized, and aware of who is coming and going, when, and what they'll be doing. It's important to know who is available and when, what their skills are, and what materials they can bring, if any. It's particularly important to ensure a good showing on the first day, because this is the most legally vulnerable point: this is when the project becomes visible.

17. Go public

Write a press release and invite the local press and supporters on the first day of work. It's also a good idea to publish a blog post - this was ours: <https://sweetswayresists.wordpress.com/2015/07/24/prsh-launch/>. Make sure that there will be plenty of people at work on the house when the press arrive, as well as for the duration of the press visit. If you have established press lists/ contacts with national media, contact them as well. If you have journalists you already know and trust, feel free to send them a little more heads-up in advance, though make clear that the information is under embargo until the the time the work officially kicks-off. It's a good idea to send another out the day before you finish the work, or if you think you're going to be delayed.

18. Shout LOUD on social media

Maintain a vigorous social media campaign throughout your regeneration project. Some of the best protection is in a public profile, and social media is one of the strongest ways to get that these days. Establish a twitter hashtag (ours was #SWshowhome) and make sure all of your contacts and supporters are aware of it. Post regular photos and updates, calls-out for odds and ends, as well as volunteers. Connect with other relevant local groups, not only to raise awareness, but also to seek solidarity, contributions, practical help and inspiration. Social media allows you to tell your own story, in real time; and it's free.

19. The grand opening

Schedule a grand opening day (when the home will be ready and open for viewing), and invite the local press and other contacts (as per point 18).

20. Take before photos

If you want to show what you've achieved as a group, you need to be able to show the sorry state of the home before you worked your magic on it.

21. An important formality

Print out and post a Section 144 notice on the door before you do anything else. You can download one here (you might need to amend it to fit your situation): <http://www.squatter.org.uk/2012/08/legal-notice-for-laspo-2012/>. The homes in Sweets Way had already been designated as decommissioned residential buildings. You'll need to find out what the situation is with the home/s you want to regenerate, and make legal provisions accordingly.

22. Get to work!

- a. Send in 2-3 people to remove any broken glass, exposed nails, sharp surfaces, making it safe for others. Steel-toed boots and tough gloves can be very useful for this.
- b. Get in and begin work just before morning rush hour, so that the entry point/moment is not too public
- c. Remove rubble
- d. Sweep, Hoover, dust and wipe
- e. Fill holes/cracks with plaster/filler, giving plenty of time to dry
- f. Begin breaking up pallets so you can use the planks for flooring/woodwork. Either prise the pallets apart using a hammer and chisel, or saw apart at joints (the latter method resulting in shorter planks, but much quicker)
- g. Measure your planks and cut them to size, ready for flooring (do this before painting so that you don't create dust when the paint is fresh on the wall) – <http://homeguides.sfgate.com/use-wood-pallets-create-floor-34723.html>
- h. Paint walls and hang wallpaper (if using)
- i. Lay flooring – lino/tiles/carpet/planks

23. Stay alert throughout

You don't need to nominate a security guard for your project, but it's good if everyone is aware of who is passing by, and whether anyone is monitoring the regeneration work. If police/security/bailiffs come, don't panic or become aggressive or snarky. Simply go inside the house and secure the doors. If you are questioned about the regeneration work, simply respond 'no comment.' Refer to the Green and Black Cross Bustcard for more advice: <https://greenandblackcross.org/bustcard/>.

How and where we found our supplies

1. Surprising places

Obvious, but not obvious. If you keep your eyes peeled, and ask around, you'll be surprised too.

2. Nearby building sites

Ask around at nearby building sites about whether they have any materials they've finished with. It costs businesses money to have rubbish collected; you'll be doing them a favour.

3. Local skips

Drive around the local area, both before the project and at regular intervals during it. Look in skips for useful materials.

4. Local shops

Ask in local shops about whether they throw things away or whether they're willing to donate materials. Remember that local businesses suffer because of social cleansing too.

5. Open your mind: repurposing

Consider repurposing materials: someone donated some slate tiles from the roof of a derelict building they were renovating – we used these for a beautiful floor in our show home's kitchen.

What we learned

1. It's possible

The People's Regeneration Show Home began as a dream; a wild, fanciful idea. What if we could ignore the council's heel-dragging intransigence and just do it ourselves? Could we really achieve the impossible – could we bring the dead back to life? Well, we did it. We did it – together - and it felt great. The demolition ball did eventually knock down the walls of the People's Show Home, but it could never destroy what we did. Because we made the impossible happen; and we exposed the UK's housing 'regeneration' policy for the cynical and dangerous lie we all know it to be. And you can do it too.

2. The People's Show Home wasn't built in a day

We'd originally scheduled three days for the project, but it took six. Make sure you allow plenty of time. Advice from experienced renovators/decorators will help with this.

3. Know your enemy

We were surprised to find that the greatest threat and opposition seemed to come from not from the police, but from private contractors (security/bailiffs). The tide may be turning, and the situation may be different where you live. You'll just have to find out.

4. Look after yourselves

Make sure you're getting enough sleep, enough healthy food to eat, and plenty of hugs. To our regret, we weren't always so hot on the sleep and the food (hugs were in abundance). Buoying each other along, laughing, keeping morale high – such things are hard to capture but impossible to succeed without. Social media can help with this. It's an easy way to stay connected and receive messages of solidarity and love from across the world, keeping you focused and keeping you happy.

5. Have fun and feel the love

Fun and love are the ultimate protest. The People's Regeneration Show Home is beautiful because we had fun doing it; we built it in solidarity. We did it as an expression of our love for everyone in our society.

Get in touch

Drop us a message if you want to find out more: sweetswayresists@gmail.com.