



Social housing and working class heritage

Fighting for survival perspective: Alan Powers

**Alan Powers, professor of architecture and cultural history
University of Greenwich**

In my experience there is a community feeling that a building should be kept and it may or may not be housing. That is a great advantage towards an outcome in which it is eventually kept. This is strictly speaking outside the criteria of listing but in the political arena it can't help making a difference. Partly it removes fears that politicians may have that they're going to be criticised for doing this, and they feel much more secure about taking a decision that may otherwise look a bit rash, and this seems to have been the case with the listing of a housing estate called Alexandra Road in Camden, a listing which took place really very early on in this whole reappraisal of post-war architecture, I think it was in 1994. And in that instance the residents had come out and said we want to be listed. It wasn't really that they'd kind of researched the historic buildings field, there was something that their landlords, Camden Council, were planning to do that they didn't like, and they thought that listing could be available as a way of stopping this and, as it happened, it was available.

Not many housing estates have that possibility and it's usually fairly easy to know which side of the line it's going to be on. From watching the cut footage of the Carpenters Estate none of the residents talked about listing at all and therefore I drew the inference that they weren't expecting it. I think the motives of the inhabitants, the people in the Carpenters Estate, was very clear, that they mistrusted the process that was going on, seemingly behind their backs despite a lot of consultation suggesting something different, and their attachment to their place where they lived and had grown up came out very strongly against the background of this threat. Unfortunately social housing tenants have very few rights and not much of a voice, and this is the outcome of many years of politics which have made sure that that's the case.