

## Leeds Community Project

leedscp@riseup.net

07951355293

www.leedscp.noblogs.org

Facebook: Leeds CP

Twitter: @Leedscp



## Leeds Community Project Re-occupies 6 Grosvenor Mount After Unlawful Eviction

- Unique LS6 space, 6 Grosvenor Mount, re-opened for the community
- 6 Grosvenor Mount was unlawfully evicted on 19<sup>th</sup> February – legal action is being planned
- Local people should be able to decide the future of a unique asset which could support the necessary sustainable future of Leeds

On 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015 Leeds Community project (LCP) re-occupied the non-residential areas of 6 Grosvenor Mount, LS6, after an unlawful eviction. We aim to continue to open up the space for the local community, and to facilitate discussions around how the unique infrastructures, including the glasshouses and garden, can be used to benefit the communities of Leeds beyond private housing.

The former University of Leeds research site, a unique space of nearly one acre, contains seven glasshouses and many established plants, including rare species. It now holds many future possibilities for sustainable food growing and can be envisioned as a space for education and social events, as well as a space for nature and wildlife<sup>1</sup>. Since its closure in 2011, North Hyde Park Residents Association tried to designate 6 Grosvenor Mount as a 'community asset' and took this to Leeds City Council in an attempt to halt plans. The designation was not successful because the Council argued that the space was not being utilised by the local community. However, use of the space by the local community has not been possible due to the site being closed off. There have also been attempts by several individuals, including students, to communicate with Leeds University to prevent the sale for private investment and to open the space for community benefit, but the university has not continued discussions.

The University has been granted detailed planning permission to renovate the current residential building and to build seven new houses where the outbuildings, glasshouses and gardens now stand. It is currently in the process of selling the space to a private investor. Leeds University has publicly committed to values of education and sustainability, and we believe selling the site for private investment does not align with these.

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<sup>1</sup> Opened in 1946 as an experimental garden and biological research area, the site consists of one residential building, several outbuildings and classrooms, 7 large glasshouses and a variety of large established plants, including some protected species, on a plot of 0.92 acres

Due to the imminence of the sale, on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015, LCP took action and opened the site. In the week it was open we hosted a variety of activities including food growing, community social events, live acoustic music, activities for children and, in conjunction with The Real Junk Food project, a food initiative was launched. Over 100 people came to support the project, including local residents, by participating in activities and meetings. This, alongside the positive response to the social media campaign, showed there was potential and enthusiasm from the very beginning to discuss a future for 6 Grosvenor Mount beyond housing.

On 19<sup>th</sup> February LCP was unlawfully evicted and three of its members were arrested before being released without charge<sup>2</sup>. Since, our legal working group has been in touch with external legal advisers to explore our options, and is now working on taking legal actions against the University and Leeds Community Project has re-occupied the land.

Leeds Community Project strongly opposes the unlawful eviction and the actions of the University of Leeds and of the police. Therefore we have legally<sup>3</sup> re-entered the site to continue our primary goals. These include to immediately stop the sale of 6 Grosvenor Mount, open it up to the communities of Leeds and facilitate discussions exploring the potential of the unique infrastructure so it better benefits local communities and interested groups.

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2 We strongly believe that University Security Staff committed an offence, violently breaking entry to the site by forcing the front gate open. Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 makes it a criminal offence to secure entry to a property by force when someone is present who is opposed to that entry. Security Staff intimidated our members, who felt the only option left was to call the police. The Security, uncomfortable in their legal position on site, left and intercepted the police. Despite being called to investigate the criminal offence, the police arrested three members on suspicion of stealing electricity. All of them were released on the same day without charge, after we provided evidence of our electricity account.

3 Occupying non-residential buildings is a civil matter. To resolve it the owner has to start a court procedure. The owners have legal ways and procedures to have squatters evicted and cannot legally use force or threats. Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 makes it an offence to force entry to a building which is occupied.