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OPINION

What's the most important part of any urban landscape? The people who inhabit it

Transitions gives Ilford residents who may not, by dint of being working people, get access to creative spaces and concepts

JULIE ADAMS | 7 Dec 2025

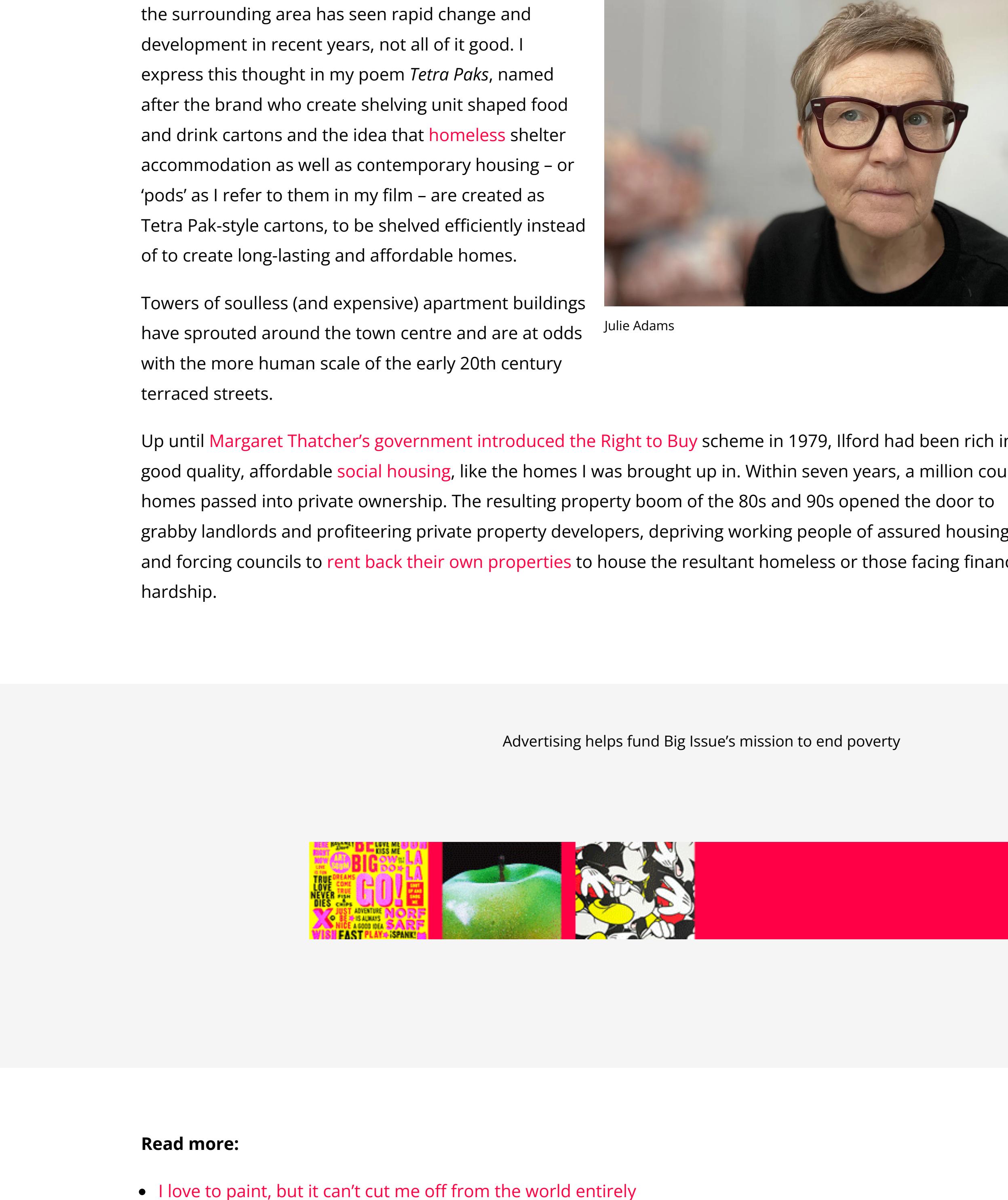


Image: David Mirzoeff / SPACE



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Having grown up in East London in a working-class family, I was already familiar with Ilford and its history, so I was very interested to be part of [Alan Abraham's Transitions project](#). Alan had no such familiarity and came to the area with fresh eyes and no preconceived impressions. He saw a very different place to the one I thought I knew.

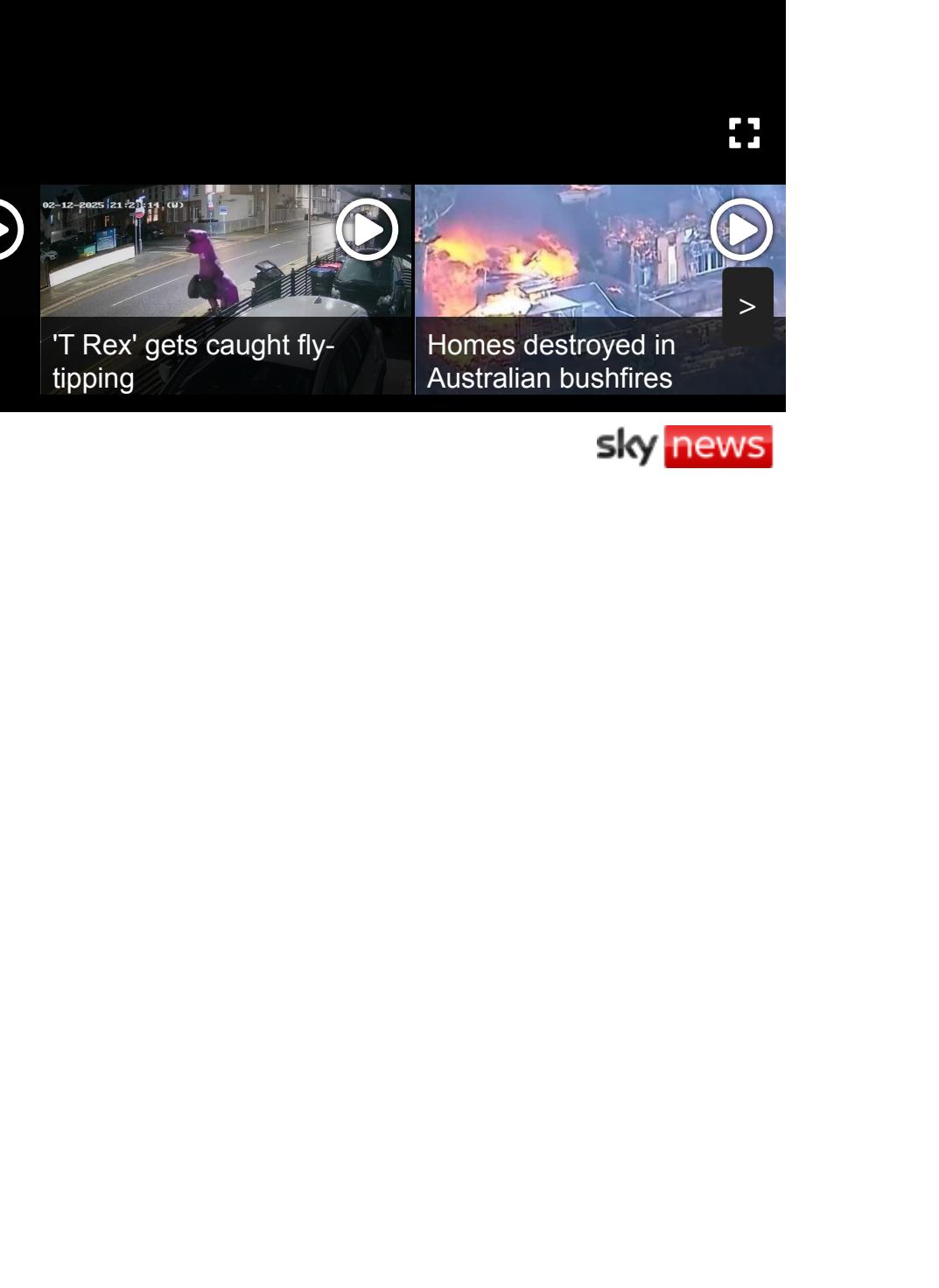
With his [films](#) and [music](#), he drew out of each participating poet subtle and sometimes profound impressions of what at first glance appears to be just another gritty Greater London environment.

Although primarily focused on the built environment, the films served to direct our attention back to what is always the most important part of any urban landscape: the people who inhabit it. Their private thoughts, hopes, struggles, fears and identities and cultures.

Like many other parts of Greater London, Ilford and the surrounding area has seen rapid change and development in recent years, not all of it good. I express this thought in my poem *Tetra Paks*, named after the brand who create shelving unit shaped food and drink cartons and the idea that [homeless](#) shelter accommodation as well as contemporary housing – or 'pods' as I refer to them in my film – are created as Tetra Pak-style cartons, to be shelved efficiently instead of to create long-lasting and affordable homes.

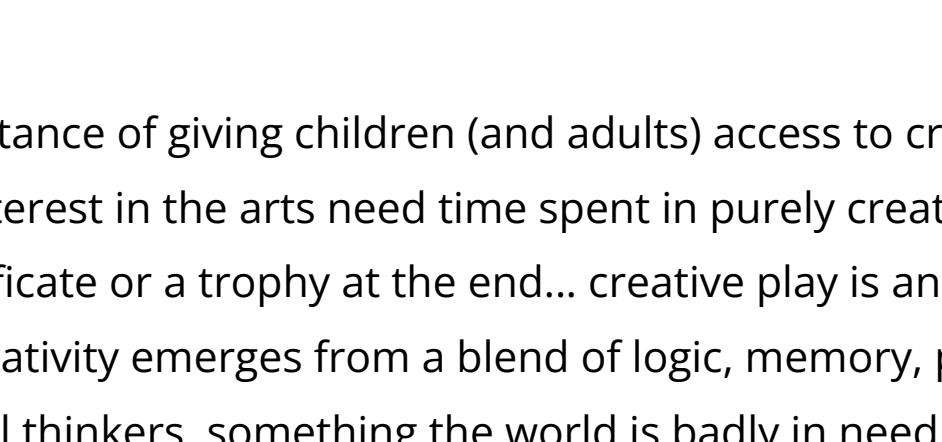
Towers of soulless (and expensive) apartment buildings have sprouted around the town centre and are at odds with the more human scale of the early 20th century terraced streets.

Up until [Margaret Thatcher's government introduced the Right to Buy scheme](#) in 1979, Ilford had been rich in good quality, affordable [social housing](#), like the homes I was brought up in. Within seven years, a million council homes passed into private ownership. The resulting property boom of the 80s and 90s opened the door to grabby landlords and profiteering private property developers, depriving working people of assured housing and forcing councils to [rent back their own properties](#) to house the resultant homeless or those facing financial hardship.



Julie Adams

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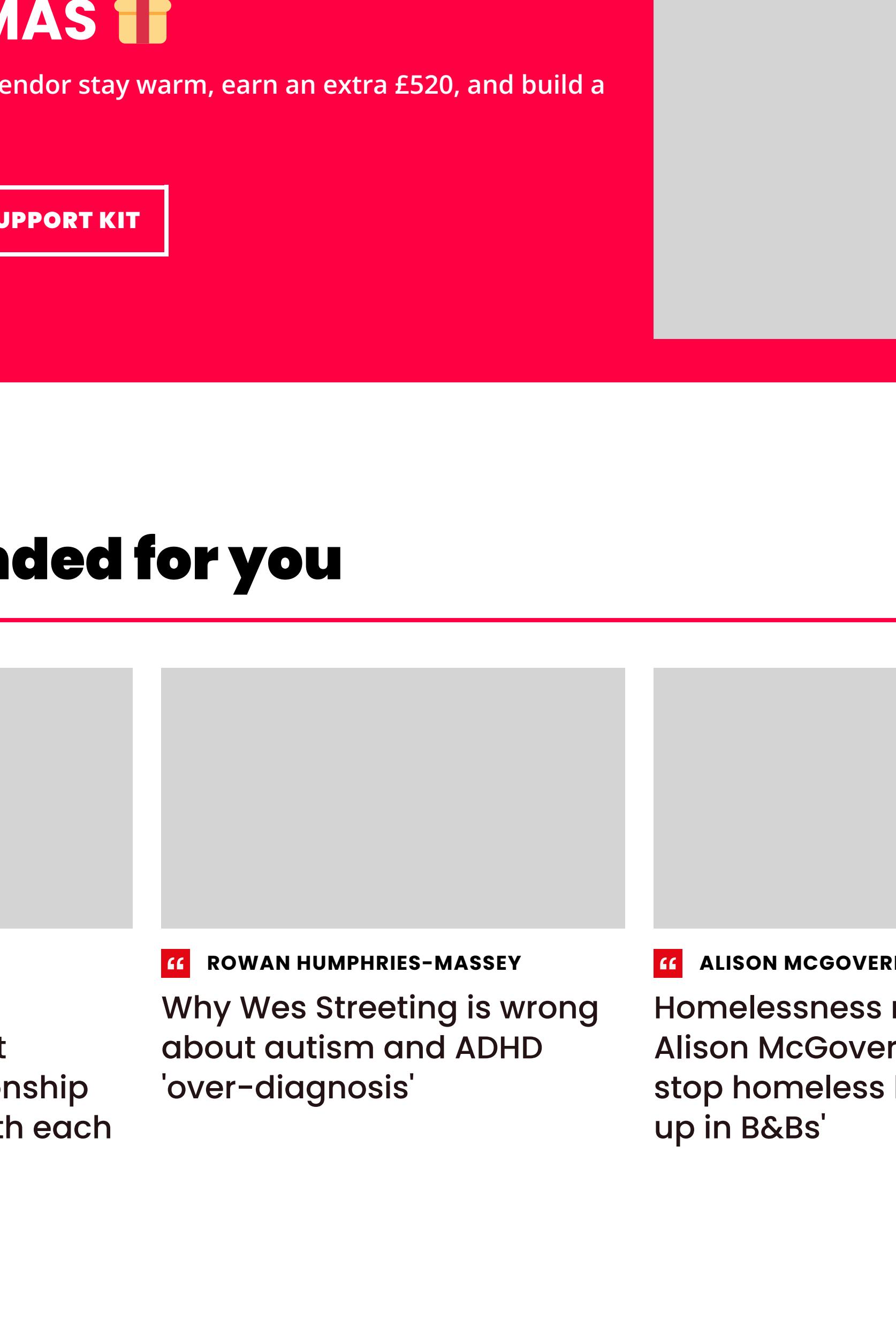
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This trend has only intensified, putting cheap, liveable accommodation beyond the reach of many working people and placing enormous strain on council budgets.

I find it hard to watch the existing housing stock fall into disrepair at the hands of absentee landlords and this decline is in sharp contrast to the pristine glass and steel monoliths that rise everywhere.

I've spoken to many people struggling to raise families in tiny 'apartments' – the 'pods' mentioned in my poem. The children of these families are denied access to gardens, green spaces, light and air.

Unfortunately, being raised in a [working-class](#) neighbourhood can equate (as I know from my own lived experience) with limited aspirations and opportunity.



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