

Haringey Council says, "You will need to earn more money to afford these new homes"

Response to Haringey's Local Plan from Haringey Defend Council Housing

27 March 2015

Excluding Existing Local Residents

"The ability of local people to afford the new homes being built, especially in the east of the borough, is dependent on them accessing jobs and also increasing their incomes to a sufficient level to afford the new homes on offer as a result." (Equalities Impact Assessment on Haringey's housing policies, Cabinet, 17/03/15, p62).

These shocking words should tell local councillors that it is time to stop and think again about the huge programme of housing demolitions and redevelopment in the Local Plan.

The suggestion that Tottenham residents must compete against all-comers to secure 'jobs in more highly-skilled sectors, such as sustainable technology, digital design and skilled / craft manufacturing' (p62) seems perplexing, when local people are facing cuts in youth services and Further Education opportunities, and when the regeneration plans include the elimination of local jobs at the Peacock and Brantwood Road industrial estates, and in community shops and businesses.

Some people have health or disability issues, or other barriers to reaching the highly-paid work which will now be required. Housing is a human right, and it is unjust to deny decent homes to local people purely because they have low incomes.

The Equalities Impact Assessment shows that Council renting and Housing Association renting at target rents are really-affordable in this borough, while the preferred regeneration tenures of low cost home ownership and so-called 'Affordable Rent' (meaning time-limited tenancies and near-market rents) are not affordable, especially on the average incomes in Tottenham.

So when council housing is demolished, "affordable housing is not affordable".

The Equalities Impact Assessment also states that the reliance in these plans on low-cost home ownership will adversely affect black people in particular (p62).

Policies that disadvantage the poor will have an institutionally racist impact.

Targeting Council Housing

The redevelopment plans are relentlessly focused in and around council estates, seeking the strategic alteration of tenure mix by removing the most secure and really-affordable tenure in the rented housing market, i.e. council housing. These plans propose to build housing developments with defined physical attributes, but much less-defined ownership, security of tenure, or rent regimes.

The number of homes at risk of demolition just keeps increasing. No official figures are ever given for the total numbers, but we estimate more than 4,000 working class homes are at risk of demolition, and probably around 3,500 of them are on council estates: at Broadwater Farm, Love Lane, Northumberland Park, and on estates in South Tottenham and Bounds Green; and there is no awareness in these documents that these are living communities, at risk of dispersal.

We acknowledge that the Council can sometimes listen, and amend its plans. Larkspur Close in Tottenham has been saved, taken off the demolition list, and placed on the decent homes programme, because of persistent campaigning and the active support of a local Councillor.

Naivety about the Private Sector

These plans rely upon speculative private sector actors, without any assessment of the risks or consequences of such a strategy. We seem to be told of a glittering future where property developers join hands with the Council to meet housing needs and deliver social integration, apparently without any price to be paid. This narrative is naïve and unrealistic.

Haringey Council has chosen to meet its property investor partners at MIPIM in Cannes, and at Sitematch at the Shard, beyond the reach of any democratic control or scrutiny.

Already, conflicts of interest are being resolved on the developers' terms, with reductions in affordable housing quotas to preserve 'viability' ([Proposed Alterations to Haringey's Adopted Strategic Policies](#), Alt 62).

Haringey's developer partners will not rebuild existing council estates with the same number of better-quality social homes, because that would not be 'financially viable', meaning not profitable for them ([Proposed Alterations](#), Alt 64).

It is alarming that the revised Plan casually states that working with developers 'may require flexible application of normal planning policy expectations for affordable housing provision', meaning much less affordable housing (Proposed Alterations, Alt 64).

There is also a risk, not mentioned here, that even after signing regeneration contracts, development partners will continue to reduce the numbers and standard of social or affordable housing, using confidential 'viability' assessments to protect their profits.

The Council has embraced privatisation with the proposed stock transfer of Imperial Wharf, where on Haringey's own figures 81% of residents want to keep council ownership of the estate, and of Noel Park, where 1,042 council homes are within a Conservation Area, and therefore cannot be demolished.

The use of Housing Associations to take over Haringey's rented housing stock, both on stock transfer and demolition estates, is especially problematic as these Associations are currently pushing to be privatised after the general election, with market rent setting and unfettered selection of their tenants in future, ignoring all needs-based waiting lists.

There is no proper appraisal here of the strategies of the Coalition Government and the Mayor of London, who aim to raise rents irrespective of real affordability, and reduce the security of tenure that has meant real social inclusion for working class people.

There is no appraisal of the risk that public policy may shift even further against the needs of tenants and lower-income homeseekers after the general election, especially if the outcome is a Conservative government.

There is no proper assessment of what Haringey residents are being asked to give up in this risky situation, were we to agree to move away from our secure tenancies, really-affordable rents and democratically-accountable landlord.

There is an Alternative

This is a massive programme for remaking Haringey, and Tottenham in particular, on a free market model, with the social cleansing of many existing residents. If people need much higher incomes to stay, then market forces will drive poorer people out.

Instead, we need more and better council housing. There should be no demolition of structurally-sound council estates. All new housing developments should include at

least 50% really-affordable housing for rent, and all new housing developments on public land should consist of 100% publicly-owned, really-affordable housing.

There should be government quantitative easing initiatives to write off the historic debt burden on local authority Housing Revenue Accounts. Much of this debt was taken on long ago, at central government initiative, to build homes many of which have since been sold off or demolished. It is grossly unfair that this burden should be paid by today's smaller and relatively poorer council tenant community.

Borrowing for housing, supported by the income stream from rents and service charges, is not considered part of public debt in any other European country apart from the UK. Our government should therefore lift the restrictive 'borrowing cap', so that local authorities can invest in both existing and new-build council housing.

Haringey Council should lobby alongside tenants and residents to win the necessary policy changes, working with trade unions, other local authorities, those London Assembly members who have criticised the Mayor's agenda, and MPs and general election candidates. We look forward to working together on this.

Unacceptable Standards of Consultation

The language of the council documents seems deliberately misleading – council housing and secure tenancies are never mentioned, and the terms affordable housing and social housing are often used interchangeably and confusingly.

The demolition plans have cynically been explained away by officers with the words 'nothing has been decided yet', and residents have then been asked to 'choose the architects' for the homes that will be built after demolition. Residents have been invited to take trips to the seaside and encouraged to run gardening clubs in the months and years until demolition. This is utterly cynical. We need real social inclusion programmes, without this hidden agenda, and not just sweeteners to support the demolition of our housing estates.

We have had the denial of policy. Officers have denied to the press the reality of demolition and redevelopment possibilities for the 1,000-home Broadwater Farm estate, another 335 homes nearby, and one-third of the Lordship Recreation Ground. We believe that such an extensive demolition area is needed at Broadwater Farm, mainly to sustain the likely profit of the developers. It is profit before people, every time.

On 11th March, we attended a meeting at Park Lane in Northumberland Park, where Matthew Paterson, the Head of Strategic Planning, stated that all council rented

homes in the regeneration area would be replaced by new council-owned rented homes. This pledge is certainly not in any published council document. A few minutes earlier, Mr. Paterson had acknowledged that present government policy forces those councils which plan large scale housing redevelopment to use Housing Association partners and new, near-market, time-limited tenancies. Taken together, the officers' comments were defensive, misleading, confusing, and contradictory.

Extend the Consultation

This dire standard of consultation is completely unacceptable. The abuses of due process should be properly investigated. We strongly support the call by Our Tottenham and others for the consultation period on the Local Plan to be extended, so that all residents have access to full and accurate information and perspectives about what is being proposed.

We welcome further discussion on the points raised in this submission.

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