

SILCHESTER ESTATE PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETINGS

JANUARY 2017

HAVE YOUR SAY RESPONSE FROM THE NOTTING DALE WARD COUNCILLORS

Introduction

This was not a fully informed and open consultation.

The Infill and Refurbishment Option that RBKC has said will be prepared was not tabled, as required following the first judicial review of the Cressingham Gardens regeneration plans. [In November 2015 the High Court ruled that Lambeth Council had acted unlawfully when it removed options for refurbishment from its public consultation on the future of the estate.]

This omission means that Silchester area residents were not presented with the full range of Options before being invited to comment. Indeed, the consultation could be said to be unlawful in the light of Cressingham Gardens.

Infill and refurbishment can be environmentally-friendly, involving retrofitting, in-fill development and additional storeys to preserve embodied carbon and can achieve regeneration more quickly, less contentiously and with far less disruption to residents than full demolition and reconstruction. It can create a more traditional street pattern and housing density can be increased significantly while retaining the existing homes and community.

There is no evidence that Silchester Estate has been subject to a financial viability assessment to prove that it is beyond repair and that regeneration through demolition is the only way to increase available housing within the Borough. There is no analysis of the proposals that demonstrate that the long term benefits outweigh current uncertainty and future disruption, although the Local Plan would suggest that this analysis is necessary before proceeding any further.

Residents should have seen the Infill and Refurbishment Option before being asked to comment on the Options. Without this, we believe that this consultation can be subject to formal challenge.

Other shortcomings in this consultation include:

- the failure to provide information in a three-dimensional format, making it impossible to gauge what the Options would look like in reality
- although described as “a consultation on design options”, no designs were available. Two-dimensional ground plans do not constitute a “design option”
- the architects said they had no idea which blocks would be allocated to what tenure or whether each or any block was “mixed”
- figures for the final quantum of housing in the various Options were unclear
- no indication of the balance between market and “affordable” housing was provided

- no bespoke Housing Allocations policy, nor a Housing Needs Assessment, nor a Strategy for Leaseholders was available, so residents could not assess whether the new homes would meet their needs
- there was no “You said, We did” board to show whether residents’ comments at the first consultation had been heard and acted on, or why they were not acted on
- when asked, the architects “believed” all the Options conform to the Mayoral density standards, but this cannot be checked since the storeys and the number of dwellings within the proposed new blocks were not specified.
- RBKC has not demonstrated what steps it has taken to engage with more vulnerable and harder to reach residents about these Options.
- residents have not been told what percentage profit a developer in partnership with the Council would take from regenerating this public land. In RBKC it is generally around 20-25%, whereas in Islington, for example, it is only around 13%. The percentage would affect viability and hence the mix of affordable, private market and social rented homes.

RBKC could – and should - redevelop any estate approved for regeneration through its own Council-owned Company and it should include that as an Option. If there is no need to provide a developer’s profit, improved viability will make it possible to build additional much needed social rented homes within the “affordable” homes target.

It was unclear whether Porphyrios have ever designed a large housing estate before and whether they really understand the issues. The Principal confirmed that he had not visited any of the existing Council-owned flats on the Estate.

What do you think about the Council’s over-arching objectives for the future of Silchester Estate?

The Introduction to the consultation states that RBKC wishes to maximise the benefits to the borough as a whole “whilst at the same time protecting the existing community on the site”. Unfortunately none of the Options brought to this consultation fully protect the existing community.

- No clear commitment was offered to rehouse adult children living with their parents unless they are formal carers or formal dependants. A Council officer has said that: “should the Council choose to go for a redevelopment option, then the intention is to rehouse households with adult children together, provided that they live at the address, as their main and principal home”; whereas the Cabinet Member has said: “I am always very careful to emphasise that the Council (and I personally) must avoid making promises until we are certain that we can deliver on such promises”; and the current Decant Policy says: “The Housing Needs Survey will need to be updated during the course of the regeneration programme ... The Council may find it difficult to consider the requirements of a household whose needs were not built into the development plans due to an increase in their

family size or a change in their circumstances”. Given all this ambiguity, residents are understandably very confused on this point.

- Residents of existing blocks (both Council and housing association) form their own very longstanding micro-communities, yet they do not know whether they will be rehoused together in any new development or be scattered randomly across any new estate; this would destabilise community cohesion.
- Long term tenants of buy-to-let leasehold flats have no assurance that they will be rehoused; it had been suggested that they could have first priority for intermediate (or London Living Rent) rental flats on a regenerated estate but this commitment has not been offered.
- Resident leaseholders have been told only that they “may” be offered shared equity to help them buy a new home on the estate if they wish to remain.
- Although tenants and shared owners of homes provided by the four registered providers were invited to this consultation, they have been given no indication that they can remain on the estate if it is regenerated – either from the Council or their own landlord.

Why should these residents, many who have lived on the Estate for a very long time, some having spent their whole life on Silchester, be asked to maximise the benefits to “the borough as a whole” at the cost of losing their homes?

What are your thoughts on the Council’s commitments to residents?

The current commitments do not meet the residents’ requirement to keep the Silchester community intact, for the reasons stated above.

There is no commitment that the Council will use regeneration of the Estate to reduce the number of people on its Housing Allocations Register, yet this should be one of its major priorities. It should offer any properties that become void to those on the Register, rather than using them for temporary accommodation. This in itself would contribute to addressing the homeless problem in RBKC.

The Introduction also states that redevelopment will not go ahead unless the Council is confident that it will “meet its commitment to tenants and to leaseholders” – yet the commitment to leaseholders has been qualified by the use of the word “may” with regard to a shared equity arrangement. We were advised that this commitment is subject to the final viability assessment. Leaseholders have not had this important qualification to the Council’s commitment drawn unambiguously to their attention. A firm commitment to provide shared equity *must* be given to *all* resident leaseholders who wish to remain on the estate, otherwise their responses must be treated with caution.

RBKC have said that bespoke decant and allocations policies are premature – but these need to be available *now* since they will influence residents’ responses to the consultations. Again, their absence renders much of this consultation valueless.

Do you understand the four redevelopment options that the Council are considering for the Silchester Estate?

No, they are very unclear:

- they do not indicate which housing tenure will be provided where
- they do not show how the massing of the proposed buildings will work
- the number of storeys per block are vague
- they give no indication of the overall housing densities proposed
- no building designs were available
- some of the architects' responses to questions were not well informed, others were gnomonic. For example, the response to the question "How many storeys will there be in the new residential tower in Option Six?" was "Up to 25, this is a part of the Masterplan concept and the tower will be a 'beacon' for the site" with no further clarification.'

This is the first time we have heard of the "Masterplan concept".

What is this Masterplan? Where can it be found? What is meant by "a beacon for the site"? Why does the site need "a beacon"?

What do you like about the four redevelopment options for the Silchester Estate and what do you think could be better or should be changed?

Like

Nothing. These plans are far, far worse than those produced at the first consultation.

What could be better or should be changed

- Options 4, 5 and 6 all reiterate an unnecessary road along the western edge of the Estate, parallel to the Westway slip road, despite so many objections to it at the first round of consultation. This will not only bring extra vehicular traffic deeper into the Estate but it will be used as a "rat run" during the rush hour, worsening the already very poor air quality.
- The answer to the question "why is an unnecessary new rat-run road proposed along the western edge of the site?" was "to service the buildings in the Markland House area and to ensure that there are no cul-de-sacs and dead-ends". These are not acceptable reasons for eliminating so much of the present green open space to create a road that residents do not want.
- Options 4, 5, and 6 show buildings of up to nine storeys directly alongside the Westway and its slip road. RBKC is one of the London boroughs with the very worst air quality. It is unacceptable – and possibly unlawful - to expect people to live immediately next to an elevated motorway or its slip road in the heart of such a polluted area. Residents believe that this "design" is a cynical manoeuvre that will be

removed from the next iteration of the plans so that the Council can claim to have heard and acted on residents' comments.

- In response to questions, the architects said the proposal to build housing alongside the motorway and the motorway slip road was “because there is some there already”. The only housing directly alongside the Westway is the end of one small block owned by Catalyst Housing. There is NO Council or other social housing directly alongside the Westway and its slip road.
- This element of the proposals greatly increases the quantum of housing in an inappropriate location. The architects said, in response to the question “will this housing be for the social rented homes?” that this has yet to be decided. However, no one at the drop-in believes anything other than that the blocks along the Westway and the slip road are intended to be only for social rented homes. Who would wish voluntarily to live in a home in such a location, to buy it or even to pay an “affordable rent” for it?
- To the question “will there be any measurement of the ambient air pollution at these motorway sites before any housing is considered for construction there?”, the response was “there will be a full Environmental Impact Assessment, *but only across the whole site*” and “there is no commitment at this stage to build houses alongside the motorway as shown in these Options”. If this is the case, why were these sites shown for housing in the Options at all?
- The lower floors of the northern Westway blocks would receive almost no daylight at any time of the day since the Options show Westway to the north, a 7-9 storey block to the west, a 4-7 or 6-7 storey block to the east and a 3-5 storey block to the south, with the first two or three floors beneath the shadow of the Westway.
- The gardens proposed between the “canyons” formed by the Westway blocks will receive little sunlight and daylight and will be dark and dank wastes of open space. The sense of enclosure will be oppressive. This is already the situation at the Frinstead/More West/Peabody development by Latimer Road station, where the “garden square” has become a waterlogged mud patch that receives almost no sunlight or daylight due to the height of the surrounding buildings.
- Given how beautiful the environment is at Silchester, destroying Waynflete Square and the open spaces around the tower blocks would be municipal vandalism. All the birdlife, wildlife, mature trees, shrubs and flora would disappear. This has already happened at Frinstead/More West/Peabody - where once there was public open space with mature trees and birdlife, now no birds sing.
- The Options show much of the public open green space being privatised into a series of small gated developments. Gated developments go against the Council’s planning policies, are isolating and would make the roads forbidding at night and probably unsafe. Green spaces in small gated areas receiving little sunlight in those “canyons” will not flourish and will replicate the problems at Frinstead/More West/Peabody.
- It is also unethical to propose to privatise so much public open space. The Council has a policy to protect existing open space - and privatising open space and allowing it to degenerate is not the same as protecting it.

- The architects said that they were not asked to re-provide the Lатыmer Community Church, the ACAVA building, ADKC, the St Christopher Training Centre, Buggsi’s convenience store and the *Pig and Whistle* public house in any of the Options. Consequently three of the four Options are misleading, since all these facilities will have to be re-provided somewhere – but re-provision is not mentioned.
- None of the Options includes a health and well-being hub or a children’s centre or a primary school, all of which will be necessary if the population increase is to be as the Options suggest.

The exhibition boards show how the masterplan area changes when we include, or leave out different buildings and areas and how this impacts on the number of new homes we could provide. We would like to hear your views on this and key elements of the design.

This question is very unclear, especially as neither the “key elements of the design” nor the Masterplan were available.

Should the Council focus on options which maximise the number of homes, retail and public space, and which might involve all land within the estate?

No

Tell us why

There is so much that is good about the current Estate that must be retained, as explained above. Focusing on options that maximise homes and retail space at the expense of the current land usage within the Estate must be avoided at all costs.

From what you have seen and understood today, if you had a preference, do you think the Markland, Dixon and Whitstable tower blocks should be retained, demolished or replaced?

(Note Frinstead Tower is retained in each option, see boards 4, 5, 7 and 9 which show tower options).

Retain and refurbish all the towers.

Tell us why

- Retaining and refurbishing all the towers is by far the most cost effective option and will enable more funds to be released to provide additional social rented and affordable housing.
- RBKC’s successful refurbishment of Grenfell Tower cost less than £12 million and not only refurbished the Tower and the homes but created nine new social rented homes, a state-of-the-art boxing club, a suite of community rooms, some landscaping improvements and a wonderful new nursery. We understand that demolishing each tower block will cost well over £22 million, totalling over £66 million, compared to refurbishing each block that would cost around £30 million. This is before leaseholders have been bought out, or shared equity calculated, or the cost of

replacing the demolished homes. Where are the figures to enable residents to compare demolition and replacement with retention and refurbishment?

- The towers on Silchester Estate are far more robust and well-built than Grenfell Tower and each dwelling has its own outdoor space with a good sized balcony that already conforms to the Council's desired standards. These are very good reasons to retain them.

Redevelopment would enable the introduction of new space for local shops, primarily at the centre of the site fronting Bramley Road. What type of shops or other retail services would you like to see provided?

(see boards 4, 5, 7 and 9 which indicate location of retail space)

Retail units should be those that serve the needs of the local community and workers, including a Post Office facility. However, the Council would need to be very cautious before building retail units that would prove unviable and impossible to let.

Redeveloping the Estate would enable us to improve access and connections between Silchester East and West via new pedestrian routes and road layouts. What are your thoughts on the current access arrangements and how would you like to see them improved? *(see boards 4, 5, 7 and 9)*

Current access arrangements between Silchester East and West are perfectly acceptable as they are. The proposed routes and layouts in the Options are unnecessary and unacceptable, as far too much public green open space would be sacrificed to make way for them. The Council's planners should move away from their obsession with "traditional street patterns". Building the Westway has made their restoration impossible.

Do you think that the green spaces should be in privately accessed courtyards (similar to Frinstead and Bramley House), open for all to use (like Waynflete Square), or consist of a mix between private and public spaces? *(see boards 4, 5, 7, and 9)*

- No public open space should be privatised under any regeneration. One of the most significant drawbacks in all these Options is the loss of the public green open space, especially at Waynflete Square and around the tower blocks.
- The inclusion of "gated communities" contravenes the Council's planning policies and major damage would be inflicted on the present green and pleasant environment. The gated garden squares are too small to flourish and would become sunless, dank mud patches as at Frinstead/More West/Peabody.
- Whatever else happens, Waynflete Square must be retained as the exemplary and beautiful local amenity that it is. It is not a gated space and is used by most residents and also people from the wider neighbourhood. It is a haven for birds, wildlife, mature trees, shrubbery and flora. This key element of the current Estate *must* remain in any new development.
- The community events held at Waynflete Square could not be replicated in the proposed meagre Bramley Square alternative to Waynflete. The architects could not explain why this square was so small compared to Waynflete Square. The answer to

the question “how will children be able to play safely in Bramley Square?” was “it will be gated and have railings all around it. Only residents of the Estate will have keys to get in. The management of the Square will be up to the Council” – so the question of safe play for children remains unresolved. Waynflete Square’s very popular children’s playground is not included in the Options either.

- All green open spaces on any new Estate should be open for all to use and enjoy.
- The private courtyard at Frinstead/More West/Peabody demonstrates the folly of creating gated, enclosed spaces. This space has become both an interesting challenge to those who seek to enter it illicitly and a source of friction between the differing needs of the approved users. Spaces accessible to everyone mean that everyone can find a place within them to suit their individual needs, while enabling a community to come together as a whole for special events, such as Fundays and Festivals.

What are your thoughts on this round of consultation?

Do you prefer events on a Saturday?

- Events should be held both at weekends and also during the week, as these were, to enable the widest reach to residents. The excellent attendance levels at both sessions demonstrate that this approach works well.
- Any subsequent consultations and drop-ins must include a clear “You said, We did” board or residents will think there is no point in attending any more events.

Other comments

Please provide any other comments or thoughts on today’s exhibition in the space below.

- All the Council-owned homes on Silchester Estate are built to Parker-Morris standards. Nowhere in the consultation were residents told that homes on any new development will be built to the lesser “current Mayoral standard” (according to the architects).
- This means that resident leaseholders who wish to stay and who “may” receive shared equity to buy a home in any new development will be paying far more for a home built to a lesser standard than their present home. Some leaseholders are very unhappy about this, having bought their homes in good faith, often under the original Thatcher government Right-to-Buy. This came with assurances of permanency and the ability to leave their home to their heirs that are now being undermined.
- The following, and other, questions remained unanswered, comprehensively demonstrating the inadequacy of these two drop-in events as an example of full and effective consultation.
 - What sort of employment uses are proposed to run alongside Markland House?
 - Will the development be car parking permit-free? If so, will current residents entitled to be rehoused on a regenerated estate still be offered a parking permit?
 - Why do none of the options include community infrastructure requirements, such as a health and well-being centre, a children’s centre, a primary school?

- Where would these vital facilities be provided? The architects said that these and other infrastructure facilities were excluded from the master planning process (another reference to the existence of a Masterplan)
- Where are the Latymer Community Church, the ACAVA building, ADKC, St Christopher's, the *Pig and Whistle* and other existing facilities reprovided? The architects say the Council did not ask them to relocate any of these facilities on the site. Does this imply that they will not be re-provided, or that they will be re-provided elsewhere? If so, where?
- How and where will all the Westway Trust sports facilities be provided?
- Will the Council work with a development partner, given that the developer will expect at least a 20% profit from such a venture?
- Or will the Council carry out its own development under the auspices of the Council-owned Company?
- Why is there no commitment to prioritise existing private tenants living on the estate for an intermediate rented home on a regenerated estate?
- Why does the Council seem determined to destroy Waynflete Square, the jewel in the crown of the current Estate and a much loved centre for the whole neighbourhood?
- Where is the "Masterplan" provided to the architects that was mentioned three times - and why have residents not had sight of it?
- Will these consultation events lead to the production of a Supplementary Planning Document that will first be agreed with residents and other stakeholders and then not deviated from at any stage without further agreement from all stakeholders?
- Will the Council assure everyone that any new development will be built to the highest possible standards and that the Council is not building something that will become a slum in 30 years?
- Will any new development be properly maintained and not allowed to run down?
- How will this happen, given the constraints of the Housing Revenue Account and the added complexity of the maintenance and repair of private sector homes differing from the maintenance and repair programmes of TMO/Council-managed properties?
- Will the design of any new development improve upon what residents saw at the first consultation event?
- Clearly before any final decision is made, the Council must assess and take account of all possible risks should it opt for any form of demolition and rebuild. The risk assessment must be published and made available to residents and other stakeholders before any final decision is taken. So far, the only risk that RBKC has identified is that "the case for regeneration is deemed unacceptable and not agreed by the existing resident community"; but other risks could include that:
 - the case for regeneration is deemed environmentally unsound as air quality assessments may breach statutory guidelines
 - future iterations of the London Plan make the plans financially unviable

- too much loss of light and too high a density render the regeneration plans unsound
- over-reliance on the sale of market housing to cross-subsidise the regeneration, where they may not be an attractive opportunity for enough buyers
- severe reputational damage if legally challenged Compulsory Purchase Orders are needed to permit redevelopment
- severe reputational damage should resident or a group of residents seek and succeed with a Judicial Review of the Council's plans;
- etc.

We know that the Westway Trust have reservations about the Options that assume usage of their land and that they will be responding accordingly.

Any regeneration at Silchester will also have a significant impact on the surrounding neighbourhood. Very few people in the wider community are aware of these proposals and they should be engaged at the earliest opportunity. Leaving this until the formulation of a Construction Transport Management Plan will be far too late

There is a feeling that these proposals are being rushed and a consensus that RBKC should pause and reflect, for example, on what is happening at other regenerations across London, the difficult situation at Earl's Court, progress at the Warwick Road Estate and the Mayor's new London Plan that will be produced with the benefit of a clearer understanding of the changed economic and social conditions following the Referendum vote.

The points we raise above represent views and worries that many residents have brought to us as their elected representatives and we urge RBKC to take all these residents' and stakeholders' concerns very seriously.

Councillors Robert Atkinson, Judith Blakeman and Beinazir Lasharie

Notting Dale Ward

16 February 2017