



The Counties Residents' Association

Protecting the interests of the community

10 April 2007

Mr Harry Cohen MP
House of Commons
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Cohen

I am pleased to say that our Association is going from strength to strength, with over 100 households now being members and our Committee doubling in size. The last few weeks have been ones of intense activity for the Counties Residents' Association [CRA] and as a result we ask for your support on the following issues:

The Chepstow Estate No 49 Leicester Road [Application No: 0619/07]

Telford Homes has just submitted a planning application to demolish the large house and build a car park in its place, while building 6 semi-detached houses and 18 flats on the landscaped garden. I enclose a circular showing some of the plans which have been submitted, along with our notification about this to our residents.

Needless to say, there is consternation over this and therefore we are requesting, as a matter of urgency, that you instigate an inquiry: I understand it is important to get this underway before the planning process gets too far advanced and the final date for objections is 26 April. The Higgins development has caused such an outcry amongst our residents, as well as our Councillors, that there is an upsurge of energy and emotion on Chepstow.

Conservation

As you will be aware, Mr Hetherington, the Redbridge Conservation Officer, is undergoing a review of Wanstead. However, almost all of his work is only concerned with the existing conservation area, while the Wanstead Society and the CRA would like Grove Park, Grosvenor Road, The Avenue and the Counties Estate, including Nutter Lane and Field, Preston Drive and Reydon Avenue, to be added. This was an agenda item at the Area 1 Committee, where both the Wanstead Society and CRA spoke and the CRA presented a report, a copy of which is enclosed.

All the 5 Councillors present, representing the Snaresbrook and Wanstead Wards, were wholeheartedly in favour of this. Any support which you can provide, especially in contacting Mr Hetherington, would be very much appreciated. He has been saying that he has a lack of resources to do a reappraisal but he has a new budget since April 1 2007. If conservation is not granted quickly, a lot of serious damage will be done to our neighbourhood. The depth of feeling was shown in a packed out Area 1 meeting and over 250 petition signatures as can be found on appendix 4 of the report.

As you will see from the notification of meetings, the level of local concern over conservation and planning is indicated by the meeting which the Wanstead Society is holding. Marc Dorfman, the new



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Head of Planning and James O'Shea the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration have been invited to speak to us.

The Higgins Development

You may recall that we showed you a block of 12 flats which Higgins are completing on the corner of The Avenue and Leicester Road, ironically named the Garden Room.

Again, our residents and Councillors are horrified by the building which is totally out of scale and character with the area. Apart from the incongruous design [two flats even being built on stilts], we cannot see how the regulations on disability or amenity space have been met. The building line is inches away from the pavement and the balconies overshadow it. As you will see there is further detail and a photograph of it in the report.

I attach a copy of the letter in which Mr Clark the former Redbridge Head of Planning rejected the initial planning application and a letter from the Bristol Inspector passing the appeal. I attach a copy of our letter inviting the Inspector to come to view and discuss the end result of his appeal approval. We would appreciate it if you could also write to the Inspector to ask him to come to view the flats and explain how they meet planning regulations.

Other Matters

In addition to the above issues and further to our letter of 7 December 2006, we are writing to you about our concerns in four other areas of housing planning

1. Lack of an opportunity for the public to appeal against local authority planning decisions

This is indicative of the way in which the planning process is weighted in favour of the developer, as a developer can appeal to the Regional Inspector against planning refusal, while the public have no such right of appeal, either to the local authority or Bristol.

We notice that in the Barker Report, which has been adopted in the imminent White Paper, residents will have less say in planning applications in their area. Current events have shown some of the social consequences of communities being eroded: encouraging developers to pull down houses and replace them with flats, on top of squeezing them in wherever possible, will accelerate the breakdown of community solidarity. Many of our residents are already feeling powerless in having a say in what happens in Wanstead and fear for the future.

2. Appeals to the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol

There are two aspects of the procedure which we find inadequate:

a) Availability of the application plans

When a developer appeals to Bristol about a particular planning application which the local authority has rejected, there is no mechanism to allow the public to view the plans.

b) Brevity of the information about the planning application in the Bristol letter

There is a growing trend for developers to submit a number of planning applications for the same site, in quick succession or even simultaneously, which makes it even harder for the public to understand



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the details of the particular application being sent for appeal. The text of the letter informing the public of the appeal only contains a short sentence describing the plan, which provides no detail.

Therefore when an appeal is made to Bristol, the plans, along with a detailed explanation, ought to be made available at the local library, as it is in the procedure used for planning applications sent to the local authority.

3. ODPM Circular 08/5005

As this circular, entitled “Guidance on Changes to the Development Control System” is merely a guidance and not mandatory, a local authority can still allow multiple applications in a short period of time. The Note asks local authorities to be aware of the developer “*trying to wear down opposition by submitting repeated applications*” and on this basis, deny early consideration of similar applications – an interval of 2 years is suggested. “*It can be a major source of frustration to members of the public and the local community to have to deal with repeat applications when they have already dealt with the original application and seen the development refused.*”

I attach a copy of a letter to the new Head of Planning at Redbridge, which is about such a situation which occurred over a development at 22a Gloucester Road.

4. Section 106

This has been unsuccessful for a number of reasons. Firstly the amounts of money required by Section 106 are tiny compared with the financial gain which developers make. Secondly, the amounts of money raised are nowhere near adequate to make a significant contribution to local infrastructure. Thirdly the system allows developers to enter long, complex and protracted negotiations with planning officers. Fourthly, the current legislation has a loophole, whereby developers do not need to contribute to badly needed services, as planning officers say that certain services are outside those catered for in Section 106. Sometimes developers refuse to pay the stipulated sum and go to appeal, so that payment is made long after the residents of their development are using the local infrastructure.

At present different local authorities have different Section 106 arrangements, while few local authorities have a proper strategy to negotiate the sums of money involved, or in determining how the moneys are used. As much of the development in Wanstead is on a small scale, it is likely that developers will avoid section 106, but the cumulative effect is that many new dwellings are built, with no contribution to local hospitals, GP services, schools, roads etc.

The London Assembly Environment Committee has concluded that the pressure of meeting development targets has led to environmental needs being pushed aside, which is also having a detrimental effect.

The January 2007 Parliamentary Debate on the Planning Gain Supplement (Preparations) Bill offers little comfort. Although MPs agree that developers ought to contribute to the infrastructure of the local community, the system proposed in this Bill is vague, complex and unrealistic. Developers will get on with building dwellings and the local community will have no idea how much money is



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forthcoming: there is no mechanism for ensuring payment. As the existing system is so poor, there is no reason to think the proposed new system will be any better. Is the Government merely paying lip service to the principle of developers contributing to the local community?

A fixed amount of money, which developers **MUST** pay, needs to be determined by each local authority. This could be based on the level of council tax levied on each category of dwelling in the borough, in accordance with the banding structure. Also, to avoid the current protracted negotiations about developers' payments after the building has been done, the Section 106 payment **MUST BE PAID BEFORE ANY BUILDING WORK CAN BEGIN.**

Also, local authorities need to have a clearly defined strategy for how the money should be allocated to the borough's resources. Each time the Section 106 money has been paid over to the local council, a committee would decide on the best allocation of it to meet the needs of the local infrastructure which that development would use, ensuring that none of the money goes into some nebulous financial pool. If such a system were in place, Wanstead would have had its long promised health centre by now.

Yours sincerely,

HELEN E ZAMMETT
Chair

Encs