

Mr Harry Cohen MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

P.O. Box 2, Town Hall, High Road,
Ilford, Essex IG1 1DD
Planning and Regeneration

Marc Dorfman
Chief Planning and Regeneration
Officer

Direct line 020 8708 2067
Fax 020 8708 2985
Marc.Dorfman@redbridge.gov.uk

Our ref: MD/fsf
Your ref
Date: 28 March 2008

Dear Mr Cohen

Thank you for your letter of 19 March 2008, received on 27 March. I set out below my response to your letter and some comments on key concerns of the Counties Residents' Association.

Public Consultation

There is significant opportunity for local comment and involvement in the planning process and I set those out in points 2 and 3 below.

Appeal Process

Please see point 6 below in addition to 2 and 3.

Wanstead Action Plan

Please see point 4 below.

Comments on CRA Letter

1. Potential Sales of Car Parks and Allotments

I note the CRA's concern. As you know, this is not happening until there is a new Borough-wide consultation on key Council priorities and how to fund them, called the "Redbridge Conversation". This is likely to begin in May/June 2008.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

2. Headlong rush to provide new housing

After two years of intensive study and community consultation, the Redbridge Local Development Framework has been found “sound”. As you know, this means an independent Inspector has agreed that the Borough’s research and consultation methods have been good. Our Core Strategy sets out a target to increase homes by some 9,000 over the next 10 years (we currently have 110,000 homes) to support a population growth of some 15-20,000 (we currently have 250,000 population). These are not excessive growth targets – indeed, we are only going back to a population figure that existed in the Borough in 1951. However, with household sizes reducing, we do need more flats and we need more family housing in the affordable category. In the early part of the 2007-17 plan period, there will be new homes in the South Woodford and Wanstead areas, but by far the largest growth will be in the south of the Borough and in main town centres – the more sustainable locations. We have strong policies on design in conservation areas and these are ably supported by strong advice from our Conservation Advisory Panel and community organisations like the CRA. In Redbridge we also have a new Planning Obligations policy which will require more significant contributions from developers to support community infrastructure as homes are grown, alongside a more detailed social and physical infrastructure plan, which the “Redbridge Conversation” process will help develop. This new Redbridge tariff system is being taken on board by both Labour and Conservative parties in the form of a possible new Community Infrastructure Levy, which also has support from both public and developer sectors.

But I repeat – the new Redbridge Plan

- a) has been assessed as “sound” – including the way it was consulted on,
- b) represents only an increase of less than 10% of the number of homes we already have in the Borough over the next 10 years,
- c) is designed to support ongoing scrutiny by councillors and valuable community groups like the CRA on individual site proposals and their planning and design issues.

3. Duty to Involve

I would argue that our commitment “to involve” is considerable and includes:

- the rigorous involvement process of the LDF
- the regular appearance of me and my service at Scrutiny Committees
- the public annual monitoring of LDF aims
- the published consultation standards in our Statement of Community Involvement
- the existence of 4 public local planning decision-making bodies with public speaking rights



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- the existence of a special councillor and lay advisory group to comment on schemes in conservation areas (mainly focused on the west of the Borough)
- my and my officers' presentations to local area committees
- my and my officers' replies to over 6,000 letters and emails a year on the submission of 2-3,000 planning applications per annum

I believe this shows that local communities have a good opportunity to be involved with the planning process. The above programme of opportunities represents a far wider and more sophisticated system than "third party rights of appeal". The Government, in addition, this month announced an increase in the funding of the UK Planning Aid Service, which supports communities making representations.

4. Action Plan for Wanstead

After the main opportunity sites in the west of the Borough (all identified in the Redbridge LDF) are built out, the area will settle to a more stable turnover of applications driven by predicted population growth and household size. Much of the area is covered by constraint planning policies in the form of conservation areas and residential precincts, which afford the area appropriate levels of protection and development opportunity. I feel there is no need for an Action Plan. Resources instead are to be focused on the Roman Road/ Crossrail Corridor. Barkingside and South Woodford do not have Area Action Plans – only Gants Hill and Ilford do. There are requests for the extensions of various conservation areas and these are being examined. Community groups are at liberty to request new Area Action Plans, but in Redbridge I am currently focusing these on where there will be a need for major development and change.

5. Elected Councillors and Local Views

I feel I have answered this issue above. You will know about councillor guidance on probity and the importance of making decisions based on up-to-date planning policy for both the Borough and local area. Please find attached a useful guide.

6. Developers use appeals to get what they want

This is not fair or correct. Since my arrival here at Redbridge, I have increased our win rate of appeals from 50% to 67%, which is now the same as the national and London average. Over the last 10 years this has been the general win rate of all UK authorities and provides a good balance between local control and a system that



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

recognises there must be development opportunity.

7. Community Desires and Development Delivery

By the increasingly effective running of a planning service, Redbridge is both offering significant community involvement and efficient processing of applications that deliver development agreed within a proper planning framework which has been externally scrutinised.

8. Confusing transition between UDP and LDF

I agree it is confusing but Redbridge, as you know, has now made this transition and is the only Borough in London so far to do so. I would be happy to do local seminars and workshops for Councillors, MPs and community groups on this. My Planning Policy staff would also be happy to send out information explaining the transition. Please find attached a brief outline of our newly approved Core Strategy – the first in London.

9. Affordable Housing

This has been a significant new policy in the Borough. But please remember that

- a) Redbridge has one of the lowest provisions of any Borough in London
- b) The new 50% target would only result in a maximum of around 4-5,000 new homes over 10 years, with some 40% being intermediate for people on salaries between £25–50,000 who are finding it hard to get onto the housing ladder.

Overall, the new policy will only increase affordable housing by a small but much needed percentage of the current 110,000 stock of homes. I believe this level of change can be integrated into the Borough.

10. More Homes and Social Infrastructure

I have dealt with these points earlier.

11. Flats and Family Homes

The facts are that Redbridge has a surplus of family homes but they are significantly under-occupied. There is a significant need for more small houses/flats because household sizes are falling and we have an important need for a small amount of



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

affordable family homes.

12. More Involvement of CRA

CRA have been lobbying for conservation area status and my view is that it is not needed. However, a study by independent consultants will now review the issue and this will report in June/July. I and my staff have discussed and written to them on this matter. I would be

happy to walk round the area with them to discuss the matter again as part of the review. I would also be happy to discuss CRA's views on planning application consultation. But even if I do not consider it necessary to extend neighbour notification,

- a) CRA can purchase the weekly application list, or
- b) See it for free every week on the Council website.

Please also see attached copy of Redbridge Statement of Community Involvement.

13. SCI and Duty to Involve

Whilst independent examination may be removed, local examination will not be and that is what is critical.

14. Conclusion

I note the comment from the DCLG. For the reasons set out above I do not agree with CRA views that the planning system "favours developers even more". It does aim to favour good development more – which means better plans and more consistent and transparent decisions, which I am working towards with local councillors, MPs, local businesses and valued community groups like the CRA.

Please let me know if I can help further on these matters.

Yours sincerely

Marc Dorfman
Chief Planning and Regeneration Officer

c.c. Helen Zammett, CRA
Cliff K. Prince



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Len Norton, Roger Hampson
Emma Watson, John Pearce, Mark Lucas, Amrik Notta



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE