

Statement to the Inspector: **The London Borough of Barnet (West Hendon Regeneration Area) Compulsory Purchase Order No 1 2014**

**Cllr Adam Langleben**

**Councillor for West Hendon ward, London Borough of Barnet, May 2014–Present**

**Member of the West Hendon regeneration partnership board**

29<sup>th</sup> December 2014

**Introduction**

1. This statement is a collection of my views on the regeneration, what I have witnessed and why I believe that major errors have been made by the Local Authority. My views in no way represent the views of the West Hendon Partnership Board.
2. I have been a Labour Party councillor since being elected in May 2014 along with two ward colleagues Cllr Devra Kay – also a new councillor, and Cllr Agnes Slocombe who has represented West Hendon for thirty two years.
3. I am providing this statement to offer a different perspective to the views offered by residents, affected parties and the Local Authority. As a ward councillor I receive casework from hundreds of residents a month. The vast bulk of the casework that my colleagues and I handle originates from the West Hendon estate relates to regeneration and decantation issues.

**Basic concerns**

4. Regeneration of any Council estate is difficult and can take a long time. The original proposal to regenerate West Hendon was made under a Labour/Liberal Democrat administration. The offer by the previous administration was a like for like offer to all residents. A ballot of residents was later taken on that pledge.
5. In my view, a basic minimal aim within any regeneration programme should be to replace any type of tenure of units you dismantle. This seems that it should be a basic principle of any regeneration programme. If you do not 'regenerate' the estate, i.e. replace the units... then all you are really doing is demolishing homes for the existing residents and replacing them with different people. This displacement is contrary to an aim of the Mayor of London and London Borough of Barnet which is to create mixed and balanced communities as part of the London Plan.<sup>1</sup>
6. Just 250 units on the new estate will be for rent at 'social' or 'affordable' rent levels.<sup>2</sup>
7. There are current 449 socially rented units within the CPO area on the West Hendon estate, meaning a reduction of 199 properties at affordable or social rented levels.

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<sup>1</sup> London Plan Policy 3.9 *Mixed and Balanced Communities*

<sup>2</sup> West Hendon estate Planning Statement: 4.1 Regeneration Benefits | [http://www.west-hendon.co.uk/downloads/WH4.2%20Planning%20Statement%20\(inc%20docs\)%20110313.pdf](http://www.west-hendon.co.uk/downloads/WH4.2%20Planning%20Statement%20(inc%20docs)%20110313.pdf)

8. The London Borough of Barnet are relying on a ballot of residents as local consent for this scheme and no doubt will use the ballot as evidence of consultation. The ballot of residents was taken on a completely different scheme than the one we have before us today. It cannot be used as justification or used as comprehensive evidence of consultation.

### **Non-secure tenants**

9. As of 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014 there were 207 non-secure tenancies of the 593 residential units on the West Hendon estate. This number makes up over a third of the estate.<sup>3</sup>
10. Some of the non-secure tenants have been living on the estate for up to 12 years with little security of tenure.
11. Some non-secure tenants living on the West Hendon estate have already now been decanted once, from another regeneration estate on Stonegrove in Edgware. They face another decantation.
12. Many of these non-secure tenants already have or face being decanted onto Grahame Park estate in Colindale onto another estate due to be 'regenerated'. The Colindale CPO process is moving along fast and some of these residents may have to move again within a couple of years. The problem those residents face is that once Grahame Park is demolished the Council will have run out of housing stock.
13. In my view the authority has been extremely aggressive in their pursuit of getting non-secure tenants to vacate their properties prior to 31 March.
14. Residents who have fought their cases and gone to court have had offers of more secure housing. Those who have not fought it seem to have been transferred onto a different regeneration estate on the existing terms of a non-secure tenancy.
15. Anecdotally I have been told by residents that they were advised by Barnet Homes staff not to go to court as the council's desire to claim possession of their properties was just a normal process or tick box exercise.

### **I respectfully ask the inspector to:**

- Ask the London Borough of Barnet and the Partners to live up to their original pledge to residents on the West Hendon estate by either a) Increasing the number of social units to compensate for the loss of units this 'regeneration' is bringing. b) Upgrade all non-secure tenancies on the West Hendon estate to secure tenancies to ensure that they do not have to go through this uncertain process again and again and again... Until there is no housing stock left.
- Ask that the Council allow non-secure tenants to be eligible to be made up to three offers of rehousing.

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<sup>3</sup> Question to the Leader of Barnet Council, 17 December 2014, Question 123 | <http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/b25069/Questions%20to%20the%20Leader%20and%20Committee%20Chairman%20if%20heshe%20has%20delegated%2016th-Dec-2014%2019.00%20Counc.pdf?T=9>

## **Pledges made to residents by the London Borough of Barnet**

16. In the original 'pledge' made to West Hendon estate residents, which were balloted on, the following pledges were made:
- a. 'You will have a brand new home'
  - b. 'All will be housed on new development'
  - c. 'You will have a choice of landlord'
  - d. 'You will have a choice of where to move'
  - e. 'You have a real say in the regeneration'
  - f. 'York Memorial Park will not be touched'
  - g. 'Homeowners properties will be bought at current housing prices'
  - h. 'No major works will be undertaken while the regeneration is under construction'
  - i. 'You will have a real say in the regeneration process'
17. However, these pledges are now being broken under the current terms of the scheme:
18. Not all residents are receiving 'a brand new home.
19. Everyone currently living on the estate will not be housed on the new development.
20. Only secure tenants have a choice of landlord.
21. Residents have little choice of where to move when they are bullied into accepting unfair offers of housing.
22. My experience of being a member of the Partnership Board indicates to me that residents have had little real say in the regeneration project. This experience is shared by former colleagues who have sat through endless Planning Committee meetings where objections to specific proposals have been ignored.
23. York Memorial Park which was left to the community after a Luftwaffe raid in 1941 destroyed the Victorian terraced housing that was previously in the area.<sup>4</sup>
24. I would argue that homeowners' properties are not being bought at current prices and that the valuations are blighted by the regeneration scheme. Due to the secretive nature of these offers and the mechanics of working out valuations I am unable to offer a comprehensive critique of the valuation methodology – I can only go on using comparative properties within the nearby area unblighted by regeneration to offer a rough guide. One way or another I believe that the offers to leaseholders are below the true unblighted market value.
25. Major works are being undertaken due to neglect by the London Borough of Barnet. These works are necessary and legally required, but should have taken place a decade ago. Some elements of the works and the pushing of these costs onto leaseholders are unfair as I believe that some of the works are things that the developer would need to do eventually regardless i.e. removal of asbestos.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/46/a5554046.shtml>

26. A real say in regeneration would involve the Partners acting upon legitimate concerns over the entire scheme. It would be a responsive approach over a number of years to accommodate all residents of the West Hendon estate. It would have meant that alternative accommodation would have been confirmed months prior to now with all residents and negotiations with leaseholders would have started at an earlier point. A real say in regeneration would have also involved tackling the core issues of contention of this project, those being the lack of affordable housing and the uncertainty and anxiety felt by many residents. The London Borough of Barnet has failed to ensure that residents are the priority in this project and when balancing the needs of the developer vs residents, at almost every occasion LBB has put the priorities of the developers over the priorities of existing residents.
27. The agreements over this development with the partners were made at the end of the financial crisis and during a period of uncertainty in the property market. The market conditions since this development was agreed have changed dramatically. The London property market shows no sign of any slump and investors are choosing to put their money into this market as opposed to alternative investments. Regardless of the ethics of such financial management it is a reality of 2014 economics and therefore I believe that due to the change in financial climate, taxpayers and residents are getting a very poor deal from the West Hendon regeneration.

*I respectfully ask the inspector to:*

- Ask the London Borough of Barnet and the Partner's to fulfil all of the original pledges above.
- Ask that the London Borough of Barnet and the Partner's renegotiate the scheme to ensure that the above points are met, taking into consideration that this is a transfer of public land and the authorities duty to meet its obligations regarding 'best value', in which social value is a key element and now a statutory consideration.

### **Homeowner valuations and issues**

28. To put it simply I believe that Capita, acting on behalf of the London Borough of Barnet have undervalued the properties in the CPO process.
29. I have used the Fosters estate in Hendon – also a Barnet Council managed estate – as my comparator. The Fosters estate is approximately one mile away; the properties are of a similar age to the West Hendon estate and are as run down due to the local authority not investing in their housing stock.
30. In August 2000 a 2 bedroom flat on Marsh Drive, NW9 was sold on the open market for £70,000.
31. In June 2000 a 2 bedroom flat on 'Upper Fosters', NW4 was sold on the open market for £89,000<sup>5</sup>
32. In September 2014 a 2 bedroom flat on 'Lower Fosters', NW4 was sold on the open market for £322,000.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.zoopla.co.uk/property/33-marsh-drive/london/nw9-7qe/17299781>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.zoopla.co.uk/property/flat-61/lower-fosters/new-brent-street/london/nw4-2dh/17221080>

33. As I understand it leaseholders are being offered approximately £170,000 (give or take, depending on the unit) for a two bedroom property. Whilst the NW9 postal district in West Hendon has historically had lower property prices than NW4, the difference is not nearly as wide as suggested by the current offers. The discrepancy looks very odd considering the current state of the London housing market and the attractiveness of Barnet as a place to live.
34. Zoopla has suggested that the average property price for Marsh Drive on the West Hendon estate is £170,000<sup>7</sup> but any current market valuation of Marsh Drive would take into account the blight caused by regeneration. If the London Borough of Barnet or Capita acting on its behalf has used this methodology it would be amateur.
35. My key point I wish to emphasise is the issue of regeneration blight on property valuations.
36. The leaseholders have faced intimidation and bribes throughout this process. The offers seem to have been made with the aim of picking off leaseholders one by one despite the wishes of the leaseholders to negotiate as a block.
37. The opening offer by the Partners was pitiful and the closing offer is in my view laughable. I am a young professional who rents in Mill Hill. I would love to pick up a property for what is being offered to leaseholders anywhere in the London Borough of Barnet – the problem is that I am unable to find any such properties at this price as it is not an accurate market valuation.
38. Leaseholders have now been told by the Partners that they will be able to get one of the new properties as part of a shared equity deal but as I understand it, these offers are conditional on withdrawing objections from the public inquiry, as are the 'goodwill payment' of £10,000 and the offer to pay for the electrical works. The only way to reach the appropriate level of equity for the new build shared equity properties would be to accept this offer. This does not appear to me to be a fair negotiation but rather more like an aggressive tactic.

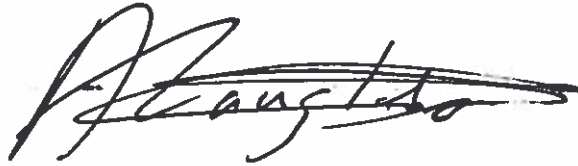
I respectfully ask the inspector to:

- Ask the London Borough of Barnet and the Partners to undertake a new valuation process with instruction that blight resulting from the regeneration scheme itself should be taken into account.
- Ask the London Borough of Barnet and the Partner's to ensure that leaseholders are compensated for their loss of homes at a proper and fair market rate that does not take into account any blight from the West Hendon regeneration programme.
- Ask that the Partner's ensure that every leaseholder has the option of taking up an equity stake in the new build.
- Ask the London Borough of Barnet to meet the cost of the electrical mains works as this should have been carried out many years ago and is nothing short of negligence on behalf of the London Borough of Barnet to have waited and not carried out these works.

I believe that everything I have written in this statement is accurate and true.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.zoopla.co.uk/home-values/london/marsh-drive/>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Langleben', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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