

HACKNEY DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT LOCAL PLAN FURTHER WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Personal details

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Policy Number DM20

In response to Question 4.2: Is Policy DM20 (loss of housing) effective, particularly in terms of protecting social rented homes?

Further argumentation supporting my submission and proposed changes

Current regeneration projects are not protecting social rented homes.

In the case of Woodberry Down, there were originally over 2000 council rented homes. In 1999 Hackney Council took the decision to knock down and rebuild the estate. The 2014 re-scheduling of the plan for Woodberry Down has increased the number of phases from 5 to 8; the plan is only on Phase 2, and the redevelopment is due to continue till 2032. This prolonged uncertainty about their homes is unfair to both tenants and leaseholders. The number of projected homes has gone up from 4,000 to 5,557, but 60 per cent of these will be for sale by developer Berkeley Homes. None of the remainder will be council rented homes. Replacing the 2000 original council rented homes, there will be 1,088 social rented homes owned by Genesis Housing Association, which means higher rents, higher service charges and less security of tenure. There will be a further 1,177 so-called 'affordable' homes, but these are not actually affordable to most people in Hackney or indeed in London, as I will argue elsewhere. By any calculation, there is a net loss of social rented homes.

Hackney Council's Estate Regeneration Programme Update, delivered to the Cabinet on 24 March 2014, aims to deliver 2,485 new-build homes and 275 refurbished ones. Only 912 of these (717 new-build and 195 refurbished) are to be for social rent. The remaining 1,848 are made up of 519 shared ownership, 1,249 private for sale, and 80 private (refurbished). The update does not give the overall figures for the numbers of social rented homes to be demolished in the regeneration programme. Figures for Tower Court may be indicative. 57 tenancies are to be replaced by 33 social rented homes, 18 shared ownership and 80 for private sale. This is a net loss of social rented homes.

A further indication may be found in figures published from the Hackney Cabinet meeting on 18 July 2011. There it was stated that the programme from 2011 – 2019 aimed to deliver some 2,304 new build homes and 195 refurbished homes. Of these 626 new and 195 refurbished social rented homes would add up to 821 social rented homes. But the programme was to replace 853 tenanted homes – a net loss of social rented homes.

In 2008 in 'Does demolition or refurbishment of old and inefficient homes help to increase our environmental, social and economic viability?' Anne Power argued that there is compelling evidence that estate or tower block refurbishment is both cheaper

and less damaging to the local environment than demolition and new build in all but the most extreme cases. Recent research by University College London similarly indicates that economic, social and environmental factors favour refurbishment over demolition.

It is important, therefore, to prioritise refurbishment over demolition of council estates to spare tenants the upheaval and mental and physical unpleasantness of having to participate in a demolition and rebuilding programme; to retain desperately needed council rented homes; and because it makes economic and environmental sense.

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Policy Number DM21

In response to Question 4.3: What does Policy DM21 (affordable housing delivery) add to Core Strategy Policy 20? Is it justified and effective?

Further argumentation supporting my submission and proposed changes

The term 'affordable housing' is used to cover housing which is not actually affordable to most Londoners.

Calculations about two years ago indicated that in London 80% of market rent (so-called affordable rent) required a household income of £44,000. 65% of market rent required a household income of £36,156. The inner London median income at the time was £31,379. Many people in Hackney live on an income much lower than that. So affordable rent housing is not affordable.

Affordable rent is a proportion of market rent. Hackney Citizen reported in February 2014 that homes in the borough now sell for an average £500,000, and that in recent months house prices in Hackney had risen by 17%, more than in any other area in England. On 18.6.14, the Evening Standard reported that rents in Hackney had risen by 9% to £2,125 per month. In April 2012 housing charity Shelter said a Hackney family needed to take home £3,960 each month to keep their rent to a third of their income, a situation which, in view of the above increases in house prices and rents, has undoubtedly got worse.

The government maintains that the affordable rent product is intended to address the same housing needs as social rented housing; the above evidence shows that it cannot do that.

Shared ownership (part rent, part buy) housing is also counted as affordable. A GLA housing need study found that of people who were unable to meet the cost of market homes, only an additional 7% were able to afford shared ownership housing. 2009 research shows that 92% of shared ownership dwellers had not been able to increase their share from the initial stake (usually 25%).

Hackney's evidence base for its housing policy was produced in 2009 using 2008 data, so a new survey is clearly needed. However, this found that more shared ownership homes were being built than were required. It also revealed that the suggested target for 15% intermediate homes was based on an unaffordable 40% of household income being spent on intermediate-rented homes.

Writing in the Hackney Gazette in February 2014, Councillor Philip Glanville, Hackney Council's Cabinet Member for Hackney Homes and Regeneration Estates, said that shared ownership homes built by the council in Homerton High St started at £170,000 for a one-bedroom flat, requiring a deposit of £6,800 for a 25% share. While this is a lower than market price, it is still a sum beyond most Hackney citizens. There are also many disadvantages to shared ownership, as the part-owner is also a tenant and therefore in many ways has the worst of both worlds. Hackney Council should be concentrating on building social rented homes, not these other products.

Only 20% of homes delivered in Hackney from 2007–12 were social rented. Social rented housing – preferably council housing, because of its lower rents and greater security of tenure, and because it is provided by a democratically elected council and not a housing association with a private board – is the only actually affordable housing for well over half the residents of Hackney. Research by the Smith Institute shows that people in social rented housing show 70 – 80% satisfaction rates.

The needs of people on council waiting lists can only be genuinely met by social rented housing. Hackney Council has cut its waiting lists from 19,000 by removing people who haven't been bidding, but this is more likely to indicate the hopelessness many people feel towards the chance of actually getting a social rented home than their need for it. Hackney Council's cabinet report of April 2012 advised: 'The level of "true" need remains very high though: 9,000 households await fewer than 1,000 new lettings in social rented homes available from 2013.' In London's social-rented sector, 43% of children are now living in overcrowded homes. More people, such as adults in their thirties, are staying in the family home or moving back into it because they cannot afford to live anywhere else. Many of these would like to have a home of their own and start a family; only a social rented home would enable them to do this.

High market rents and changes to the benefit system have increased the numbers of homeless people. Hackney Council's cabinet report of April 2012 said 'An increase in homelessness applications is already under way'. At the same time lack of building, and conversion of housing association homes from social to 'affordable' rent meant, according to the same report, that there would be 'a projected 30% reduction in social rented homes available to the council for letting from 2013'. As reported in the Hackney Gazette, in 2013, 618 families were declared homeless in the borough, equating to a rise of 19% from 520 the previous year.

Hackney Council does not give a full and open picture of the housing crisis in the borough by statements like this one from Councillor Philip Glanville, quoted in the Hackney Gazette on 28 August 2014: 'Our programme to regenerate Hackney's ageing housing estates is providing more than 2,770 homes for social renting, shared ownership and private sale ...' This statement does not mention how many homes are to be demolished. And it gives three categories of housing as if they were equivalents when they are not, without a breakdown of how many of each category are to be delivered.

More and more families in Hackney who a few decades ago would have been in council rented homes are in private rented property. Shelter has produced some figures on a nation-wide basis: a third of private renters are now families with children; 54% of renting families have £50 or less left over after paying rent and other

essentials; 35% of private rented homes do not meet the basic standard of being a 'decent home'.

Last year at a Hackney Housing summit called by MP Meg Hillier, Councillor Glanville expressed concern that large housing associations were converting social rented properties to affordable rent. He said, however, that this was not true of smaller housing associations. This is no longer the case. My landlord, a housing association with about 700 properties, has informed our tenants' association that henceforth they will be letting out at affordable rents empty properties which were previously social rented properties. This again reduces the number of social rented properties available to those in need, including those on the housing waiting list.

On 28 August the Hackney Gazette reported that between April and June Hackney Council had sold 30 council homes under the Right to Buy. This adds to the loss of social rented homes.

These are the reasons why in every case priority should be given to the building of social rented homes, and this should not be fudged by lumping them together with market homes and 'affordable' homes, whether rented or shared ownership.