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Shadow Minister for Justice
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Dear Sir,

I am writing in response to the consultation on the Conditional Land Sale Agreement , referring to the letter sent to residents above Melbourne Barrett's signature and dated 3rd February 2012. Many residents have shown me their copy of the letter and expressed their misgivings about both the overall plan and the process by which the council seeks to progress it. It is clear to me that a large number of residents feel that the council is pushing these proposals through with indecent haste and is suspicious of the council's motives for that reason.

There are many other reasons that I feel this land sale should not go ahead, and that the associated development needs to be halted and reconsidered at the most fundamental level. Linked as it is to the whole Earls Court Opportunity Area scheme, it is difficult to separate the sale of the West Ken and Gibbs Green Estates from the scheme as a whole – the developer clearly sees the whole scheme as a strategic whole, which makes it all the more worrying that the council is intent on proceeding with individual elements of the scheme before agreement has been reached across the whole piece.

Nevertheless, I shall try to confine myself here to issues that specifically relate to the CLSA.

My first concern is that the offer made to tenants and leaseholders, is presented – at considerable public expense – from an entirely partisan position. This is a document produced entirely from the developer's point of view and has the appearance of a holiday brochure, glamorising the development and paying only the most superficial attention to the very many, very serious concerns that residents have raised over this project, and sidelining the large, organised groups of residents who have examined the proposals in details and have expressed their opposition. Yet this document is proposing the biggest single life change that many hundreds of these people will ever experience – a huge civil engineering project that will change the whole world for thousands of people. A responsible council would present this information in a more dispassionate, unbiased way. The only balancing point of view is from individuals such as myself and those tenants and residents who have organised themselves into voluntary groups. Against the economic might of the council and its development partner, other points of view get drowned out. One might expect a developer to behave in this fashion, but for the council who should have the best interests of its electors at heart, it is a denial of democracy, and the consultation exercise a piece of window dressing.

What would happen if the Seagrave Road application was called in or stopped by the Mayor? The one move promise touted in the Consultation document would become meaningless. This is only one illustration of why it is unwise to proceed with elements of the scheme before it is all in place.

Further promises about rehousing are so vague as to be meaningless – the reassurances they offer are all dependent on the whim and fortunes of the developer – as the resignation statement by the head of the council’s own steering group revealed , there are no legally binding reassurances to back up these promises.

How can the council expect residents to comment on a CLSA which it refuses to publish? This is the most extreme illustration of the fact that this document asks people to make life-changing decisions with virtually no reliable information to hand. The summary “What kind of replacement homes would be built?” is 150 words long and offers little useful information to someone trying to take a decision such as this. Even those determined enough to read the small print associated with this section, will find disingenuous and evasive answers like this:

Q Will the room sizes of the new homes be smaller than the size of my current property?

A The room sizes of all new homes will meet the space standards set out in the London design Guide published by the Greater London Authority, The standards are based on the parker Morris standards which were in operation in the 1960s and 1970.

This sort of evasive blandishment is more suited to a used car salesman than a council which has the interests of its tenants and leaseholders at heart.

The council knows very well that over three-quarters of residents households have signed up to become members of the West Kensington Gibbs Green Community Homes Group, which is committed to using section 34A of the Housing Act to take control of the estates and administer them for the benefit of the community. The council will see, amongst the responses to this consultation, evidence that the West Kensington Estate TRA, the Gibbs Green and Dieppe Close TRA, and the West Ken & Gibbs Green Community Homes groups have all reached democratically arrived at decisions to oppose these plans; the Chair of the council’s steering group resigned accusing the council of incompetence and duplicity over its relationship with the developer and what it was telling residents. I submit that the council knows very well what the overwhelming majority of residents on these two estate think of these plans: they want them shelved and they want investment to improve the existing much loved and decent neighbourhoods that are their homes.

I ask the council to stop the CLSA immediately, withdraw its proposals to demolish the estates, and open a meaningful dialogue with residents about how they would really like to see their homes improved.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Slaughter