

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY, 8TH JULY 2021, 6.30 - 9.30pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Matt White (Chair), Bob Hare, Kirsten Hearn, Emine Ibrahim and Noah Tucker

11. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Charles Adje and Cllr Dawn Barnes.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

15. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

16. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record. It was noted that a spreadsheet containing the responses to action points from the meeting had been circulated to Panel Members. There was one action point still outstanding about a referral to the audit team which would be followed up. **(ACTION)**

AGREED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

17. UPDATE REPORTS

Update reports on five different topics were introduced by Cllr Ruth Gordon, Cabinet Member for House Building, Place-Making and Development and Cllr John Bevan, Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and Housing Services.

High Road West

Cllr Hare asked about the businesses impacted by the High Road West redevelopment proposals, including those who were concerned that they would lose the freehold ownership of their land, and how they could be helped. Cllr Gordon emphasised that this was not a redevelopment scheme that she would have originally signed up to, as she had made clear during her previous role as Chair of the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel. She said that, while the Council was locked into the agreement with Lendlease, discussions with the businesses were ongoing and the Council would do what it could to help them. She also noted that the scheme would take some years to come to fruition and the work to the north of White Hart Lane, which included the Peacock Industrial Estate, would be part of the second phase of the scheme.

Asked by Cllr Hare whether it would be possible for the businesses to be offered 'like for like' alternative premises, Cllr Gordon said that this would be explored as part of ongoing discussions. She added that models of mixed-use sites which included industrial space was being explored in some parts of London.

Cllr Ibrahim said that there was a commitment to build 500 new Council homes on the High Road West site and noted that Cllr Gordon had previously expressed concerns about the terms of the acquisitions of these homes. Asked by Cllr Ibrahim whether that was still her view, Cllr Gordon reiterated that she had never been in favour of this redevelopment but that this was the deal that the Council was currently locked into. Her general position remained that if Councils can build their own homes on their own land, then this was the preferable option as acquisitions were typically a more expensive way of increasing housing stock. She would have preferred the Housing Delivery team at the Council to have been built up earlier in the Housing Delivery Programme for that reason. However, she added that if properties could be obtained at a reasonable price then this could be justified in some circumstances and, with the GLA funding package included as part of the overall scheme, these acquisitions would not be as expensive as they might otherwise have been.

Asked by Cllr Ibrahim whether she supported the deal as outlined in the report to the Panel, Cllr Gordon said that the key decisions, such as on the GLA funding package, had been agreed prior to her appointment to the Cabinet and that there were no fundamental changes from this in the report. Asked by Cllr Tucker whether she regarded the acquisitions in the scheme to represent value for money, Cllr Gordon

said she did because it was deemed to have met value for money criteria. Cllr Tucker suggested that the argument in favour of acquisitions was that this was in addition to direct delivery and helped to build up Council housing stock more quickly. Cllr Gordon responded that acquisitions may be appropriate in some circumstances but cited examples such as the Red House in Tottenham where Council land was sold to a developer with new homes then to be acquired by the Council. She said that she preferred direct delivery to this model as it would be cheaper and would deliver more new Council homes.

Cllr Tucker noted that the previous Leader of the Council's targets had been for 1,150 starts on site by March 2022, 1,000 completions by May 2024 and 250 Council homes every year, asking whether Cllr Gordon was committed to these targets. Cllr Gordon said that she was committed to delivering manifesto commitments and would provide a written answer in response to the figures quoted. **(ACTION)** Cllr Tucker commented that these targets required a significant component of acquisitions to be met but Cllr Gordon responded that most of the acquisitions had already been committed to under the previous leadership. Asked by Cllr Ibrahim and Cllr White whether she advocated a change in approach to acquisitions in future, Cllr Gordon said that would not agree to overpriced acquisitions but that, if the Council was offered new homes at good value for money, then they would go ahead but each proposal would be considered on its merits.

Cllr Hearn observed that Cllr Gordon had previously been critical of the redevelopment scheme and asked what she would have changed about it. Cllr Gordon said that she would have preferred the refurbishment of the estate and perhaps building some additional homes through infill development. However, this went back many years as decisions had been made and this was no longer possible. She welcomed the changes to the scheme made under the previous Leader of the Council that had increased the number of Council homes being delivered, though she was concerned about the resulting increase in the density of the redevelopment. She added that she had recently had discussions with temporary accommodation residents of the Love Lane estate and had encountered some scepticism and confusion about the scheme, so further engagement was needed to explain what was on offer to them. The primary focus was to keep the community together, including the temporary accommodation residents.

Cllr Hearn expressed concern about some of the language used around the scheme, such as the naming of the development as 'High Road West' and Cllr Ibrahim added that, in her views, new homes should not be referred to as 'products'. Cllr Tucker observed that language of the report was 'selling' the development, whereas the tone from Cllr Gordon was that this was a development that the Council was stuck with. Cllr Gordon responded that this was a report written by officers and that, as the Cabinet Member with responsibility, she was answering questions on the strategy.

Cllr Kaushika Amin was invited by the Chair to ask questions to the Cabinet Member. She noted that the proposed number of Council homes on High Road West had already been increased to 500 and asked what Cllr Gordon had done to increase the number of homes. Cllr Gordon responded that her criticism of the scheme had been that she would have preferred refurbishment and infill to the current proposals but that there had been no change to the proposed number of Council homes in the scheme since she had been appointed to the Cabinet.

Cllr Amin noted that the new Leader of the Council had been critical of the 250-year lease that the Council had with Lendlease and asked whether anything had been done to address this. Peter O'Brien responded that any change would involve a fundamental change to the Development Agreement with Lendlease and it seemed unlikely that Lendlease would want to start such a process.

In response to a question from Cllr Amin about the rents to be paid by Love Lane Estate residents after moving to new homes on the redeveloped site, Cllr Gordon said that it would be based on a formula for social rent with any increase capped at 10%. Cllr Ibrahim said that formula rent was different to average rent and different to what some current tenants were paying, explaining that she had previously asked that tenants should not pay any more as a result. Cllr Gordon confirmed that this was the case. Cllr Amin expressed concern that there could be rent unfairness with residents in different parts of the borough paying different levels of rent.

Wards Corner

Asked by Cllr Hearn about the current approach to the Wards Corner redevelopment scheme, Cllr Gordon said that she aimed to work closely with the Seven Sisters traders. She had recently met with the West Green Road/Seven Sisters Development Trust and the market trader tenants association, along with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, and had discussed their proposals for their Community Plan and a place-making approach. The immediate concern was to get the market trading again and conversations were ongoing with TfL who were the landlords for the site.

Asked by Cllr Hearn what the 'place-making' aspect meant, Cllr Gordon said that this was an idea that had originated in the US and had developed in the UK, along with ideas such as community wealth-building, in Preston and elsewhere. It was about working with communities to develop local areas based on what they wanted rather than adopting a top-down approach. Cllr White said that his understanding was that place-making was based on redevelopment and community wealth building was about the local economy. Cllr Gordon said that the two were connected but that the term regeneration had been associated with gentrification and a top-down approach whereas this approach was bottom-up. Cllr Tucker suggested that the term place-making was a word designed to conjure good feeling with little meaning to it. Cllr Gordon responded that the meaning came from action and that the term was a signal

that the Council was working with communities to improve their neighbourhoods rather than imposing top-down regeneration.

Cllr Ibrahim asked about the viability challenge described in paragraph 3.1 of the report and options that were being explored by the Council. Cllr Gordon said that various options were being explored and discussions were ongoing with the community to achieve the best possible outcome. Options being looked at included looking at the Community Plan, how traders could have more say over the governance of the market. However, none of this was set in stone and was subject to discussions with all relevant parties.

Cllr Ibrahim asked if the Development Agreement had been breached given that Grainger had not been able to deliver the temporary market, Cllr Gordon said that Grainger had written to the traders to indicate that they did not have viability for the scheme and that this had been apparent for some time. Peter O'Brien said that development agreements were typically based on a set of conditions, one of the most important of which was the viability condition. If the viability condition was not met then the scheme could not proceed. He said that this element was currently being worked through and so it was not appropriate to comment in detail about it at this time. It was hoped that there would be more clarity on this point in the next month or so. In relation to the temporary market, Peter O'Brien said that after Grainger had indicated that the work on this would not be proceeding, TfL had written to traders to say that they would immediately be looking at alternative options for an interim arrangement. TfL were conscious of the situation that the traders found themselves in and had provided financial assistance to them via a Hardship Fund in December 2020.

Asked by Cllr Amin about the status of the CPO agreement with Grainger, Cllr Gordon confirmed that this remained in place until 2023.

Broadwater Farm

Asked by Cllr Ibrahim about the use of a S105 consultation relating to the Stapleford block during the summer holidays, Cllr Gordon said that she understood the concern and that, if it did not prove possible to speak to a sufficient number of residents, then it may be necessary to think about this again.

Cllr Ibrahim and Cllr Amin emphasised the importance of the Cabinet Member standing by the content of the reports provided by officers to Scrutiny. Cllr Gordon reiterated that she had been closely involved in the discussions on all of the issues reported on and reflected that she had only stated that she had not written the reports but perhaps could have asked officers to temper some of the language used.

Local Plan

Cllr White asked for updates on the studies outlined in paragraph 5.7 of the report that had been commissioned to support the new Local Plan. Bryce Tudball, Interim Head of Planning Policy, Transport & Infrastructure, provided the following details:

- **Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment** – the London Plan sets the Council’s housing target to be included in the new Local Plan. This report would be about understanding what mix of housing was required in the borough, including the amount/type of affordable housing and the size of the housing. This piece of work was now substantially complete. The second part of the work on the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment was underway and expected to progress to a draft report fairly soon.
- **Archaeological Priority Area Study** – This was completed around six weeks previously and was about understanding the archaeology in the borough, what could be disturbed by new development and how to protect it.
- **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment** – This was about understanding flood risk across the borough from all sources. The draft report was expected in a couple of months’ time.
- **Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINC) Study** – The current Local Plan identified a range of SINC’s across the borough and this report was to identify whether these designations had changed. It also looked at what protections for SINC’s might be necessary as a result of new development.
- **Retail and Town Centre Needs Study** – This had been procured quite recently and was to understand needs in the borough for future retail and other town centre uses such as leisure.
- **Employment Land Study** – This had only started a couple of weeks previously and was to understand the borough’s employment land needs and whether changes in designations might be needed.
- **Whole Plan Viability Study** – This was currently out to tender and was to understand what type of developments in the borough were viable and the impact of the Council’s policies on this (e.g. affordable housing policy, sustainable credentials of buildings).

Asked by Cllr White about the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Cllr Bevan said that he had not yet seen the report but was aware of concerns about 3 and 4-bedroom property requirements in the borough and also about accommodation for single people. The assessment would provide the evidence for what type of properties would be needed. Asked by Cllr White for further details on the assessment, Bryce Tudball said that it had concluded that the overwhelming need in the borough was for affordable housing, around 80% of which was for social housing. It also indicated some need for intermediate products such as shared ownership, and a need more

generally for larger homes. Asked by Cllr White about his plans to address these needs, Cllr Bevan said that Cllr Gordon was responsible for the house-building aspect but that they worked closely together on this.

Cllr Hare asked about the timescales for the Employment Land Study and how it would be adapted to the dramatic changes to the ways that people were now working. Bryce Tudbull said that this was still at an early stage and that some draft outputs might be expected by September with a draft report towards the end of the autumn. He added that the Employment Land Study and the Retail and Town Centre Needs Study were interlinked and that the brief for these reviews required a careful look at the changes to the employment sites in the borough and the implications of the changes in employment patterns caused by the pandemic.

Cllr Tucker asked about car parking spaces in new developments, citing the high number of spaces at the proposed St Ann's development which was contrary to the aim of the low traffic neighbourhood in the ward. Cllr Bevan said that this was a contentious issue and that a lot of residents, including those for whom use of a vehicle was an essential part of their employment, need somewhere to park. He added that the increased provision of electric charging points was also an important requirement in new developments. The consultation for the Local Plan would help to gather views on this issue but the Council was being pushed by the GLA to reduce the number of parking spaces. Cllr Hearn commented that small businesses should provide more support to employees that require a vehicle to be more environmentally friendly. Rob Krzyszowski, Assistant Director for Planning, Building Standards & Sustainability, said that, while he couldn't comment on the specific development cited, any planning application must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan (which included the London Plan and the Local Plan) which had adopted policies on car parking. These policies could be looked at again as part of the development of the new Local Plan, though it would also be important to consider the Council's existing wider policies in the Transport Strategy.

Asked by Cllr Tucker whether there were specific requirements on parking in the London Plan and Local Plan, Rob Krzyszowski said that the latest London Plan policy had stated that zero parking should be the starting point for new developments that had strong public transport links. There were maximum car parking standards in the London Plan (but not minimum standards) which would be applied to any new development in the borough.

Asked by Cllr Hearn for his views on the government's proposals on planning reform, Cllr Bevan said that the Council had made representations to the government's White Paper consultation. His opinion was that the current proposals would be radically changed and that it could be some years before they were implemented. Rob Krzyszowski added that the government's response to the Planning White Paper had been delayed until at least the autumn. The White Paper had referred to fundamental

change to the planning system whereas the recent emphasis from the Secretary of State was about evolutionary change, so the rhetoric appeared to have been toned down.

Homes for Haringey Repairs Service

Cllr Ibrahim expressed concerns about the doubling of the wait time for tenants reporting repairs resulting from issues with the ordering process as outlined in paragraph 3.2 of the report. Judith Page, Executive Director of Property at Homes for Haringey, said that this related to the upgrade of the housing management system and that a lot of the end user testing had been difficult to carry out during the pandemic. Some issues with the process had caused significant delays to call centre performance. Extra support and resource was being put in to overcome those issues. Cllr Ibrahim said that some repairs were not dealt with until the issues had become more serious which often increased both the inconvenience and the cost of resolving them.

Asked by Cllr Ibrahim about the Council's progress towards meeting the target on the Decent Homes Standards, Cllr Bevan said that there was a huge job to do to reach the Decent Homes Standards but this had not been helped by the complications arising from requirements following the Grenfell tragedy or the disruption caused by the Covid pandemic. However, notwithstanding these difficulties, there had not been the staff capacity within HfH to deliver the size of the programme that was required. That issue had now been resolved, with a substantial number of new officers recruited with the required technical and procurement expertise. Cllr Bevan said that the policy would be to carry out refurbishments to estates all at once rather than doing partial refurbishments in several separate stages as had occurred in the past. This was the aim and he was committed to carrying out the work but he could not guarantee that the programme would not be interrupted by future cuts to government funding.

Adding to the previous point, Judith Page said that if the Decent Homes work was not done then this would impact on the repairs budget. HfH had a target to include the most significant backlog properties, which they were on target to meet with the exception of the Noel Park estate where there had been some delays to the installation of the bathroom pods. All the Decent Homes work was being programmed to be completed by 2025 in line with the Asset Management Strategy. Significant changes had been made to the team and a lot more was being managed inhouse which provided a greater level of control and flexibility on what could be delivered.

Cllr Amin commented that it had not been possible to carry out some repairs and building maintenance over the past year or so, though service charges remained high for many residents. She asked whether residents would be refunded some of the unused funds. Judith Page noted that, while this was not her area of specialism, her understanding was that service charges were fixed and went into the Housing

Revenue Account (HRA) rather than directly to HfH. There was an adjustment process on service charges, so residents were charged based on an estimate at the beginning of the year with an adjustment made at year end based on the actual costs incurred. Any refunds due would therefore be issued through this process.

Asked by Cllr Amin about the expected timescales for the repairs backlog resulting from the pandemic, Judith Page said that around 5,000 fewer repairs were carried out last year which was about 10% less than usual. 4,000 of these were in the first lockdown and most of these were caught up with over the summer. She appreciated that some people had been waiting a long time for their repairs but some more permanent and temporary staff were being recruited and it was expected that backlog levels would be back to normal by the end of September.

Cllr Amin observed that some residents were frustrated by repair workers attending but not being able to complete the repair, resulting in multiple repair appointments and longer delays before the problem was resolved. Judith Page said that sometimes repairs required more than one person to complete. HfH was due to do some work later in the year in consultation with tenants and leaseholders about how to improve the service. She also said that HfH was aware of a problem with leaks where the source of the leak was in a different flat that could not be immediately accessed, particularly if it was a leasehold property. HfH was therefore looking at their access process to help address this. Cllr Bevan said that the leak issue was clearly a problem and had been raised with him several times. He was considering setting up a working group to address this. He also informed the Panel that a new repairs director had recently been appointed who would be addressing the wider repair issues.

Cllr Tucker noted that paragraph 4.3 of the report stated that the use of sub-contractors was being reviewed to identify areas where it was felt that in-house delivery would offer a better service or improve value for money. He expressed concern about the use of these criteria as the manifesto commitment was for insourcing to be the default option. Cllr Bevan said that, while Cllr Tucker might disagree with the wording, the Amey services had recently been brought back into HfH and there was other work being done that would previously have been outsourced. Cllr Ibrahim proposed that the rewording of these criteria be a recommendation of the Panel. **(ACTION)**

AGREED: That the Panel recommends to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and Housing Services that the wording of the criteria for insourcing is amended to make clear that in-house delivery should be the default option unless it can be demonstrated that a better service or value for money can be achieved through alternative means.

18. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Panel Members discussed possible items for future meetings to be added to the Work Programme.

Cllr Hearn proposed that the two Cabinet Members relevant to the Panel should provide reports on the actions that they were taking within their portfolio to contribute towards the Climate Change Action Plan

Cllr Tucker proposed that a report be brought to the Panel about the St Ann’s Hospital redevelopment site.

It was agreed that any other agenda items for future meetings and the terms of reference for the proposed scrutiny review on the future of housing management could be discussed outside of the meeting via email or separate informal meetings.

19. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- 13th September 2021
- 4th November 2021
- 9th December 2021
- 28th February 2022

CHAIR: Councillor Matt White

Signed by Chair

Date