

LAMBETH COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE GLA CONSULTATION "PROPOSED NEW FUNDING CONDITION TO REQUIRE RESIDENT BALLOTS IN ESTATE REGENERATION"

APRIL 2018

Lambeth welcomes the publication of the Mayor's Good Practice Guide. We fully support residents being at the heart of decision-making.

No one at Lambeth underestimates the stress that rebuilding an estate could potentially cause for current residents. We want to give residents living on estates that will be rebuilt all the information and support that they need to make the best choices about their and their families' futures.

Lambeth has embarked on estate regeneration on some estates as part of our plans to tackle Lambeth's housing crisis. We have over 28,000 households on our housing waiting list, and over 1,700 families in temporary accommodation.

We do not have enough council homes, and many of the homes we have are in a poor state of repair. Many tenants on our estates are living in dilapidated conditions that the council can't afford to refurbish.

We're not prepared to leave people living in sub-standard properties but funding for refurbishment or additional borrowing powers are not available due to decisions made by the government on Decent Homes funding and Housing Revenue Account borrowing caps. In addition, funding for new council homes has been substantially reduced by the government.

So, we face a choice: of doing nothing for these estates; or rebuilding them to provide the more and better homes our community needs.

Over time, choosing the do nothing option will result in a loss of social homes as families will need to be moved when their homes fall below decent standards.

Estate regeneration is a very important part of how Lambeth can both improve the condition of our housing stock, and provide much needed new affordable social rented housing. But estate regeneration has to meet key principles and put residents at the heart of the process.

Lambeth has been engaging with residents on six estates since 2014, holding extensive consultation and engagement on how to deliver better homes where refurbishment is unaffordable. We have one of the strongest offers to residents of any estate regeneration programme anywhere in the country set out in our 'Key Guarantees'. These guarantee that every secure tenant will be able to move to a brand-new home at council level rent and they provide affordable options to assist resident homeowners to stay on the estate. These guarantees were finalised after extensive consultation with residents and an external review by TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service).

All of our schemes meet the principles set out in the Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration: to deliver an increase in affordable housing, provide full rights to return or remain for social tenants and a fair deal for leaseholders and freeholders.

Throughout the process we have sought to engage current residents to both provide them with as much certainty as possible and ensure that they are involved in and influence the decision-making process.

To make this a reality we have created a set of engagements, set up hubs on each estate, provided training to residents, ensured there are engagement partners working with each development

management team and provided independent advisors for each estate. Since 2015 there have been over 800 events which have been attended by over 1,100 residents.

This engagement has improved schemes, for example, residents on South Lambeth wanted a community room, and plans have been added to create one under Wimborne House. Residents on Westbury Estate wanted better access to Heathbrook Park, and we worked on a series of options for them to do this. Also, residents on Knights Walk wanted the new homes for existing residents to relate to the heart of Knights Walk and onto the new open space, which has formed a core part of the design for this phase.

While we accept the principle of applying ballots to future schemes, we hope that the final guidance recognises that they are only one part of the extensive engagement work with residents that any estate regeneration project should involve.

In reference to your specific questions:

**1. Do you agree that the GLA should make resident ballots a funding condition for estate regeneration schemes?**

Lambeth welcomes the commitment to place residents at the heart of the decision-making process on each estate and supports the principle of resident ballots in certain circumstances.

Any proposal on ballots must balance the needs of the wider community with the wishes of local residents directly affected.

Lambeth recommends incorporating three guiding principles to underpin a new, London-wide ballot process for residents living on estates earmarked for regeneration. They are:

1. Guaranteed rights for residents: An approved key guarantee offer for all affected residents
2. A voice for residents on local housing waiting lists: weighted to those most likely to directly benefit from a programme of additional council housing in their local area
3. Providing transparent and deliverable options to residents

We want to support the building of better homes for existing residents and new council homes for local people in Lambeth, to listen and work with those directly affected and ensure people have the information, support and advice to make an informed decision about their future.

**2. Do you agree with the proposed criteria that would trigger the requirement for a resident ballot? Why?/Why not?**

The proposed threshold of 150 homes is reasonable.

The line in para 3.3 “A ballot would not be triggered by plans to demolish homes that may have been purchased from private ownership to facilitate regeneration” is unclear. We would welcome clarification as to what scenario this refers to – social landlords would not purchase homes from private ownership prior to a decision being made about the wider scheme.

**3. Do you agree with the proposed scope of resident ballots? Why?/Why not?**

Yes, we agree that residents must be given sufficient information to make an informed decision.

**4. Do you agree with the proposed stage in an estate regeneration process at which ballots should happen? Why?/Why not?**

Estate regeneration projects are complex and can span over several years. The timing must balance the need to provide residents with enough information to make an informed decision about the future of their estate, with the resources and time required by local authorities to develop these. For example, we spent over 18 months working with residents and their independent advisers to develop the Key Guarantees, which requires significant resources, time and buy-in from both residents and the council.

There would be significant abortive costs to local authorities to develop such an offer if it was then to be rejected in a ballot.

There would also need to be sufficient progress on the design of the scheme to ensure that is compliant with relevant local authority and GLA planning policy before a ballot takes place.

This is similarly the case if developing the design principles of the proposed regeneration, as well as the future tenure mix and associated social infrastructure all of which requires significant design work at cost to the council.

**5. Do you have any other comments on the threshold, scope and timing of resident ballots?**

No

**Eligibility requirements**

**6. Do you agree with the proposed eligibility criteria for resident ballots?**

Lambeth has a very high demand for social housing, which is allocated on a borough wide basis according to housing need. Statistically, few tenants on non-secure tenancies currently living on the estates earmarked for regeneration are likely to be on a high enough priority that they would be able to successfully bid for the new build properties. We note that there are over 28,000 households on Lambeth's housing register, of which around 6,000 are in high priority and stand a realistic chance of being allocated social housing.

It is not clear why those that have been on the housing register for a year should have a vote and other private tenants shouldn't, particularly as a ballot is likely to take place several years after the idea is initially proposed.

We do think it is very important to consider the views of those likely to benefit from the new homes and to provide a voice for residents on local housing waiting lists. This could be weighted to those most likely to directly benefit from a programme of additional council housing in their local area. In Lambeth, the top two priority bands account for a fifth of the waiting list but around three-quarters of allocations and may be a reasonable group to ask for their views during the ballot.

Any proposal should also come with a full Equalities Impact Assessment.

**7. Do you agree that eligibility criteria should be the same for all schemes?**

Yes

**Implementing ballots**

**8. Do you agree with the Mayor's proposed requirements for implementing ballots? Why?/Why not?**

We support the use of independent bodies throughout the consultation process, not just for ballots.

**9. Do you have proposals for other potential Mayoral requirements for implementing ballots?**

No

**Exemptions**

**10. Do you agree with the proposed exemption where the demolitions are required to deliver an infrastructure scheme? Why?/Why not?**

We think that genuinely affordable housing is just as pressing a need as new infrastructure schemes.

**11. Do you agree with the proposed exemption where the demolitions are required to address safety issues? Why?/Why not?**

We agree that demolitions required to address safety issues should be excluded.

We also believe that where the condition of homes is resulting in higher cases of poor breathing and health impacts because of damp and poor quality housing, that the Mayor should consider exempting those estates from a ballot.

**12. Do you agree with the proposed exemption where a specialist or supported housing scheme is being decommissioned by the local authority? Why?/Why not?**

We agree that decommissioning of specialist housing should be exempt.

**13. Do you have proposals for other potential exemptions to the proposed funding condition?**

We would add a further exception for estates where the extent of refurbishment required to ensure homes are brought up to a decent standard is not economically viable and does not represent value for money.

**14. Do you agree with the proposed transitional arrangements? Why?/Why not?**

We note that ballots will not be required retrospectively for five of the estates on our regeneration programme (Knight's Walk, South Lambeth, Westbury, Fenwick and Cressingham Gardens) that are in receipt of GLA funding.

On the other estate in our current programme, Central Hill, we commissioned an independent company to carry out a test of opinion in October 2016. This demonstrated that there was a clear majority of secure tenants, and a majority of all residents who expressed a view, in support of redevelopment.

Partly on the basis of the test of opinion, Lambeth's cabinet approved the redevelopment in March 2017. Since then, a number of leaseholder buybacks have since been completed and a number of tenants have exercised their rights to take Band A priority elsewhere in the borough in anticipation of the estate being redeveloped.

Residents have been given certainty that redevelopment is taking place. We are keen to avoid further uncertainty for the tenants and leaseholders and would welcome certainty from the Mayor that this condition will not be applied in this case.