

Opposition Priority Business: Council approach to the delivery of new homes

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The starting point for this Opposition Priority Business on housing is the fact that Labour's record on housing whilst in government is the worst since the 1920s. **To spell it out, the Labour governments of 1997-2010 formed by the party that falsely claims a monopoly on caring for the poor and the disadvantaged, delivered fewer houses/flats whether private or public across England than at any time since the 1920s.** That is a grave indictment of Labour's housing policy while in government. It is aggravated however by the fact that Labour in government deliberately pursued a policy during this period of allowing uncontrolled immigration into the UK, both from within and outside of the European Union so that we had a rising population with no increase in housing provision.. That is the principal reason why we have a serious housing crisis across London at the present time.
- 1.2 There are three different aspects to this paper, which I will deal with in turn, but all in our view demonstrate that this and the previous Labour Administration in Enfield are as usual, long on rhetoric but incredibly short on delivery!

2. Meridian Water

- 2.1 The Labour Administration when elected in 2010 inherited from the previous Conservative Administration, four "place shaping sites" which had been identified by that Administration as sites in need of regeneration, and sites which would provide additional housing. The biggest of them being Meridian Water where there was to be a minimum of 5000 new homes, since revised to 8500, on a very large site, off of the North Circular Road in Edmonton. The Meridian Water site, formed part of the council's draft Enfield Core Strategy, which had been worked up by the previous Conservative Administration. This was ready for adoption in 2010 and was duly adopted by the new council in November 2010. A Masterplan for Meridian Water had been commissioned and was finally approved in 2012. Despite this, at the present time, the council's land ownership in the site is negligible; until very recently, no serious attempts had been made in the years between 2010 to date to acquire land on this site, notwithstanding that for the site to be at all viable to any potential developer there is a need for the council to have demonstrated intent by acquiring relevant land and/ or passing the necessary Compulsory Purchase resolution. A main highway, now known as The Causeway is and always was a pre- requisite to the successful development of the site and obviously requires, construction, yet no land for that site is yet in the council's ownership.
- 2.2 It is a travesty that four years have come and gone since May 2010 and very little significant advance has been made in preparing this site for redevelopment. No developer has been identified but as I say above, that in many ways is unsurprising given that the council owns no land!

- 2.3 The Opposition fully understands the desirability of the introduction of twin tracking and the redevelopment of the Angel Road Station as part of the regeneration of this site, indeed the previous Conservative Administration had initiated discussions to this end via the North London Strategic Alliance and the then chairman of the TfL board.. However, in our view that should not have prevented the process of acquiring some of the land. If the Administration was serious about proceeding with this development, such acquisition would not have been speculative in our view.
- 2.4 We are also cognisant of the problems surrounding the National Grid gas holders, and again right from the start we had initiated discussions with that company and they were on side, so that of itself should not have prevented early acquisition of land, particularly that required for the new highway.
- 2.5 Throughout this period, needless to say land costs were increasing and that was yet another reason to proceed with land acquisition earlier.
- 2.6 The Council could and should have made a compulsory purchase order by now because the earlier it had been made using Town and Country Planning Act powers, the better it's negotiating position for purchasing land would have been. It is still not too late to take effective action to try to facilitate earlier redevelopment, and given the urgent and dire need for housing in the borough, that should and should always have been the imperative.
- 2.7 The Opposition therefore proposes that Cabinet considers an early report leading to the making of a compulsory purchase order on so much of the site as is required, in particular for the construction of The Causeway, but also for other redevelopment of the site.

3. **Small Housing Sites**

- 3.1 We turn now to the position on development of small sites.
- 3.2 The seven small residential sites concerned (Parsonage Lane, Forty Hill, Lavender Hill, St George's, Tudor Crescent, Jasper Close and Holtwhite's) were originally used for sheltered housing. The accommodation provided became increasingly unattractive for this client group resulting in unacceptable levels of voids. Therefore, the then Conservative Administration decided in principle to demolish the existing buildings and redevelop the sites for modern housing. May 2010 saw the election of a Labour administration.
- 3.3 The timeline for the design and planning process thereafter was reported as follows:
 - Cabinet commitment to proceed – September 2011 – some 18 months into the Administration's four year term.
 - Cabinet commitment to proceed with revised scheme – July 2012
 - Planning application submitted – August 2013 – a full three and a half

years after they were elected on a manifesto pledge to deal with the housing shortage!

- Invitation to Tender – September 2013
- Approval to appoint developers – December 2013
- Developer selection approved – March 2014
- Legal documents signed – May 2014 – a full four years after the 2010 election
- Planning permission finally granted – September 2014, a whole year after the application was submitted.
- Start on site December 2014? Still uncertain.

3.4 The Opposition supports the general purpose and nature of the overall programme, but it deplores the unacceptably long delay (over four years) from Labour's election, before a single brick has been laid.

3.5 The first priority of public housing funders in the past, such as the Housing Corporation, the HCA and currently the GLA, has been to put in place rigorous disciplines to avoid the sort of mission creep and slippage, which is otherwise endemic to public sector managed projects. The Council for the first time since the 1970s has been given the powers and funds to develop subsidised housing. The small sites programme is a worrying indication of the delays that may plague future schemes.

3.6 The Council should without delay put in place the appropriate reporting systems advocated by our Shadow Housing Lead over the past six months so that cost and programme issues for all estate regeneration and other housing schemes can be monitored readily in a transparent way by Members, the Housing Board and senior management.

4. Housing Gateway Scheme

4.1 Finally, we cannot let a paper on housing delivery pass without mentioning the Gateway scheme.

4.2 Under this scheme, more than 11 purchases of residential properties have been completed in the Borough since the commencement of the Gateway programme earlier this year. This is the first tranche of Labour Enfield's controversial programme to spend £100m buying homes over the next five years to re-house homeless families from expensive temporary accommodation. Offers have been made so far on over 47 properties, mostly two bed and three bed homes, and the programme is speeding up. The Council officers have confirmed that unsurprisingly they are increasingly being contacted by estate agents looking for a quick sale.

- 4.3 The money to purchase the Gateway properties is being lent by the Council to the new company from the general capital fund not from the housing account. This enables the Council to avoid breaching the government limit on total capital spend for housing, which they are close to. This is a financially imprudent approach and wrong in principle.
- 4.4 The Conservatives are totally opposed to this programme, which uses tax payers' money to transfer substantial numbers of privately owned homes into the public sector. It's what left wing Labour authorities used to call "municipalisation". It puts the Council in the position of competing unfairly with first time buyers and others desperately seeking to own their home. It also, by the injection of such a large sum of money into the local housing market, artificially raises house prices by more than they have increased already. **The Council, because of its financial clout and ability to conclude deals quickly, has an inbuilt advantage when purchasing in the local housing market. But significantly, we must remember that this costly Gateway programme does not deliver a single additional home in the Borough.**
- 4.5 The Conservative Opposition is seriously concerned that the council is using its limited financial resources to deprive struggling families wishing to buy, from obtaining housing at the cheaper end of the market. We fully accept that due to past Labour government policies on housing and immigration, the council faces unprecedented demand for social housing from a rising population, and the export of homeless families from other parts of London.
- 4.6 Conservatives believe that the Council would be better advised to use what resources it has, such as Right to Buy receipts, to encourage housing associations to develop additional new low cost housing in the Borough. This would enable housing associations to use their borrowing powers to lever in private finance to provide additional social housing in Enfield. At the same time the Council needs to review and strengthen its policies on encouraging relocation outside of London.

5. Recommendations

Thus the Opposition formally recommends:

- 5.1 That officers be instructed to bring forward a report to an early meeting of the Cabinet to consider the making of a Compulsory Purchase Order under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in respect of such land as is required to secure the redevelopment of Meridian Water
- 5.2 That officers be asked to bring to Cabinet a viable timescale for the redevelopment of the Meridian Water site, with critical points identified.
- 5.3 That as regards the estate regeneration programme and other housing developments, the council should immediately put in place appropriate systems to facilitate monitoring by Members and management of cost and other programme issues in a transparent way.

- 5.4 That the Gateway scheme be abandoned and that instead the council should use such resources as it has, including Right to Buy receipts to encourage housing associations to develop additional low cost housing in the borough, so that in turn they could use their borrowing powers to lever in private finance to provide additional social housing in Enfield.
- 5.5 That the council reviews and strengthen its policies on encouraging relocation and rehousing outside of London

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