

Lea Bridge Ward Forum Meeting

Thursday 11th February 2016, 8pm

Councillors present: Cllr Ian Rathbone, Cllr Margaret Gordon and Cllr Deniz Oguzkanli

Guest speaker: Nathaniel Mathews, Senior Housing Solicitor, Hackney Community Law Centre

Members of the public: 9

Implications of the new Housing Bill

Presented by: Nathaniel Mathews, Senior Housing Solicitor, Hackney Community Law Centre, who has been working in the housing and welfare fields in Hackney for more than 20 years. Speaking in a personal capacity, he made the following substantive points:

- The Housing Bill proposes to bring in fundamental changes to social housing.
- There is still a lot of details that need to be worked out and initial questions that remain unanswered at the moment.
- Despite strong opposition, the Housing Bill is being pushed through Parliament very quickly and if it is successful it will be 'the end of' social housing. This would have serious implications on Hackney where 52% of residents live in social housing.
- The Housing Bill favours home ownership over rented accommodation. Therefore, there is little in the Housing Bill to preserve social housing. This emphasises the notion that the current Government view of social housing as a source of poverty.
- Properties are promised to be replaced like for like, nevertheless the current replacement rate is 1 to every 8 sold.
- The top 10% of social housing will have to be sold and this will have a devastating impact on London in particular due to the high land value. London is at risk of losing 60% of its social housing stock. Where is the new social housing going to be built? Where are the social housing tenants going to live? What about those in temporary accommodation? How long will their wait be?
- The implications of the 'Right to Buy' for Housing Associations were summarised as follows. Council high value property has to be sold when vacant and the funds from the sale goes Central Government, not to local authorities. Housing Associations will be forced to sell with certain rare exceptions such as specially adapted properties.
- The Housing Bill also proposes to phase out tenancy for life. Instead it will be mandatory for Local Authorities to introduce the new English Secure Tenancy. This is a 2-5 years tenancy which makes it easier to evict tenants, will provide less security and will uproot both families as well as communities. No-one seems to know how to bring those tenancies to an end. Do you get another five year tenancy? Absurdly with a 2-5 year tenancy new Council tenants would lose any meaningful right to buy.
- The Housing Bill also proposes to introduce 'Rent to Stay'. Meaning that households with an income over £60k will not be eligible for social housing and this group of people will be moved into the private rental market. This will potentially trap people, that can't buy their own property and ill-

afford the market rent, in poverty. As many as 27k households could be affected. It can also be seen to discourage pay progression and will have a negative impact on the local workforce.

- The Housing Bill will also remove the protection around Gypsy and Traveller sites as well as mooring sites. This will further disadvantage a group of people already suffering from higher rates of ill-health and homelessness.

The residents were informed of the 'Kill the Housing Bill' demonstration that is due to go ahead on the 13th March.

Discussion

Cllr Gordon said this is splitting communities. Big gap opening up between those who rent and those who own their own home. It's creating an apartheid system and is a shocking piece of social engineering. Cllr Oguzkanli said there are likely to be many legal challenges and it would cause chaos in the housing field for many years to come. Cllr Rathbone said many communities would be broken up by these proposals and no tenants would be feeling secure any more. Housing was about caring for people's needs not measuring it purely financial terms. A resident said it looked like housing would be set back by a century and a half and even the workhouse could re-emerge.

AOB

Celia Coram, Lea Bridge ward resident and representative from 'Save Lea Marshes' group, informed the meeting of the following:

On Wednesday night there was a busy meeting of Waltham Forest's Lea Bridge Ward forum and on the agenda included Controlled Parking Areas (CPZ's) for 97 Lea Bridge Road where 17 storey blocks of flats are being proposed by LB Waltham Forest, and a proposal to build a new Free School on the water works site opposite the ice rink, currently occupied by Clancy Docwra. This site was originally earmarked for housing. Both developments will cause traffic problems which will impact on Hackney residents, particularly in Lea Bridge ward Hackney.

Residents were informed that objections will be taken up to 14th March but everyone was advised to get their comments in as soon as possible. The planning number is 153834FUL (www.walthamforest.gov.uk) and the planning officer is Nick Eagle (London Borough of Waltham Forest).

Ms Coram added that it is concerning that the two boroughs of Hackney and Waltham Forest appear to work in silos especially in regards to the riverside development at 97 Lea Bridge Road; the Mini Holland Scheme, the Ice Rink and the opening of Lea Bridge station even though these are issues that also affect Lea Bridge Ward (Hackney) there has been no proper consultation with Hackney residents or councillors.

Cllr Rathbone said this is an old problem of lack of cross borough liaison, and Lea Bridge ward councillors had been pressing for years for a cross borough working party to help improve things, and would continue pressing to discuss the LB Waltham Forest proposals with the LBWF officers, and supporting the Save Lea Marshes campaigning around the issues reported.
