



**High Path Estates' Local Plan 2016/17:
High Path Community Association Committee's Summary**

The following is a summarisation of comments by the *High Path Community Association's members regarding the document: "Estates' Local Plan Winter 2016/17".

2. Background, Key Drivers, The Case For Regeneration, The Vision, Urban Design Principles

It is fair to point out that the residents' views was requested by Circle Housing Merton Priory (CHMP) at regular intervals since the idea of an upgrading of the estate was proposed around 2013. Complaints about the repairs and maintenance programme had reached a tipping point and, as social tenants were voicing comments such as "tear it down", "pull it down and start again", in relation to a quick fix for restoring a well rounded aesthetic pride to the area, we need to note that it was never clear what this work on the estate meant. The latter remark has been a constant theme throughout this entire process and moving forward it is hoped that the Secretary of State and whomsoever is heading up strategic positions for the entire timeline of the estate will bring about an energy to **1regenerate** an area such as those allocated (High Path, Ravensbury and Eastfields) for new works.

Pop up exhibitions on the estate were strategically placed and passers by were asked their views as to how they felt about the state of the area.

Fast-forwarding to when CHMP's draft masterplan was delivered (late Summer 2014) it had the unfortunate effect of clashing with Merton Council's 'Have Your Say' document. These two major documents which would ask a different set of questions but nevertheless wanted residents opinions on the ideas posed caused much confusion among the majority. As a result residents questioned who was delivering the overall improvement to the area and when one considers that a

proportion of residents are still under the misguided impression that Merton Council still own and manage the estate then the general view is of bewilderment, and a overwhelming sense of no control of the entire process. Set within this is the view of the homeowners (leaseholders/freeholders) who have felt detached from the social tenants since the transfer of stock and even alienated despite the fact that they (leaseholders) have paid service charges since the transfer of the land.

If this is placed within the context as to why the regeneration was called upon (a general improvement to the internal/external areas of the estate) and as to how this came about (the poor repairs and maintenance programme by Circle Housing Merton Priory and the suspension of the Decent Homes programme) then the necessity of such a wide-spread programme could be argued is one that the residents did not request. The general opinion is that if CHMP managed their contractors appropriately then the estate might well be considering a refurbishment of the buildings or a partial regeneration at best. This view is taken when one considers the delivery of its repairs and maintenance programme which was mismanaged mainly because of the poorly executed procurement process and it also coincided with allegations of fraudulent behaviour by CHMP's contractors (Keepmoat) which in turn evolved at the time of the suspension of the 'Decent Homes' programme by Merton Council's Regeneration member. Bringing also to bear down heavily is also the daily upkeep of the estate by the cleaners and caretaker

CHMP's document/s from start to finish - if you engaged with the process - was clear: regeneration was the outcome that they wanted to deliver. They felt that this was best for all concerned. However Merton Council's document asked what variation of the scheme the residents wanted:

We are minded to note that a regeneration is needed so that those who are living in overcrowded dwellings are rehoused suitably. Also the performance of some buildings, specifically the tower blocks are not in keeping with modern day standards and in some homes, specifically where overcrowding is evident this leads to an extensive build up of condensation and damp which in turn leads to a lowering of a resident's general state of health (physical and mental well being).

The 'Estates Local Plan' refers to the Equality Act 2010, specifically "**2.37. The Equality Act describes a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on ones ability to carry out normal day- to- day activities. All development proposals will be expected to have consideration to people with disabilities as de ned by the Equality Act 2010. This includes physical and mental conditions - for example, dementia.**"

We anticipate a wholesale improvement on the woeful promises (eg '91 Promises' and '10 Commitments') made by the resident provider in this regard as it is noted in the draft document of the stock transfer "**WOULD MERTON PRIORY HOMES DO ANY WORK IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?**"

Yes.

Merton Priory Homes would work closely with residents, local councillors and public bodies like social services, education, the police, the health authority, GPs and voluntary agencies to help local communities tackle problems and improve the quality of life for residents. (Consultation on the proposal to transfer Merton Council's homes to Merton Priory Homes - Appendix 3, 2008/9)

We have noted that as CHMP have not engaged with Merton NHS CCG as a community partner to the level we deem appropriate for a project of this magnitude, there is a concern on the part of not just the community on the whole and the services we use, if it is assumed a near tripling of the density of the population is to go ahead as preferred that in this context, we have a heightened concern for the increasing population of the elderly and the indigenous vulnerable cohort. Moreover CHMP have sought to remove staff for this particular service last year (June 2016) as it was not considered appropriate or within their remit as a resident provider and this was partly due to their inability to engage with the areas they covered (East and West Merton aka Merton Central). We need also to point out that in view of financial challenges in adult social care and the mitigating financial issues for the NHS in general then a more robust level of discussion needs to be had with the respective agencies related to health and wellbeing in our community.

It is difficult to give a fair appraisal of the 'Estate Local Plan's Urban Design Principles as we have been told by architects on the events on numerous occasions that the finer details are yet to come. With that in mind we are concerned as to the general height of the build and most especially the 'right to light' aspect. Open space within the plans show little in the way for what we currently have and if the density is to be propelled forward as intended (608 homes to 1,600 homes) then the whole estate will be making a mad dash to the proposed central park for their uptake of vitamin D.

As with most new builds the building design is typical of the London vernacular and though we empathise with PRP's desire to have a modern outlook we regard this as an opportunity to harp back to the past and refer to the curves of yesterday for the facades of the buildings instead of the cold, Brutal preference. A way around this would be to work with another company of architects as PRP seem intent on stamping their Goldfingersque footprint around the city. Most of the staff of said company have been laissez-faire and uninvolved when residents have opened up the conversation in public events to different designs to their own and this has not been lost by the indigenous population. Size of proposed dwellings has brought with it some contentious thoughts and this needs to be agreed upon and the task repeated because a number of residents have had misgivings as to the authenticity of surveys conducted by the likes of Savills.

In accordance with this are the materials for the build and given that we are supposedly a long way off we would ask that in the forthcoming workshops the

leading designers look to incorporating sustainable materials for the proposed works. We say this because convention says that as this is a multi-million proposal the big companies will utilise the usual mediums to frame our new homes. This is an opportunity to work with materials and train residents within the process. If the intention is to rebuild the estate for more people and have homes that perform holistically then why not be forward looking and opt for different materials such as lime and straw? Our concern is that because of the urgency to appease central government and meet the targets for housing those in need that this will be a big moment lost. Working with what we know is the prevailing narrative amongst builders of this type of instead of being groundbreaking.

The raw materials are there and readily available and presently going to waste - residents living in these homes will have lower fuel bills and the surrounding area will benefit with the reduced offset of pollution should we decide to build with such organic materials.

We commend the retaining of mature trees in the area as this not only adds to the 'greenspace' aesthetic but also enhances the clean/environmental buffer for air pollution off the nearby highways.

Last month we formed with other neighbouring resident groups the 'South Wimbledon Enhancement Plan' as the area is not only bereft of a neighbourhood plan but also any localised character. Heritage is important to those that live here and we are disappointed at the rapid advancement of planning for some heinous examples of design in the area. If 'Rose Cottage' in Hamilton Road is to go the way as planned then epic historical draws for outsiders will never happen and so again this is an opportunity to funnel avenues towards the nearest transport hub or currently quiet Merton Abbey Mills. Containing the estate (as it currently is) and minimising traffic flow will give the new estate a homely feel and residents will have a place of community. The High Street will still act as a fulcrum for those travelling east to west (or vice versa) but the commercial premises must reflect and retain this connection with the estate. The estate is not to be a hub for the masses ala Oxford Street but we are mindful as work is nearing completion on the former Brown & Root building in Colliers Wood and the desire to increase the aesthetics by the SWEP in the area on the whole it would be preferred if ownership of such commercial venues was pitched at independent proprietors. The connectivity to the area will then ease the transition to Wimbledon's Business Investment District and as Colliers Wood and us are twinned as an area of intensification then the fluidity will be simpler. A plan for working with the Council with SWEP can easily be formulated to keep everyone happy and if the opportunity to employ local residents in such establishments was to come about then this would be beneficial all round: residents will have less of a desire to work in 'town' and community spirit will be enhanced. A good example of this connectivity is 'Battersea Square' where residents are forced due to a lack of regular public transportation to socialise nearby and this enhances the neighbourhood both financially and collectively.

Given the fact that Crossrail 2 has not been reignited as a topic for sometime and the Tram extension to the area has gone quiet too we would say that keeping certain corridors of access open to change and, flexibility. Locking in plans now will be difficult to change later and this is very evident in the road en route to Colliers Wood (near to the station there is always a bottle neck throughout this journey and this ruins what could have been a pleasant ride if the small parade of shops on the left were set back nearer to Wandle Park).

Executive summary

As a community we endorse a regeneration but this needs to be delivered in a manner that is in keeping with the implicit wishes of the community on the whole. A good and sound example of this can be found in the paper: *Estate Regeneration National Strategy, December 2016 Department for Communities and Local Government* .

5. Residents' involvement in the management of estates

The ongoing management of the estate is vital to its sustainability. Residents should have the opportunity to participate in the ongoing management of the regenerated estate. In some cases this may be through a formal tenant or resident management organisation or through a resident- led board. Ongoing opportunities should be provided for residents to influence decisions and develop the necessary skills to take on more responsibility, if they choose.

Where elected or self-selected residents represent the estate, landlords should provide them with the resources to communicate and engage with all residents to ensure their representative approach is inclusive. This could include a place to meet or computers for preparing and distributing communication materials.

Estate regeneration schemes can play an active role in identifying community facilities which can be owned and managed by resident and community groups. Where community assets are run by the community, people are more likely to have an active and sustainable voice in their neighbourhood.

It is also important to undertake post-occupancy evaluation to understand the impact of regeneration, and to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to residents by acting on the results of any evaluations. This maintains trust with the local community, and encourages social sustainability and community cohesion.

As important as the aforementioned is the need for clear and transparent dialogue between the resident provider, local authority and the residents. In particular is the Council's recent proposal with Harris Academy to build a secondary school on the area of South Wimbledon. We oppose such a venue as not only is it too small to accommodate the needs of its pupils but the proposed regeneration makes no mention of it and all affected stakeholders are wrought with anxiety, exacerbated by the impact of such a venture. Married to this is the large contingent of disadvantaged young people who attend the local primary school that live on the estate and the neighbouring district therein it is folly of the Department of Education and smacks of desperation on the part of the Council to entertain such a proposal. If any of the adjacent stakeholders considered such a proposal it is because they were not aware of the massive undertaking by the resident provider and as such the general conversation was as disjointed as we had previously noted in the consultation back in 2013. The head teacher of the local primary school was

unaware of the proposed increase of the density of the estate as was the manager of the Resource centre which houses groups for those with learning difficulties and the resident provider is unaware of the significantly high proportion of disadvantaged youth in the area and to compound this Harris Academy plead ignorance regarding the proposed regeneration on the whole.

The estate has had to endure a consistently bad level of service over the entire period since the stock transfer took place and as a result this has built a very high level of mistrust. Rumourmongering and disgruntled members of staff whose conditions proliferate their lackadaisical approach to their toil does not help matters either when residents approach or telephone staff earnestly to assist with queries.

When you set this out in the mix of the 'Residents Offer' and the pitiful financial remuneration if residents want to sell to CHMP and or the loss of footprint on the new homes for the freeholders then the 'plan' on the whole does not look enticing to many. The tenants may acquire free 'white goods' but what assurance have they got as well if they are tied into a district heating system which might well offset the 'freebies' given the prolonged tie ins that other new builds have had to withstand. The Council needs to address the latter aspect robustly as we are minded to say that whilst this is a policy imposed upon them from a greater Central London administrator the local authority must implement a charge that benefits the resident as opposed to any other agency and that includes the resident provider. An example of bad practice has meant that an estate in London (Myatt Field) has been locked into a deal which has them tied in with an energy provider for decades and residents were misguided as to the longevity of the contract and now they are having to experience long periods of no heating or hot water as contractual obligations mean no one wants to admit liability or accountability. It is with this in mind we refer to:

EP H6 and h) The feasibility of CHP and district heating must be investigated. As a minimum this should include:

- (i) An assessment of the secondary heat sources within a 400 metre radius of the site boundary (e.g. river water heat recover from the Wandle; heat extraction from the London Underground).
- (ii) Evidence to demonstrate ongoing engagement with key stakeholders associated with the potential secondary heat sources such as Transport for London and the Environment Agency feasibility.
- (iii) Consideration of air quality issues should include an investigation in to the potential benefits that a district heat network could deliver to the wider area through the connection to existing buildings or development sites outside of the high path regeneration.
- (iv) Energy strategies should clearly demonstrate that development delivers energy efficiency improvements at each level of the Mayors Energy Hierarchy when compared to the existing buildings on the estate. Outlining how improvements have been achieved according to the hierarchy of; improved building fabric, increasing the efficiency of supply and renewable energy generation, and how this compares to existing development on the sites.

**High Path Community Association' is a constitutionalised residents group based on the High Path Estate, South Wimbledon, SW19, which works with the following community partners:*

(alphabetical order) Baitful Futuh Mosque, Catch 22, Circle Housing Merton Priory, Cooperative Foods, Duke of Edinburgh Awards (Merton), Healthwatch Merton, High Path Resource Centre, Independent Merton Greenspace Forum, Merton CIL, Merton Council, Merton Abbey Primary School ('Governors' and 'Friends'), Merton Heritage Forum, Merton Tenants Residents Federation, Merton Voluntary Service Council, Prostate Cancer UK, Safer Neighbourhood Panel (Abbey ward), St John Divine Church, Sustainable Merton, WIFFA (West Indian Families and Friends), and YMCA.

¹regenerate

(verb)

1. (of a living organism) regrow (new tissue)
2. bring new and more vigorous life to (an area or institution)

(adjective)

1. reborn, especially in a spiritual or moral sense

Origin from Latin *regeneratus* 'create again'

Concise Oxford Dictionary

²caretaker

(noun)

1. a person employed to look after a public building

derivatives of care - feel concern or interest and **take** - reach for and hold with one's hands. Carry or bring with one; convey or guide.

Concise Oxford Dictionary

Cypren Edmunds

Chair

email: highpath@live.co.uk

Twitter: @highpath

Facebook: High Path Community Association