

Meeting Notes: Burnhill House Residents Meeting held on 2 October 2017 at St Luke's Community Centre

Meeting notes capture residents' comments and suggestions. For the council's detailed response please refer to 'Frequently Asked Questions' document to be published on the project's website.

Islington Council:

- Councillor Claudia Webbe
- Councillor Diarmaid Ward
- Eshwyn Prabhu (EP)
- Rosemarie Jenkins
- Mohamed Bhimani
- Katarzyna Bendowska

Pollard Thomas Edwards Architects (PTE) and other consultants:

- Dominique Oliver
- Peter Watkins
- Paul Farry
- Ben Kelway, Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners

Burnhill House:

- 14 residents
- Jonathan Card, Chief executive, Keniston Housing Association

Meeting notes

Introductions

- 1.1. Councillor Webbe highlighted the purpose of the meeting as a specific opportunity to listen to residents' concerns and to discuss the Finsbury Centre proposals. Councillor Webbe chaired the meeting until 7.30pm. Cllr Ward chaired the meeting from 7.30pm onwards.

General Resident comments

BH residents noted the following items:

- 2.1. BH residents did not believe the consultation process has been transparent and felt they have not been given all the information they require to understand the proposals. PTE confirmed that the purpose of this meeting was to share detailed facts and to provide clarification to residents' queries.
- 2.2. BH residents felt that they were going to be the most impacted group of local residents since, unlike the leisure centre users, they would live next door to the new residential development.
- 2.3. BH residents noted the online petition and blog and asked if the council and Design Team were aware of it. Images and information used in the petition were discussed and PTE have provided clarification on how the artists' impressions of the project were created. PTE assured the residents that the heights and views of the buildings proposed at the time of the design completion were accurately reflected in their images.

Planning Brief and Competition

EP gave a brief explanation of the planning brief and competition process including the timeline.

- 3.1. BH residents felt that project plans have not changed since 2014 despite their comments made at the time in writing and during the design competition exhibition.
- 3.2. During the planning brief phase, comments were made claiming that “people on Central Street don’t want the residential block facing them”. BH residents are concerned that the Council are listening to Central Street and Dance Square residents, but not BH residents. BH residents felt that Dance Square’s 2013 petition against housing along Central Street informed where the housing should go.
- 3.3. EP noted that the winning competition design was the optimum scheme chosen by the Design Panel made up of independent architects, local councillors and the council’s Director of Planning and Development. EP confirmed that no particular residents have unduly influenced the process.

Phasing and location of the residential block

- 4.1. BH residents noted they had discussed the proposals with Emily Thornberry MP and she had asked why the residential building and civic building locations could not be flipped. It was noted that their proposed locations resulted from the requirements of the construction phasing strategy; the council intends to keep the existing leisure centre open while the new building is under construction. The council is planning to close down the existing centre once the new centre is up and running and move current activities into the new centre. If the building locations were flipped, the leisure provision would be interrupted.
- 4.2. BH residents noted that, as the group of local residents most affected by the proposals, they would rather see the leisure centre out of operation and the phasing approach changed.
- 4.3. BH residents felt that the decision why the residential block is located on St Luke’s Garden and not on Central Street has not been answered.

Height and massing of the residential block

- 5.1. PTE presented the following information to clarify details of the proposals:
 - a cross section through Burnhill House and the residential block showing the 2.6m floor to ceiling heights which were greater than BH floor to floor heights. PTE clarified that the residential building consists of the 8-storey block facing St Luke’s Gardens and the 5-storey block facing Norman Street;
 - the distances between Burnhill House and the residential block as being over 18m; and
 - detail of the type of rooms in the new residential block which face Norman Street, highlighting that there are no balconies or living room windows directly opposite Burnhill House.
- 5.2. PTE confirmed that the description ‘mansion block’ is an historical term, appropriate to this kind of housing provision. PTE confirmed that arches and arched windows are a local detail which references the character of St Luke’s and Bunhill generally.
- 5.3. PTE highlighted that the 8-storey gable end facing Norman Street is 15.3m long. The remainder of the residential proposals facing Norman Street are 5 storeys high.
- 5.4. BH residents felt that any tall building should be placed at the south-west corner of site, at the junction of Helmet Row and Mitchell Street.

- 5.5. BH residents noted that the 2004 St Luke's Conservation Area Guidelines (CA16) specify that 3 storeys & parapet height would be acceptable at this location.
- 5.6. Post-meeting correction:
 - At the meeting EP stated that he thought the Conservation Area Guidelines have been superseded by the Finsbury Local Plan and the Planning Brief. The Conservation Area Guidelines have not been superseded and remain relevant. The Guidelines will be considered alongside the Finsbury Local Plan and the Planning Brief when any proposals for redevelopment of the site are considered.
- 5.7. BH residents felt that the proposals would create a monolithic structure in the area.
- 5.8. Residents noted the adjacent Conservation Area and how Redbrick Estate construction happening now was only 55 units and therefore of a lower density of development. Residents felt the provision in this scheme was overbearing on the adjacent Conservation Area. BH residents asked if the density of this scheme was classed as 'super' or 'hyper' density. PTE confirmed that the proposed density sits within the GLA density guidelines for a site in this location.
- 5.9. BH residents expressed concerns that a tall building will create a wind tunnel.

Housing Mix

- 6.1. BH residents noted that the Dance Square and East Central schemes did not have the 50% affordable housing it said it would. EP explained that both the Dance Square and East Central sites were built by private developers and that the level of affordable housing was not entirely under the council's control. The Finsbury Centre site is council-owned, so there is more control over the final affordable housing provision.
- 6.2. BH residents expressed concerns over some private developers not building the affordable housing as part of their development. EP responded to a question that the council are not seeking to make a profit on this project. Any surplus money would go straight back into providing more council homes on the site.
- 6.3. RJ explained that the council would not undertake a development unless it would get 50% affordable homes.
- 6.4. BH residents asked how many houses do the council need to sell. Councillor Webbe confirmed there will be approximately 60 private units for sale which would pay for approximately 60 affordable units and new civic facilities.

Daylight and Sunlight

- 7.1. Lichfields provided a summary of the daylight and sunlight assessment work carried out to date. An assessment has been run of the development's effects on neighbouring properties including Burnhill House. It was noted that the analysis demonstrates that the south facing habitable rooms in Burnhill House will continue to experience good levels of interior daylight owing to their large south facing windows. In terms of sunlight, the building's deep balconies will provide solar shading during the summer months and winter sunlight levels will remain high when the sun is at a lower angle in the sky. It was noted that the development presents a slender return elevation to Burnhill House allowing good levels of natural light and outlook to be retained. Overall, it was noted that while the development will reduce levels of daylight and sunlight experienced at the lower level of some neighbouring properties, the levels will remain consistent with expectations of natural light in an urban environment in Inner London and the development's effects are consistent, and frequently superior to, the effects of other developments in this area of Islington.
- 7.2. Residents were worried that the proposed design would prevent sunlight from reaching St Luke's Gardens.

- 7.3. BH residents explained that they depend on solar gain for heat and therefore they felt the proposals will put them into fuel poverty.
- 7.4. EP confirmed that the council would work with Keniston Housing Association to explore options for connecting BH to the Energy Centre network.

Landscape and Public Realm proposals

- 8.1. BH residents expressed concerns that the eco system of St Luke's Gardens would be flooded by light affecting bird/animal habitats. It was noted that the team are working closely with an arboriculturalist (tree specialist) and ecologist to ensure there is no harm to the existing trees and habitat.
- 8.2. BH residents expressed concerns that the residential courtyard would be a gated community. EP explained that the council intends that this space will be open to the public. The design team are working on options to achieve this taking into account the requirements of Secure by Design.
- 8.3. EP noted that gated communities have been created within private developers, but as this is a council scheme there is an opportunity not to create a gated community.
- 8.4. BH residents expressed concerns about new resident cars that would come with the proposals. The council confirmed that this is a car-free development. 24-hour parking controls mean there will be no resident cars as part of this development and that new residents will not be allowed to apply for resident permits
- 8.5. BH residents noted that recycling on Central Street is already an issue with current population and questioned if it is going to get worse with more people living in the area. The refuse and recycling strategy for the project is being developed in line with the relevant council policies.

Civic Building facilities

- 9.1. BH Residents queried if there is a reduction of leisure facilities and questioned the effect of the extra 300-400 people on the leisure facilities.
- 9.2. BH residents questioned if there would be Leisure Centre jobs losses because of the proposals.
- 9.3. The council confirmed that the original design brief provided for a reduction of leisure floorspace on the basis that the existing leisure centre is not very well laid out, and there were areas of the centre that were not used. The council's intention was to provide the same level of usable floorspace in the new centre. In recent years the council's leisure operator has improved how it uses the existing floorspace. The challenge for the council is maximise the amount of leisure centre space as far as possible and manage the space so that it delivers more capacity.
- 9.4. BH residents felt that the impression is that the leisure centre is more important than residential element and existing residents.
- 9.5. BH residents questioned if the GP Surgery would be a new surgery or a relocation of City Road Medical Centre. The council confirmed that the City Road Medical Centre would be moving into the civic centre and the floorspace was increasing in size to allow them to expand their patients' lists.
- 9.6. Residents queried why there are no images of the residential block in communications and posters, only images of the leisure centre. The team noted there is no intention hide the residential element, and that images of both buildings were included in all communications materials. Only the posters, due to size and layout, included a single image of the civic building, but listed all facilities to be provided as part of the development.

Closing comments

- 10.1. Councillor Ward noted that the Council will be moving forward with Burnhill Residents and the Stakeholder Group. EP described that the upcoming Stakeholder group will be split into smaller groups to ensure a greater focus on individual concerns providing more opportunities to speak with the Team.
- 10.2. Notes of meetings will be sent out directly to attendees, where email addresses are known, and will be posted to the project's website at www.thefinsburycentre.co.uk. BH residents asked if their views could be heard by the wider community.
- 10.3. BH residents expressed their concerns that they feel they are making comments on things that cannot change.
- 10.4. Post-meeting note:
 - All queries raised above will be addressed in an updated version of Frequently Asked Questions to be published in November 2017.

End