

Environment & Regeneration  
Directorate Suite,  
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Upper Street  
London  
N1 2UD

22 December 2017

Dear ,

**Re: Petition: Redesign of St Luke's Area**

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Thank you for your petition titled 'Redesign St Luke's Area' presented to the Council on 7 December 2018 in respect of the proposed redevelopment of the Finsbury Leisure Centre.

The Council's ambition for the Finsbury Leisure Centre site is to help meet the housing need in Islington by redeveloping the site to provide new housing, including Council homes, particularly homes suitable for families and older people. The Council also wants to provide improved leisure facilities at Finsbury Leisure Centre, incorporating healthcare, childcare and energy facilities into one new exemplary civic development, and to improve the layout of outdoor spaces for local people.

As part of the development of the design for the site we are considering all the feedback received from the local community, and wherever possible the Council will take on board these comments. Please be assured that the comments set out in your petition have been passed to the design team for consideration.

I have set out the queries you have raised in order to ensure that the Council has addressed each one.

*Misleading public advertisements do not include the over scaled proposed mansion block*

I regret that you found the project's advertising misleading because it does not show the residential block on the flyer/poster produced. The Council is promoting the delivery of much needed new Council homes as a central part of the Finsbury Centre project, alongside an upgraded leisure centre, a new nursery, a GP surgery relocated to a larger space and an expanded energy centre.

We have been careful to include this information on the Council's publicity materials, with images of both the residential and civic building. However, in the case of a flyer and poster publicising the proposals, an image of the proposed residential block was not included on the front of the flyer, but was shown on the rear. We will take your comment on board for any future communications materials.

*The proposal for the new leisure centre means a reduction of facilities*

As part of the redevelopment of the leisure centre the Council intends to re-provide all the leisure services currently provided in the Finsbury Leisure Centre in a modern and inclusive building, with

improved accessibility for persons of all abilities. The new sports hall will be larger, and will be able to offer space for additional classes; we are also discussing hosting fencing classes in the sports hall. The same number of exercise studios will be provided to host the same number of classes, albeit one of the studios will reduce in size, but this will not affect the ability of the centre to provide classes. The squash court provision is greatly improved and the new arrangement is better suited to host tournaments. Although the football pitches will reduce in size, they will remain 5-a-side pitches, and will meet Sports England standards.

The proposed changes to the leisure facilities are shown in the presentation that was provided at the Stakeholder Group Meeting on 11 October. A copy of the presentation slides can be found at: [http://www.thefinsburycentre.co.uk/uploads/5/0/0/1/50014965/stakeholder\\_meeting\\_slides\\_11.10.17.pdf](http://www.thefinsburycentre.co.uk/uploads/5/0/0/1/50014965/stakeholder_meeting_slides_11.10.17.pdf). The extent of expected changes to leisure provision are set out from slide 25 to 29.

#### *Affordable housing is not social housing*

The Council has made a strong commitment to providing genuinely affordable homes. We recognise that some forms of affordable housing can be far from affordable, especially in Islington where property prices are very high. At the Finsbury Centre site, the Council plans to build at least 60 Council homes (half of the new homes built) to provide much needed homes for social rent.

#### *Two studios not three, therefore less classes, as well as loss of classes that require equipment from reduction of storage space*

The new Finsbury Centre building is still being designed and we are considering changes to include a third studio space. Appropriate and sufficient storage space is also provided for each studio as part of the design.

#### *No staff room is provided*

A staff room is provided as part of the proposals. In the current designs, this is situated next to the Leisure Centre reception.

#### *Racket sport space reduced*

The proposals do not reduce the amount of space for racket sports. The proposals incorporate four squash courts, which have been laid out to better host tournaments, and six badminton courts. The sports hall for badminton and other sports has been increased in size by more than 40% to better meet space standards for badminton and other sports taking place in the sports hall.

#### *There would be a loss of jobs*

The Council's leisure centre operator has confirmed that it plans to retain the same number of employees in the new building as in existing Finsbury Leisure Centre, and we do not anticipate that any jobs at the centre will be lost.

#### *Ceilings would be higher, making it difficult to hang equipment or hear a teacher's instructions*

At this stage of the design, precise ceiling heights are still to be determined. Your comments and feedback from other stakeholders representing the users of the leisure centre will be taken into consideration, alongside Sport England guidance on studios' height, to provide a flexible space suitable for multiple activities.

*Football pitch sizes have not been made transparent and according to the proposed design are set to be reduced*

As set out above the football pitches will reduce in size, but they will remain 5-a-side pitches and will meet Sports England standards. Also, the number of pitches will remain the same.

*A redesign needs to maintain space and situate pitches away from the polluted main road*

The new design locates the pitches away from Central Street; the new development provides a physical buffer to any vehicle pollution from Central Street, whilst still providing multiple viewing opportunities to all pitches from inside the Civic Building and from the public open space/pedestrian areas.

*The proposed nursery needs views of trees and the park, not be subject to open view by transient users of flats on Central Street*

The location and design of the new nursery is such that surrounding neighbours will not overlook the new classrooms or playground areas.

*The entrance [to the new centre] is severely misaligned with the entrance to Ironmonger Row, which would inhibit user-friendly access between the sister sites*

An important part of the design of the new site layout is that there is a clear sightline between the entrance to the new centre and Ironmonger Row Baths. This has been achieved because the design straightens Norman Street and Paton Street.

*The plan would simply relocate City Road Medical Centre to the [leisure centre] site*

The Council has been working with both the City Road Medical Centre and the NHS for several years to explore the potential to provide the practice with larger premises so that they can better meet the health needs of the expanding population in the area. The new design provides more capacity for the practice to expand, and modern spaces for patients. This is the preferred approach of both the NHS and the practice.

*Retain open space and sunlight to the park and to the residents of Burnhill House*

The Council is working to retain as much open space as possible on the site as part of these proposals. There is an overall increase in open space as part of the new design when compared with the existing site, including improved green space, public realm that is overlooked, new tree planting and a selection of play-on-the-way and seating opportunities.

We are also conducting a daylight and sunlight assessment of the proposals, and this is progressing in parallel to the development of the design. The Council operates strict planning standards to protect the amenity of local residents when planning permission is considered for new buildings. To do this, we need to understand the impacts of the proposals on each individual home affected to enable sufficient sunlight and daylight to penetrate into and between buildings, and ensure that adjoining land or properties are protected from unacceptable over shadowing. We will be carefully examining the findings of the daylight and sunlight assessments to make sure the impacts can be clearly understood, and where possible we will take steps to mitigate those impacts.

*Reduce construction time*

The Council is committed to ensuring the existing leisure centre and at least two of the football pitches remain open during the construction of the new centre. This will result in the construction

phase taking approximately three to four years. However, we recognise the disruption construction can have on people's lives and will seek to minimise the amount of time the construction of the new centre and new homes takes as far as possible.

*Ensure health, safety and wellness of the community*

The new design seeks to achieve these objectives through the provision of a larger GP surgery on the site, improved and modern leisure facilities and overlooked public spaces. The Council considers that the new civic building will become a focal point of the local area.

*The present location of the [leisure centre] needs to remain and classes need to migrate to the Ironmonger Row site*

If the new leisure centre were to be built on the site of the existing centre, it is estimated that the existing centre would have to close for between two and three years. The requirement to keep the leisure centre open was taken to minimise disruption to the leisure facilities for the wider local community, and help us to encourage the local community to stay active and healthy.

The Centre is very popular and between 800 and 1,000 users visit the centre each day. The Finsbury Leisure Centre and Ironmonger Row Baths operate in tandem, and services at these locations are not duplicated, and it is not possible to relocate leisure services into Ironmonger Row Baths on a temporary basis.

*Housing needs to be built on the wider Central Street which also accommodates shop frontage and therefore not endanger and fragment open space and community*

The proposed design allows the Council to locate the new homes, including the new Council homes, in a more appropriate location on quieter side roads and overlooking St Luke's Gardens. Placing the new leisure centre and community facilities on Central Street enhances the visual presence of the new centre and these facilities. In addition, it is more appropriate that the leisure centre, the doctor's surgery and the nursery are located on the busier Central Street where they can be easily accessed. This approach also supports the regeneration of Central Street by improving the quality of the street frontage.

*Architecturally, the proposed design is destructive to the entire local community, including St Luke's Gardens and Burnhill House within the St Luke's Conservation Area*

The St Luke's area has a rich historic context and it is important that the design for the new Finsbury Centre site takes into account this character and context. The proximity of the site to listed buildings is a key design consideration, and the proposed external appearance, architectural detailing and the choice of materials of the scheme reflect the character of the area. The Council has commissioned a Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment and Heritage Impact Assessment to assess the impact of the proposed development on the Conservation Area and important local buildings. This work will also identify any changes to the design that may be required.

The design team is working closely with an arboriculturalist (tree specialist) and ecologist to ensure there is no harm to the existing trees and habitat in St Luke's Gardens. The Gardens are also included in the Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment that has been commissioned, to assess how existing views to the Gardens would be affected by the proposed development.

*The design is out of scale, forcing Burnhill House and St Luke's Gardens into permanent shadow*

As set out above, a daylight and sunlight assessment of the proposals is being carried out. The proposed design will be assessed to ensure that adjoining land or properties are protected from unacceptable over shadowing. The initial findings of the above mentioned daylight and sunlight analysis indicate that Burnhill House properties will experience no noticeable changes to their daylight levels except for one room located on the first floor which will experience a small change.

The exact height of the residential block across Norman Street from Burnhill House has not been settled yet. The current proposals are for the residential building to be five storeys on Paton Street and Mitchell Street, and eight storeys on St Luke's Gardens. As the design progresses, building heights will continue to be assessed in line with planning requirements, as well as daylight and sunlight considerations.

*Residents of Burnhill House will fall into fuel poverty from a detrimental loss of light*

As mentioned above an initial assessment of the impacts on daylight and sunlight has been carried out. This assessment shows that there will not be a detrimental loss of light for the residents of Burnhill House

We are concerned that the residents of Burnhill House are worried about the effects of the redevelopment on their fuel bills. Based on the Council's discussions with Keniston Housing Association we understand that there have been issues with the heating system and the building's windows and insulation in the past.

To help address the issue of fuel poverty, the Council is working with Keniston Housing Association to investigate the potential of linking Burnhill House to the Council's Burnhill Energy Network, which provides cheaper, greener and locally produced energy. A meeting took place in early November between the Council's Energy team and Keniston Housing Association to explore this potential, and residents will be provided with an update once we have further information.

*St Luke's Gardens ecosystem will suffer from the flooding of artificial light and the lack of natural light will potentially turn the green space into a mud pit*

The proposals for the site will be assessed by a specialist Ecologist who will report on any impacts and advise on mitigation to prevent any impact on the St Luke's Garden ecosystem. The potential impacts and any necessary mitigation will be detailed in a dedicated ecology report that will be submitted as part of the planning application, including the impact of artificial light.

As mentioned above an initial assessment of the impacts on daylight and sunlight has been carried out. The assessment shows that St Luke's Gardens is not expected to suffer from a lack of natural light.

*The noise generated by the over-development will affect the overall soundscape of the area, more so than any football pitch*

The Council does not consider that the design will result in significant levels of additional noise being generated in the area. However, to ensure that this has been carefully considered, a noise assessment is being undertaken and will be submitted as part of the planning application. In addition, all the buildings are being designed to meet latest regulations to help insulate the buildings to minimise the effects of noise escaping from the residential blocks.

*Norman Street, where Burnhill House is situated, is not even mentioned on the developments website, which is again marginalisation to an entire building of people who will suffer the most detrimental impact from an over scale build*

I regret that you feel marginalised as a result of the way the redevelopment plans have been presented. The project's website provides a map showing the location in detail with Norman Street's name visible. The Council recognises that the redevelopment of this site will have an impact on neighbouring residents, and we are committed to working with you to understand and address your concerns.

*St Luke's Housing Area compromises privacy to both St Luke's Garden users, Burnhill House and Mitchell Street*

The design that has been developed protects neighbouring residents, ensuring that there is enough space between buildings so that any overlooking is mitigated. Where possible additional steps are also being taken, such as for the building proposed to be located opposite Burnhill House. In this case a careful approach to design has been taken to respect the privacy of the residents of Burnhill House, so that no balconies or living room windows will be located directly opposite Burnhill House.

*St Luke's Housing Area and its gated communal space will create exclusion and fragmentation within the community*

The Council does not propose to build a gated development on the site of the Finsbury Leisure Centre. We are working on a design that seeks to keep the garden space within the residential block open to the public. The Council is working towards creating a design that encourages local residents to participate in local life at the new leisure centre and community facilities that we are building, and that the new homes feel part of the existing community.

*St Luke's Housing Area and will create a potential new wave of crime*

The Council is working to ensure the new designs do not create opportunities for street crime, and we will be carefully scrutinising the final proposals to ensure that the designs provide good levels of natural surveillance, well lit public pavements, and avoid creating hiding places or places where anti-social behaviour can take place unobserved. The Council is working with advisors to meet Secure by Design standards for the site to tackle concerns regarding personal security and safety.

*St Luke's Housing Area is an over scaled development in the most densely populated area in the UK*

The Council has carefully considered the scale of the proposed development and the appropriate level of density for this site. The density of the proposed design is similar to the average building densities in the area. The Council has also been working to ensure good levels of public space are provided as part of the plans, including a new public space on Paton Street, a new public route across the site linking Paton Street to Mitchell Street, and a courtyard open to the public within the residential development. The amount of public space is relevant when considering the density of the site.

*Burnhill House is a social housing community that has been marginalised by the council and the architect's design*

As mentioned above, I regret that you feel the Burnhill House community has been marginalised by the Council and through the design process. The Council has sought to provide as much information as possible regarding the development of the design with the residents of Burnhill House.

To gain a better insight into the views of all the residents of Burnhill House, the Council undertook a door-to-door survey of residents on four separate occasions in late August and early September 2017. As a result, we have made contact with 24 out of 34 households in Burnhill House. Based on

our discussions with residents we have established that there is a variety of views and opinion regarding the proposals. During the door-to-door survey we provided information to residents on how to find out more about the proposals, and how residents could provide their views either directly to us, at the public meeting we arranged for the residents of Burnhill House on 2 October 2017, and/or through representation at the wider Stakeholder Group meeting which was held on 11 October 2017. The meetings with the residents of Burnhill House and the wider Stakeholder Group for the Finsbury Centre redevelopment were well attended by residents. These meetings provided a better opportunity for residents to express their views in far greater detail. The views of all residents and stakeholders were recorded and will be addressed as far as possible as part of the design process. I understand that there will also be a further meeting with the residents of Burnhill House on 9 January 2018.

*Burnhill House, Central Street, Mitchell Street, the Leisure Centre's commuters and overall local community must be considered inclusively and equally*

Please be assured that the council is giving equal consideration to all concerns raised by all members of the local community as part of the consultation process. As set out above the Council organised an additional door-to-door survey, and a dedicated meeting with the residents of Burnhill House in recognition of their concerns regarding the proposed development.

*This petition has come off the back of years of being ignored and unheard throughout the whole consultation process, contradictory to Islington Council's aim of a 'fairer Islington'*

The Council is working to ensure that all comments and concerns regarding the development proposals are carefully considered and where possible are addressed. The Council's primary objective that underpins this redevelopment is to tackle the shortage of Council homes for residents in Islington in dire need of housing, and one way we can achieve this is by building homes on land owned by the Council.

The Council began consulting on plans to redevelop the Finsbury Leisure Centre site in the summer of 2013 as part of the development of a planning brief for the site. The views of local residents were taken into account when the planning brief was adopted by the Council in 2014. Between 2014 and 2016, the Council held a design competition for the development of the site to ensure the highest quality conceptual proposals were brought forward. As part of the competition process, a public exhibition of the proposals was held in May 2016, and the comments received from local residents and the community were presented to the design competition panel and influenced the selection process.

As mentioned above, the Council has been consulting with the local community as the designs have been developed for the Finsbury Centre site, and a number of meetings both with local residents and stakeholders, including residents of Burnhill House, have taken place. There will also be a further opportunity to comment on the proposals once the planning application has been submitted.

*As a result of this petition - Islington Council has promised 60 units of social housing. A third fitness studio is in the pipeline!*

The design process is ongoing, and in line with the Council's objective for the site, as we refine and develop the design, we will be seeking every opportunity to maximize the numbers of Council homes we include in the redevelopment of the site where this is appropriate, as well as deliver the best possible community facilities. We will also be working on the other elements of the design to provide the best possible outcomes.

I trust this responds to your petition. However, should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact the team leader, Eshwyn Prabhu on 020 7527 2450.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'K O'Leary', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kevin O'Leary  
Corporate Director of Environment & Regeneration  
Islington Council