

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY)

WEDNESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2015

LATE QUESTION

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

What was the purpose and outcome of last week's developers' 'bidding' event at the council offices?

RESPONSE

The main purpose of the Bidders' Day was to generate interest in the council's Southwark Regeneration in Partnership Programme (SRPP). Increased interest in our programme and competition in the market should lead to better value for money, new investment and employment for local people.

The programme was agreed by cabinet in October 2015. 19 sites across the borough have been identified for development for new homes and other regeneration opportunities. These have been divided into two lots (A & B) and we are currently undertaking a procurement exercise to appoint two development partners. We expect to announce these in summer 2016. The event was an opportunity to discuss the individual sites and the feasibility work undertaken to date with potential developers and emphasise our commitment to building 11,000 new council homes. We also launched the council's design guide which was approved by cabinet in October and demonstrates our aspirations for strong design across all developments.

Bidders' days are good practice in terms of procurement and we have held them on previous high value procurement projects such as the Aylesbury in 2011 and Building Schools for the Future in 2009.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION 1 TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Thank you very much to the leader for his answer. I've got the lot that he refers to - the site that was on display at this auction bidding day thing last week. I suppose my concern is the Seven Islands Leisure Centre site being there, given residents have been assured there will be a consultation about the future site of the leisure centre and Seven Islands is still one of those options, so I just wondered whether including it in the lot therefore means that the consultation can't seriously consider a leisure centre remaining on that site.

RESPONSE

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Al-Samerai for your supplemental question. No I don't think it does mean that. My understanding is that the lots are set out at the moment but sites can fall in and out of those lots during this process through the rest of this year so it coincides effectively with the consultation process that will take place. It is right that the cabinet member for regeneration and new homes has indicated that the council does have a preferred site which would move the leisure centre much further in to the heart of the new town centre at Canada

Water and that is a move that we believe will be in everybody's interest.

I think it is remarkable actually at a time like this that we are talking about opening new leisure centres fresh from just having opened a new library. The new leisure centre at Elephant and Castle will be open in the new year and we are talking about opening a new leisure centre at Canada Water at a time when other local authorities are closing some of these facilities and services for their residents

And what is more, I should remind members that as of next July, there will be a universal free swim and gym offer for all residents in our borough. Labour once again delivering on the promises we made to the electorate in 2014.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION 2 TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Thanks for that and I suppose my original question was about the developers, the sort of session that you had and not just particularly at that event but generally. You do see a lot of developers coming and going in this building and it sometimes feels a bit like they're getting a lot of time of councillors and officers spent with developers and I am not saying development is a bad thing. I suppose my worry is where residents get that time and attention. For example, at the leisure centre, there has been a lot of discussion with British Land about where it goes but not so much with residents or with you. We heard about different housing sites TRAs only finding out by tweet that their TRA hall is being considered and so I just wondered what the leader can personally do to try and I suppose redress that balance a bit about making sure that the residents are actually shaping some of these planning decisions and it's not just conversations in this building between planning officers and developers.

RESPONSE

I think we are a council that has demonstrated over time that we are committed to community engagement as with community conversations, from innovative approaches that we have taken to resident engagement, that we are absolutely committed to residents, helping to form the future for our local authority and I am sure if you look into it, the time I and cabinet members spend talking to residents, TRAs and other community groups far outweighs the time that we spend talking to the development world. But a couple of points just to take into account though. You know we are very ambitious in terms of delivering new homes in our borough. We have been since 2010 and we have a proud record. I think we should all take pride in that record because some of the delivery started quite frankly under the previous administration. I don't think we should want to disown some of the big projects that are being delivered on at the moment but we have a proud record of delivering new homes across our borough and we will carry on doing that and that means that we do have to talk to builders who are going to build these homes and deliver these. I know it's a shocking fact but we have to do that in order to deliver these homes. We could turn our back on the development world but I think that would be a grave mistake because that would not address the housing supply crisis that we have in our borough. I'm sure that you're not suggesting we should do it. The other point I would just make though as well in terms of resident involvement, we are all representatives of the residents we serve in our individual wards and in our individual communities and should not think that we are here in some other capacity. We are elected as the resident representatives for Southwark and in May last year they elected 48 Labour resident representatives for this borough and we will carry on serving them to the best of our ability championing their interests and their causes through to 2018 and I hope beyond.