

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

14 MARCH 2018

STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN OBE

Dulwich Hamlets Football Club and Champion Hill

Dulwich Hamlet Football Club's ground is on a site owned by Meadow Residential off Champion Hill. Meadow acquired the site to build residential flats. Since their ownership no planning application has ever been considered by our Planning Committee. However, their proposals have been considered by planning officers and were considered to be unacceptable for a range of reasons - including that they failed to deliver appropriate levels of affordable housing and relied upon relocating the football stadium from its present location onto the adjacent Metropolitan Open Land on Greendale.

Meadow appealed their planning application to the Planning Inspector for non-determination, but withdrew that appeal in October 2017. Since that time, and particularly over the last few weeks, Meadow have taken a number of actions which could threaten the future of DHFC including: serving a statutory demand on them for £121,000 in respect of alleged unpaid "rent" for use of the stadium; the registration of the clubs names as trademarks and demanding that DHFC cease the use of them; and last week terminating their licence – effectively evicting them from the Champion Hill stadium. Meadow's actions have been irresponsible and have been extremely damaging to DHFC.

It is apparent that the football club's future at the stadium is now in danger and it has become clear that there is virtually no prospect of an acceptable scheme coming forward while Meadow remain in control of the site.

The response to Meadow's actions from the club, its supporters and the wider community show the strength of local feeling for the club. I am proud that the council can stand alongside them in the fight for Dulwich Hamlet.

Last night cabinet instructed the Director of Regeneration to start negotiations with Meadow for the council to buy the site. Acquiring the site means that the council can bring forward proposals for much needed homes including affordable homes, make provision for the continued use of the site by Dulwich Hamlet, and protect Greendale.

Should the council be unsuccessful in acquiring the site from the current owners through negotiation then we will consider use of our statutory powers, including making a Compulsory Purchase Order, to enable the delivery of much needed new council homes on this site and maintaining the uses on the site as set out in the New Southwark Plan.

I should also make clear that this is not a fight between Meadow and this council. We are the statutory authority responsible for regulating development in this borough and will always seek to enforce our planning policies when considering any planning application. However, we will not stand by and allow a valued community asset to be threatened or used as a "bargaining chip" in order for any developer to obtain a planning consent. We are not impressed by threats or aggressive gestures.

Even at this late stage, I would urge Meadow to negotiate with us, to find a way forward for the club, to secure new housing and ensure a long term solution for the Champion Hill site.