

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 1 March 2023 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Ian Wingfield (Chair)  
Councillor Suzanne Abachor  
Councillor Rachel Bentley (Reserve)  
Councillor Victor Chamberlain  
Councillor Ellie Cumbo  
Councillor Jon Hartley  
Councillor Laura Johnson  
Councillor Sunny Lambe  
Councillor Margy Newens  
Councillor Jason Ochere  
Councillor Leo Pollak  
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted Member)  
Marcin Jagodzinski (Co-opted Member)

**OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Darren Merrill, Cabinet Member for Council Homes and Homelessness  
Councillor Emily Tester

**OFFICER SUPPORT:** Debbi Gooch, Head of Litigation, Legal Services  
Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Irina von Wiese, and apologies for lateness were received from Marcin Jagodzinski.

## **2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

The chair gave notice of the following late report. Item 6 – Work Programme.

The chair also notified the meeting of correspondence received from Extinction Rebellion Southwark Lobbying Group in respect of Item 5, Scrutiny Call-in, Abbeyfield Estate – A Way Forward.

## **3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

Councillor Rachel Bentley declared to the meeting that Abbeyfield Estate, Item 5 on the agenda was situated in the Ward she represents (North Bermondsey Ward).

## **4. MINUTES**

It was reported that the Minutes of the meetings held on 5 December 2022 and 11 January 2023, were still to be finalised.

### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2023 be approved as a correct record.
2. That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2023 be approved as a correct record subject to accuracy of the minutes in respect of Item 5, decision 4, and a request for the recording of a vote in connection with a motion relating to waste charges. The Head of Scrutiny informed the meeting that he would review this aspect of the meeting and amend the minutes as appropriate.

## **5. SCRUTINY CALL-IN: ABBEYFIELD ESTATE - A WAY FORWARD**

The committee heard from the requesters of the call-in, the cabinet member for Council Homes and Homelessness, the Head of Regeneration North, the Head of Building Control, and appointed architects. The committee also heard from Councillor Emily Tester in her capacity as local ward councillor.

Councillor Leo Pollak, outlined the grounds for call-in of the decision and highlighted the following:

- Call-in requested to look further at the assumptions and cost that underpinned the decision
- The potential write-off to the council of consultants fees to date, as well as future fees, and the demolition were considerable

- Significant loss of embodied carbon with the demolition of a block of this size
- The decision not sitting in accordance with the council's policies in terms of the strategy for building new council homes, and the strategy for responding to the climate emergency
- There were questions that would be of benefit for residents and interested stakeholders to explore in more depth, namely the extent to which the costings that were presented in the report [£27m] had been allowed to vary according to different depths of refurbishment of the block, viability assumptions and the different tenure mix models that were introduced
- Divergence in the technical consultancy conclusions provided six years ago and three years ago which had led to very different conclusions.
- Increased cost due to building control changes throughout span of project - whether the council approached government to recoup some of these costs
- Aragon Tower, Pepys Estate Deptford (benchmark building, built by same contractor with same construction methods and materials, and built at the same time), sold to Berkley, subsequently refurbished, with an additional five storeys added, and the homes have now been inhabited for around 17 years. Useful to understand similarities and differences between Maydew and Aragon Tower, and also what communications there have been with Lewisham Council building control.

The committee heard from Councillor Darren Merrill, Cabinet Member for Council Homes and Homelessness, Ian Ennis, Head of Building Control, Graham Howarth, Director of Howarth Tompkins (Architects for the project since 2016), and Neil Kirby, Head of Regeneration South.

Councillor Merrill advised that this was the last option going forward and that demolition was not the preferred option. Councillor Merrill explained the process that had been gone through in reaching the decision taken. He highlighted that building regulations had changed, there had been lessons learnt from Ledbury, Grenfell and other buildings. This had resulted in stricter regulations and risk factors that engineers were now required to factor into buildings.

Councillor Merrill informed the committee that he had taken note of decisions taken in the past, and previous considerations around the tenure mix.

The committee then heard from Neil Kirby who provided members with a presentation on the history of the refurbishment project.

The committee then heard from Councillor Emily Tester, local ward councillor. Councillor Tester informed the committee of the experience and concerns of residents living next to Maydew House. Councillor Tester also expressed concerns around, and implications of delaying the project any further, and the need for certainty for residents.

Following the presentations, discussion took place around the following:

- Absence of comparative data around carbon impact of demolition and carbon impact of rebuilding
- History of project before 2012
- Length of time taken to reach this decision and cost implications of that, and lessons to be learnt to ensure this does not happen again
- Building control and communications with Lewisham Council
- Timescales for commitments coming forward in terms future development of the site.
- Communication from Extinction Rebellion Southwark
- Delay in terms of looking for a better design solution [2014]
- Southwark Construction Strategy Report
- Timeline for redelivery of both options – Demolish/rebuilding vs high quality refurbishment
- Space standards
- Consultation with residents
- Options presented to cabinet

The committee discussed the options available to them on how to proceed.

**RESOLVED:**

That the matter not be referred back to cabinet, but a subsequent scrutiny review be undertaken. Scope of review to be confirmed.

**6. WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme as at 1 March 2023 be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.11pm

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**