

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
(ORDINARY)
WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 2015
URGENT QUESTIONS

1. QUESTION TO THE CHAIR OF PLANNING COMMITTEE FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL MITCHELL

What steps will the chair of planning now take to guarantee that the agreed council procedures for councillors to request a planning application is referred to the relevant planning committee are followed in the case of all applications?

RESPONSE

I will ask the chief executive to ensure that where councillors request that an application for planning permission is referred to a planning sub-committee, all appropriate steps are taken to ensure that this is carried out subject to the chair of planning's agreement. If members copy me into any requests that they make then I can ensure that these are appropriately followed up.

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

Now that the Elephant Park viability assessment has been released, can the leader tell us how much the council spent in total challenging the freedom of information request from a former Heygate Estate resident?

RESPONSE

The cost was £56,063.50 in legal fees which is fully reimbursable by Lend Lease.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

I do, thank you very much, Madam Mayor. I would also actually like to thank Adrian Glasspool and the campaigners, the Elephant Network, for pursuing the information which has finally been released and I'm sure the council leader studied it carefully. I just wondered if he could confirm that it is correct that planning officers were unable to open the software to look at that viability assessment when the deal was being done, and if so, whether that's now been fixed?

RESPONSE

I want to thank Councillor Al-Samerai for her supplemental question. I don't know the answer to that supplemental question. What I can say in respect of delivery of affordable housing at the Heygate Estate is that this administration negotiated 25% affordable housing on that site at a time when any viability assessment would have shown something between 9% and 16% so whatever any viability assessments might have said, 25% negotiated by this administration, given the failure of the

Liberal Democrats to negotiate or secure any guarantee of any affordable housing of the Heygate, is a fantastic result.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR AL-SAMERAI

I'm really concerned that he doesn't seem worried that planning officers can't scrutinise viability assessments with the right software so I would ask that he would actually go and find out the answer to the first supplemental that I asked him and get back to me. The second supplemental I have, Madam Mayor, is whether the council leader will follow the examples of Greenwich and Islington at looking at whether those viability assessments can be made public as a matter of course?

RESPONSE

I thank Councillor Al-Samerai for her second supplementary. I think it is very important for her and for members and for the public to realise that it is the district valuer service who undertake assessments of any viability assessment; an independent body, sitting outside the council, that scrutinises the figures that are put forward and therefore to suggest almost in a throw away manner that 'oh, you know, something sent in is not considered, we agree to whatever we put forward' is just wholly wrong and I think really it does bring in to question their commitment to the whole regeneration of the Elephant and Castle. This is, I believe, one of the most important regeneration programmes going on in London. It is important that we do something to create genuinely mixed communities to deal with the issues of ambition and aspiration that politicians in this borough failed for too long to address and it is right that we provide people with houses which they can be proud of, with homes which are indistinguishable, whether they are social rented or private to buy; and I make no apology for wanting the very best housing for every resident in our borough.