

PRESS RELEASE

Residents of the Central Hill estate in Upper Norwood held a public meeting on Saturday 21st March to discuss Lambeth's regeneration plans for the estate. Organisers estimate about 120 local people attended the meeting held at Christ Church, Gipsy Hill. The residents had been denied permission to meet at a community space on the estate despite this being a resource that is funded by service charges paid by residents. The event on Saturday was led by residents with the aim of sharing information and coming together as a community to demand answers from Lambeth.

Central Hill is a diverse community with families, social tenants, leaseholders, professionals, essential workers and elderly people. Just a year and a half ago the community celebrated its 40th birthday with Tessa Jowell MP and Lambeth's cabinet member for housing Cllr Matthew Bennett. However, it has now come to light that for over a year Lambeth has been privately discussing with the Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) their plans for 'regenerating' the estate.

The initial consultation workshopsⁱ were held by Lambeth in December 2014 (the first time wider residents were made aware of the impending regeneration), the discussion led by architects was around lighting, walkways and bins. Unless directly questioned there was no mention of partial or full demolition. It quickly became apparent, when a group of concerned residents met a month ago, that many residents had no idea of the potential impact of the proposed regeneration. Most residents did not attend the workshops – with many saying they had not received the invitation or they did not understand what they were being asked to attend. As a result a group of residents decided to organise and reach out to all members of the community, as Lambeth had failed to do.

The public residents meeting on Saturday was led by residents who provided an overview of attempts so far to clarify Lambeth's plans, understand the principles behind the regeneration and the likely impact for social tenants and leaseholders. During question and answer sessions, many residents spoke powerfully about their fears for their future and their anger at being kept in the dark by Lambeth. Many residents reported being unaware of the 'consultation' workshops conducted by Lambeth in December and January.

Members of the wider community also showed their support at the event and shared advice and expertise with the residents. Rashid Nix, Green Party Parliamentary Candidate for Dulwich and West Norwood and resident of the Loughborough Park estate in Brixton, spoke of his community's experience of not being listened to by Lambeth or fairly consulted on regeneration plans.

Lambeth are making no guarantees and saying very little – the residents don't know what options are being considered, who will own the estate in the future, what proportion will be social or affordable housing and what influence they will have, if any, on the final plans. Information is being requested using Freedom of Information legislation as it is not forthcoming from the council.

Architects PRPⁱⁱ have been appointed to develop regeneration options and have shared their initial drawings with the TRA. These plans offer a clue to what is to come - partial or full demolition of the community with higher density housing built in its place. Lambeth state that no formal proposals have been made, however these plans, and the language used by PRP and Lambeth Cabinet Member for Housing Cllr Matthew Bennett appears to be building a case for completely rebuilding the estate rather than repairing or restoring

what is already here. Lambeth seem to be making a case for demolition based on the amount of repairs the estate will need; residents are angry that the extent of these issues is a direct consequence of years of neglect and mismanagement by the council. Furthermore, Lambeth are not providing any facts or figures to back this up. By rebuilding the estate the council will be able to make significant profit from the sale of private homes in the desirable area of Crystal Palace with views across London. This will be at the expense of current residents many of whom live and work in the local area and who will be 'decanted' elsewhere.

Lambeth provided a "Draft Principles for Regeneration" document to the residents who attended the initial workshops. This document stated "*we will be open and honest about the advantages and disadvantages regeneration can present*". Residents at the event agreed this is far from their experience so far. The consultation has been a sham – neither providing clear information nor demonstrating a true commitment to co-producing plans with residents. Central Hill residents are acutely aware of the current housing crisis and are not simply resisting change – however we demand to be treated fairly and recognised as a community at risk of displacement.

There is very little time – Lambeth have stated that a decision on the estate will be made in June 2015. The Save Central Hill Community campaign will be going forward from this event demanding that we are involved in decisions about our homes and our community. We will be fighting together to be treated fairly and to hold our elected representatives to account. Further meetings, events and actions will be publicised in local press, social media and throughout the estate.

Lambeth council are holding two more public workshops on Tuesday 24th March (3pm – 8pm at Upper Norwood Community Resource Centre, 3-4 High Limes, Central Hill, SE19 1EX) and Saturday 28th March (10am – 1pm at Lunham Road Day Centre, 1 Lunham Road, Central Hill, SE19 1AA). These have not been advertised publicly. We would strongly urge all residents and interested parties to attend and make their views known.

ENDS

For further information contact: centralhillestateresidents@gmail.com

Twitter: @savecentralhill

Facebook group: Save Central Hill Community

Editor's notes:

This event was organised by a group of concerned residents, who are acting independently of the formal Central Hill Tenants Residents Association at this stage.

i four drop in workshops were held in December for each area of the estate, then an estate wide workshop was held in January

ii <http://www.prparchitects.co.uk/press/news/2014/lb-lambeth-appoints-prp-for-central-hill-estate-regeneration-in-gipsy-hill.html>