

Public Question for Housing Scrutiny Committee – 21 November 2023

Dear Councillors,

We are the Save Ekin Road community group, and we are writing to you regarding Cambridge City Council's proposals for redevelopment of Ekin Road. We are a group of 60 council tenants and leasehold and freehold residents, living in the flats, semi-detached houses, and bungalows on Ekin Road.

As done in the past, we wish to express our thoughts and concerns to you regarding the investigation work and potential development of our estate.

Councillors, you are investigating the wrong options for Ekin Road.

- The JLL shortlisting completely ignored the needs and desires of residents.
- One option (refurbishment) is deemed “unviable” by JLL; the rest are blatantly unacceptable to residents.
- You are wasting immense amounts of money chasing these options and no others; they will never succeed.
- You have disregarded some of the better intermediate options (eg: Option4, which retains all houses and demolishes all flats)
- You never explored any hybrid options, for example, demolishing some flats and refurbishing others, as we recommended to you at the last HSC meeting.

Councillors, you have nowhere to put the residents of Ekin Road.

- Many of the residents of Ekin Road have spent their entire lives in the area, and have no desire to be housed elsewhere. Ekin Road is a vast estate, and you do not have the provision to rehouse locally.
- The East Barnwell project is significantly behind schedule, with phase 1 only due for completion in August 2026. That phase only has provision for 22 social housing dwellings, 10 of which will be immediately needed to rehouse residents from site 2.
- There are over 100 social housing dwellings on Ekin Road, so East Barnwell will only be of measurable use in rehousing Ekin Road residents if you wait for phase 2 to be completed, which is due in September 2028. So if Ekin Road is to be rehoused locally, that will be at least 5 years away.

Councillors, you face immense legal difficulty in seizing freehold properties.

- The legal protections for freeholders, especially resident freeholders (of which there are 7 on Ekin Road) are incredibly strong.
- At no point in the past has the Council ever seized, or even tried to seize, a freehold property for a residential redevelopment.
- You’ve never even seen through a Compulsory Purchase Order on a leasehold to conclusion.

- The work to date on this project leaves you very vulnerable to successful legal challenges of any Compulsory Purchase Order you may try to execute on residents.
- Our members who are freeholders have no desire to leave; negotiating with them will be pointless.
- We can give you an ironclad guarantee that, should you try to seize any freehold properties on Ekin Road, you will face a thorough and robust legal challenge, which you are unlikely to win.

Councillors, you have taken a back seat in this whole process.

- No councillor in this committee (excluding ward councillors) has attended a single Liaison Group meeting.
- No councillor in this committee (excluding ward councillors) has replied to a single email sent to them by Save Ekin Road.
- Only one councillor on this committee (excluding ward councillors) has reached out to any members of Save Ekin Road to ask about the estate.
- Your current "resident consultation" was delegated through your executive councillor to your officers, who then delegated it to JLL, who then delegated it to Marengo, who have now surveyed residents. That is 5 degrees of separation between councillors and residents on a street less than 2 miles away.

Councillors, your officers are not up to the task.

- The last Liaison Group meeting, run by your officers, was an absolute disaster. We dread what future meetings might bring, and are considering a boycott for our own mental health and wellbeing.
- Your officers routinely mis-send correspondence to residents, leave out crucial details, or only manage to post correspondence to part of the estate (even though many residents are not internet connected).
- Your officers make empty promises to us, such as the promise by the Assistant Director, Development in June HSC that the Ekin Road website will soon be upgraded - it is still a completely unusable and un navigable resource.
- Your officers have a poor grasp of FOI law. We requested a simple document from them via FOI (the instructions sent to JLL) back in April, and after several rejections from them, and a lengthy appeal to the ICO, we only received it last week - a 7 month turnaround.
- In the process of this same FOI request, your officers earned the dubious merit of having the ICO issue its first ever enforcement notice against the Cambridge City Council.
- If your officers have trouble understanding and complying with FOI law, you may wish to review their suitability to deal with something as complicated as Compulsory Purchase law.

Councillors, we therefore ask the following of you:

1. That you work with us, the residents, to revise the options being investigated for the estate, before more money is wasted on investigatory work that will ultimately lead nowhere.
2. That you gain an understanding of how many residents wish to be rehoused locally, and a plan for obtaining such housing, before deciding on any options for the estate.
3. That you immediately cease any investigatory work on options which require the seizure of freehold properties, as such options will become impossible for you to carry out.
4. That you start to engage directly with residents, by meeting with them and attending Liaison Group meetings. We now take this opportunity to formally invite all councillors of the Housing Scrutiny Committee to attend a meeting with Save Ekin Road, organised and hosted by us at a venue nearby to the estate.
5. That you review the current team of officers doing the investigatory work on Ekin Road, to ensure they have the appropriate skills, understanding, and approach for a project of such complexity and sensitivity.

Regards,
Save Ekin Road

Two separate questions were submitted to Housing Scrutiny Committee regarding anti-social behaviour (ASB) matters however these questions have not been accepted as Housing Scrutiny Committee as a public meeting is not the appropriate forum in which to discuss these issues as potentially sensitive personal data and information relating to potential legal proceedings may be divulged. These questions will be handled under the Council's Complaints Procedure.

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