

Housing Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday 12 March 2024 – Public Questions

## Question 1

1. on 23rd January Cllr Bird reported that of the 72 flats damp and mouldy on Ekin Road, 5 were vacant (void works) and 67 were occupied, could she please update the meeting on how many are currently vacant and occupied.
2. on 3rd December it was reported in the Cambridge News based on information supplied by the "Action on empty homes" campaign group that within the city there were 2,437 properties classed as second homes and 131 houses that are categorized as long term empty, does the city council agree with these figures? Can the city council supply accurate current numbers for second homes and long term empty houses in the city?

## Question 2

We are the Save Ekin Road community group, and we are writing to you regarding Cambridge City Council's proposals for Ekin Road. We are a group of 60 council tenants, leasehold and freehold residents. As done in the past, we wish to express our concerns regarding the investigation work and potential development of our estate.

We note the release of the "Ekin Road Options Appraisal" report by JLL, and associated statement by the Council accepting those findings, on 26 February. We completely disagree with the conclusions of that report, and strongly object to the Council only taking forward the full demolition option to public consultation. Indeed, the JLL report itself describes that option as being the "least worst" option, which is hardly a compelling case for it.

We do, however, wish to express our tentative support for the partial demolition option, as presented in the JLL report. That option preserves 24 of the 32 houses on the estate, and achieves the same outcomes desired by the council in a near-identical way. We believe that this should have been the starting point for the public consultation, and that this option could, under an "emerging designs" approach and with close engagement with affected residents, be made to work well, for the residents, and for the council.

Nonetheless, we remain concerned by many aspects of the JLL report, by the option being taken forward for public consultation, and by the overarching processes within this project. As such, we wish to ask the following questions to you today:

**Who made the decision to proceed with a public consultation on (only) a full demolition option, and why was this not brought to the Housing Scrutiny Committee to decide on?** The council statement accepting the findings of the JLL report was unsigned.

**Given the £300,000 expense to the Council of these investigatory works and reports, why is the Council not consulting residents on all of the investigated options from the JLL report, or at least the two “viable” options of partial, and full, demolition?** It seems illogical, and wasteful, to commission all this costly work and then not make full use of it.

**Why do the remaining options for the estate have no provision for additional social housing above current numbers?** One of the main selling points of this project, and justification for the massive ensuing resident disruption, was the creation of additional social housing. But neither the full, nor partial, demolition option adds a single extra social-let dwelling.

**How is it acceptable that the preferred option reduces the number of social-let 3 and 4 bedroom houses on the estate from 22 to just 6?** There is an acute shortage in Cambridge of council houses of that size, and yet the preferred option proposes to slash the number on the estate. By comparison, the partial demolition option would retain at least 14 such houses.

**Given the long timescale of this project, what urgent repair work and resident rehousing is taking place in council housing on the estate?** A decant of residents in stage 1 of either option would take years, and for those in stage 2 could extend to 2030. That is far too long for many of the residents to wait; those in sub-standard or overcrowded dwellings need repairs or rehousing immediately.

Councillors, it seems clear that there are now two distinct choices for the final direction of the project. One of these presents a future for the estate that is acceptable and appreciated by practically all residents, while at the same time addressing the key issues and concerns that brought the council to consider works on Ekin Road in the first place. The other presents a future for the estate marred by conflict, delays, legal challenges, political turmoil, and ultimately uncertainty for everyone - residents and the council alike.

The Council now stands on this precipice, and thus now is the final opportunity to act. The next time we meet, a final decision will have been made. We pray that it is a good one, and that the Council uses the coming months wisely.