

Public Questions for Housing Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday 17 September 2024

Question 1.

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

We note Agenda Item 10 of this meeting, where it is noted that the Ekin Road project has now been added to the Housing Delivery Programme, following the decision by the Council at HSC on 18 June 2024. However, no further details as to the design, layout, or construction stages on the estate have been provided to residents since then.

We welcome the redevelopment of the flats on Ekin Road. We welcome the fact that emergency Home-Link banding has been given for those council tenants, several of whom have already found new housing. And we welcome the rehousing prioritisation of tenants whose living conditions are the worst on the estate, and hope that those worst-affected can be rehoused before the onset of winter.

However, although we welcome the retention of the 14 houses on the southern edge of the estate, we maintain that this does not go far enough. We continue to advocate for the retention of the 6 houses in the north-east corner, so as to preserve the health and wellbeing of those living in them who continue to express a strong desire to stay.

We are also concerned that, as rehousing progresses for residents on the estate, there is an increasing number of void properties. This could lead to the estate giving the appearance of being abandoned, which may attract anti-social behaviour and is thus a concern for both those residents whose homes are being retained, and those who might not be rehoused for many more months.

Having reviewed the current status of the development project, and having consulted our members, we now wish to make the following three requests to the Council, which we believe are reasonable and justified, with reasons to follow below:

Request 1:

We *again* request that the 6 semi-detached houses in the north-east corner of the estate (odd numbers 13-23 inclusive) be retained in the redevelopment of Ekin Road, in addition to those 14 houses on the southern edge of the estate (odd numbers 33-59).

Request 2:

We request that the Council provide the number of households in the redevelopment area who have reported damp and mould issues in the past 2 years but have yet to be rehoused, and to provide a clear outline of how it intends to rehouse these residents before the onset of winter.

Request 3:

We request that the Council provide a plan for dealing with the vacated dwellings, outlining if any will be used for temporary housing and the criteria for deciding which, and what will be done with dwellings that are not to be used for further housing, including how they will be made secure while vacant.

Our reasons for Request 1 are as follows:

- The majority of the residents in those houses have expressed a **strong desire to keep their homes**, and some have been in theirs for over 40 years. These are well-loved family homes, and there are no intrinsic reasons to take them down.
- Several of the residents in those houses have **physical, or mental, health issues, for which their house is their lifeline**. To forcibly remove them from their home will substantially reduce their quality of life, in ways that, for many, will be irreversible. We will not articulate their (very personal) circumstances here; the Council has already been made aware directly from them, in a meeting as recently as last week.
- There is a **strong sense of community** even within those 6 houses. Many residents are very close, and have been family friends for decades. There is also a community connection to the remainder of the estate, with some of those residents having relatives who live in the retained 14 houses on the southern edge of the estate.
- Our full analysis (available at [x.com/SaveEkinRoad/status/1805253143019630612](https://www.x.com/SaveEkinRoad/status/1805253143019630612)) of the Council's current documentation for the project, shows that the Council will suffer a **net loss of homes in its housing stock** as a result of demolishing these 6 houses.
- We are aware of **various protected species** which live in the gardens of the houses in the north-east corner, whose habitats would be destroyed if those houses are demolished.
- There has to date been **no compelling reason given by the Council** for including those 6 houses in the project. All the main aims of the project can be achieved without the demolition of these houses.

Our reasons for Request 2 are as follows:

- One of the main reasons given by the Council for proceeding with this project, and one of the reasons so many residents supported it, was that it was put forward as **a way to rehouse those living in dreadful housing**. If that cannot be achieved in a timely manner, then it **undermines the entire basis for the project**.
- The worst period for damp and mould is over the colder months, and so the Council should aim for that as a final deadline for rehousing those affected residents, so as to **avoid them suffering through yet another winter cycle of damp and mould**.
- The 6 months between the HSC vote in June and the onset of winter in December should be ample time to find new housing for those affected households. If that deadline cannot be met, then the council **should not have relied on a redevelopment project to secure adequate rehousing**, and should have instead or concurrently explored other remedial strategies.

Our reasons for Request 3 are as follows:

- As well as being informed of what the end outcome for the estate will be, current residents should be kept up to date with how the street will evolve leading up to construction. It is ultimately these residents who will **need to live on the street in those intervening months**.
- The Council needs measures to deal with any untoward activities arising from having a high vacancy rate on the estate. Residents have the **right to live in a safe and secure environment**, and should not be put at risk because of a project being carried out by the Council.
- If the Council could maintain an up-to-date list of which dwellings have been made permanently void, then this would **enable remaining residents to point out any vandalism or break-ins** that may otherwise go unreported.

We make these suggestions to you, the Council, to guide the project towards an outcome that we can all support, and a process that is both fair and reasonable for all those impacted. With the design changes outlined in Request 1, and the execution steps outlined in Requests 2 and 3, this might become a project that our group can openly support. Unfortunately, as things currently stand, it remains not.

Kind regards,
Save Ekin Road

Question 2.

1. On the 23rd January and subsequently on the 12th of March Cllr Bird reported that of the 72 flats damp and mouldy on Ekin Road, 2 were vacant (void works) and 70 were occupied, could she please update the meeting on how many are currently vacant and occupied.
2. Has the council performed a risk assessment of Ekin Road flat residents in receipt of a pension who may well have had their winter fuel payment withdrawn in flats which are known to be damp, mouldy and difficult to heat in winter.

Question 3.

I would like to ask the Executive Councillor for Housing to think about what it is like to be a leaseholder at Davy Road at the moment.

Let us first remind ourselves that leaseholders are people who have focused resources and intentions on creating a stable and long-lasting home for themselves and for their families and who contribute considerably and regularly to Cambridge City Council in terms of income.

Since this time last year the leaseholders at Davy Road have received two letters having a heavy impact on their lives:

- one letter stating that the building in which they have set up their homes is now marked for redevelopment (future demolition)
- one letter stating that they will soon be charged for repairs on that same building; charges that will cost thousands of pounds to each leaseholder.

This week we can confirm that two leaseholders received three copies of the same letter dated 10th September requesting different payments of £1664.43 and £1829.97 for the first instalment of the work.

Notwithstanding carrying out charged repairs on a site earmarked for redevelopment, the repairs themselves have caused confusion and disbelief from the leaseholders and tenants alike. The structure and stability of the blocks and the balconies appear sound and good and when asked about the detail of the 'planned works', no detailed explanation has been given. Without proper evidence given for claiming thousands of pounds from the leaseholders for seemingly "pointless and unnecessary" repairs makes this area of the council appear dishonest in its lack of transparency.

Also there is no breakdown of the costs amounting to £1664.43 and £1829.97. The leaseholders deserve to know how these figures have been arrived at.

In the meantime, the leaseholders have no idea what the future holds for their homes and the experience is making one feel "nervous, angry and unsure what the future holds" and it is "all out of their hands."

Please could the Executive Councillor for Housing explain in detail what is the justification for these extensive works costing thousands to leaseholders at Davy Road, bearing in mind that one leaseholder works in property maintenance and knows that the explanation given is not up to standard. Also, could the Executive Councillor explain in satisfactory detail how the costs have been arrived at? Finally, please can the same Executive Councillor give more information to the leaseholders and the tenants of Davy Road on how development of this site can be justifiable given that the flats and the building are in good working order?