

## **Response BirminghamLive: Concern residents facing bulldozers are 'being failed'**

27<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Dear Shabana Mahmood MP

I have copied BirminghamLive reporters, Cllr Cotton, Cllr Francis and Commissioners into this email which is a response to your newspaper article 25 October. The focus of this correspondence is on the 600+ homeowners of Central Ladywood who are being failed by Birmingham City Council.

Whilst on the one hand I remain very disappointed by your lack of response to my queries and request as one of your constituents to meet with you, on the other hand your article in BirminghamLive 25 October: **Concern residents facing bulldozers are 'being failed'** is most welcome. You state that you are "very concerned" about the process so far and rightfully so. Therefore, I am still surprised that you still appear to remain 'on the fence' as far as your red lines are concerned.

In the Central Ladywood Labour Christmas and New Year Newsletter 2019/20 (attached) you stated "we must see to it that we stick to these aims (8 principles to guide the regeneration) and that we get the best for Central Ladywood." Since then the 8 principles have simply disappeared and are not mentioned in the Cabinet Report 27 June 2023. You also state in this document "We want to get it right and to make Central Ladywood the best resident-led regeneration in the country." You conclude "We make no apology for making space to say something about the Election here. Please make a special effort to vote for Labour's Shabana Mahmood on Thursday 12 December (2019)."

Many of us did vote for you and so far we have been appallingly let down. It is widely accepted by BCC that the regeneration process is "shambolic" and continues to be so and therefore is very much at odds with your assurance to your constituents in Central Ladywood that the project would be "the best resident-led regeneration in the country".

You state in the BirminghamLive article that "My support is conditional and based on a full and transparent consultation process that residents who want to stay in Ladywood, are allowed to stay...."

When I wrote to you last I was of the impression that each engagement workshop was open to 100 homeowner residents. This was the impression given from booking details as the venue used for this event has capacity for 100 participants. In actuality, the engagement workshops, for which there are still a total of three for homeowners, had only 20 places available. Therefore, BCC had made provision for 60 engagement workshop places for homeowners for which there are over 600. I have corresponded with Cllr Jayne Francis since who tells me that they have increased the number of residents who can attend these workshops by 10 – from 20 to 30 and that there are more workshops planned. It will then take at least a total of 20 workshops for homeowners to cover the private properties and then only if one resident from each property attends. The opportunity for homeowners to be part of the workshop engagement process remains worryingly limited.

With regard to your assertion that your support is "conditional" based on a transparent consultation process this is not the case. For instance, at the start of the first homeowner's engagement workshop the officers presenting the event stated that they were not directly involved in the regeneration project which was untrue. One of the officers presenting was the Compulsory Purchase Order Manager for the project – I knew her as I had spoken on the telephone with her early in July – the same officer that told me at the time that a cap had been put on CPO and that using CPO entitlements such as home loss payment and disturbance payment should help bring my property up to market value. The officer in question during the break of the engagement workshop apologised to me for "lying" at the beginning of the event stating that she would be more open in future events and that her intention was to catch up with me soon. Trust is fundamental and should be at the core of the process and yet time and time again we are lied to by BCC at all levels.

With regard to your red lines on regeneration: ***Residents who want to stay in Ladywood are guaranteed to stay in Ladywood, and they are rehoused in one move to prevent disruption***

In a letter I received from Cllr Cotton 19 July 2023 he stated:

***For Private homeowners, the Council will work with St Joseph and/or external grant providing bodies to explore the provision of suitable financial mechanisms to assist existing owners in acquiring their new property in the proposed development. This could be through either shared ownership opportunities or direct grant subsidy, dependent on the status of the property owner, the applicant, and the range of market products available at that time.***

This would indicate that homeowners could stay but at a financial cost to them. Surely taking into consideration the significant financial gains Berkeley Group will enjoy from this project that homeowners would be offered like for like properties within the red lines? Many homeowners, as myself, live in good quality private properties built from the 1990s onwards and the concept of demolishing such homes in itself is shocking. In your letter outlining your red lines you state: 'Any regeneration should not leave the existing community worse off' and in your letter to Cllr Cotton 7 July 2023 you state "I will continue to back the regeneration agenda of the council provided it is not a backdoor for mass gentrification of Birmingham Ladywood. I trust that our shared Labour values will ensure that the planned regeneration put residents first."

With regard to homeowners in similar regeneration projects in other parts of the country there are numerous accounts reported nationally in the press highlighting the detriment that such regeneration projects bring to those who own their properties causing financial hardship and at times leading to eviction and homelessness. Your WhatsApp videos demonstrate the vulnerability of homeowners in Central Ladywood who have put their entire life and their savings into their homes.

I've carefully gone through the Cabinet Report June 2023. The finances do not add up. The sum of £176 million investment from the developers in land assembly is certainly not enough and would indicate that indeed a cap has been put on the valuation of our properties. I have asked BCC numerous times for clarification on this to no avail. BCC continues not to listen even in a time of desperate measures during the financial recovery period. Ladywood Regeneration Project appears to be yet another BCC hare-brained and ill-judged project putting the interests of the council before that of residents whilst at the same time having little regard for the public purse.

Kind regards

George Smith