

25 May 2024, 16:14 (1 day ago)

to Layla, Helen, George, Lee, Robert, Gareth, Naomi, Councillor, Councillor, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Colette, Eleri, Marco, jane.haynes

Dear Helen,

I will allow George to respond on behalf of Ladywood Unite but I wanted to support everything Layla has said and add a few things that immediately spring to mind.

Many aspects of your response made me feel extremely upset as I read it - both on account of my own personal circumstances and for that of the broader community.

Simply because the appointment of St Josephs was legal does not mean that it is the best choice for Ladywood. We should have stronger values than what is minimally legal. It is widely known internationally that single bidding is not best practice. The red line should have been drawn with residents in a way that encouraged market competition for the best outcomes for the people of Ladywood. Instead, the council drew a red line around us and selected the only developer willing to take on such a grossly overambitious project. We spoke with attendees of the meeting in February 2019, one of whom is a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), and the plan approved bears little resemblance to the one discussed in that meeting.

There are so many decisions that happen in developer agreements that affect our community outcomes. We know this from speaking with other regeneration campaigns around the country. We believe it is inconsistent with the values of Powered by the People to be excluding us at this stage.

If the council wanted to focus their resources on seldom heard voices, then the council should have accounted for this in the design of the project. It is not our fault that the council have so many voices needing attention – this is by design of how the council has structured the regeneration of such a large area. Please do not suggest that somehow talking to us is taking away from the need to focus on other seldom heard voices. And note that homeowners are now part of those seldom heard voices - no UK regeneration to my knowledge has attacked so many of them. The press is shocked by this every time I relay our plight, particularly the attack on freehold houses because this resonates by illustrating how it could happen to them.

I was a renter for 16 years and moved 20 times before purchasing what I thought was a home for life in Ladywood. My partner and I spent months renovating our home, making it our special place. My neighbour lost £20K because of the regeneration when selling their home. The new homeowner is regularly in tears because she is so upset by the council's plans. I have been told by Councillor Bore that it is optimistic that I will have any say in what a new home for me could look like if mine is knocked down against my will. And told by the council that my likely only option to stay here would be share my home with a luxury developer whose values I question.

Even if the masterplan is designed with community support, there are problems with the planning process including around viability clauses. This means that any approved amounts of social and affordable housing can be changed by the developer after the planning approval stage based on financial viability. Until something is done about this, large projects like the Ladywood regeneration are, by design, not for the community - no matter how much engagement and consultation is done. Council staff and politicians will change over the years and promises will continue to be broken. We cannot trust this process. The council's actions could be perfect but the developer will have too much power.

There are things that our politicians and the council can do to work to address these problems. We want to work with you to make it happen but responses like this do not help move things forward. The work of Shelter's Fair Housing campaign is an excellent example of how to work to make things better and we would love for more to be done to listen to them and us about how to fix the broader problems affecting Ladywood and beyond.

I look forward to having an independent consultation specialist that is separate from both the council and St Joseph so that I no longer have to spend my free time on the regeneration. I would rather be spending time on my career, with my family and my loved ones, working to improve the world rather than stopping a worse one from becoming reality.

Kind regards

Laura