

17th July 2009

Dear John

Thank you for your recent letter. I do understand that this letter will be made available to members of the public as you mention.

I am writing to you in your capacity as Secretary of the Outer London Suburbs Commission. I wish to share with the Commission my idea of the GLA and London Boroughs supporting house owning neighbours in residential streets, to work co-operatively and take responsibility for the external state of repair and decoration of their houses and maintaining all common areas and gardens facing the street and the street itself. This would involve a Residents Society, a company limited by guarantee. The residents would have shares in the Society and fund the work themselves. This approach has similar benefits to private housing estates, such as the many central London estates (eg. Grosvenor), i.e. central management and long term planning to maintain asset values. It is also similar to the very many tenanted blocks where leaseholders buy out the freehold and manage the building.

My idea does not require legislation. I envisage local authorities developing a set of publically available template documents (including practical advice, policies, financial advice) to offer to Londoners living in privately owned housing. They can then consider their particular circumstances and if it is appropriate, set up a Residents Society. I also imagine soon people would be setting up chat rooms on the web and exchanging helpful changes and fresh ideas.

A similar concept in Business Improvement Districts already applies to large commercial centres. The approach I am suggesting, however, has more of a focus on individual shopping streets where a management company (owned by the existing landowners and leaseholders) can have a better chance of turning around ailing centres, as has been done successfully, for example, by the estates which own e.g. Marleybone High Street and Sloane Street.

In streets/centres which have already suffered degeneration and need public funds to improve them, my model could ensure the money was spent in a way that secured a long term return on the investment; sustainable regeneration. But, who am I? As I have relevant career and personal experience to back up my idea, here is some personal information. I am a retired lawyer, having been a Partner in a City firm and a director, administrator and legal advisor within the public sector. My field was public and administrative law and regeneration. I was an executive director (Solicitor and Secretary) of London Docklands from its foundation in 1981 until 1987. This period includes DLR, City Airport, the Royal Docklands CPO public Inquiry and Canary Wharf. I was a member of the management team. As a Partner, I advised 10 UDC's and many local authorities on major regeneration projects. My role would often involve me innovating and producing unique legal documents/policies/strategies/procedures for my clients. I was a Council

Member of the London CBI (for 10 years), and the TCPA, Director of The British Urban Regeneration Association, involved with Civic Trust, etc. Further, I lived for 10 years in New Ash Green, a large Kent, village begun in 1969 by Span that had a corporate set up with a Village Association and Resident Societies to manage and maintain the village common areas and landscaping and external decoration of all houses within the individual estates. This kind of approach is being used by Prince Charles in his new towns and it is common with holiday estates. These arrangements were introduced in advance of the developments. Can their benefits become available to existing houses and commercial centres? I believe they can. Returning to my idea what could be more sensible than neighbours in a street, working together, to plan, project manage and then maintain all the houses, front gardens and common areas? My experience is how easy it all was in New Ash Green. In my residents society there were around 180 houses. A committee oversaw the landscaping and every 4/5 years let the contract to paint all the houses (they had a lot of wood cladding). What a relief for residents. We did not have to contract with our own painters (or put this off as it is all too much). We only paid what it cost, with regular payments. Importantly, my neighbours could not reduce the capital value of my house by failing to maintain their houses or painting them a ghastly colour! Recent research confirms that uniform treatment of the exterior of neighbouring houses adds value. Today New Ash Green is well maintained. By the way, a residents society offers a useful meeting of minds for neighbours who want to help each other with, mothers groups, social committees, help for the sick or disabled etc. This happened (s) in New Ash Green. There in the early years, the social committee raised so much money they set up a Village Trust to ensure it was spent properly. I was a founder member and later the Chairman and we built a £80,000 (1976) youth centre. As the Commissioners and you will realise, my idea builds on current cross party political interest in encouraging/enabling communities to take over responsibility for local issues and management of their areas. There is a history of initiatives along these lines. However those did not go so far as providing a step by step guide (with template documents available on the web) to enable people to set up their own residents management company to maintain the street.

I believe passionately in the social benefits of adopting the residents society model across London (it can be extended across UK). One result should be that houses are well maintained in the long term, do not lose value due to poor maintenance of individual houses and offer the return of the organised London Street parties!

The Commission/GLA can take the lead, review my idea to make sure it meets its own policies and is practical, and if it passes this testing procedure, then work out a strategy to involve others, particularly the London Boroughs, to work it up.

I hope this is interesting to you and that we can sit down together to talk it through and consider the next step.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours

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