

MAYOR OF LONDON

Assembly Member Siân Berry
By email

23 June 2023

Dear Siân,

Thanks you for your letter regarding Hyde Housing's engagement with residents on its plans for regenerating the Brookhill Close estate in Woolwich, including the resident ballot it held in 2019. I will address the three points you raise in turn.

1. *Consultation should have been extended to nearby residents, but they were excluded up to the point of the application being determined.*

As the extract from *Better Homes for Local People: the Mayor's Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration* that you cite makes clear, the Mayor considers that engagement and consultation on estate regeneration plans should include those who live or work near an estate where regeneration is planned, although estate residents should be the primary focus. That said, the nature of *Better Homes for Local People* is that, as a good practice guide, it sets out how the Mayor expects councils and housing associations to approach engagement and a number of approaches they may find useful, in different contexts, rather than stipulating a series of mandatory requirements that apply to all estate regeneration projects. Accordingly, it isn't possible to identify and penalise breaches in the same way as the Mayor does in implementing his Resident Ballot Requirement (RBR).

As you're aware, in addition to the expectations outlined in *Better Homes for Local People*, there are statutory obligations for Planning Authorities to consult with all those in the local area.

While a resident ballot on plans for estate regeneration is specifically for those living on the estate who are eligible to vote (as outlined at 8.4.2 to 8.4.4 of the Mayor's RBR), it should also be "the culmination of period of resident consultation, engagement, and negotiation" (8.2.3 of the RBR) and, if residents support plans, it should herald the start of the ongoing consultation and engagement to which a provider has committed in their Landlord Offer.

Consultation, engagement and negotiation with residents eligible to vote may happen in parallel with consultation with those living in the local area and other stakeholders. Or a provider may opt to include all those living on or near an estate and other stakeholders in a single exercise that includes a ballot for eligible residents. It is likely that some residents will move from, and others arrive in, both an estate and the wider area during these exercises.

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Following your correspondence, GLA officers invited Hyde to detail the consultation activities they undertook prior to the ballot and since, both with residents of the Brookhill Estate eligible to vote and those living in the wider area. Their account includes the following:

- In 2016 and 2017, Hyde invited those living around the estate, including residents of numbers 1 to 8 Lord Roberts Terrace, to be involved in the master planning work. (They confirm that a resident from one of the homes at 1 to 8 Lord Roberts Terrace attended a master planning event in March 2017.)
- Between 2016 and 2019, Hyde sent those living around the estate, including residents of numbers 1 to 8 Lord Roberts Terrace, letters and newsletters, on a number of occasions.
- In late 2018, Hyde wrote to all those living near the estate, including the residents of numbers 1-8 Lord Roberts Terrace, to explain that a ballot was taking place, in which eligible estate residents would be able to vote on plans for regeneration. In this letter, Hyde invited recipients to contact the project director if they wanted to discuss plans for regeneration.
- Since 2019, Hyde sent those living near the estate quarterly newsletters about regeneration up until the point when it submitted its planning application for Brookhill Estate.

On the specific point you raise about consultation with residents of Vintners, Drysdale and Lloyd Courts, I note that these homes were not completed and occupied at the time of Hyde's residents' ballot in January 2019 or during the period when Hyde sent quarterly newsletters to local residents. Therefore, it wouldn't have been possible for Hyde to consult residents there in the course of the engagement that preceded the ballot, or to send them newsletters.

GLA officers working with Hyde on its Brookhill Estate project understand that the local planning authority, the Royal Borough of Greenwich, notified all those in the local area, including those living within Vintners, Drysdale and Lloyd Courts, that Hyde had submitted a planning application and that they could participate in the consultation process. I suggest that, if you would like further information on Greenwich's engagement with residents in the local area about the planning application for the Brookhill Estate, you contact the case officer from the council's planning team.

2. *The area of the ballot was allowed to exclude residents within the estate.*

The Mayor's RBR notes that the boundary of a social housing estate may not always be clear "There is no simple way to define what constitutes an existing social housing estate and the properties that form part of it." (8.3.2) This paragraph of the requirement provides some advice on identifying a boundary and directs IPs to seek advice from the GLA about how to approach this issue where it is unclear. (You also cite the note that the Mayor's housing team published in June 2021, which provides advice for Housing and Land officers advising IPs, although I note that the resident

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ballot at Brookhill Estate predates this note.) The RBR proceeds to explain that “The GLA will review applications for funding to ensure proposed estate regeneration projects are not partitioned in such a way as to avoid the RBR.” (8.3.5)

I can confirm that Housing and Land officers reviewed Hyde’s application for funding to ensure that its plans for the Brookhill Estate did not reflect artificial partitioning. They were satisfied with Hyde’s rationale for the estate boundary proposed, including the exclusion of homes at numbers 1 to 8 Lord Roberts Terrace. Hyde noted that the homes on Lord Roberts Terrace are of a very different typology from those within the estate boundary it proposed: they are semi-detached houses, built at a different time. They also noted that the homes have their own road, Nightingale Place, that does not connect with the estate and that, prior to autumn 2019, residents’ service charges were separate from those for residents within the proposed boundary. Given this, I do not agree that there is any need to run a further ballot in which the residents of numbers 1 to 8 Lord Roberts Terrace are able to vote.

3. *The report erroneously claims that the duty to review the proposed boundary lies with the Independent Body appointed to run the ballot.*

I recognise that the stage two planning report mischaracterises where the duty sits and apologise for this. You are right that responsibility for reviewing the definition of the estate proposed by an Investment Partner sits with the GLA (as per paragraph 8.3.5, which I quote above), not with the independent body. The error in the report is not the responsibility of the Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills, but stems from an error in the advice that my team provided to Planning colleagues who were preparing the report. I have raised this with my team, who apologise.

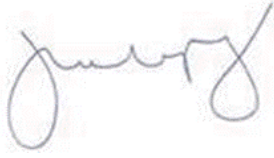
While the error is unfortunate, I am confident that the requirements set out in the RBR for the GLA to be satisfied that an estate has not been artificially partitioned have been met. As the report also stated “GLA officers consider that the ballot has been undertaken in line with GLA funding guidance and the boundary has been established in an appropriate manner.” That is, the GLA fulfilled the responsibility assigned to it in paragraph 8.3.5 of the RBR – as I’ve described in my response to your second comment.

Identifying the independent body as the Electoral Reform Society is also an error that arises from advice my team shared with Planning colleagues. It is almost certainly a typo: the independent body for the Brookhill Estate ballot was Electoral Reform Services, which operated under that name until February 2020 (i.e., after the Brookhill Estate resident ballot), despite becoming part of Civica in December 2018. The error does not affect the substance of the report.

Ultimately, the resident ballot for the Brookhill Estate indicated overwhelming support for Hyde’s plans for regeneration, with an 87 per cent turnout. Eighty-six per cent of residents who voted supported the plans set out in Hyde’s Landlord Offer. Any delay to progress with regeneration would be detrimental to local residents, who are keen to move to modern, comfortable, affordable homes.

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Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Copley', with a large loop at the end.

Tom Copley

Deputy Mayor, Housing and Residential Development