

Page High Tenants Association

Response to Wood Green Area Action Plan (AAP) Consultation, 2018

Foreword by Catherine West MP

I fully support the role that residents and tenants' associations play in strengthening community relations, and specifically I would like to pay tribute to the work of Page High Tenants' Association for their role in strengthening the dialogue between residents, Sanctuary Housing Association and local stakeholders. I hope this relationship will deepen and strengthen further over time to address arising issues around repairs, security and the building maintenance. Finally, ensuring that there is pro-active and comprehensive consultation with local residents on future projects is key to a strong and lasting relationship, this includes residents' ballots on proposals for estate demolition and redevelopment, a mechanism endorsed by the Mayor of London housing strategy.

Introduction

Page High Tenants' Association is recognised by Sanctuary Housing as the representative body of Page High estate, the 92-flat rooftop village in Wood Green, N22 6JQ.

The tenants' association, having taken soundings on the estate and having received overwhelmingly strong support for a petition, is strongly opposing the demolition of Page High implied by the Wood Green Area Action Plan (AAP) (WGS12 Bury Road Car Park).

Here, in our response to the council's consultation on the revised Regulation 18 AAP document, we cover:

- Tenants' overwhelming opposition to demolition
- The flawed nature of the council's consultation
- Page High as a model for social housing
- Required improvement and/or re-purposing of Bury Road car park
- Problems with the Estates Renewal Policy

We conclude by stating that:

- We're in favour of regeneration, but not demolition
- Social rent housing must be key to regeneration
- We look forward to on-going dialogue with council officers

1. Overwhelming estate opposition to demolition

1a 79% of households oppose demolition

The tenants' association petition, which calls for the withdrawal of the council's demolition threat, has been signed by people living at 72 of the flats at Page High. To our knowledge, one of the 92 flats on the estate is certainly unoccupied. Not counting that property, then, the petition has received support from 79% of households on the estate.

This represents a *very* high proportion of the estate.

In considering this figure, we should note: (a) more than one flat may be unoccupied; (b) the occupants of some flats find it difficult to communicate in English (and the tenants' association has not had the benefit of translators); (c) inevitably some people have been away for weeks or months; (d) that some people are reluctant to answer to unknown visitors. Given these considerations, 79% is an even more remarkable figure of support for the petition.

We are sending both the original signed, multi-sheet petition, and a pdf version.

1b Details of petition against demolition

The full text of the petition reads:

We, the undersigned, are all Page High (N22 6JQ) residents, and believe that:

- Page High should be preserved—and improved by Sanctuary Housing—not demolished by the council as part of its Wood Green Area Action Plan.
- Rather than demolishing Bury Rd. car park, and Page High with it, the council should consider both improving and maintaining the car park, and re-purposing the space (e.g. as a storage facility or as studios).
- The council and Sanctuary should work closely with Page High Tenants Association in matters concerning the future of Page High.

These three points have been repeatedly voiced at tenants' association meetings, especially the meeting of March 1, 2018, attended by Catherine West MP and Cllr Peary Ahmet.

1c Support for preserving Page High beyond the estate

Our sister residents' groups, Sky City Action Group, Parkside Malvern Residents Association, Caxton Road Save Our Homes, and Bruce Grove Residents support the preservation of Page High. We have received numerous messages of support through e-mail and Twitter, and we

understand that several Haringey residents have e-mailed localplan@haringey.gov.uk to express support for the preservation of Page High.

1d Council must recognise overwhelming opposition to demolition

Clearly, it would be unreasonable to speak of a significant “diversity of views” in respect of demolition at Page High. While the tenants’ association would not, of course, claim unanimous support for its opposition to the AAP on the estate, the anti-demolition viewpoint is held overwhelmingly. This must be recognised clearly in the council’s evaluation of feedback on the consultation.

2 The flawed nature of the council’s consultation

1a *Fait-accompli* style consultation

The Page High consultation event at the Salvation Army, Lymington Avenue, close to Page High, on February 19, 2018, was poorly attended. 10 council officers were present: more than the Page High tenants who attended.

We suggest that the poor attendance can be accounted for in part by the timing: 5-8pm on a Monday night--certainly unfortunate.

But there is another reason for the small number of people. Prior to the current phase of AAP consultation, the council has not shown itself to be a good listener. On the contrary, it has appeared to many Page High tenants that the council has been fundamentally disinclined to hearing them.

Previous meetings with tenants, such as the one at the Salvation Army during the 2017 AAP consultation, appeared to signal clearly that the council was not prepared to hear views opposing the AAP. The meeting, at which the dominant view was that tenants did not want to leave the estate, was ended half an hour early—despite there being much still to discuss. Several tenants left saying that they would never attend another meeting with the council, who would simply do what they wanted despite tenants’ opposition.

The council’s position has largely been to present ‘what is going to happen’ (i.e. demolition and ‘decanting’) to tenants, and then to discuss minor details (i.e. the Estates Renewal policy).

Tenants have been given little or no invitation to consider the more basic question: Do you want to move or stay at Page High?

Given the discouraging ways in which the council has pursued consultation, it is no surprise that so few tenants turned up to the February 19, 2018 consultation event for Page High residents.

2.2 Feedback forms: Opposition to demolition

As so few tenants attended the February 19 event, the Chair of the tenants' association requested, and was kindly given, several copies of the council's Wood Green Area Action Plan (AAP) feedback form. These were given out to Page High tenants, and the completed forms are included with this submission.

It should come as no surprise that tenants have written expressing strong opposition to the knocking down of Page High.

2.3 Consultation 'exhibitions': No reference to Page High

The AAP 'exhibitions', held at the former post office and the library (on February 13, 17, 21 and 27), did not present a more open approach to consultation. On the contrary, anyone interested in the plight of Page High would have searched in vain on the 'information boards' for reference to the estate, which was not referred to *in the slightest*.

2.4 AAP Regulation 18 Draft: No reference to Page High in Bury Road car park section

The 179-page February 2018 Regulation 18 Preferred Option Consultation AAP Draft refers on pages 132-133 to the Bury Road car park site (WGSA12 Bury Road Car Park). There is no mention there, however, of Page High—no mention of either the name of the estate, or the number of homes; or the community's status as social housing.

Yet if the plan to build on the site were to be carried out, Page High would have to be destroyed.

A curious and public-spirited Haringey resident might well pore through at least some of the 179-page document. (At this point it must be said that the Plan is not easy to read; far from it—written in the idiom of developers, it is difficult for most to understand). The public-spirited citizen keen to contribute to the consultation would not find the material necessary to enable him or her to engage in the democratic process in an informed fashion. With no mention of Page High, the document is fundamentally mendacious.

2.5 Residents' groups request for consultation extension

Page High Tenants' Association fully supports the request made on March 12 by eight local residents' groups for an extension of eight weeks to the AAP consultation period.

3 Page High as a Model social housing

3a A community, not just an estate

Small-scale and low-rise, throughout most of its 43-year life, Page High has been model social housing. Admittedly, over the last four or five years, the landlord, Sanctuary Housing, has rather withdrawn from its responsibilities and standards have fallen in security, repairs and maintenance. But such problems are not irredeemable, and the tenants' group is working with Sanctuary to turn around the estate.

The estate is small enough for a substantial proportion of residents to know one another. Many have lived at Page High for decades; some since it opened in 1975.

Page High is not simply an estate, then. It is a community—and that is what at stake when the council considers its future.

3b Architectural interest

A rooftop village opened by HRH Duke of Edinburgh in 1975, Page High sits on the former site of the Empire Theatre, and, after the closure of the theatre, what then became a TV studio. Brickwork was chosen to blend in with surrounding buildings.

The estate sits above mixed-use units. We are on top of Bury Road car park, and also above Matlan on Lymington Avenue.

The architectural significance of the estate, designed by the Dry Halasz Dixon Partnership, was recognised by its architects' receipt of the Good Design in Housing Award, 1976.

Page High is a small-scale, low-rise estate consisting of 92 homes arranged largely either side of a wide central walkway, a veritable street in the sky. Each apartment has a balcony; homes on one side of the street have small front gardens. Most homes are single bedroom flats, but some have two bedrooms, and there are also some maisonettes. There is no building that rises higher than one floor above ground level.

On the estate there are no narrow walkways; no sudden corners that might make someone turning around them anxious; and no sequestered spaces in which anti-social behaviour might flourish unseen.

Page High, then, is well-designed, a fine example of post-war social housing construction.

3c Page High: A model to be celebrated

Page High, which has attracted interest from the 20th Century Society, will take part in London Open House this year, and visitors will be able to take a tour of the estate.

Far from considering its demolition, the borough of Haringey should be proud of Page High, a building it should celebrate. Indeed, the council should take the estate as a model for social housing, a jewel in the borough's social housing crown.

4 Required improvement and/or re-purposing of Burry Road car park

4a The car park has a future—and so does Page High

Page High sits on top of Bury Road car park. While the lower floor of the car park is widely used, at present the upper level is not so well used.

The council should consider (a) the improvement and maintenance of the car park; and/or (b) the partial or complete re-purposing of the building currently occupied by the car park.

If the car park is demolished, Page High goes with it. Yet there is no need to demolish the car park.

4b Improve and maintain the car park

Currently, the building is difficult to use. The lifts are frequently out of action. The lift that comes down to Matalan, for instance, has not been working for over a year. The other lift, that goes down to Dovecotte Avenue, is often unreliable. How, then, can the car park be used by drivers, especially by those with small children, or with heavy shopping to carry?

Lift disrepair provides a context for understanding why the top level of the building is under-used. If the car park were properly maintained, we suggest that it would be more widely used.

Drivers, too, should be better directed to the car park. Better signage on and around the High Road would be helpful to shoppers, many of whom might not even know that the car park exists.

4c Re-purpose the car park

The car park, or at least part of it, might be re-purposed. Possible uses include storage spaces or studios. The former large car park in Peckham, now known as Peckham Levels, provides a possible model here.

5 Problems with the Estates Renewal Policy

5a Page High tenants do not want to move in the first place

Finally, we turn to the ‘right of return’ and the council’s Estates Renewal Policy, which has been extended to include housing association tenants. We turn to this last because the tenants’ association wishes to foreground our opposition to the very notion of demolition. We do not wish this focus to be lost amid discussion of ‘decanting’ or the ‘right of return.’

These issues, however, must be addressed and we do so here.

5b Decanting: Tenants would move who-knows-where for who-knows-how-long

No one knows where, if tenants were forced to move, they would go, or how long they would remain in alternative accommodation. With nearing 10,000 people on the council waiting list, and with several thousand people in bed and breakfast accommodation, clearly housing people is not easy, and would not be so even with phased 'decanting.'

Page High tenants would be in an extremely uncertain position. In fact, already tenants are unsettled in this matter.

5c 'Right of return': Same tenancy, but what about council tax and service charges?

The council's Estates Renewal Policy guarantees a 'right of return' on the same tenancy. But the policy makes no mention of council tax or service charges. Given that demolition/re-building would be motivated by the prospect of bringing in more council tax, it would be reasonable to expect that tenants' community charge would rise, perhaps significantly.

And what of the level of the service charge? This could well rise significantly, too.

5d Right of return may not hold water

We have serious concerns about the so-called 'right of return.' Our concerns are not related to the intentions of councillors or council officers, which, we have no doubt, are honourable. The history of UK estate regenerations is not encouraging for social housing tenants. All too often, social rent tenants have been squeezed out of new developments. We would not want this to happen at Page High.

6 Conclusion

6a We're in favour of regeneration, but not demolition

We recognise that Wood Green needs a plan for redevelopment. We are not opposing ourselves to regeneration *per se*. We believe rather that Wood Green can, and should be, regenerated, and that the 92-home rooftop community of Page High should be part of the area's improvement.

Regeneration should work in favour of existing residents, not against them. Page High tenants want to be able to enjoy a regenerated Wood Green, not be excluded from it.

6b Social rent housing must be key to regeneration

In Page High, Haringey can boast an innovative rooftop village that has been, and can be again, model social housing.

Beyond issues affecting Page High, the tenants' association is seriously concerned that the AAP places the largely social rent Sky City (above the Mall) under threat.

We are concerned, too, that the AAP will not significantly reduce the council waiting list. Those on the waiting list require in most cases *social rent* housing (that is, properties with rents at council/housing association levels). This, however, is not prioritised by the AAP, which, according to a January 2018 report to cabinet authorised by Lyn Gardner, then Director for Regeneration, Planning & Development, envisages 40% of new builds as 'affordable.'

When 'affordable' can mean up to 80% of the going market rate for a one-bedroom flat, we must question the council's commitment to the building of reasonably priced accommodation. Quite simply, we need more social housing.

In the revised AAP, there must an explicit commitment to the construction of social rent housing. On publicly owned sites, we would like the council to guarantee that at least 50% of residential new-builds be social rent properties.

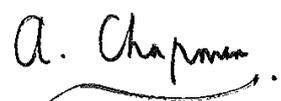
6c We look forward to on-going dialogue with council officers

This text has outlined our firm opposition to demolition and our grave concerns about the consultation process thus far. However, we have also been encouraged by council officers' willingness to meet representatives of the tenants' association during the current phase of consultation.

It was unfortunate that bad weather prevented council officers from attending our group's March 1, 2018, general meeting. We hope that officers will be able to attend our next meeting, and we will issue an invitation near the date.

As plans for Wood Green's future are further revised, and as elected officials and the council administration undergoes changes in May following the election, Page High Tenants' Association looks forward to playing our part in on-going conversations about the future not only of our estate but also the future of Wood Green more widely.

We hope that the response to the AAP given in this document can fruitfully inform the revision of the council's plans to regenerate Wood Green.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Chapman" with a decorative flourish underneath.

Dr Adrian Chapman, Chair

On behalf of Page High Tenants' Association

March 15, 2018

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