

Spur Rd & Stonegrove Estate

Andrew Dismore MP

March 2006

I promised to keep you up to date in relation to the regeneration scheme. There have been a lot of stories and rumours lately, so I thought it would be a good time to write.

However, before I deal with the main “business” of this letter, I need to tell you that the House of Commons authorities are actively considering a major change to the rules and budgets available to MPs to write to constituents in this way. In future, I may not be able to keep you up-to-date by post as well as I have tried to do, or even at all. If you have an email address, I would like to be able to write to you through that, to keep costs down. If you wish to hear from me by email in the future, please let me have your email address by emailing me at updates@hendonlabourparty.com with your name and postal address too, so that I can update my records.

In view of all the speculation, I had a meeting with the Council at the end of February, to try and establish exactly what is going on.

It has become clear that there have been considerable difficulties with the regeneration scheme due to the Conservative administration of Barnet Council. As I am sure you remember, when they took over the Council almost four years ago, they expanded the scheme to 1355 properties.

I have always supported the regeneration scheme, and pressed the Council to get on with it. However, along with many residents on the estate and nearby, I have had concerns about the scale of the scheme and its impact on local services. My view was that the scheme should proceed, but any difficulties such as these should be ironed out as the detailed design of the scheme progressed, and over the years it would take to finalise the plans and physically construct the new buildings.

It is now clear that Barnet Council has secretly been having major problems with the scheme and the Council's various partners.

Since September 2005, the Council has been in detailed discussions with Barratt Homes, the housing development company. These discussions were held in secret. The Conservative Party decided at a private meeting to change the scheme to reduce it to 999 dwellings in total. This was formally approved by the Council's leading members on the 27th February.

Council officers have been authorised to negotiate a framework development agreement with Family Housing and Unitary Ltd, the commercial partner in the development. Barratt is expected to acquire half of this company.

Under the revised scheme, there will be a total of 325 properties for rent, which the council believe will be sufficient to meet a guarantee to rehouse all secure tenants. There will be 36 properties owned by ‘shared equity’ for current leaseholders, which the Council also believes meets their commitment to them. In addition, there will be 110 shared ownership properties on the site. The Council say that putting all these together, there will be a total of 479 affordable homes, from this mixture of properties for rent, shared ownership and shared equity.

The intention is to go ahead with this latest version of the scheme over a period of five to seven years, slightly shorter than the original timetable, catching up some of the lost time, caused by the considerable delays which have occurred under the Conservative Council's administration, whilst the scheme was being developed.

The parent company of Barratt will guarantee the project.

The Council will retain control over the design and quality of construction of the new buildings.

I also understand that the density of development on the site will be the same as on the existing estate.

The number of properties is just over 50% more than the existing number (603 properties). With the additional land which will come from the school site (once the new school buildings are completed) the Council say this means that although there will be more properties, the density will remain the same, though of course the configuration of the new homes will be very different.

The Council say that with their new timetable, they expect it will take a couple of months to conclude the framework development agreement, through the negotiations which have now been authorised. It will then take just over three months to complete the additional design processes, for the outline plan of the estate. If that scheme is then agreed by the Council, a detailed planning application will be worked up, with a view to submitting this to the Council itself for approval in the autumn of 2006, with a formal decision being made in the spring of 2007, with a view to starting on site in the summer of 2007.

In the meantime, Barnet hopes to start work on the garage site, on the corner of Stirling Avenue and Green Lane, this summer. This building programme will take some 15 months to complete.

This is of course what I have been told by the Council, and I certainly cannot guarantee that any of this will happen as predicted or expected, but you may rest assured that I will continue to keep pressure on the Council to make progress with the regeneration scheme.

The new proposals, if they come to fruition, have answered some of the criticisms that have been made of the scheme, especially in terms of over-development and the impact on local services.

However, there is a significant reduction in the number of affordable homes to previous versions of the scheme.

Whilst the Council believe that they will be able to rehouse existing tenants and leaseholders

who wish to remain on the estate, I am very concerned about the position of growing families and the lack of affordable additional homes for their children as they grow to adulthood, and may wish to live near their parents and childhood homes.

I will continue to keep up the pressure on the Council to increase the number of affordable homes in the scheme.

I also think it is essential that the Council consults residents throughout the process as what is proposed is very different to the plans on which they provisionally asked for residents' views. Whilst the Council have agreed that they will consult at the stage of the initial design process, I believe it is important that the Council also holds a further test of opinion of residents, as it is so long views were last sought. You can tell me what you think at this stage, on the "Report Back" form, in the campaigns section of the website.