

Gill Kernick

7 August 2021

Councillor Kim Taylor Smith

Re: Questions regarding the proposed Edenham Estate Development

Following the breakdown in the collaboration between the RBKC and COMMET as outlined in their letter of 22nd June 2021, I have been working to understand the process of including residents' views to date, particularly considering what has emerged during the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. I have some questions that I'm sure you will, in the interests of transparency, be willing to provide answers to, without me needing to go down a FOI route.

As you know, I support the development of social housing on the estate.

What I am opposed to is the height of the two proposed buildings that raise concerns about fire and life safety in the wake of Grenfell. Additionally, they negatively impact both the views of and from the Grade II listed estate and place a wall that effectively divides the Cheltenham estate in half. Residents have consistently objected to building heights and do not believe the consultation has been done in good faith, given your failure to propose any viable alternative to their inclusion.

I'd greatly appreciate information regarding the following:

1. The decision to include high-rise buildings (HRBs) in the development

The current proposal includes an HRB (and the initial proposal included two HRBs), which would be the first one RBKC has built since Grenfell, I'd like to assure myself that you had resident's views at the heart of this decision. I'm sure you will agree that that this is a particularly sensitive issue. The Edenham Estate watched Grenfell burn from our homes. Our views are of the white clad remains, the green heart a daily reminder of the 14th of June 2017.

I'd like to understand:

- *How you have proactively assured the fire safety aspects of such dense, high and medium-rise buildings, before considering bringing the proposal to residents?*

I understand you have employed ARUP as fire consultants (which is great) but have been told they have not completed their report. Neither, I've been told, have you consulted the London Fire Brigade about their views on the development.

I would have expected that, given Grenfell, you would have gone beyond minimum requirements to assure that any fire safety concerns were dealt with prior to proposing the inclusion of HRBs. And that residents would have been part of this process.

Of additional concern, the architects said that they were planning to build to existing building regulations meaning buildings below 18m could use flammable materials.

I'm struggling to understand how you expect residents to even consider this density of building before we have been included in rigorous conversations about fire safety. (And, saying this will come later in the process, won't satisfy this concern).

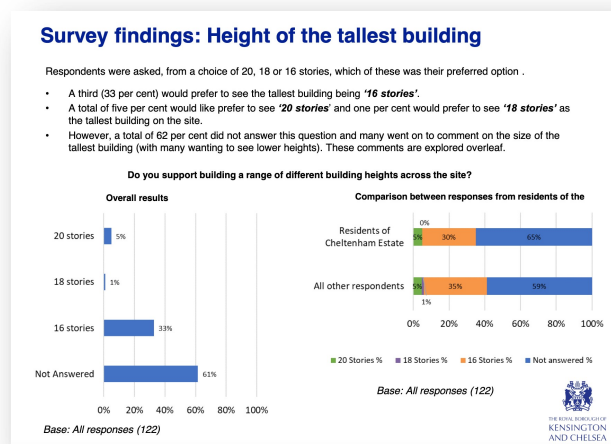
- *How residents were included in the 'blank paper' exercise to include HRB's in the proposal.*

You say that you conducted a 'blank paper' consultation with COMMET. Could you please point out how during this 'blank paper' exercise residents were consulted specifically about the possible inclusion of HRB's in the proposal.

- *How residents were consulted on the inclusion of HRB's through the consultation process.*

Your second consultation included a question asking whether we wanted a 20-storey; 18storey or 16-storey building. We were not given the option of saying we did not want a high-rise.

While I understand the trade-off between density and community/green space – I fail to see how the consultation has in any way asked us about our views on the trade-off. Where have you asked if we'd prefer higher buildings and more space, or lower buildings and less space? You cannot justify the inclusion of higher buildings by saying we wanted green space, when you didn't ask us about the trade-off between the two.



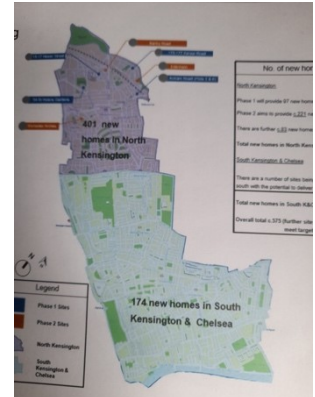
- *How the 2015 SPD recommendations on height and number of houses were overwritten.*

The 2015 SPD that was adopted by council and was widely consulted on, recommended in the region of 60 homes (with some upside); and a limit to the height of buildings to six storeys. Both have been significantly changed. The original proposal you bought to residents was for 168 homes (now 110) and buildings of 20 and 16 storeys (now 14 and 6).

You say that the RBKC planning department has said that it would not accept the 2015 SPD as it did not maximise use of the site. Could you please let me know the process that was followed to move away from these recommendations?

- Specifically, ○ How residents were included in this process regarding the Edenham development
- How the planning departments' views were scrutinised and verified given their failings at Grenfell.
 - How the impact on services in the North Kensington were considered.

Given North Kensington is more densely populated than South Kensington, and has fewer services, leading to massive inequalities, how was the decision to build most houses in the North (401 v 174). What was the process for making this decision and how were residents and local services (transport, schools, doctors) included in this process? How do current proposals create more equity across the borough?



2. The selection of the architects

I am sure you will understand the sensitivity about the procurement process for the selection of the architects given what has emerged in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry regarding Studio E. Haworth Tompkins were, I believe, selected for this work in 2014, under the then deputy leader of the Council, Rock Feilding-Mellen.

During his evidence at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, we heard that Mr Feilding-Mellen had not read the Lakanal House coroner's 2013 recommendations and, by his own admission, had not heeded the recommendation that councillors should not 'make assumptions that fire safety is being actively or effectively managed in purpose-built blocks in your borough'.

I assume, given your stated commitment to learn from Grenfell, that you have in place systems and processes to rigorously assess current projects and historic decisions against the multitude of failures in the Grenfell refurbishment projects.

To assure me that this has been done, I'd greatly appreciate you providing details of:

- The original brief and procurement process used in the selection of the architects in 2014.
- How residents were included in this initial procurement process
- The brief Haworth Tompkins were given for the current proposals
- How residents were included in the development of this current brief
- What scrutiny process RBKC undertook to assure themselves that the lessons from Grenfell Tower had been learned and that Haworth Tompkins were sufficiently qualified for the current scope of work. In particular, ○ How you assessed their competence to design residential high-rise buildings, and ○ How residents were involved in this scrutiny process
- How the selection criteria addressed the heritage nature of the site and how residents' views were incorporated in choosing an architect that would pay due regard to this.

3. The proposed contracting method for building the development

Finally, could you please confirm your proposed method of contracting for the building.

My understanding is that you plan to go the route of Design and Build versus a traditional contracting method. Design and Build was used at Grenfell. Given the failure across the whole supply chain, including providers of building materials and RBKC's building control, and failure to scrutinise work, I'm sure you will understand that residents are concerned about the quality and safety of the development.

I don't believe you have addressed this at all during your consultation. I'd appreciate understanding what processes you have put in place to ensure the lessons from Grenfell are heeded. What scrutiny is in place that was not before, how will residents be core to this?

I appreciate that some of what I'm asking falls outside of the minimum requirements that you are expected to adhere to, however, given both the RBKC's failure regarding Grenfell and the heritage of the site, I'm sure you will agree that it is reasonable to expect the council to move beyond minimum standards.

I look forward to your written response and trust you will operate with a principle of transparency given the history of the council and your commitment to change.

Please reply by 13th of August 2021 so I can take them into account in my response to the current consultation (which ends on the 20th of August 2021) Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Kernick', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Gill Kernick