

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS****MINUTES OF THE TOWER HAMLETS SELF-BUILD FORUM****HELD AT 18:00 ON TUESDAY, 2 MAY 2017****MP702, 7TH FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT,  
LONDON, E14 2BG.****Members Present:**

Councillor Rachel Blake (Member)	(Cabinet Member for Strategic Development & Waste)
Councillor Sirajul Islam (Member)	(Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing)

**Officers Present:**

Martin Ling	– (Housing Strategy Manager)
Tom Scholes-Fogg	– (Housing Policy Officer)
Alison Thomas	– (Head of Housing Strategy, Partnerships and Affordable Housing, Place)

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Cllr Blake welcomed everybody and explained that the main purpose of the meeting was to seek the views of those people who had registered on the Council's self-build web page. The Council was currently developing its approach to its duties which it had been given through recent self-build legislation and the meeting would further inform how it could respond to the interest in self-build in the borough.

**2. NATIONAL POLICY AND THE COUNCIL'S OBLIGATIONS****3. DEMAND IN LB TOWER HAMLETS - STATS FROM THE REGISTER****4. MEETING PEOPLE'S NEEDS: IS SELF-BUILD AN AFFORDABLE AND VIABLE OPTION?****5. WHAT CAN LBTH DO TO PROMOTE SELF-BUILD IN TH?**

## **Presentation**

Martin Ling did a short presentation on self-build covering the following areas:

- Overview of housing demand in Tower Hamlets and the housing market
- Priorities in the Council's Housing Strategy
- Outline legal position and self-build regulations
- The Council's duties under the regulations
- A profile of the people who had registered
- Key issues in Tower Hamlets including land values, regional housing targets and densification

## **Discussion Notes:**

### **Land:**

#### **Available Plots**

Attendees felt that the main issue was not knowing where plots of land are advertised. The general view was that plots of land are essential, as without the land the rest is a non-starter.

One attendee suggested that the Council could consider fixed-term plots of land, or shipping containers to ease the housing problems in the Borough.

#### **Land availability Study**

Tom Dollard suggested the Council could do a study looking at the possibilities of land availability and site layouts and work out what is possible. He said a basic study was needed. TD added that LBTH could consider holding an exhibition and invite people to see what land and what property is available and match applicants to locations. Tom asked when there would be a full capacity.

Councillor Blake advised that an estate capacity study of council estate owned land was part of the housing strategy recommendations which was approved at Council in December 2016, and that the Council is looking for potential plots as part of the estate capacity review. It was agreed that this would be a topic for a future forum.

Martin Ling said he knows the Council has parcels of land but many are disused garages or laundry areas so their suitability would need to be assessed. Martin advised that LBTH was losing a lot of council owned property due to right to buy and identifying land for its own new build programme to replace these homes and meet the huge housing need in the borough.

Councillor Blake said LBTH should have a full assessment of available in a few months, and the aim of the meeting was for LBTH to hear from applicants about what they want, and for the Council to find a way of moving forward – including looking at partnerships.

### **Value of land**

Applicants asked Members and Officers about the value of land and the bidding process. Some were concerned that plots of land can only be purchased by agents and big developers meaning smaller developers and self-builders don't stand a chance to build their own property.

Attendees were advised that it is very difficult to control the value of land, and that Tower Hamlets Council cannot make it cheaper. One officer advised the applicants that co-operatives are an option.

The cost of land discussed and whether there was a minimum price per square foot. Alison Thomas advised that competition amongst developers can inflate the cost for land which leads to high prices in the borough. Some applicants asked whether there was scope to allow some land to be sold to only those who have lived in Tower Hamlets.

### **Best Value**

It was suggested that the Council should look at best value as it is about more than bringing in money. Councillor Islam agreed but said that because of budget cuts, the Council had to be innovative in bringing in money in order to protect essential services. Some applicants asked whether land could be leased and paid for in instalments.

### **Social Impact**

Councillor Islam talked about the social impact of housing including the impact on family, mentally and physically. Going through the housing process can often be stressful and tiring. He reiterated the point that the Council has huge demands; from the 10000 people in priority on the waiting list including 2000 families in temporary accommodation and that it has to weigh up all its priorities when thinking about how best to use land.

### **Co-operative Approach**

Another advised that one option may be establishing a Co-operatives, however it was noted that such models don't work for everybody

One of the attendees at the meeting suggested co-housing and a property around 300-500Sqm could fit in 8 families with each unit self-contained and multi-generation. This would mean younger tenants would be living amongst and near older tenants and there would be social benefits for both sides. It

was emphasised that there could be many different approaches to self-build and community housing.

Councillor Blake said LBTH needed to think of value – in co-housing there needs to be a way of ensuring homes are long-term affordable. Applicants generally agreed, one asked whether the disposable strategy could be changed, and whether co-housing will contribute to TH priorities.

### **Website**

Applicants raised the question of a website where all the information on self-building can be held. They were advised that whilst some information is on the Council website, we are not able to create a specific website for self-builders to connect.

The attendees agreed to work together to set up a website where ideas and information could be shared.

## **6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

### **Next Steps:**

1. Tom Dollard has agreed to be the applicant contact point and will organise an external meeting for applicants. LBTH has agreed to fund a meeting room for 2 hours at an Idea Store.
2. Tom Dollard to set up a basic website so that attendees can share information
3. Tom Scholes-Fogg (TSF) to create the contact table and email it to all persons on the self-build register.
4. TSF to write and disseminate the notes from the first meeting with a copy of the presentation.
5. TSF to organise the second meeting and email all applicants with the details including a draft agenda

The meeting ended at 20:30

Chair,  
Tower Hamlets Self-Build Forum