

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE TOWER HAMLETS SELF-BUILD FORUM
HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2018
MP701 - TOWN HALL MULBERRY PLACE

Members Present:

Councillor Sirajul Islam (Member) (Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing)

Others Present:

Robin Sager (Housing Regeneration Co-ordinator)
Charlie Carter (Housing Regeneration Officer)
Abidah Kamali (Housing Strategy & Policy)
Mark Slowikowski (Housing Strategy & Policy)

Other Guests:

Levent Kerimol (Community Led Housing)

Attendees:

9 Self-Build Applicants

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Islam welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies were received from Cllr Blake and Mark Baigent.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

3. PROGRESS SINCE LAST MEETING

Robin Sager updated the forum on the work the Council has been doing on Self-Build/Cohousing.

Site Identification - the Council has identified eight potential small sites in the Borough. Title searches for each of the eight sites have now been commissioned. Robin explained that this is an important first step in ensuring the suitability of any site. Applicants were reminded that the list of potential sites is subject to change following the outcome of initial title searches and mayoral review.

GLA Small Sites – the Council held a meeting with the GLA small sites team. Following Phase 1 of their small sites programme (ten TfL pilot sites inc. Cable Street), the GLA have announced an extension of the programme to include public landowners. The programme aims to provide public landowners with an alternative mechanism to bring small sites forward, which seeks to balance the convenience of land auctions with some of the delivery controls in development agreements. The Council is exploring opportunities to work with the GLA to bring forward its sites. The forum will be kept up to date with this.

4. SELF-BUILD WORKSHOP

A workshop was held and attendees discussed the Council's draft principles and offered their feedback on site disposal, eligibility and site allocation.

Feedback received has been summarised as follows:

Site Disposal - There was general consensus that land should be disposed of at a discount proportionate to the community benefits the Council receives. It was felt that if no discount was applied, then housing being affordable in perpetuity is an unrealistic ambition. More broadly, it was felt that covenants should only to be applied if a discount was applied to the land.

A further discussion took place over how to ensure affordability in perpetuity; it was felt that it would be built into the CLT model, however for other self-builders the Council needs to devise a way to make this feasible.

If sites were to be advertised without planning permission, concern was raised over how self-builders would finance planning application/advice. Applicants asked whether pots of funding were available to assist with the planning process. Similarly, the problem of overcoming the knowledge barrier was raised.

Forum members encouraged mechanisms to be established if bidders were to drop out.

Questions were asked about why the Council wasn't considering using their CPO powers to acquire underused/vacant commercial premises for self-build purposes, as opposed to just identifying small sites that have been deemed inappropriate for alternative uses?

Eligibility - It was felt that the introduction of an income cap makes a small scheme difficult in viability terms. It was felt that perhaps the introduction of a

discretionary panel vs standardised “hard structure” would be sufficient for relatively small number of sites, however the legal implications of this need further discussion.

Some concern was raised about precluding homeowners entirely.

Local connection needs to be defined; it was suggested that this connection could be as long as 5 years as opposed to 2 years.

The majority of attendees agreed that priority should not necessarily be given to those who first signed up to the register. Long standing ties to the area was generally deemed of greater importance.

Applicants stressed the need to distinguish between the “setter upper” and “end user” – the eligibility criteria are likely to differ.

Site Allocation - Restricting sites to self-build forum members was received positively; however as was pointed out, in reality this may apply to the lead bidder only.

There was general consensus that expressions of interest would be followed by a full application. The application will include financial capability and deliverability test, submission of a business plan and demonstration of social and economic benefits.

It was felt that if decisions were to be influenced by a design competition, assessors must be aware of the disadvantage this puts some applicants at.

General

Feedback suggested that the Council needs to make the parameters of the self-build discussion clearer from the outset. There was frustration from some applicants that the self-build register is open to everyone, yet the Council appear to only be considering a CLT/affordable self-build programme, therefore excluding some interested parties.

Additionally, applicants requested more information about how a prospective self-build project would be financed and the capital required.

5. NEXT STEPS

Robin thanked all attendees for their participation and their feedback. He explained that the Council will take on board feedback from the workshop and define its approach at the next forum.

The next forum is yet to be scheduled.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business

The meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.