

A letter to local residents on the council's proposals for the Canal Club site

The Wellington Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association (TRA) is opposed to the redevelopment of the Canal Club site as this will be a loss of play, amenity and community gardening space plus a further increase in the building density of the area. We know that the original reason for the purchase of this land by the Greater London Council (GLC) in the 1970s from the saw mill site is still valid – to provide canal side green amenity space for use by the estate and local residents.

We do not have sufficient room on the estate for the existing residents. Successive infill projects, as well as the demolition of Fane House, (now occupied by the Peabody Lark Row estate), have left us with a shortage of play, amenity and green space (that includes Lark Row).

A good example is cycle parking. The TRA are struggling to find space for residents' bike (and buggies) sheds following the loss of storage space ('the pram sheds'). Bikes are currently locked in communal access areas but our landlord (Tower Hamlets Homes) is enforcing that stairwells and walkways are cleared in line with the fire safety work underway across the borough following the Grenfell Tower fire. (Removing plant pots, shoe racks, cupboards...) To 'retrofit' the estate to current planning guidance would mean finding sheds for about 580 cycles. At the moment we have secure cycle 'parking' for around 30 bikes (organised by the TRA).

As to play space, the recent Family Mosaic development in Bishops Way/Parmiter Street does not have amenity space for over 12s, and restricted play space for under 12s, and their children play in the Canal Club ball court and come to the community garden. It is a safe play space.

The planned "infill" housing will enjoy (planning legislation) a level of family outdoor and children's play space, and bike storage, denied to the rest of the estate whilst using "our" space.

We want to organise community vegetable growing, again no (safe) space on the estate. We would like the youth club back in the Canal Club, as this area desperately needs one.

We want to work with our neighbours to preserve this site for local use. The TRA favour the council's 2017 option of a refurbished community hall that can provide dual access for a community nursery and community use. The 2017 feasibility study included the council's architect's proposals for this option and we feel that is a good start in the right direction.

Of course we are in favour of council housing however the council is losing housing stock daily into the private market via the Right to Buy legislation (RTB) and housing on this site will go the same way. Tenants moving in will be able to buy at discount after three years (less if they can transfer their tenancy) and can then sell in this prime location into the private market.

We have suggested that the council buys back properties on the estate that are now being sold through the private market. It will be cheaper than this "infill" scheme. About one-third of RTB properties on the estate are owned by absentee landlords, with a high turn-over of tenants. In the last three years the council has bought back on the estate THREE properties under their Buy Back scheme, 2 x 1 bed bedroom and 1 x 2 bedroom. It will not buy back dwellings of four bedrooms and above even though the more recent "infills" were to provide housing of this size.

We do not think that the loss of this land and the Canal Club to future estate and local residents is offset by the gain in council housing stock to the borough. We say buy back on the estate.

Please sign the Save our Space E2 petition and support this campaign to keep this site.

Wellington Estate Tenants and Residents Assn January 2020

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