

English Partnerships

Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project

Stage 1A: Statement of Community Participation – Phase 1 Consultation

Report

February 2008



Prepared for:

Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project
Final Participation Report, including Summary, Report and Appendices
February 2008

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English Partnerships

Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project

Statement of Community Participation

Summary

February 2008



Prepared for:



1 Table of Contents

- 1 Table of Contents 1
- 1.1 Introduction..... 2
- 1.6 Top Findings..... 3
- 1.16 Recommendations for the next steps 5

1.1 Introduction

- 1.2 Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project is the name given for the ‘regeneration’ of private and public sector land in the area of Robin Hood Gardens in Tower Hamlets Borough. Blackwall Reach is a small, neighbourhood with worn out buildings, isolated by major roads on all four sides and home to approximately 300 households, predominantly from the Bangladeshi community, many of whom have lived there for many years:

Aerial view showing regeneration area for purpose of consultation:



Source: HCLA, marked up by Scott Wilson

- 1.3 This brief report sums up the findings and conclusions of an intense and detailed public consultation and engagement exercise with the residents of Blackwall Reach which took place between August and November 2007. For the purpose of the consultation this included Robin Hood Gardens, Woolmore Street, Anderson House, Macrow Walk and Indigo Mews. A copy of the full report and appendices is available on the Tower Hamlets website or can be obtained by phoning 0800 055 6340.
- 1.4 The work introduced to residents wide ranging plans to regenerate the whole neighbourhood creating a new, significantly larger community that will be a place people really want to live in. The consultation had to stick to the ‘principles’ of the

regeneration approach, as detailed in an initial plan presented to the Tower Hamlets Council Cabinet in August 2007, about the options available to the Council for it to meet its responsibilities under Central Government's Decent Homes legislation to address the problems with the current Robin Hood Garden estate buildings. This formed the backbone of the consultation and contained 2 important options – whether to knock down Robin Hood Gardens and replace with new homes or whether to refurbish the two main blocks (where the majority of residents live).

- 1.5 A great deal was discovered during the consultation about the hopes, fears, ideas and lives of this stable and relatively content community in Tower Hamlets. A wide variety of consultation approaches were used in order to engage local people and groups and to stimulate a genuine debate. The engagement succeeded in reaching the vast majority of people living in the area through home visits, workshops, a busy all day Community Gathering and through newsletters, the press and the local primary school. A dedicated website and helpline has also been running since August 2007. Although this first stage consultation has now finished, regular meetings are now being held between those in charge of the regeneration and local tenants, leaseholders and freeholders through a new 'Local Voices Group' which was set up at the Community Gathering.

1.6 Top Findings

- 1.7 Residents thought there were real plus points to living in Blackwall Reach including community facilities, shops and market, a thriving mutually supportive community, open space, school and its location. However residents also expressed significant 'negatives'. At the top this list was overcrowding, problems with building maintenance, estate management and the old and poor condition of the buildings together with, pollution traffic noise and volume and community safety.
- 1.8 Some problems mirrored more general fears for Londoners such as drugs or alcohol related problems and not enough for young people to do.
- 1.9 In spite of the negatives 77% of residents said that they wanted to remain living in the neighbourhood following the regeneration. 39% would consider a move elsewhere in Tower Hamlets, whilst 18% would prefer to move out of Tower Hamlets.
- 1.10 Over three quarters wanted to see Robin Hood Gardens knocked down and replaced with new homes (Option 2). However this number needs to be looked at

in light of the number of residents who wanted to keep their secure council tenancy. In response to a key question on the housing tenure options tenants would consider (e.g. Housing Association, Council, Shared Ownership, Private Rental, Purchase Own Home), 95% of existing council tenants identified Tower Hamlets council rented home as a housing choice option, as against 36% who would consider a housing association rented home and 46% who would consider purchasing their own home.

- 1.11 Taken together it can be concluded that the vast majority of existing tenants want *both* redevelopment *and* council housing, with a smaller percentage of those who wish to remain in the neighbourhood prepared to keep their options open with regard to a housing association or other forms of tenure.
- 1.12 The consultation has, perhaps inevitably, raised the anxiety levels of the local community. The management of this particularly in the context of a re-housing policy that may not be able to give the same re-housing priority to 'hidden' households or which can only deliver new homes through an RSL partner will be important. It is considered that the current support for the regeneration is quite fragile and very much linked to the kind of guarantees tenants will receive with regard to their right to remain, their re-housing offer and the difficult question of whether there is a genuine choice for those who wish to remain, but who do not currently wish to consider a housing association as landlord.
- 1.13 Leaseholders and freeholders also face significant decisions and upheaval linked to the regeneration. We found a small but active group of leaseholders in the neighbourhood who were keen to have their own meetings with those in charge. Although leaseholders shared many similar concerns as tenants and were keen to see plans that work for the whole community, they also had specific concerns about compensation, their right to return and how this will work if new properties are more expensive than their current ones. Other concerns included the long timescale for the regeneration and the inconvenience and disruption during rebuilding. Finally there were specific concerns around how vulnerable (particularly older) leaseholders' concerns will be dealt with.
- 1.14 Both tenants and leaseholders wanted to know a great deal more about what exactly will happen to them and more detail of what is planned.
- 1.15 This report finishes with a number of recommendations for the next stage of the regeneration which, if it goes ahead, is due to put a great deal more flesh on the regeneration plans.

1.16 Recommendations for the next steps

- 1.17 The consultation team from Scott Wilson offers here a number of recommendations which reflect the strong themes to come out of our contact with local people.
- 1.18 The regeneration plans have prompted a large number of questions and doubts about the proposed re-housing strategy and the individual re-housing offers that both leaseholders and tenants will eventually receive. The strongest, single message to send to recognised secure tenants would be a guaranteed right for them to return to or remain in the neighbourhood in the future. Such a 'right to return' would acknowledge the strengths of the existing community, ensure longer term success and address the current cynicism. The project partners are recommended to review if such a policy is possible.
- 1.19 The second big concern that residents won't be able to return to a new home as council tenants is much more difficult to resolve. Government policy prevents councils building new homes on their own land. Only housing associations can build and manage new social housing homes. Throughout the consultation period the Government appeared to be at the point of reviewing this policy. However, this door has now been closed again.. It is recommended that through the Local Voices Group, the community representatives explore thoroughly the advantages and disadvantages of housing association tenancies and report back to the whole community at a future stage.
- 1.20 We recommend re-drawing the edge of the regeneration boundary so street improvements on both sides of Cotton Street and pedestrian passage between Bazely Street and Cotton Street are possible. This will also make it easier to put in traffic calming measures and safer pedestrian crossings. We also suggest re-drawing the boundary so that Indigo Mews residents wishing to sell are clear that their properties are no longer directly affected.
- 1.21 In terms of what goes where, we recommend strengthening that future planning builds in the following principles:
- A quiet 'corner' site for the replacement mosque.
 - Multi-purpose activity area (or access principle if shared with school).
 - GP/health surgery on-site or within walking distance of neighbourhood.
 - Replacement school sited so that current school can remain fully functional until new is built and open.
 - Maintenance of current bus routes and bus stop locations.

- To clarify the community benefits which would arise from constructing two residential towers at the South East corner of the neighbourhood near to the DLR
- Making sure the Community centre, mosque, health centre and school can all be kept going throughout regeneration.
- Making sure the existing condition of the Robin Hood Gardens blocks are not allowed to deteriorate any further.

1.22 In terms of the design of future new or improved homes we recommend the adopted design standards respond to tenants 'top 4' wishes:

- Secure and managed entrance and communal areas
- Size of bedrooms and living room
- Separate toilet and bathroom
- Private external space – balcony or garden

1.23 Given the significant number of unemployed people in the area the plans need to consider how the physical regeneration can join up with other programs to address issues of social and economic deprivation including training and employment opportunities and the need for a new larger community to be a cohesive and well run one.

1.24 The way in which the community and those in charge work together in future on the detail of this regeneration is particularly important. A new 'Local Voices Group', made up of local residents and community groups has been bought together for this purpose. This needs to be a group that truly represents local interests and we would recommend that Tower Hamlets Council and English Partnerships provide an appropriate level of support and resources to help the group do its job well.

1.25 It is recommended that Leaseholders are properly represented on the Local Voices Group and form a key working group of the main group with separate meetings with those in charge when necessary. We also suggest that the Blackwall Reach website has a regularly updated dedicated page for leaseholder and freeholder interests.

English Partnerships

Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project

Statement of Community Participation

Report
February 2008



Prepared for:

Table of contents

- Table of contents 2
- 1 Section 1: Methodology and Approach..... 3
 - 1.1 Acknowledgements 3
 - 1.3 Introduction..... 3
 - 1.10 Our Brief 4
 - 1.12 Our Approach/Methodology 4
 - 1.17 Description of Methods Used 6
 - Stakeholder analysis 6
 - Helpline 6
 - Level of translation Required 7
 - Level of Translation Provided 7
- 2 Section 2: Analysis of Findings..... 9
 - 2.1 Introduction..... 9
 - 2.5 Home Visit Survey 9
 - Profile of respondents 10
 - Preference for Two Main Options for Development..... 11
 - Housing Tenure Options 11
 - Future place of residence..... 12
 - Social and community facilities and amenities..... 13
 - Features of a new or improved home 13
 - Atmosphere, Community Feel and Location..... 14
 - Transport and traffic 15
 - Open spaces 15
 - Crime, anti-social behaviour and policing 15
 - General Concerns about redevelopment - tenants..... 16
 - Concerns about redevelopment - leaseholders & freeholders..... 16
 - 2.51 Workshops 17
 - Women’s Workshop 17
 - Youth Club Workshop 18
 - Mosque Workshop 20
 - Community Gathering – Reaching out to Blackwall..... 21
- 3 Section 3: Implications for the Way Forward 23
 - 3.2 Regeneration Boundary 23
 - 3.8 The Vision 24
 - 3.10 The Green Park..... 24

- 3.12 Movement and Connectivity 24
- 3.14 Transport 25
- 3.18 Height and Scale of Building 26
- 3.21 Location of Key Uses 26
- 3.23 Housing Mix..... 27
- 3.26 Shopping and Commercial 27
- 3.29 Key Options for Regeneration 28
- 3.32 Development Principles..... 28
- 3.36 Implications for re-housing strategy 29
- 3.48 Implications for Forward Community Engagement..... 31
 - Introduction31
 - Need for Dialogue31
 - Local Voices Group – Terms of Reference and Programme.....32
 - Community Charter32

1 Section 1: Methodology and Approach

1.1 Acknowledgements

- 1.2 The Engagement Team would like to recognise the contribution and to thank all those residents and local community interests who found time to contribute to the consultation, together with the local fieldwork team and translators, SPLASH Arts, the Tower Hamlets Participation Unit and the Partners and their advisors for their enthusiastic contribution to the Community Gathering. We would also like to thank Woolmore Primary School for their making available their lovely warm building for key meetings.

1.3 Introduction

- 1.4 This report details the approach and findings of an intense and detailed public consultation and engagement exercise with the residents of Blackwall Reach between August and November 2007. The report will eventually become, together with later consultation findings, the Statement of Participation submitted as part any future outline planning application.
- 1.5 Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project is an English Partnerships initiated proposal for the physical regeneration of 8.83 hectares of existing private and public sector land in Tower Hamlets Borough. For the purpose of the consultation this included Robin Hood Gardens, Woolmore Street, Anderson House, Mackrow Walk and Indigo Mews. This small neighbourhood, isolated by major roads on all four sides is home to approximately 300 households, predominantly from the Bangladeshi community, many of whom have lived here for many years.
- 1.6 The work introduced to local residents wide ranging proposals to regenerate the whole neighbourhood led by English Partnerships and Tower Hamlets Council over the forthcoming 10 years. A draft development framework presented to Cabinet in early August formed the focus of the consultation and contained 2 key options – whether to knock down Robin Hood Gardens and replace with new homes or whether to refurbish the two main blocks. Both options had pros and cons and significant implications for resident re-housing choices.
- 1.7 A wide variety of consultation and engagement techniques were used in order to engage as many local people as possible and stimulate a genuine debate locally. These included a helpline, website, door to door visits, a household survey, a key community event, exhibition and workshops. The different consultation and engagement activities and events and materials were designed to reach both individuals and the community as a whole, to be a mixture of information giving and dialogue, persuasion and active listening, reassurance and hard facts. In addition there was a formal survey and in-depth

workshops and a crucial balance between face to face explanation and media communications, some of which were translated.

- 1.8 The consultation findings and process to date need to be taken in context. Neither the findings nor consultation itself are the end of the story. This exercise was very much a first phase consultation, designed to raise awareness, assess preferences on the main options and establish the concerns and expectations of the community for later, more detailed work. Should the scheme proceed, there will be a number of important further opportunities for the community to be consulted – not least at the Outline Planning Phase (Autumn 2008) and detailed planning phases thereafter. In addition a formal ‘Local Voices Group’ is being developed as a practical working group between the community and the lead Partners (see section 3.48 for more details).
- 1.9 As well as informing the way forward, the consultation has also contributed to the Partners’ understanding of the socio-economic characteristics of the community and also challenged both the community and the Partners on how they might best work together on the housing strategy and design detail longer term.

1.10 Our Brief

- 1.11 The brief developed by English Partnerships required a multi faceted consultation and engagement aimed at local residents, community groups, the local school, mosque and traders requiring:
- A stakeholder audit.
 - Delivery of a communications programme, using a variety of methods, to communicate what is being proposed and why, the likely timescales and how local people can get involved.
 - Keeping local stakeholders and residents informed throughout the duration of the project.
 - Development of an ongoing process of developing collaborative relationships with local stakeholders and the community, and of providing opportunities for their views to feed into and influence the evolving scheme.
 - Documenting the consultation exercise via a Statement of Participation.

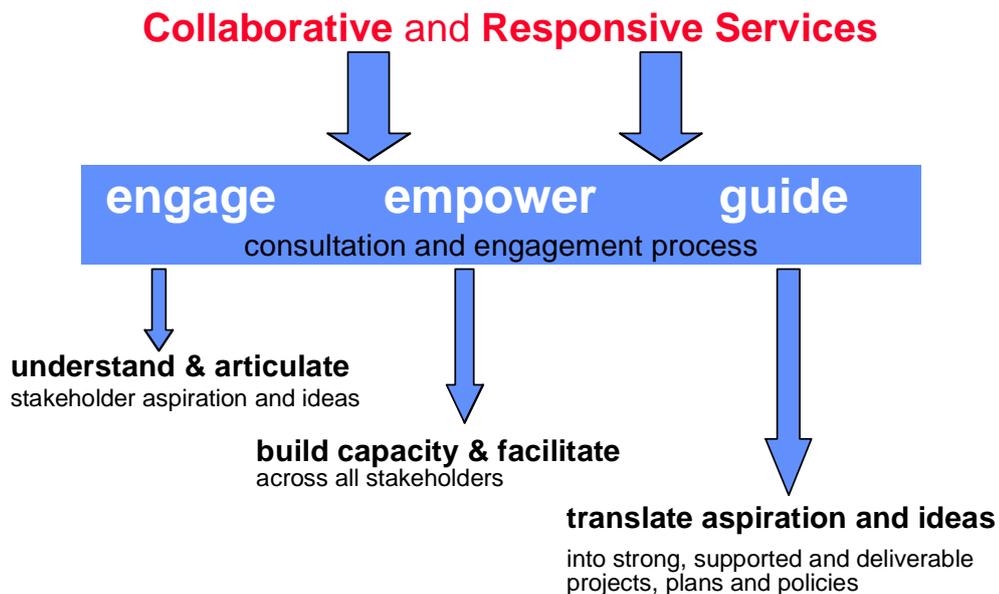
1.12 Our Approach/Methodology

“The Government is committed to developing strong, vibrant and sustainable communities and to promoting community cohesion in both urban and rural areas. This means meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion and creating equal opportunity for all citizens”

Department of Community and Local Government

1.13 Our approach to this project was informed by good practice, the policy and legislative background, Tower Hamlet Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and our own experience. The diagram below illustrates Scott Wilson's general approach to consultation and engagement within regeneration projects. Effective community engagement requires understanding of the community context, the timely provision of accessible information to enable a full range of stakeholders to engage effectively, and a strong process, which targets different stakeholders appropriately and provides good feedback to the client. Evaluations of engagement processes undertaken by Scott Wilson have shown that lack of feedback is a key weakness of some excellent processes. Another essential, which is sometimes under-emphasised is demonstrating to the community that their concerns have been properly addressed.

Figure 1: Consultation and Engagement process diagram



1.14 Underpinning our stakeholder engagement are the RTPI / Consultation Institutes' best practice guidelines (2005), which embraces 7 principles in terms of measurable standards:

Integrity (that the consultation has an honest intent)

Visibility (of engagement processes to interested participants)

Accessibility (ease at which participants can engage)

Confidentiality and Transparency (*presumption of transparency and following Freedom of Information Act*)

Full Disclosure (*consultors and consultees being open with each other*)

Fair Interpretation (*strict burden on consultors to analyse and interpret consultation output data objectively*)

Publication (*of results in accessible form*)

- 1.15 Scott Wilson's consultation and engagement proposals take the challenge of reaching out and engaging as many people as possible, extremely seriously. Engagement is about good communications together with an understanding of how communities, groups and vested interests work. How they can frustrate each other or work together for a greater good and a sustainable future. Every community is seen as unique and both strategy and practice is based on a thorough understanding of both a given community and what the client is trying to achieve.
- 1.16 In other words (and returning to our original quote from the DCLG (top)), we see consultation and engagement as more than just good planning practice, we see them as adding value to the wider challenge of nurturing active citizens and creating truly sustainable communities.

1.17 Description of Methods Used

- 1.18 Breaking the news of a major new regeneration proposal to a community is no easy task, particularly when it may result in the loss of homes and a change to the community fabric. Many of methods described briefly below therefore concentrated on one to one information and support to individual households and families, providing them with dedicated time to understand the regeneration principles and the implications of the key options.

Stakeholder analysis

- 1.19 It was important to build up a picture of the different interests and groups living in or serving the neighbourhood. These were built up over the first 2 months of the project and identified stakeholders according to their interests, characteristics and preferred method of communication. See Appendix 2 for a detailed breakdown.

Helpline

- 1.20 A bilingual freephone helpline was opened on 10th August 2007. It was advertised through the first consultation postcard, and advertised in all communication materials since then, including posters, leaflets, adverts and newsletters etc. It was also highlighted on the project website. 61 calls have been recorded until date of printing.

- 1.21 The helpline was designed to encourage requests for home visits for the first stage of consultation, as well as to provide callers with key information about the project. Callers with lots of questions and definitive comments and concerns were reminded that the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project was in early stages, and then encouraged to book a home visit for further discussion.
- 1.22 See Appendix 7 for a detailed description and analysis of helpline activity.

Level of translation Required

- 1.23 At least 50% of the target audience for the Blackwall Reach consultation programme did not have English as a first language. Translation was gauged to be required even in cases where some members of a family spoke English. In these cases, the emphasis was on cultural translation for complex concepts such as regeneration, decanting and urban design, rather than a direct translation of the words.
- 1.24 The challenge was to explain the concept of sustainable communities to an audience with low levels of interaction with the wider community, as well as urgent rehousing concerns, which could hinder engagement with the Blackwall Reach consultation process. The language barrier also made it easier for rumours about the regeneration proposals to abound among the Bangladeshi community. For example, they had limited access to factual information about the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project.
- 1.25 Communication in languages other than English, with Bengali being the main alternative, was therefore recognised to be crucial to the consultation programme. However a significant minority of the population was not Bengali. The level of translation had to be suitably adjusted, so as not to alienate the English speaking population.

Level of Translation Provided

- 1.26 A Scott Wilson consultation specialist with background in architecture and urban design led on the translation element, being a native Bengali speaker. Two Bangladeshi students were recruited for fieldwork. Both had prior experience in regeneration projects; one had translation and interpretation experience with LBTH.
- 1.27 Interpretation in other languages was provided on case to case basis; Somali and Portuguese were the only other languages requested. Translators were sourced from Scott Wilson staff as well as the translation wing of the London Borough of Newham (Language Shop), who then accompanied a fieldwork specialist from Scott Wilson on the home visit.
- 1.28 Full interpretation was provided in home visits. Residents' preferences for language of conducting the home visit were noted when visits were booked on the freephone helpline or through cold calling. Accordingly, a suitable fieldworker was appointed to carry out the home visit. Prompt cards used in home visits were translated into Bengali and issued to all Bengali-speaking fieldworkers.

- 1.29 Translations were provided of key communication materials, such as a community newsletter, consultation postcards and publicity posters.
- 1.30 The community gathering on 3rd November 2007 was staffed with three Bengali-speaking staff members from Scott Wilson, who had also carried out the home visits. Simultaneous interpretation was provided at key points of the community event, such as the straw poll. The rehousing workshop was facilitated by a bilingual member of staff, as large numbers of Bengali speakers were anticipated.

2 Section 2: Analysis of Findings

2.1 Introduction

- 2.2 This section draws on the wide range of information, opinion and ideas absorbed from working on the ground with stakeholders over a four month consultation period (August to November 2007). During this period there were two parallel activities going on. Firstly, the formal explaining and recording reaction to the development framework proposals. Secondly, an up-front 'hearts and minds' engagement in which the consultation advisors sought to help local residents understand the Lead Partners' view that something needed to be done, that doing nothing was not an option and that there has never been a better time to rebuild the neighbourhood.
- 2.3 However, the Development Framework was not presented as a fait accompli. Indeed, as has been detailed in Section 1, the Development Framework was drafted in such a way as to show that there were real options, sub-options and that this regeneration wasn't just about bricks and mortar issues; that sustainable communities thinking considered all aspects of people's lives, their environment and their future. This starting point was an important baseline and very much influenced both the style and the content of the consultation activities.
- 2.4 The detailed findings of each engagement and consultation activity carried out are written up in full in section 4 (Appendices). Here we summarise and analyse those findings.

2.5 Home Visit Survey

- 2.6 A total of 110 Home Visits were conducted at residential dwellings located within the red line area of the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project. The visits were conducted either in response to requests for a home visit by residents who called a project helpline or as a result of interviewers ('cold call') door-knocking at residences within the red-line.
- 2.7 The visits consisted of a scripted explanation of the development framework proposals so far and a prompted discussion of householder concerns, with a survey questionnaire being completed by the interviewer during the visit. The average visit was one hour duration. Whilst most visits were conducting during the day-time, evening visits were also conducted where requested.
- 2.8 This means of arranging home visits in response to requests is likely to mean that findings are skewed towards the views of residents who are more willing to engage in discussion regarding the redevelopment. A more random sampling method might have represented a more balanced sample of respondents. For further explanation of the methodology see section 1.

Profile of respondents

- 2.9 The majority, nearly 70% of respondents have lived at their current address for more than ten years. The community thus appears to consist of a very stable core of long-established households, with a relatively balanced mix of newer households. However, it is likely that the survey may over-represent longer established households and not truly represent the level of shorter stay households.
- 2.10 Over 70% of respondents identified themselves as Muslim and just over 10% of respondents identified themselves as Christian. This suggests that Muslims are somewhat over-represented and Christians under-represented, by comparison with Census figures on the local population profile¹.
- 2.11 Bangladeshis made up 60% of respondents in terms of ethnic identity, with the next largest groups being White people and Black people. Again, Bangladeshi households are somewhat over-represented amongst respondents, when considered against Census data on the local population profile.
- 2.12 56% of respondents were women and 43% were men. (the remaining 1% is not profiled, as in these cases, more than one person's answers were included in the survey responses). This gender imbalance probably reflects the fact that there is a high level of economic inactivity amongst women, who are therefore more likely to be at home in the daytime.
- 2.13 22% of respondents considered themselves or a member of their household to be disabled. Of those, a third is affected by a mental disability and just under two thirds are affected by a physical disability. This suggests quite a high level of self-defined disability amongst the population.

¹ It is likely that the 2001 Census now significantly under-estimates the number of Bangladeshi Households living in the neighbourhood in 2007.

- 2.14 Over 50% of respondents stated that they or someone else in their household acted as a carer to a family member, friend, neighbour or others because they have long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability, or problems relating to old age. This means that carers' specific needs are likely to be of particular importance.

Preference for Two Main Options for Development

- 2.15 Of those who had already formed a preference between the two main options for redevelopment (85% of respondents), a clear majority (81%) preferred Option 2 of knocking down and replacing Robin Hood Gardens. Only 17% preferred Option 1 of keeping Robin Hood Gardens. Although this suggests there is no great attachment to the two main blocks, this percentage needs to be treated with some caution. Firstly, this preference wasn't explored beyond the straightforward question, 'If Yes, (i.e they had a preference), what is your Preference?' (Q22). In particular the Option 2 preference was not explored in terms of a further question which asked respondents which housing tenure options they would consider. This is analysed below.

Housing Tenure Options

- 2.16 A number of housing options were explained to residents throughout the consultation period and their reactions sought. Under current Government Policy, local Councils are not allowed to build new homes on their land. Throughout the consultation period the Government appeared to be at the point of reviewing this policy. However, this door has now been closed again, leading to some confusion on the part of many tenants who very much hoped this was a genuine option.
- 2.17 In response to a key question on the housing tenure options they would consider (e.g. Housing Association, Council, Shared Ownership, Private Rental, Purchase Own Home), 95% of existing council tenants identified Tower Hamlets Council rented home as a housing option as part of the redevelopment, as against 36% who would consider a Housing Association rented home and 46% who would consider purchasing their own

home². In other words, although just over a third of tenants would consider a housing association home, a much higher proportion also mentioned their preference for a Council rented home.

- 2.18 Of those respondents, both existing leaseholders and council tenants, who stated that they would prefer to remain living in the neighbourhood, a smaller proportion, 27%, reported they would consider a Housing Association rented home.
- 2.19 Taken together it can be concluded that the vast majority of existing tenants want *both* redevelopment *and* council housing, with a relatively small percentage of those who wish to remain in the neighbourhood prepared to keep their options open with regard to a housing association home.
- 2.20 Given current Government policy on new build affordable housing, consultation advisors recommend that the lead Partners and the Local Voices Group take an objective look at the services provided by Housing Associations and the advantages and disadvantages of housing association tenancies and report back to the whole community at a future stage.

Future place of residence

- 2.21 77% of respondents answered that they would wish to remain living in the neighbourhood following redevelopment of the area. 39% would consider a move elsewhere in Tower Hamlets, whilst 18% would prefer to move out of Tower Hamlets. Residents showed a strong commitment to remaining in the neighbourhood.
- 2.22 Of 55 respondents with children living in the household who attend Woolmore School, 87% indicated that their housing choices would be influenced by a preference for a child or children to continue at Woolmore Primary School.

²² See Appendix 4 for further analysis.

- 2.23 49% of respondents considered their household to be overcrowded. Whilst this finding is based on subjective responses, it does provide an indication of high levels of overcrowding, as a result of 'hidden households' or where the size of the household relative to the size of the residence is such that it causes overcrowding.
- 2.24 2% of respondents considered their household to be under-occupied. This finding is based on subjective responses and is likely to be an under-estimate of existing levels of under-occupancy, particularly as many households have lived at their current address for over 10 years, long enough for families to have grown up and children moved out.

Social and community facilities and amenities

- 2.25 The availability of a range of local facilities is highly valued by current residents. The most frequently identified facilities in response to an open-ended question were the schools and colleges, Woolmore School in particular; shops, supermarkets and markets in the vicinity, including Poplar High Street; doctors and a health centre; mosque; church; youth facilities; and Post Office.
- 2.26 In response to a multiple choice ranking question, the top three priority facilities and services emerge, in order, as:
- Well-maintained building
 - Health facilities
 - Local place of worship
- 2.27 Other lower priority services include local affordable shops, play facilities, facilities for older people and leisure facilities. It is likely that the spread of views reflects the different identities of respondents, in terms of their age group or lifestyle.
- 2.28 Dissatisfaction with existing facilities identified in response to an open ended question were lack of a leisure centre; distance to a children's centre; access to a GP, poor quality health centre; inadequate shops; lack of youth facilities/provision.
- 2.29 Lack of provision for young people was identified as a serious problem by 42% of respondents and as some problem by 39% of respondents.
- 2.30 Lack of provision for older people was identified as a serious problem by 35% of respondents and as some problem by 33% of respondents.

Features of a new or improved home

- 2.31 The existing condition of the housing stock is a major issue of concern for respondents. Recurrent issues concerning building maintenance included water leaks within the building; poor maintenance and need for repairs; old and poor condition of the buildings; problems with the conditions of the lifts and stairwells; problems of drainage and sewage; and infestations by insects and rodents.

- 2.32 The immediate external environment is also a major issue of concern. Recurrent complaints concerning the living environment were: dirty, depressing and unattractive buildings and surrounds; overcrowded accommodation; litter; and crime.
- 2.33 Aspects of current housing that are valued include council responsibility for housing management (even though respondents thought they were not particularly well managed) and that bills are included in rent. Other aspects included a liking for the layout of the accommodation, generous size of rooms, and good soundproofing.
- 2.34 Respondents' top priorities for a future new or refurbished home in response to a closed-end question, in order, were:
- Secure and managed entrance and communal areas
 - Size of bedrooms
 - Size of living room
 - Separate toilet and bathroom
 - Private external space – balcony or garden
- 2.35 Energy saving design was identified as a low priority, although as one respondent commented, this may be because people do not yet really understand it.
- 2.36 96 respondents identified other features that they particularly want to see in a new or refurbished home. These were quite diverse. However, some of the major themes, which add to the features identified via the multiple choice questions are:
- Bigger or improved kitchen
 - Additional toilet or bathroom
 - Window in bathroom, ventilation in bathroom
 - Disabled friendly
 - Specific requirements regarding internal layout of accommodation

Atmosphere, Community Feel and Location

- 2.37 Recurrent positive comments on the atmosphere included the sense that the area is spacious; peaceful; safe; comfortable; 'relatively little trouble'; friends, family and/or relatives close by; neighbours. Comments relating to the community included 'thriving', 'healthy mix'; and 'belonging, having lived here a long time'. The location was valued as close to Canary Wharf, Docklands and convenient for other parts of London.
- 2.38 Recurrent complaints within this theme included: problems with drug users in the area; unhappiness with the existing community mix and relations between different ethnic and faith groups; anti-social behaviour; bullying of children; influence of gangs; poor safety and security; lack of adaptation for disabled people within their home. A few additionally

commented that the area feels cut off from wealth in the wider area and suffers from isolation.

Transport and traffic

- 2.39 Many respondents identified the buses, bus stop, DLR station and trains as important, with others commenting that the area was 'well connected' for transport.
- 2.40 However, there were also recurrent complaints aired about traffic-related issues, including:
- Noise from the Blackwall tunnel including the loud speakers
 - Traffic congestion
 - Need for speed humps or better pedestrian crossings on Cotton Street
 - Bad air pollution
 - Poor parking for residents – parking used by commuters
- 2.41 53% of respondents identified pollution as a serious problem.

Open spaces

- 2.42 The park, open spaces, school ground, playground and football pitches were identified as valued parts of Blackwall Reach, mainly referring to the open space area within Robin Hood Gardens.

Crime, anti-social behaviour and policing

- 2.43 Drugs or alcohol related problems are identified as the most important problem affecting respondents, with 63% identifying it as serious problem and 17% as some problem.
- 2.44 Local crime is identified as a relatively significant problem - 38% identify it as a serious problem and 33% identified it as some problem.
- 2.45 The general issue of crime was recurrent as a complaint about the area, but with a range of different, but nevertheless serious examples of specific concerns identified. These covered: theft from cars; car-jacking; poor police response; drug-related crime; theft and vandalism.
- 2.46 Respondents identified the following as the top three measures they would welcome to make Blackwall Reach a safer and more tolerant neighbourhood:
- Increased police patrolling and stronger information sharing between Police and other agencies
 - CCTV
 - Better lighting

General Concerns about redevelopment - tenants

2.47 There is a relatively high level of general non-specific anxiety about the uncertainty of future amongst tenants. The main specific areas of concern were regarding the rehousing process and the future make-up of the community post redevelopment.

2.48 Amongst tenants, concerns about the re-housing process focused on:

- Knowing the timescale, duration, location and suitability of temporary housing
- Costs associated with moving
- Temporary inconvenience
- Being forced to move out of the area permanently, with an associated concern that this is to make the area an exclusive area
- Fear of being moved away from own community
- Determination to remain living in area
- Who decides where people will be moved to
- Desire to remain a council tenant and retain the right to buy
- Financial costs including increased rent and bills, and particular concerns due to personal circumstances making them more vulnerable to increased costs
- Compensation for improvements to existing house
- Effects on children's education
- Quality of future new homes

2.49 Amongst tenants, concerns about the future community focused on:

- What facilities will be provided in the future (whether in the regenerated area or in other area where rehoused)
- Future racial or religious mix of the community, with preference for a mixed community without a single dominant group
- Scale of buildings, with preference for low scale

Concerns about redevelopment - leaseholders & freeholders

2.50 Fewer comments were given by leaseholders concerning the redevelopment. Those given are summarised below:

- Knowing the timescale for the regeneration
- Financial compensation and valuation of property
- Don't want to move from the area or even move house
- Increased financial costs, including increased mortgage

- How vulnerable leaseholders' concerns will be dealt with
- Size of future new home and whether new homes accessible to them after redevelopment will have comparable space standards
- Inconvenience and disruption during rebuilding

2.51 Workshops

2.52 Three workshops were held with key stakeholder groups, namely young men, women and the mosque committee. The workshops were designed to empower and build relationships, to explore issues at a depth not possible in the home visits and to identify priorities. Full accounts can be found in Appendix 5. We summarise below the main issues that emerged.

Women's Workshop

2.53 27 women attended the workshop; all were local residents and almost all from Robin Hood Gardens. All attendees were Bengali except one. The workshop used a mixture of approaches to draw out detailed information including filling out daily timelines, resource mapping, identifying aspirations for the regeneration by theme, and collectively deciding on a 'crunch' question to ask the Partners at the forthcoming community event.

2.54 The women were encouraged to arrive at a list of key priorities that the development Partners could take forward. The following list was agreed:

- Safer neighbourhood
- Modern and spacious layouts of homes
- Leisure centre
- Bills to remain the same
- Hidden households – their right to be housed
- Better health services
- Mixed community
- Bigger mosque
- Live-in security personnel
- More storage room
- Noise proof walls and floor

2.55 The discussions generated in the women's workshop indicated a number of important characteristics of this group which possibly extends to the Bengali community as a whole.

- 2.56 An inherent distrust of ‘developers’ was evident; participants were wary of the BRRP and the consultation, suspecting that their views would somehow be used against them, to push a development forward against their wishes. Some feared poor treatment from the regeneration Partners in terms of their choices and compensation, which limited their ability to engage with wider issues in the regeneration.
- 2.57 At the same time, participants were excited about the possibility of change and improvement. They bought into the possibility of BRRP bringing a change for the better, being most interested in the community facilities that could be delivered, including better health facilities, leisure opportunities and security provisions, besides the improvement of their living conditions.
- 2.58 Based on this workshop, a key facility to be prioritised is a community centre, with an educational, recreational as well as religious remit. According to participants at this workshop, such a facility should be equipped to accommodate women, youths and children comfortably, without the activities of one group encroaching on those of the others. This is expected to contribute to making the neighbourhood safer, and to promote a community feeling, thereby giving the facility a better chance of upkeep than existing facilities on site.
- 2.59 A crucial theme generated by this workshop is that of trust and guarantees. This is reflected in the ‘crunch question’ put to the panel, several individual conversations with participants at the workshop, as well as the formal findings recorded in the tables in this section. The women of Blackwall Reach collectively ask for a form of ensuring that their priorities and concerns will be addressed by the BRRP.

Youth Club Workshop

- 2.60 Although a number of children and younger teenagers participated in the community gathering, it was thought important by the Partners to spend additional time talking to older teenagers and young men. The workshop was organised through the popular on-estate youth club and attended by 15, all Asian Bengali except one. All attendees were males aged between 16 and 23 years reflecting the dominant users of the youth club. Two attendees were youth club organisers and respected activists locally.
- 2.61 This was a semi-formal structured workshop with planned activities using prepared materials as well as discussion oriented sections around table groups. The meeting benefited from having the exhibition boards up around the walls and these were used to explain the regeneration proposals. The response was mixed, showing potentially good group leaders, but also a level of apathy among the youth in general.
- 2.62 The importance of on-site and nearby facilities to this group was emphasised:

Table 1: Facilities discussed at Youth Workshop

| Facility | Status / Comments |
|--|---|
| Community Hall | This is where the Robin Hood Gardens Youth Club operates from and is very important to this group. |
| Tower Hamlets College | Several participants were students at this institution. |
| Langdon Park Community Centre | Important as an evening football venue. |
| DLR network; Blackwall and All Saints stations | Used frequently; link to Beckton and to Canary Wharf's shopping facilities. |
| Poplar Mosque and Community Centre | Important to young Asian men as a central feature of their community in Blackwall Reach. |
| Mc Donald's at Prestons Road roundabout | Used frequently as a destination for a midnight snack; issues around dangerous crossing at the roundabout; the underpass is less used because it takes too much time. |
| DLR network; Blackwall and All Saints stations | Used frequently; link to Beckton and to Canary Wharf's shopping facilities. |

2.63 The above table shows the importance of local facilities in Tower Hamlets to this group. However, it may also indicate a lack of confidence and aspiration about engaging with the wider city.

2.64 A number of key issues emerged from the workshop session which were not spelt out as succinctly as the women's workshop, but nevertheless indicate areas of opportunity and concern to the youth of Blackwall Reach that the Partners need to be aware of as the project develops.

- The group came to a consensus that as a minority ethnic community, their interests needed special representation in the political arena, preferably through a member of their own community.

- Members of this group are keen to head business establishments in the near future and consider themselves capable of this if the BRRP generates enough retail space at affordable rental rates.
- Overall, this group's support of the BRRP hinges on their right to come back to the area. On a related note, participants stated that their decision would depend on the quality and conditions of their rehousing offer, whether temporary or permanent. Another decisive issue is the tenants' right to buy, post-regeneration.
- Participants at this workshop, while choosing Option 2 over Option 1, asserted that when participants at the community event on 3rd November supported Option 2 in straw poll, they believed that this involved them moving back to the site with secure council tenancies.
- Three members of this group have volunteered to be on the Local Voices Group.

Mosque Workshop

- 2.65 A specific workshop was held with the mosque committee (Poplar Mosque and Community Centre) to reflect its importance as a religious and cultural centre in the neighbourhood, its position as a freeholder and to take forward the Mosque's desire to expand its operation as detailed in a letter to the Council in October 2007.
- 2.66 The meeting was attended by representatives from the project Partners and their engagement consultants including two translators from the fieldwork team. From the mosque, members of mosque committee attended including the Secretary together with community elders and two young men currently organising the youth club.
- 2.67 This workshop was semi-formal and discussion-oriented rather than structured around activities, which was gauged to be the best way to interact with this particular interest group. A number of important issues were raised:
- The limitations of the current mosque. At present the site can only act as a prayer room and women cannot worship here as there is only one entrance.
 - The mosque committee spoke of its aspiration to enter into partnership with different faith and cultural groups, as it professes social cohesion, welfare and well-being as its ideals. The committee recognised that there are members of the community who are capable, energetic and enthusiastic enough to achieve these ideals.
 - Although the mosque committee had not appreciated the very different community profile of the new (i.e. expanded community) that would come to live in the area post-regeneration, their aims were not incompatible with such an expansion. In particular their aspirations, now committed to paper in the form of a petition to LBTH, for a multi-purpose social, cultural, educational and recreational centre were made clear to the Partners. The extent to which the mosque committee ran the whole centre or part of it was not clear. The future structure and management arrangements of any such facility are likely to be sensitive and an independent feasibility study will need to be commissioned at a future point once the resources available for such a centre are clearer.

- It is notable, though, that there were participants of the workshop who did not want the mosque to be the main common services delivery agent.

Community Gathering – Reaching out to Blackwall

- 2.68 A major public event was run towards the end of the consultation period. This was delayed twice, once to avoid Ramadan (mid September to mid October) and once to avoid half term and make best use of the primary school as the preferred venue and its staff.
- 2.69 With such a large regeneration initiative coming unexpectedly, it was seen as important to hold a whole day community event which went beyond the traditional exhibition or public meeting – particularly as the Blackwall Reach helpline and home visits indicated a strong desire amongst residents for answers to their questions, information, reassurance, more detail and to know the opinions of other residents.
- 2.70 The event, held on the 3rd November 2007 was designed to engage local residents and encourage conversation, to give access to professionals and to provide a level of information and reassurance for people to start forming a conclusion about the development principles and the key options. A diverse range of outcomes were sought:

Table 2: Community Gathering Outcomes

| Expected Outcome | Comment |
|---|--|
| To bring the whole community together, regardless of age, ethnicity or tenure. | 225 residents signed in on reception, over 60 children engaged plus approximately 10-15 youths. |
| To symbolically and successfully ‘launch’ the regeneration proposal. | Sense of occasion and seriousness of the regeneration proposals very much in evidence from feedback sheets and questions being asked. |
| To show how the regeneration proposals can respond to resident needs, concerns and ideas. | 5 workshops, question time debate and exhibition all succeeded in getting across the relevance and flexibility of the regeneration proposals. |
| The identification of volunteers for a ‘Local Voices’ group to work closely with the project team in the future | 30 local residents of all ages identified and ‘signed up’. |
| To raise ‘whole community’ consciousness and persuade people they really are the starting point. | Community able to show their muscle, improved trust between BRRP project team and residents, majority in favour of regeneration principles. Strong support for Option 2 (demolishing RHG). |

| | |
|--|---|
| To celebrate the current community and understand its potential. | Sense of occasion palpable. Residents stayed for longer than expected, many all day. Partners deepening understanding that this is a living community, not just a development area. |
| A common sense of purpose and direction. | Strong involvement in straw polls at end of day, Increased trust and enthusiasm to work with Partners through Local Voices Group. |

- 2.71 The day was considered a success by the Partners in terms of meeting its objectives and producing some valuable 'process' outcomes. In addition a wide range of opinions, ideas, understanding and concerns were captured from the wide number of parallel activities taking place throughout the day including a housing and leaseholder workshop, an exhibition of the proposals and housing options, a explanation by the architect together with a purpose built scale model, a debate and straw poll. These are written up in detail in Appendix 6.

3 Section 3: Implications for the Way Forward

3.1 We conclude this report with a number of conclusions and recommendations around the Draft Development Framework together with recommendations on how to maintain and build upon the positive relations and understanding between the Partners, wider project team and the residential stakeholders in Blackwall Reach.

3.2 Regeneration Boundary

3.3 The consultation findings challenge the presently drawn 'red' line in 4 ways. Whether this results in a formal re-drawing of the regeneration boundary or the acknowledgement of a 'fuzzy boundary' requires further deliberation.

3.4 Residents in the West Block of RHG feel almost as affected by traffic, noise and pollution as those overlooking the Blackwall Tunnel Approach. Traffic calming, crossing points and environmental measures along Cotton Street, together with a better link into the key open space of All Saints churchyard seems to suggest that the red line should be re-drawn to encompass the streetscape along both sides of Cotton Street.

3.5 Similarly, significant concerns were expressed about the Aspen Way underpass and the currently dangerous alternative means of crossing being used by children (on their way to Woolmore Primary School) as well as the young people and adults (for example using the McDonald's outlet) suggests the need to demonstrate more formally to residents that this area will be addressed within the scope of this regeneration and not left to an ad-hoc separate initiative.

3.6 The difficult position being faced by leaseholders in Indigo Mews in terms of the area being declared a regeneration zone needs to be addressed. We understand a re-drawing of the red-line to the south of Ashton Street would remove many problems associated with the re-sale of these properties on the open market.

3.7 The usability of the only other significant open space in the area, namely the All Saints Churchyard, is also a key issue. This is an area almost as large as the current Millennium Green in Robin Hood Gardens. It currently suffers from vandalism, poor image (particularly in terms of perceptions of personal safety) and access problems – in that it doesn't meet pedestrians 'desire lines' and has relatively few entrances and exits. We would suggest that residents would use this space and the passage linking Bazely Street with Cotton Street more if a comprehensive solution was taken to east-west connectivity which included the passage and churchyard gardens.

3.8 The Vision

- 3.9 The development framework articulates a number of principles in terms of the overall vision. We found a majority support for the overall principles behind this regeneration with a straw poll at the key Community Gathering in which 61% expressed their support. However, such support is tempered by concerns from both activists and residents generally that the area will become over-developed and lose a lot of its current social character and cohesion in the process. A stronger statement underpinning the Social, Cultural and Equity components of sustainable communities aspiration will be important for the Regeneration Partners to develop over the coming months.

3.10 The Green Park

- 3.11 We found mixed levels of appreciation of the current open space by residents generally. However, this was balanced by an appreciation by a minority of white, Afro-Caribbean and Bangladeshi residents and their children of its specific value. The raised flower beds function as (very well tended) salad and vegetable patches from the community while the sunken games area is popular among both white and Asian youths. Parents of young children felt that managed access to play areas for older and younger children was important, as there had been instances of bullying on the estate. The park was felt to be lacking in landscape features such as seating, pathways, sandboxes and paved areas, which would have made it more usable.

3.12 Movement and Connectivity

- 3.13 There was general agreement for the development framework analysis that the area was isolated by busy roads. Perhaps not surprisingly, amongst younger people we found few concerns about movement within the red line area, but significant concerns in terms of their experience moving about in nearby neighbourhoods – a concern linked to perceptions of what ‘ethnic zone’ in Tower Hamlets they were moving around in. Amongst the young men there was a perception that this part of Tower Hamlets had been deliberately engineered into different ethnic ‘zones’. The diagram below shows those movement patterns that are seen as most problematic by local people:

Diagram 1: Problematic access points according to residents



Source: HCLA, marked up by Scott Wilson

3.14 Transport

- 3.15 Young people also told us of at least 3 accidents they knew about involving residents trying to cross Cotton Street. The problems of all age groups negotiating the Aspen way roundabout have already been discussed. Conversely the advantage of decking over the Blackwall Tunnel in terms of connectivity to the East left many residents bemused. They seemed quite content with their current (infrequent) use of the Naval Row route into East India dock and the town hall. Further desire line modeling may be needed here.
- 3.16 It is recommended that the regenerations boundary (the red line) is redrawn to embrace both sides of Cotton Street including the pedestrian passage between Bazely Street and Cotton Street. This would allow for more comprehensive streetscape improvements and coupled with an opening and improvements of the All Saints Churchyard create a crucial green link between Robin Hood Gardens open space and the All Saints space.

- 3.17 On the other hand there was a great deal of support for an upper pedestrian/shopping level connecting the street and new residential blocks to the DLR level as well as keeping the current bus routes. The women's workshop made a strong case to reinstate the number 330 and D8 bus route for shopping purposes.

3.18 Height and Scale of Building

- 3.19 The proposal to build 2 high towers at the Southern end of the site appeared to shock a number of residents. There were several comments at the community gathering as to why the two towers had to be quite so high (40 storeys and more). Whilst building heights are increasing all the time around the edges of the neighbourhood, the current nearest and highest residential tower (Ontario Wharf) is significantly shorter at 29 stories. The explanation for such a high tower within the site is therefore likely to require further justification and some objections to buildings of such height can be anticipated at outline planning stage.
- 3.20 More generally the development of development framework Option 2 needs careful attention being paid to the overall design and layout principles, as it clearly involves considerable intensification to the existing urban fabric. Some people considered that more intensive development is not always appropriate. Adherence to a clear set of design principles needs to be made clear to residents and reflected in drawing up more detailed plans.

3.21 Location of Key Uses

- 3.22 The consultation did not specifically engage residents in the appropriateness of different land-use locations. However a number of expectations emerged which will need to be addressed at outline stage:
- The mosque committee are looking to relocate in a quiet corner site within the regeneration area which will be minimally affected by traffic noise.
 - The youth club are assuming they will keep their sunken play area (which currently sits close to the community/youth centre).
 - Residents currently using the GP surgery on Robin Hood Lane are assuming the facility will remain in the neighbourhood or be replaced by one within close walking distance.
 - Primary School users and staff have expressed the strong opinion that the school remains functional until a new school is in place.
 - There were strong preferences for the bus route to remain as close as it is now.
 - There was some support amongst the younger people for shops on the ground floor with residential above. This was seen as a means to increase entrepreneurship within the community.

3.23 Housing Mix

3.24 The consultation revealed concerns around people ending up in a ‘tower’ in the North West corner. There was also some cynicism about building over the Blackwall Tunnel approach – i.e. where will the pollution go? The ability of the Partners to demonstrate that the housing over the Blackwall Tunnel approach and in the North West corner will work as well as the family housing around the green park in terms of layout, views and environmental factors will be important here.

3.25 A more overwhelming and consistent request was for suitably sized family accommodation – e.g. 3, 4 and 5 bedroom properties. Therefore more consideration will need to be given to the appropriate mix of types and sizes of dwelling that will meet the housing needs of the existing and future local community. This approach is supported by the advice in paragraph 69 of Planning Policy Statement 3, that states:

“In general, in deciding planning applications, Local Planning Authorities should have regard to:

- Achieving high quality housing.
- Ensuring developments achieve a good mix of housing reflecting the accommodation requirements of specific groups, in particular, families and older people.
- The suitability of a site for housing, including its environmental sustainability.
- Using land effectively and efficiently.”

This planning policy recommendation will be a focus of the planning statement.

3.26 Shopping and Commercial

3.27 There was general support in the home visits for the idea of commercial and shopping functions being developed along the portion of Poplar High Street running through the site. However, the consultation period did not succeed in engaging with many local traders or businesses and further work is needed here, particularly in terms of how these stakeholders view the proposals and how their businesses will be impacted on. Some traders displayed posters of the Community Gathering and those from the local parade were invited, however very few came and it is recommended that further consultation work spelling out the implications for local retail traders be carried out once the commercial retail space requirement is clearer.

3.28 Through informal conversations at the community events, a number of adult residents made it clear that the types, quality and geographical spread of existing shopping areas did not meet their day-to-day needs. They also said they didn’t like the route to shopping areas or crossing the busy local roads. A few long-term residents said they would like to see shops mixed into the residential area in order to reduce local travel

distances. They explained that a local large food store had closed down, so it had reduced their choice of goods. They said they would support a large new supermarket, subject to it not causing too much local disruption in terms of traffic and deliveries.

3.29 Key Options for Regeneration

- 3.30 The consultation was careful throughout to avoid forcing consent to any one option. Most of the community is open-minded and a clear consensus emerged at the community gathering event in November in an open session ‘straw poll’. 82% of the 72 people voting opted for demolition of Robin Hood Gardens (Option 2) with 15% wanting to keep the blocks and 3% not knowing. This compares with an almost identical percentage (81%) voting for Option 2 in the home visit survey. However, as discussed in 2.15 and 2.18 above, for many residents this degree of support was closely linked to their ability to remain or return to the neighbourhood and crucially to keep their Council tenure. For many residents this first phase consultation raised as many questions as it answered, both in terms of re-housing policy and detailed design issues such as the location of buildings and which land uses are needed to meet the community’s current needs and those of future generations.
- 3.31 Many of the concerns raised by the survey, discussion groups and workshops all confirm that issues, such as crime, community safety and community cohesion, can in part be addressed through good design. For example crime can be reduced through well lit and appropriately landscaped pedestrian routes to bus stops, shops, schools and community facilities and housing concerns can be addressed through the design of high quality and appropriate types of housing that meet local people’s needs.

3.32 Development Principles

- 3.33 This regeneration project is very relevant to Government expectations towards the creation of a ‘sustainable community’ (paragraph 6, PPS1) and the associated key housing policy goal which “is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live” (paragraph 9, PPS3).
- 3.34 However at present the Draft Development Framework (DDF) shows a number of key principles (para 2.6.7 of DDF) which are almost wholly concerned with the massing, the broad mix and the design opportunities. In the course of the consultation it became clear that these markers were not seen as comprehensive enough; that there are a number of other principles which are particularly poignant to this community:
- The current community are the starting point for this regeneration project rather than just a group of current residents who cannot be ignored.
 - People have a right to remain or at least to return (i.e. in the event of a temporary decanting programme).

- Secure Council tenants wishing to remain will not lose their current secure tenancy.
- They will be no worse off in terms of the space they enjoy as a household.
- This regeneration project will develop new opportunities for the existing (as well as new) residents, particularly in terms of jobs, training, schooling and enterprise.
- Residents articulated the wish to have a strong voice and a commitment by the Partners to respond to their concerns.

3.35 It is recommended that the Partners work closely with community representatives through the Local Voices Group to develop these principles further into a community charter (see 3.55).

3.36 Implications for re-housing strategy

3.37 The secure tenants' 'Right to Return' has been a recurring theme throughout the consultation. Tenants have a high degree of awareness around this aspect of re-housing, and the majority has a strong opinion, voiced through all the consultation channels, that they expect to return to the neighbourhood after regeneration. This may not have been anticipated at the outset of the project. A means to deal with this expectation needs to be formulated - whether by aiming to meet it or to manage it.

3.38 Tenants have also consistently made clear their desire to remain Council Tenants. Only 36.2% are willing to consider a Housing Association landlord. This has historical roots as the estate recently threw out, after a campaign, a proposal for a stock transfer. Given that 77.3% want to remain in the Blackwall Reach area, it would be worthwhile to assess the number of Council properties available to bid for within ten minutes distance of the red line site. This would give the Partners and their advisors a realistic basis for communication with residents.

3.39 The official terminology used by the Council in explaining the re-housing process may itself be a barrier to understanding. This is especially true in case of the 'bidding' concept, as the term may have negative connotations (to do with gambling) for the Muslim community, which is forbidden to gamble on religious grounds.

3.40 Similarities and differences between Secure Tenancy and Assured Tenancy need to be articulated clearly; the same applies to the distinction between 'Right to Buy' and 'Right to Acquire'. Information about how a new rent structure would impact on monthly payments would go a long way towards reassuring tenants that their concerns were being addressed by the Partners; even though this information is unlikely to be available in the near future, a clear timescale for access to such information would be much appreciated.

3.41 A high number of hidden households are likely to appear when the Council carries out individual housing needs assessments. Many of these hidden households will not have the same priority for re-housing as the friends or relatives who are secure tenants. even though

many are already on waiting lists for housing. The fact that their position on the choice based lettings system will be different from co-habiting friends and relatives, who are secure tenants, may be a difficult concept for many to understand and accept. The status of housing applicants who live with leaseholders on the Blackwall Reach site, i.e. not benefiting from decant status, is another issue which may be hard for residents to understand. It may be useful for Partners to anticipate this gap in understanding while drafting a bespoke re-housing policy for the area.

- 3.42 A majority of families of Woolmore Primary School pupils have clearly expressed that they expect both temporary and permanent re-housing offers to consider proximity to the school, as they wish their children to continue there and with minimum disruption during the regeneration. It may be worth considering that these families be treated as a special group in terms of rehousing priority.
- 3.43 Advice and assistance through the re-housing process is a key concern for residents, especially the aged, sick or disabled. While Partners have indicated sensitive treatment of such tenants and mentioned the involvement of social services in the future of this regeneration, tenants are not clear on channels of communication. Clarity on who the residents' first point of contact would be, exactly how vulnerable tenants' personal carers would be involved, as well as other pertinent details of the re-housing process would be instrumental in reassuring this group. As with the monthly payments question, a timescale for access to this information would suffice for the near future.
- 3.44 In addition to vulnerable tenants, several vulnerable leaseholders have expressed the need for re-housing assistance from the Council. Some of these residents, among them the oldest inhabitants of Robin Hood Gardens and Anderson House, have no relatives or carers and live independently, but may not be able to cope with re-housing themselves without any support. Anticipating this need and possibly providing the required assistance would be good practice on behalf of the Partners.
- 3.45 It is important at this stage for Partners to generate process diagrams and timelines for stages in the BRRP which affect re-housing decisions. Tenants need to know when key decisions that affect them will be made, who will make them, and the rational processes behind them.
- 3.46 The new government legislation for greener, more affordable housing, published on 16th November 2007, may offer some exciting possibilities for Tower Hamlets Council in terms of housing. There may be potential for LBTH to take advantage of the new housing and regeneration bill to tailor re-housing strategy to the needs of Blackwall Reach. For instance, the consultation findings indicate a call for LBTH to build and manage new homes within the regeneration site, which may well be easier for the Council to attempt with the new legislation in place.
- 3.47 However, it is important to remind tenants that the Council's resources are limited. Expectations from the regeneration must be managed – the only guarantee is that

whatever they get will be better than what they have. Given the fact that social housing is for those who cannot afford the housing market themselves, it would be unfair of tenants to expect to be offered their dream home. While there cannot be any meaningful guarantees of re-housing quality, more evidence of levels of satisfaction in past decanting programmes would be useful.

3.48 Implications for Forward Community Engagement

Introduction

- 3.49 There will be a number of formal opportunities for the residents to voice their opinions again should the regeneration proceed, not least at the outline (or hybrid) planning application and detailed planning applications or reserved matters that will follow. However, it is considered that another layer of regular engagement is also vital, both in terms of developing a partnership with the community and in terms of ensuring that the skills, interest, experience and priorities of the current community feed through into the sustainable community strategy for the neighbourhood that emerges.
- 3.50 An emerging consensus became apparent towards the end of the consultation period and was most evident at the community gathering 'Reaching out to Blackwall'. This tailored event allowed the community to find its voice and together to conclude that it would be beneficial for them to support the overall approach including the demolition of Robin Hood Gardens. However, the consultants consider that whilst this was a clear consensus and one consistently identified throughout the consultation, it is a relatively fragile one.

Need for Dialogue

- 3.51 There were a number of flash-points during consultation, not least around re-housing policies and the suggestion that the effect, if not the intention of the proposals is to break the community up. These will need careful and sensitive handling by the development Partners, but a positive and strong relationship with the key community stakeholders will help to weather those periods where the community perceives it is not getting everything it expected.
- 3.52 Any complex, long term regeneration needs a regular and practical point of contact between the key drivers and the community. The first step towards the formation of such a body was taken at the Community Gathering in November where the engagement specialists introduced participants to the idea of forming a 'Local Voices Group' drawn from residents across the estate. The initiative was popular with 30 residents signing up, rather more than expected.

Local Voices Group – Terms of Reference and Programme

- 3.53 The Regeneration Partners, English Partnerships and Tower Hamlets are committed in principle to developing an accessible, meaningful, lasting and practical approach to ongoing resident involvement in the BRRP. The regeneration Partners are committed to providing adequate resources for the Local Voices Group to be well serviced and for community participants to have good support, for example training, childcare, access to consultants and advice
- 3.54 It is intended that the Local Voices Group will develop its role and structure over time. Draft aims can be found in Appendix 9 and are currently being developed into terms of reference with the community participants. Key to the success of the Local Voices Group will be the relationship and trust the lead Partners and community representatives can develop. The consultation advisors recommend it is a ‘closed’ working group reporting back to regular ‘open’ meetings and settles down to become a group of 12-15 participants that is demonstrably representative of the wider community in terms of age, sex, disability and ethnicity.
- 3.55 It is further recommended that Leaseholders are properly represented on the Local Voices Group and form a key working group linked to the main group with separate meetings with the lead Partners when necessary. We also suggest that the Blackwall Reach website has a regularly updated dedicated page for leaseholder and freeholder interests.

Community Charter

- 3.56 An important early task of the Local Voices Group will be the development of a ‘Community Charter’ which would act as a benchmarking tool with which the community can evaluate the approach, plans, policies and design of the regeneration for many years to come. It would, in effect show that the current community’s aspirations and presence is the starting point for this regeneration project
- 3.57 It is recommended that the charter is developed from the bottom up and reflects the community’s aspirations and expectations. It would embrace all aspects of the regeneration as detailed in the scoping list below:

Scoping List for the Community Charter

1. Rehousing choices, particularly tenure & priority for current residents and the phasing where it influences community cohesion
2. Phasing of any decanting programme
3. Open space – size and use
4. Massing of the buildings on the site
5. Nature of the shopping provision and protection for existing traders
6. Measures to connect people living higher up to nature

7. Opportunity to continue growing own food
8. Space and design standards within dwellings
9. Recreation and sporting opportunities
10. Treatment and size of large open space
11. Wider social and economic programme for the regeneration
12. Getting into and out of the neighbourhood
13. Sense of community and safety
14. Community cohesion
15. Access to and control of community facilities
16. Priorities for community facilities (assuming funds limited)
17. Appointment of an RSL partner
18. Support and resources for Local Voices Group and future consultation arrangements

3.58 It is recommended that the Community Charter development becomes the key early focus both in terms of establishing a working relationship between the Partners and the community and agreeing the way forward for the outline planning application. It will also provide scope for discussing changes in the development framework.
