



September 4, 2014

hillcrestra@outlook.com

Mr Michael Kelleher

Head of Housing Investment and Sites,

Haringey Council,

River Park House, 225, High Road,

Wood Green,

London N22 8HQ

cc Ms Rachel Allison, Mr Bhupinder Singh Chawla, Lynne Featherstone MP, Ms Lyn Garner, Cllr Liz Morris, Cllr Alan Strickland, Mr Nick Walkley

Dear Mr Kelleher,

Further to the meeting of July 3, 2014 and subsequent communications, I am writing on behalf of Hillcrest Residents' Association (HRA), to set out our concerns over the Hillcrest development plans and to outline our expectations for communication and consultation.

We have been dissatisfied with the lack of transparency and openness in your communication with us and as a community we are concerned that our views are being heard, but not taken into account.

While we understand the great pressure to provide more housing, we have serious doubts about the current 'infill' strategy that regards the open spaces on our estate as land for development. As we will outline in this letter, this land is absolutely central to the health of our community and to the mental and physical wellbeing of everyone within it.

Hillcrest is a diverse but cohesive community, built around the spaces that we share. We have ambitions to improve our estate for the good of everyone who lives here and of the wider community and the borough as a whole. We ask that you support us in these ambitions and respect our wish to contribute to decisions that will have a profound impact on our community.

About HRA

HRA is an officially recognised residents' association, which represents the views of tenants and leaseholders of the 116 flats on the Hillcrest Estate. The community that we represent is a diverse one, and we are committed to giving voice, as best we can, to everyone who lives here.

Residents' Views

To discover the opinions of residents about the proposed plans to build on the estate, HRA have conducted a survey of all 116 households. Many residents expressed, in their own words, their feelings about the estate and about the new build plans.

I have enclosed these survey responses (with personal data removed), as they show, better than anything, how people feel about living here and their wishes for their homes and environment. The responses came from tenants and leaseholders, from families, young professionals and the elderly, but this diverse group has one thing in common; the desire to enhance and protect Hillcrest and it is this that makes us a community.

Consultation

In the public meeting of July 3, 2014, you said that you value residents' views on the proposed development but yet were not able to explain how you were going to take account of them. We have since received a timetable which commits to one further meeting and drop-in, but does not explain how you will gauge and respond to our concerns. Nor have you said how you will decide whether to proceed with proposed new housing on our estate or not.

Please set out for us the specific evaluation criteria and method that you will use to determine the viability of new development on Hillcrest estate. We trust that this will include qualitative criteria such as social impact, quality of environment and character of the estate as well as quantitative criteria such as suitable ground conditions and parking.

Please also confirm that this evaluation will be transparent and shared with residents.

We have previously suggested that a HRA representative be included in this evaluation process and have received no response from you. Including a member of the HRA on the evaluation panel would indicate your commitment to openness in this sensitive process.

Transparency and Openness

In the meeting of July 3rd you expressed that you intend to be open and transparent in your assessment of the estate for the potential for new development. To this end we have requested, in an email, that you share the results of completed surveys with us. You have declined to do this and we have been compelled to seek this information through freedom of information legislation.

We are disappointed with this lack of transparency and we would like to ask again that the completed surveys are shared with us and that surveys in progress are shared as they become available.

Material Considerations

Based on the limited information that you have provided, we have serious concerns about the impact of the proposed development on the environment and community of Hillcrest. In the meeting of July 3rd you provided an outline of 4 areas on the estate that are under consideration as potential building sites. All 4 of these areas are currently open space and all 4 of them have essential amenity value to this community. The loss of any of these areas poses a serious risk to the health and wellbeing of Hillcrest residents and to the beauty, character and biodiversity of our environment.

Some of the detail of our concerns is outlined below:

Parking

There is already very limited parking space on the estate, with an average of less than one space per unit, leading to problems parking for many residents. It is important that any new development does not make this situation worse either through the removal of parking spaces for the development site or through the added burden of extra cars with new dwellings on the site. Please therefore confirm:

i/ that the number of spaces for existing residents won't be reduced, and

ii/ any new dwellings would have a minimum of 1 parking space per dwelling for 1,2 bed flats and 1.5 spaces per dwelling for 3 and 4 bed flats in due consideration of the low (1b) PTAL of the Estate and in line with Transport for London parking guidelines.

Cycle parking

There is currently inadequate cycle parking on the estate, falling far short of current best practice in terms of numbers, security and shelter for cycle parking. This serves to discourage the use of cycles. Please confirm that any development proposals would both upgrade the existing cycle storage facilities and provide new storage for the proposed new dwellings in line with the good practice standards set out in Code for Sustainable Homes.

Storage Space

There is currently inadequate storage space on the estate. The existing flats have less than the current standard of internal storage (7.5% of habitable floor space – SPG3a), and residents are forced to store bicycles, prams, etc. in internal hallways. The estate has a number of external storage sheds for the use of residents and these are in high demand. HRA would like to see the sheds used for communal purposes including locker storage and secure bike, pram and tool storage. The current sheds have not been well maintained, but they are not a disposable resource, and we will resist any plans that reduce the amount of space available for secure storage.

Amenity and Play Space

This is a green field site, not a brown field site. Any new dwellings would directly take away from Hillcrest amenity space.

Haringey's open space and sports assessment (Atkins 2003) shows that Hillcrest is in an area of the borough that is deficient in public open space and in particular in small local spaces and pocket parks. The green spaces on the estate compensate for this deficiency and are used daily by estate children and other local children.

We estimate that there are close to 50 children living on the estate and the open spaces are also used by non-resident children on their way to and from the local primary schools. These children have no alternative open spaces for sports, informal recreation or access to nature. The closest, Highgate Woods, is located on the other side of the Archway Road and is therefore inaccessible to unaccompanied children.

With no private gardens, families with young children on the estate tend to use the area at the side and rear of Dowding House (Your development area 2) as a play area. This is the only traffic-free part of the estate. HRA are in discussions with Homes for Haringey for the provision of a small, natural playground here.

Sports and Informal Recreation

Hillcrest's part of Highgate Borough was found by the Atkins report to have insufficient access to public sports grounds (more than 400m from a public sports playing field). The area on the estate behind Alexander House (your potential development area 3) is in daily use as a football pitch. The physical activity and social recreation of many of the estate's children completely revolves around this space.

Please share the findings of your environmental studies with the HRA and demonstrate how your plans would take into account the needs of children and communities for playable spaces, as outlined in the London Plan, Shaping Neighbourhoods Play and Informal Recreation SPG.

We strongly resist the loss of any of these important play areas on the Hillcrest estate.

Community Involvement

We note that Haringey is committed to community involvement in open space planning and management (stated in the Open Space Strategy, 'A Space For Everyone').

As a community we take an active interest in maintaining and enhancing our open spaces, and this, in turn enhances our sense of community and pride in the place where we live.

In 2014 HRA secured grant funding to build a play hut next to the football pitch, filled with much needed sports equipment. The hut is community-run and has been a great success; bringing diverse families together and giving the young people a sense of responsibility and pride. Projects like these are the life-blood of our community and are built upon the spaces that we share and care for together.

The loss of these spaces and of the collective memories that they hold would be a great blow to many in our community, in particular some of the elderly and longstanding residents whose own childhood memories are based around the spaces here.

The Hillcrest Local Site of Importance For Nature Conservation (SINC)

The Hillcrest Estate is bordered by a strip of mature woodland known as The Hillcrest bank or South Wood Lane wood, this area is designated a Local Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and contains mature tree specimens.

The bank is a self-sustaining eco system, providing habitat for invertebrates, birds and mammals. In 2014 a bat-detection walk revealed the presence of 3 species of bat. There are also owls, foxes and parakeets. Local woodlands such as the Hillcrest Bank are explicitly protected in The London Plan, Biodiversity and Access to Nature.

This nature area is of extreme value to Hillcrest Residents and to the wider community. It has been established over many decades and, we have been advised, would take at least 60 years to establish a comparable area.

The tree bank also provides a visual shield and noise blanket around the estate, protecting the privacy of the blocks, preventing Hillcrest from overlooking our neighbours on The Park and Southwood Lane and dampening the noise from the Archway Road.

We have been in touch with London Wildlife Trust who confirmed that woodland such as ours, in close proximity to the important habitats Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood, provide an important foraging ground for birds and bats and make up part of a 'green chain' that supports and protects London wildlife.

From the information you have shared with us, we see that 2 of your 4 proposed sites lie within the SINC and a third has the potential to encroach on the root radii of the trees on the Hillcrest bank.

We strongly resist your proposal to build on this important nature conservation area.

Trees

A large part of the character and aspect of Hillcrest are provided by the trees on and around the estate. Some of these trees are valuable historical specimens, which were retained from the 18th century Park House estate on which Hillcrest was built. Taken as a whole, the trees on Hillcrest are valuable as a collection and not just as individual specimens. HRA are in talks with tree officers to find ways to increase resident involvement in caring for the Hillcrest trees.

We would strongly resist any proposals to remove any trees from the estate.

Please share your arboricultural and ecological survey reports with the HRA.

Conservation Status

In addition to containing the Hillcrest Bank SINC, the whole of the estate lies within the Highgate conservation area. (Draft Character Appraisal, November 2012). As such we would expect any development to preserve and enhance the character of the estate. It is difficult to imagine how such 'infill' projects could be made to do so.

Heritage value

Hillcrest is located directly opposite the Grade I listed 'Highpoint' development. These two unique estates, on London's highest point, present a snapshot of a vital period in the history of London. Hillcrest has been called a social analogue of the Highpoint development, separated by the years of war and hardship, but representing a hopeful vision for social housing in the post war years.

The estate is in its original form with no changes or additions.

We strongly resist the Council's proposals to downgrade this important post-war social housing estate through the addition of further dwellings that would take away from the character and quality of this place.

The Local Plan

Highgate is in the process of writing and consulting upon a local plan. As part of the plan Highgate Neighbourhood Forum consulted upon a list of sites within the Highgate area that could be developed to provide public facilities and more housing. (Site Allocations DPD, Jan 2014) Hillcrest was not put forward as a potential site because HNF do not believe that there are areas on Hillcrest that are suitable for development. Your proposals for Hillcrest therefore run contrary to the developing neighbourhood plan.

Sustainability

We note that Haringey is committed to reducing carbon emissions by 40% by 2020 and of living sustainably within our environmental limits. Please confirm what level of Code for Sustainable Homes you are aiming for in the development and whether it aims to exceed the

planning minimum requirement of Code Level 4. Please also set out your ambitions for the improvement of the existing estate within these parameters as part of any new development work, for example, an estate combined heat and power system.

We note that one of the 5 recommendations of Haringey's Carbon Commission is for the Council "to help **increase the reach and impact** of community and voluntary organisations that are already encouraging a transition to more sustainable lifestyles". Hillcrest estate presents a perfect opportunity to do this, through enhancing the existing space and facilities. We believe that building new dwellings on the estate would significantly impair the quality of life and potential for more sustainable lifestyles on the estate and would run counter to the Council's sustainability ideals and vision.

Daylight and Rights to Light

The openness of the estate and the good daylighting to all of the flats here in Hillcrest are one of its key characteristics and qualities. You confirmed at the meeting on 3 July 2014 that daylight and rights to light surveys would be undertaken. Please confirm that you will share the results of these surveys with the HRA in the form of a permissible envelope drawing model in advance of developing any massing proposals for the site.

Please also ensure that all massing options that are presented to residents are shown to us in the context of the permissible envelope so that we can see the impact for ourselves.

Our Ambitions For Development

Hillcrest is a unique development in a unique location. It is a model of a successful social housing project with a strong, diverse community and low levels of crime and anti social behaviour.

We believe that the estate is much better placed to help meet Haringey's sustainability agenda (as noted above) than contribute to the Council's new housing quota.

The Greenfield site is ideal for promoting more 'sustainable lifestyles' through creating allotments, better cycle parking etc. which would be destroyed by more development.

Our SINC provides a local resource, which could be protected and enhanced to benefit residents and the surrounding community, perhaps even working towards creating a local nature reserve on the site.

Our playable spaces are not just used by children on the estate but are used by children on their way to and from the local schools. This function could be enhanced and the open spaces on Hillcrest could become a genuine 'pocket park' in an area that has been identified as deficient in small local green spaces.

We have an active residents association and a creative and energetic community who would be willing to get behind enhancement projects. We have already been in talks with Homes for Haringey and have ideas for many estate improvements including food growing areas, wildlife habitat creation, wildflower meadows, gardening clubs and pop-up swap shops in our storage sheds.

We believe that Hillcrest is a wonderful example of social housing that could be enhanced for the benefit of the wider community and Haringey as a whole. Successful estate communities such as ours cannot be taken for granted, with many factors balancing to create our social cohesion.

We are deeply concerned that taking away play space for the young people in our estate, removing the sense of openness and protected greenery from our doorsteps and putting pressure on parking could tip the balance away from the cohesion that we currently have.

Please support us in our ambitions to improve the existing estate rather build more housing here that would take away the qualities and space that we currently enjoy. By investing in the existing space Haringey could create a sustainable, flagship estate; by investing in new housing Haringey would risk creating a sink estate.

As residents of Hillcrest, we strongly urge you to reconsider your development proposals and protect -physically and socially- our estate.

Yours Sincerely,

Gillian Horn and Hannah Liptrot

On behalf of Hillcrest Residents' Association