

Resident Steering Group Meeting for Alice Shepherd House & Oak House

Monday 26th February 2024

31 Alice Shepherd House

Attendance

Residents:

Ashley Lowther (AL)
Nadia Mahmood [NM]
Cynthia Owumo (CO)
Sharon Homes (SH)
Jane McGregor (JM)

One Housing Group:

Shaun Simpson – Regeneration Officer [SS]
Leila Arefani - Regeneration Manager (LA)
Saba Choudhury – Head of Acquisition and Planning via Zoom (SC)

Residents Advocate:

Mike Tyrrell [MT]

ITLA:

Ray Coyle – Open Communities, Chair [RC] and Murselin Islam (MI)

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies.

1.1. RC took the Chair and welcomed attendees.

2. Minutes of RSG meeting of Sept 2023

These were accepted as a true record of what was discussed at the meeting.

3 Matters Arising

3.1 (3.1) (3.2) Contacting residents at 48 Alice Shephard House – Resident is out of London so appointment could not be set up. OHG to chase .

Partially completed with painting works due.

3.2 (3.2) (3.3) Issue of downsizing/like for like for number of bedrooms/adult child's option – SH asked why it is taking so long to get an answer. AL and AH said as the residents are OHG residents then why LBTH is making the decision, OHG has its own responsibility towards its own residents and the downsizing is not in the offer document, it was never mentioned before. If it was mentioned, then the outcome of the ballot would have been different. SH said there are many deals have been arranged between landlord and council, but OHG is not making the effort.

3.3. Residents said there is a clear lack of duty of care by OHG and the downsizing issue is not stated in the Offer Document which has been accepted by the borough years ago.

LA responded that OH have already formally responded on the position in the recent newsletter and Q&A sheet that was sent to residents, where it sets out that the adult child housing offer is a scheme run by Tower Hamlets Council and it sets the rules, and these could change if a new administration comes in. Currently these require that the remaining household downsize to their housing need. Ultimately if residents do not wish to downsize they can choose not to take up the adult child housing offer and the whole household can be rehoused together in a like-for-like property and no downsizing is required. This scheme gives residents more choice not less.

RSG members asked if there is any flexibility to be rehoused with need+1 bedrooms as set out in the landlord offer for other types of downsizers. LA said she would pass on the concerns of the RSG members to senior management and noted that MT was due to meet with the new OH MD Jehan in the coming weeks which would also be an opportunity to raise concerns.

ACTION – LA to pass on RSG concerns about downsizing to senior management.

Meeting agreed to take this off the minutes and move to the Tracker Q&A doc to be discussed when required

3.4 (3.4) (3.4) – Looking at the tenancy/leasehold condition in tenancies/leases to reflect current challenges. – MIs said there are numerous versions of leases. Going forward they can look at clauses around short-term renting/AIRBNB, ASB etc. Buyers can be notified before purchase so that they are clear about any restrictions. PH added that it also depends on how developers' legal section writes the lease as it will not be OHG who will be making the sales. The appointment of the JV partner should happen by end of October.

Action- OHG to liaise with JV partner on Lease agreement clauses. Due.

3.5 (3.5) (3.5) Site visits to JV partners - MIs said the photos/videos taken will be share among residents as requested. SS said he will work on a simpler log in process as some residents finds it difficult to log in.

Action - Completed but a link will be resent by SS.

3.6 (4.3) & (6.2) OHG to prepare fact sheets on decanting/priority bidding as well as the council's banding rules, especially the difference between bands 1A and 1B. OC can then put this information out when in the drop-in sessions and door knocking

Action - done with newsletter late last year.

3.7 (5.1) Recycling bin for 1-6 Oak House has been locked for few months, Paul Handley to report to relevant team

Action - residents informed it is still locked, SS has the key and will address the issue.

4. Update from OHG and Questions from Residents.

Appointment of JV Partner

4.1 Appointment of the JV Partner is still ongoing, and the delay has been influenced by following issues:

- The scoring and to work up any clarification questions that OHG had for the bidders.
- This coincided with Riverside announcing the project review of all its commitments nationally to see which projects would have the financial capacity to take forward. This started in late Sept 23.
- Riverside board approved the new version of the financial plan in December last year which captures all of the schemes to proceed and Alice Shepherd and Oak House is included in that financial plan. It is a scheme that Riverside/OHG is committed to taking forward and the financial capacity to do this scheme is included within the commitments for the next 10 to 12 years.
- Further reasons for delay is that the review of financial plan included reviewing the association's borrowing and loan portfolio (fixed and non-fixed loans) Non-fixed loans were causing some issues in terms of cash flow and capacity. Fixed loans will enable better manage cash flow going forward. Once the move to increase the number of fixed loans is done by the end of February 2024, it will enable Riverside to finish the final clarifications on the procurement process and then hopefully get the approval on the preferred JV partner. This stage should be concluded within six weeks, depending on when board meetings will take place. Riverside/OHG are looking at start/mid April to have preferred partner on board.

4.2 MT asked if there were any other teams that need to authorise this? SC said it's the Development and Investment Appraisal Panel (DIAP) who would first approve. It then goes to the group Development Committee and Board. It has not gone to DIAP yet due to the need to finish the final clarifications with the bidders. A meeting took place on Friday which included the group finance director to take it forward. So work is in progress on finalising the procurement of the JV partner.

4.3 JM asked what will happen if the committees says no? SC replied that the committee have been kept involved and updated the whole way through the process. The committee will be given a breakdown of the scoring and the reasons for choosing the preferred bidder. SC said she doesn't anticipate a 'no' from the committee.

4.4 AL said Riverside must have had the full information on all of this before the takeover so why this is getting reviewed again? LA said the takeover has resulted in additional levels of management decisions that are required as part of the process. Also, there have been changes to interest rates, inflation in the construction industry, labour shortages and the national economic condition meant that the financial modelling was based outdated costs. The current situation is much different and this information needs to be updated.

4.5 AL said residents had been told by OHG staff that no buildings are coming down leaving residents feeling uncertain about the future. MT said that in a recent public meeting a OHG operative said the lifts works are not getting done due to a decision by the regeneration team. LA said messages are being misinterpreted in other sections of the organisation as they do not have the fine details of the projects. RSG members agreed with MT that OHG must hold in-person briefing sessions for all staff so that this does not occur. OHG to action. LA said these briefings were in place at the start of the project but unfortunately both the covid pandemic then the merger/takeover has seen an end to them and that they need to be looked into.

Action – OHG to look into stating these in-person briefings

4.6 MT asked if, once the new Chief executive starts, will he be able to overturn the decision to go ahead. SC said there will be a number of projects in the new financial year. The long term financial plan gets reviewed regularly as an ongoing process but once a commitment have been made to a scheme, the works will be carried out. All bidders have produced costed business plans and all indicate the scheme is viable based on the offer document that residents voted on. There are other schemes which are not as viable as Alice Shepherd and Oak. Viability cannot be guaranteed as things change, but even if the scheme proves to have more difficult viability issues going forward, the commitment has been made by Riverside/OHG to deliver the scheme.

4.7 MT asked what the proportion of loans are fixed/unfixed? SH asked which bidder is likely to be chosen. SC said all of them have good scoring and the board needs to approve the decision so this cannot be revealed to residents yet.

ACTION – SC to provide information on proportion of fixed to non-fixed loans

4.8 MT, RC and residents asked if the RSG could be told who the preferred bidder is advance of making it public. RC said it was minuted in a previous meeting that if the preferences of the RSG and OHG differ then there will be a discussion with the steering group. SC added that once the Board approves its decision and if such situation arises then there will be a discussion, but residents do not have power to veto. SC said she thinks all three bidders have their own strength and will be a good fit for the project.

Re-Housing update by LA

4.9 There are two flats empty in Oak House and one adult child has moved out. Housing Needs Assessments are still due for 7 residents. LA reminded the residents about the importance of this information as it will be helpful for designing the scheme.

5. Any other business with OHG present

5.1 A general discussion took place about why SHs daughter had not received her bidding number as an 'adult child'. SH is very concerned and stressed about the situation and believes that OHG have not followed up on this as it should have done. LA said LBTH has two application processes, one for adult children and one for all other residents

including those subject to regeneration programme and that there is a massive back log for adult children cases. SH said it has been nearly a year and OHG did not even follow up. LA and SS said when it comes to the principal tenant, OHG can create the bidding number but not for adult children.

5.2 RC suggested that OHG should keep residents updated on issues such as bidding numbers, downsizing, adult children housing option etc on a regular basis with a comprehensive database which gets updated regularly. MT advised that tenant should be written to directly when they receive their bidding number is set. OHG agreed.

5.3 SH also complained that there is no structured support for residents who want to move out of the borough and all the difficult works has been left to residents to complete. LA said the team is there to support all residents but sometimes there might have been cases which probably needed extra support and OHG did not intentionally ignore residents' needs.

5.4 AL said she has not received the bidding number which she was promised back in September and not received the medical form. SS said he already provided the medical form and will send it again. LA said that OHG is not actively asking Alice Shepherd residents to get their bidding numbers right now as only Oak House will be decanted first. Alice Shepherd residents are still free to get bidding numbers and can still bid for properties, but without having the higher priority that Oak House residents have. OHG will actively support the residents of both blocks to get bidding numbers if that is their preference.

5.5 NM said that the 'Home Connection' portal does not have properties on the list. LA said this portal is for OHG properties in other areas outside of Tower Hamlets and that all available properties within LBTH need to be advertised on the Home-seekers website. Riverside properties should also be available but due to lack of response from the allocation team at Riverside there is no progress. LA has raised the issue with senior management.

5.6 RC said that we need to bear in mind that the regeneration of its estates on the island was top priority prior to the merger/takeover but that since the takeover, big decisions are now made in Liverpool and this is not making things any easier. It would be good to get the support of the new OHG CEO Jehan to address these issues. MT said he will contact Jehan to discuss.

ACTION – MT to raise these issues with Jehan

6. Any other business without OHG - none

7. Next meeting date

To be decided based on the progress with appointing JV partner.