

Submission from 'Public Housing in Barnet?' Public meeting 10 November 2014 and further discussions of Barnet residents

Submitted by Barnet Alliance, Barnet Housing Action Group, Our West Hendon campaign

On Tuesday night, 10 November, more than 70 people, including councillors from Enfield, Islington and Barnet and housing campaigners, gathered at the Crown Moran Hotel in Cricklewood for a public meeting with a difference. Hosted by Barnet Alliance for Public Services*, Our West Hendon**, and Barnet Housing Action Group***, 'Public Housing in Barnet?' dispensed with a panel of speakers and instead invited councillors and campaigners to start discussions with tenants and other residents about different approaches to solving the problems of public housing.

In stark contrast to the way policies are planned in Barnet council by officers working on their own and public survey designed to allow only predetermined choices, here participants' life experiences were shared and informed the two 40-minute discussion sessions, with everyone able to take part on an equal footing [see enclosed photos].

Here, instead of offering only ways to cut the budget, people looked for and found a range of solutions, including keeping rents from continuing escalation, licensing landlords, stopping the sale of properties to be left empty until the owner can realize a profit on resale, promoting self-builds, requiring that any private development includes 40–50% social housing, and redefining 'affordable' housing so that it is really affordable by people on average income.

On the whole, most of the participants agree with the positions of BAPS, BHAG and Our West Hendon campaign, that Housing should be regarded as a public service for all [along the same lines as the NHS and education]

Further meetings to take these ideas to the next stage are being planned.

Notes

* *Barnet Alliance for Public Services (BAPS) is a coalition of residents, trade unionists and community campaigners in the London Borough of Barnet, formed to defend and improve public services.*

** *Our West Hendon is a campaign group of residents on the West Hendon Estate that is striving to get a re-development that is for the local community, not at the expense of it.*

*** *Barnet Housing Action Group works with tenants, homeowners and the homeless, victims of housing benefit cuts and the bedroom tax to fight for housing as a public service run for all who need it.*



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The following is a summary of all the points raised and agreed by the participants in the discussion groups at that meeting*.

**) The meeting was supported and sponsored by Unite Communities and UNISON.*

- No sell-off of council land
- Protect public (council)'s land in Land Trusts so as to ring fence it for community use as council housing or community facilities.
- Stop handing public funds to private landlords and developers
- challenge and stop the conflict of interests whereby Capita – as the provider or Planning Services – hear first of proposals for building developments and prevents public objections via councillors' involvement
- Use brown fields spaces across the borough for new housing
- Bring existing empty properties in local authorities back into use and use CPO to purchase unused ware houses and other commercial buildings for housing
- stop the Right-to-Buy of council properties
- Stop Buy-to-Let by removing financial incentives (in mortgages) for Buy-to-Let
- create a training programme to up-skill people in renovating existing properties
- Provide materials for council tenants to renovate their homes
- Residents of existing communities to have a direct voice in the decision making process about regeneration – inviting council officials and developers to work WITH residents on planning of housing and particular projects.
- New housing built first of all for local people. Create conditions for working people, including those on low wages, to enable them to continue living in the borough and prevent de-facto social cleansing that will be the result of the current housing policies.
- Design of new developments to facilitate communal living so as to enable neighbours to meet as well as include communal spaces like gardens and community centres.
- Consult local people and families of all sizes in the design of the living space inside the flats according to their needs
- license landlords
- capping landlords' profits
- Bring back rent control (cap rent) as is done in all major cities
- recreate the council housing register list and re-define eligibility criteria; bring back more options to consider for council tenants (get rid of the 1-option policy)
- Council housing rent must remain on a sensible level of no more than 1 third of the household's earning; [Make this - rent no more than 30% of household's earning the measure of 'affordable housing']
- The term 'council housing' (rather than 'affordable housing') to mean housing built, maintained and leased/let by the council.
- The council to become a developer, i.e. bring back in-house the building of houses (e.g. as done in Southwark, Enfield, Islington)
- Legal requirement demanding developers to build at least 40-50% council houses. This should be a condition to the planning permission
- Legal requirement demanding developers to develop suitable infrastructure, **as a**

public service. This should be a condition to the planning permission [In BrentX infrastructure services like gyms and parks are in place but private; no land in Barnet was earmarked so far for new secondary schools.]

- Ensure funding for housing regeneration continues (?) to be ring fenced
- Insist on a fixed quota of infrastructure services per a number of housing units
- Incentives to take in lodgers
- Incentives to take in lodgers who are on housing benefits
- Give secure tenancies to any council tenant over 2-5 years

practical solutions

- facilitate self-build using simple, modern, innovative techniques like containers and pre-fabricated housing (fast-build)
- Use Barnet Homes to build new council homes
- Facilitate housing cooperatives

National Policy

- Local government policies on housing to influence central government policies
- Remove the borrowing cap on funding for housing builds and change the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) to favour councils.
- Allow councils to build via Land Trusts including funding the construction, and let councils be involved in all aspects of the development.
- Create conditions for massive council housing builds in order that the supply of housing will re-balance the demand and take down the rent prices across the board (including private rent)
- Create financial infrastructure support for housing (banks, mortgages, insurance)
- Facilitate financial conditions for small developers and small manufacturing companies that produce fast-build homes
- Environmental friendly energy efficient homes, leading end technologies to create homes & jobs
- To ensure the above 3 points, adopt a policy to guarantee continuity of demand for fast-build eco-houses in order to generate both housing supply and jobs.
- tax non-domicile owners
- Property Tax on any private ownership of more than 2 properties for example
- Tax empty houses

* * * End of 10 Nov public meeting's points * * *

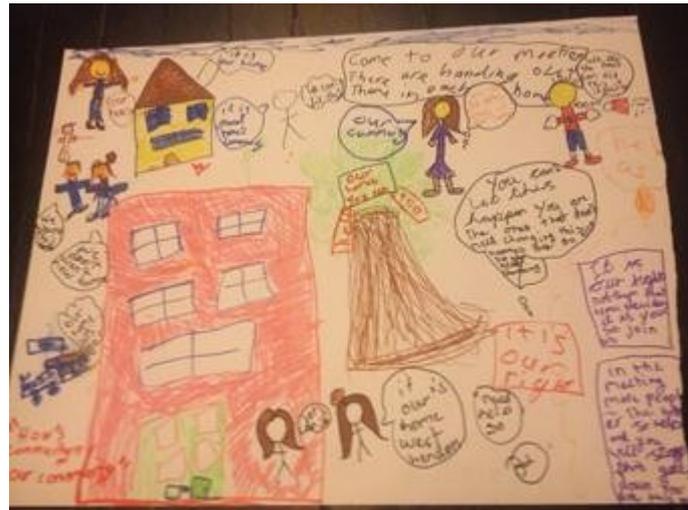
BAPS policy positions on Housing (drafted prior to May 2014 local elections):

- Launch a massive house building programme:
- Give developers planning permission only if they commit to providing at least 40% of any development as social housing, and ensure that the homes meet the standards set out in the London Housing Design Guide, published by the London Development Agency in 2010 and implemented in April 2011.
- Build council housing on all available council-owned land other than Green Belt and do not permit developers to use this land for private housing.
- Use Compulsory Purchase powers to take control of long-term empty houses for council housing, and increase council tax on shorter-term empty houses.
- Introduce rent controls.
- Defy the Bedroom Tax and ensure there are no evictions because of rent arrears accrued as a result of it.

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Suggestions from further discussions in BAPS

- Insist that residents affected by regeneration are all rehoused where they wish to be: in most cases where they live now.
- Use Barnet Homes to build new council homes by direct labour of local residents
- Make sure in particular that the 2002 promises to West Hendon residents are kept and that the [then emergency] status of 'temporary' 'unsecure' tenants is reversed.
- Rent-holiday for residents of run-down estates [e.g. Watling] until thorough repairs and generation [rehousing all tenants and residents on site] are carried out **or** hand them over to tenants
- Demand back the £103 million taken from Barnet to pay old council housing debt interest repayments - whereby we pay for housing built a generation ago 20 times over!
- we support Labour's proposal to compulsory purchase land held for speculation, for a land value tax, and for a return to Labour's old goal: nationalisation of development land, rent-controls and rights of tenure for all tenants private and public
- Buy back, by compulsory purchase if necessary, all council property which is in the hands of multiple landlords [at a rate which ensures no landlord is allowed to profiteer]
- Demand that money received by the council for previous sales of council homes be returned to Barnet Homes for building of more council housing



Young West Hendon estate's residents, 10 November 2014