Thames Life Community Development Trust

Friday, 05 September 2025

To Tom Copley

City Hall (GLA),
Kamal Chunchie Way,
London E16 1ZE

**Re: Letter of concern regarding the additional density proposals for Barking Riverside**

I am writing to ask for the following, in your as Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development:

- A meeting with residents to discuss the sustainability of the Barking Riverside proposals
- A letter of support responding to our concerns about the lack of social infrastructure, harmful environmental impact and overdevelopment of the site
- Advice on how to work with you to ensure the best possible social outcome for our community

I am following up on a latter that was first sent to Semakaleng Mokgadi Moema on 30th October 2024 (44 weeks ago) and which on the advice of her office, was forwarded to you, as someone better placed to respond. Tamsin Addison (Principal RSO) confirmed you had received this, in an email dated March 3rd 2025.

As a champion of social justice working with Searchlight and a campaigner for transparency over previous development sites like the Garden Bridge project you will know more than anyone how important it is to address the housing and wider social needs of the most vulnerable in our communities. You will also know how the housing market is broken and that without corrective measures by government (central, regional and local) the financial housebuilding interests will not meet the needs of most Londoners.

Barking Riverside is in effect a GLA town, given your ownership of the land since 2000 and now shared via the L&Q partnership. It is also an Opportunity Area under the London Plan, so you are well placed to make an intervention. However, to date, the development has not delivered much needed social equity or infrastructure and the proposals to double the number of units will make these failures many times worse, unless a corrective intervention is made.

Thames Life, the charity I work for, was founded by Margaret Hodge MP in partnership with Riverside School, to ensure a strong resident voice to support inclusive growth and as was phrased in the first Lottery bid, as a counter to 'the developer juggernaut that risked running roughshod over local people'. In the seven years since we started our work we have worked on many successful projects with partners, most notably with BRL, so it is with a deep sense of unease and pain, that we look at our core purpose and feel the need to raise the following concerns:

- Unsuitability of hyper density on the current site

The site is unsuitable not only because it is remote, accessed via an industrial zone full of warehouses, heavy industry and one of London's most congested arterial roads (A13) but also because the site fails to meet the social needs of residents of the borough, whose income levels at the lowest quartile, cannot access the housing on offer. Duncan Bowie, former senior planner at the GLA, told us, in his professional opinion, the site was not viable, not only in failing to match up to social needs, and in terms of geography but also because investors were never likely to put in adequate money for social infrastructure, requiring massive levels of public sector subsidy, that government is not willing to provide. The option to build lower rise housing, in the tradition of the Becontree estate was a more viable and socially inclusive option. Instead, the hyper density now proposed merely raises prices, as anticipated land value soars, ratcheting further levels of inequality. Assuming the site is at all viable for investors, further density benefits the financial housebuilding lobby, not Londoners. More units may meet government and GLA targets but at what social cost?

- Lack of transparency and accountability

The meetings of the Barking Riverside company and its six directors (three of whom are GLA colleagues) are held in private, with no opportunity for residents to observe or take part, and no details of minutes or agendas. This seems contrary to the Nolan principles of public life. The lesser community interest company is again not accessible to wider gaze and has chosen not to prioritise its third object of 'social inclusion' yet. The most recent accounts of the company detailed a £10,745,000 deficit alongside the expectation of addressing this via doubling existing density. What is not clear is how much money is being made across the whole of the site, by all those acting under the superior landlord's supervision. Presumably Bellway, Adriatic Land, Murphys etc are not in deficit and can be assumed to be not losing money by working on the site. The lack of basic clarity over how much money is being made from the site makes it impossible to understand what is going on. More to the point, the reason for a lack of social infrastructure is typically that there is no money being made from the site - but is it possible that the larger financial picture is being hidden and that were a fuller set of accounts made public, the case might be made for cross-subsidization from the profits of others? Likewise, is the GLA confident that it can avoid contracting with organisations that practice tax avoidance via offshore accounts? A cursory search of Adriatic Land and Long Harbour raises possible concerns that a government body might seek to avoid.

- Routine housing management failings and safety concerns

Currently residents in the most recent blocks are without water. Historically a loss of water and heating has affected phase one residents. A glance at resident social media accounts, Facebook etc, highlight an ongoing struggle to get timely action on housing related issues. The GLA as superior landlord is part of this management chain. The addition of service charges, that other nearby estates do not pay, have created a two-tier community, based on greater provision of services for those within the Riverside private estate red line, and yet

even now, there are significant delays in addressing concerns. At a presentation to the Roding Rubbish group last weekend the local fire brigade was asked about their view on higher flats and told residents that they preferred low rise buildings because high rises gave them more problems. The Barking fire of 2019 highlighted serious safety concerns that have not gone away.

- Harmful environmental impact

The massive release of carbon into the atmosphere from the building of Riverside is accelerating climate change. The mass of concrete also creates a heat trap and wind tunnels unsuited for extreme weather events. The British Red Cross identify the area most at risk in the country for wildfires and around 8th most at risk for floods which given the position of the Thames Flood Barrier and rising sea levels, is a cause for concern. The Ripple Nature Reserve has been closed since 2018 and appears to have had its hectares reduced. The Footpath 47 risks being unrecognizable with the scale of development on its doorstep and wildlife unlikely to coexist with 60,000 residents nearby. Historically the area is known for land contamination, the Riverside site covers massive landfill sites known for their toxicity which whilst 'remediated' hardly give confidence to a community that has suffered early deaths due to asbestos and other carcinogenic materials. Finally, local incinerators plants, typically located in the poorest parts of the city, overlook the site.

- Lack of accessible community spaces

There is a lack of faith, maker and community spaces for people who are most isolated or who want to connect as a community can meet. The few spaces that are for community use charge hourly rates that are prohibitive for those without money. Use of community space is just one more charge the development has imposed on one of the most deprived areas of London, where free community space could make an immediate difference. The GLA might consider the legacy of its £900,000 in the Thames Road warehouse as a motivation for ensuring greater equity and make a further investment, this time in a project with stronger links to the community. The Riverside Muslim community have long had to pray in corridors of the Rivergate Centre, which whilst notionally a multifaith space, has a Christian Cross on the front. The thousands of Muslim residents have arguably been denied a basic human right, the freedom to worship due to a lack of appropriate provision.

- Lack of health facilities

The area has the highest rates of childhood and premature mortality of any London borough. By not providing a health centre on Riverside the Thames View Health Centre has had extra demand, leading to very long delays in being seen. There is a clear cause and effect created by the development both in terms of waiting times and life expectancy. Given the diversity of the area, around 75% to 80% of residents in Thames View and Barking Riverside Wards have a global majority ethnicity, and or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, the lack of health facilities is a stark example of health inequity. This is a structurally oppressive and obviously socially harmful outcome.

The concern is that these inequities and social evils will be exacerbated by the drive towards further levels of density that the GLA is pursuing. It can often seem that no one is listening or that as another politician once said: 'there is no alternative'. However, if something continues to hurt the most vulnerable in our community, there must be another and a better way. These are serious social concerns that are not being addressed or even given a hearing. Please work with us to ensure not only this generation of Londoners but those not yet born, have something we can all be proud of.

Yours sincerely

Matt Lismore

Thames Life co-chair

c/o Thames Community Hub

Bastable Avenue, Barking IG11 0LG

E: mlismore1@thames-life.org.uk