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Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State
Department for Communities
& Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

8 January 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: New Bermondsey Development at Millwall Football Club

We write to you as the three Lewisham Conservative Association Chairmen and as the former Conservative Lewisham Mayoral Candidate in relation to the above proposed development. We have some serious concerns regarding the proposals for the New Bermondsey development and particularly with the way Lewisham Council have handled the planning decisions and the appointment of Renewal as developer.

Our main concern is that if this development goes ahead as it currently stands it will see the loss of one of Lewisham's major sporting and cultural hubs – Millwall Football Club. Millwall is a fantastic local club with over 100 years of history in the borough. The club supports local jobs, businesses, community events and schemes and provides entertainment for many local residents. We would like you to consider the handling of this proposed development by Lewisham Council and for you to call it in and make the decision yourself. We have no confidence that Lewisham Council can make an independent judgement that will benefit the local community on this matter. Below are our concerns outlined in more detail.

History

In 2012 Lewisham Council, informed Millwall FC that the freeholds of some of their land would be offered for sale through a tender process. At this time, it was recognised that Millwall FC and the development company Renewal were likely to be the only bidders.

By 2013 no communication regarding the tender process had proactively been made by Lewisham Council to Millwall FC and it became apparent that the Council were planning to sell the land in a closed process to Renewal.

Millwall FC representatives on 6 November 2013 asked the Council for tender documents so that the football club could make a bid and for the decision to be delayed to allow time for an application to be put in. On 13 November 2013 Lewisham Council replied and declined to provide the necessary information for a bid to Millwall FC and stated that the terms of agreements for the sale of land to Renewal were confidential.

Before this correspondence Millwall FC and their representatives made clear to elected Council representatives and Council Officers their interest in buying the land and redeveloping it alongside their plans to extend their stadium – The Den. It also transpires that the Council had formerly offered a deal where the Council would retain its freehold interest in both The Den and Lion’s Centre, granting a new lease to the Club and subject to planning permission redevelop the whole in partnership with the Council and local community.

In August 2014 DCLG and the GLA announced their plans to create twenty ‘Housing Zones’ and after discussions between the Council, Renewal and GLA the New Bermondsey Development was announced as a housing zone in February 2015.

Since 2013 the Council have been evasive when concerns have been raised by Millwall FC and their representatives. Cabinet Members may have been falsely informed that Millwall did not have the funds to mount the redevelopment and the Council appears to have spent huge sums of taxpayers’ money on legal advice to keep their dealings with Renewal out of the public eye.

Other Concerns:

Dave Sullivan

It has been reported by The Guardian Newspaper on 13 December 2016 that Renewal company documents have shown that Dave Sullivan, a former Labour Mayor in Lewisham, set up the company.¹ For more than a decade Sullivan was also a director of Millwall, an arrangement that came about due to the Council’s sponsorship of the club. In 2005 Sullivan’s share in Renewal was sold.

Sir Steve Bullock

It has been reported by The Guardian on Thursday 5 January 2016 that the Mayor of Lewisham, Sir Steve Bullock, has stepped back from the decision due the fact he is, astonishingly, a director of a Renewal-associated company, the Surrey Canal Sporting Trust.²

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/dec/13/millwall-the-den-development-compulsory-purchase-renewal>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2017/jan/05/millwall-admit-council-scheme-leave-lewisham>

Mushtaq Malik & Barry Quirk

It has been reported that Mushtaq Malik (in more than one news article) was a director of Renewal. Mushtaq Malik was a former Senior Housing Officer for Lewisham Council. His daughter Jordana Malik is now a director of Renewal.³ One article claims that Mushtaq Malik was a former colleague of Lewisham Council's current CEO, Barry Quirk.⁴

Renewal's Ownership:

The same Guardian article also revealed that the owners of Renewal are now two anonymous off shore trusts based in the British Virgin Islands and Isle of Man. Throughout the process, Lewisham Council have tried to keep the actual owners of Renewal secret and maintain that their identities are not relevant. Given that one of the former owners is close to the political leadership at the top of the Council and the Council's insistence that the owners identities are not revealed, this raises serious concerns that there is something very wrong happening.

Renewal's History and Capability

We believe that Renewal have no history in delivering redevelopments of this size and we worry about their ability to deliver for the local community. Even a Labour Chair of Lewisham Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee has raised doubts on Renewal being able to deliver this scheme⁵.

Late last year it was reported a document was released that suggested Renewal had plans to sell its part of the project. This document appeared to show Incorporated Holdings Limited (IHL), who own a 50% share in Renewal, had been making active efforts to sell its access to the development.⁶

New Overground Station:

Under the original proposals for this development Renewal were going to pay for a new London Overground station at Surrey Canal Road. However, this is no longer on offer and instead the taxpayer is now footing the bill for this station.

Social and Affordable Housing:

This development plans to build 2,400 new homes, but only 12 per cent of the scheme has been confirmed by the Council as definitely being affordable. We believe that this is not nearly enough and more affordable and social housing on a scheme this size is needed.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/sep/26/millwall-property-developer-the-den-offshore-renewal>

⁴ <http://realmedia.press/lewisham-council-force-residents-sell-offshore-developer/>

⁵

http://www.newshopper.co.uk/news/14756100.Millwall_Compulsory_Purchase_Order_decision_called_in_by_Lewisham_councillors/

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/sep/26/millwall-property-developer-the-den-offshore-renewal>

Impact on Businesses:

Several local businesses have raised concerns to us that if this development as it currently stands goes ahead it will mean the closure of their businesses and loss of custom. We do not believe the Council have done enough to investigate these concerns and would welcome an assessment of what the plans will mean for current local businesses.

Impact on Millwall Football Club:

Our major concern is that this will negatively impact Millwall Football Club and the club have warned that this development could lead to them leaving the borough and their local community. Millwall FC is a much-valued community asset in its own right, but also supports numerous local voluntary schemes.

We are all concerned that throughout this process Lewisham Council have not been transparent, have constantly been obstructive to Millwall FC and have ignored many local concerns. We believe that for the local population to have trust in the decision regarding the New Bermondsey Development it must be taken out of Lewisham Council's control.

We hope you will take our concerns on board and call in this scheme. If you require any more information or details, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Ross Archer
Lewisham Deptford
Conservative Association Chairman

Simon Nundy
Former Conservative
Lewisham Mayoral Candidate

Andrew Lee
Lewisham East
Conservative Association Chairman

Chris Phillips
Lewisham West & Penge
Conservative Association Chairman