



The Civic Society For Milton Keynes

## **STATEMENT TO REGENERATIONMK COMMITTEE - 14 NOVEMBER 2017**

### **ITEM 5 - YourMK ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME**

I went along to the public consultation on Fullers Slade last week. In these days of “fake news” and Brexit it was nice to have some “good news” for a change. Full, in-depth building surveys have been carried out on a sample group of houses and have revealed that there are no “systemic” problems with the construction - no issues of damp, no issues of fire safety, no faulty structures, nothing. Yes, the houses are not insulated to current standards but that is probably true of most of the homes in the city.

This might not be the answer that people expected or, in some cases, may have wanted but the obvious conclusion is that there is no need to demolish the houses. None whatsoever. We should not even be thinking of it.

What the surveys mean therefore is that the budget figure of £90m that we have been shown for the work contains no figures that are unique to Fullers Slade **because of its inherent design and construction**. Such figures could equally well be applied to any Council dwellings in the city. In broad terms the figures represent the day-to-day management costs of these houses over a sixty-year period. Yes, some improvements are necessary eg to the flats and to enhance the insulation, but they are modest and do not cost £90m. I struggle to understand why retrofitting insulation should apparently require demolition. Does the Green Agenda mean nothing?

The inevitable conclusion therefore is that this exercise is not about regeneration but building on green spaces to provide income to cover future management costs. And what happens when we reach the end of the 60 year cycle? Do we go through the whole exercise again? If we apply the same figures from Fullers Slade across all of the Council’s housing stock then, by my calculations, we need to surrender enough green space for 27,600 homes - it is a ludicrous construct.

Let me make this absolutely clear. The Forum does not oppose regeneration. Far from it, we want it to happen, but the agenda must be clear. The most important people here are the residents - their needs should be foremost. At the moment this seems to be a building exercise. I am sorry, but it is not, it is a **people** exercise. People first and foremost. Demolition should be the very last option. Some of us in this room are lucky because we feel secure in our own homes. Think what it must be like to be a resident of Fullers Slade with all of this happening around you, let alone if you live in Coffee Hall where you have a Sword of Damocles hanging over you until 2020 at the earliest. And what if you have scraped together enough money to buy your house as a sitting tenant, you

have invested money in it and now you have the risk that it can be taken away from you and, instead, you are given a shared ownership house. How is this improving your lot?

We would like to make a suggestion, based upon Fullers Slade. As a matter of urgency YourMK should be instructed to commission proper building surveys on all of the Regeneration Estates to identify genuine, systemic building problems. If, as on Fullers Slade, none can be identified then residents should be given a clear assurance that no houses will be demolished. This Council cannot run the risk of acquiring a reputation for demolishing perfectly good buildings. If problems are identified, then the estates in question should be advanced up the order of priority.

Addressing the new non-exec directors in particular: you are new to MK: you will have heard my question to the Chair at the start of the meeting<sup>1</sup> and the comments I have now made. Comments such as those to which I referred earlier about houses having a 20-30 year lifespan do not happen by accident. I hope that you will therefore ask some searching questions of your fellow directors and officers about what is happening because, from where we sit, it does not look very pretty.

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<sup>1</sup> Recently my attention was drawn to the following statement on the YourMK website: *"50 years on the town is showing its age. Houses that were built to last 20 to 30 years are still in use"*.

The wording is clearly nonsense - all houses in MK have been built to the appropriate Building Regs of the time and were therefore designed to last a proper lifespan. There are no houses in MK that have been built to last for *"20-30 years"* and such a statement seems designed to instil an element of fear into those who read it and live on the Regeneration Estates. I wrote to David Gleeson accordingly, following which the website has been changed.

The wording was, I understand, in existence for some time and will have caused concern to residents in the Regeneration Estates.

Was the Council aware of the wording?