



Councillor Denise Hyland
Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich

1st September 2015

c/o email: info@egra.london

Dear Executive Committee of East Greenwich Residents Association,

Thank you for your letter of 20 August 2015. By publishing it openly, you will no doubt have read my response to press enquiries about your letter. I trust my reply addresses all the matters you raise.

One of your concerns is that Greenwich is the only borough in London on which the leader of the Council sits as a member of the Planning Board, and is also one of six boroughs that includes the regeneration cabinet member. You believe this could make the Planning Board susceptible to political pressure and decisions made on policy and party lines rather than in the wider public or community interest, and you say that the recent decision on the cruise liner terminal is a good case in point.

Planning decisions are not made on party lines, and political groups do not discuss planning applications or instruct group members on planning committees how they should vote. The decision on the cruise liner terminal you refer to is indeed a good case in point. One member of the Labour Group voted against the recommendation and two members abstained.

You say your concern is reinforced by my tendency and Councillor Thorpe's tendency to sum up and make our positions known before voting takes place. All members are able to comment when the evidence has been presented, and most usually do.

So far as membership of the Planning Board is concerned, previous statutory guidance to local authorities on operating executive arrangements (all guidance was repealed by the Coalition Government) said with regard to development control

5.18 The Secretary of State considers that full exchange of information between the executive and any committee which takes development control decisions is essential ... In addition, local authorities should consider including a member of the executive, if possible with responsibility for the Development Plan, on one or more committees which take development control decisions although she or he should not normally be the chair.

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The Planning Board is legally required to be politically proportionate and this is reflected in its composition.

I am fully aware of the guidance published by the Local Government Association's planning advisory service to ensure probity in the planning process. This guidance is reflected in 'Guidance on good practice in planning' which is in the Council's constitution and is based on the LGA's 'Probity in planning: the role of councillors and officers'. All members are aware of the need to ensure probity in the planning process and all members of planning committees are required to take part in training before they can take part in meetings.

Members of the Planning Board and Area Planning Committees take seriously all community concerns about planning applications. The Planning Board considered the cruise liner terminal application in detail over 3 hours, including the points made by the objectors, and this was reflected in the votes on the decision. There are plenty of examples where the Planning Board has decided not to accept the recommendation of planning officers. I cannot see how you can say legitimate concerns over the development of the area are not being taken seriously and are being batted away, and I take exception to your comment that this is through a process that is less than scrupulous at times. If you have examples, please provide them.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Denise Hyland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

Councillor Denise Hyland
Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich