Dear John Comber

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY:  NEIGHBOURHOOD FUNDING

This message is being sent to you jointly from the Chairs of three long-established community organisations within the three Wards of Blackheath/Westcombe, Greenwich West and Peninsula, who have common concerns about the future administration of the neighbourhood funding element of CIL. These three organisations are all within RBG’s CIL Area 2.  The purpose of this message is to seek from you and RBG the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about the future operation of CIL within Area 2.  We would welcome an exploratory meeting with you and/or senior officers and councillors to discuss this matter (or, more precisely, the application of the 15% which is intended for community funding and where  local consultation is a requirement).   Discussion about “the 15%” might also take into account the possible related uses of the other 85% which is under the Council’s direct control.

We would propose that the terms of reference for these discussions should be based on the Government guidance for the application of CIL:

“The charging authority will retain the levy receipts but should engage with the communities where development has taken place and agree with them how best to spend the neighbourhood funding.  Charging authorities should set out clearly and transparently their approach to engaging with neighbourhoods using their regular communication tools”.

We have a concern about the nature of the “regular communication tools”.  This has so far been interpreted as the Better Together (BT) meetings.  However, the recent BT meeting at the Christchurch Forum was clearly inadequate for the purpose of considering the disbursement of potentially large sums of money in our communities.  The means of consultation about community funding therefore needs to be re-thought to establish a more focussed approach to the issue.  We have noted that other local  boroughs have set up dedicated machinery to ensure successful community involvement in deploying neighbourhood funding.

We therefore suggest the following as an agenda for an exploratory meeting:

 1 The need for user-friendly public access to information:

a)     Details of development sites in Area 2, both current and planned, which have – or are expected to - attract CIL;

b)     Details of the relevant sums which those sites have attracted, or are expected to attract, and what is the timetable for the latter;

c)      Details of the disbursements which have made since the inception of CIL in 2015.

2  The need for a bespoke and user-friendly consultation and negotiation process, particularly in the light of the high level of CIL which is expected to be levied in future.  For example…

a)     How to invite suggestions for possible CIL community-funded projects?

b)     What might be the discussion and negotiation process, including taking into account the Council’s own priorities and policies (such as, for example, environmental protection, provision for youth, or public safety)?

c)      How might CIL community funds act as leverage for access to other sources of funding?

For our part, the three organisations would be more than willing – in consultation  with the Council - to use its own means of communication with its membership and communities to help publicise the role of CIL community funding and its mechanisms.  This would help increase public awareness of the potential benefits of regeneration and the local gains which could accrue from the neighbourhood funding element of CIL.  We are also keen to help identify difficult-to-reach groups in our community whose views and needs might otherwise be unrepresented.

We look forward to receiving a positive response from the Council to our joint request for a meeting to inaugurate a consultative process. You will have received this message via Ray Smith, a member of the Greenwich Society Executive Committee, so please feel free to respond to this message via him.

This message is being copied to appropriate senior officers and cabinet members, and also to the Councillors in the three Wards.

With best wishes and thanks in anticipation

(signed)

Marilyn Little (Westcombe Society)

Jonathan Chandler (Greenwich Society)

Dan Hayes (East Greenwich Residents’ Association)