

For the attention of Councillor Denise Hyland

29<sup>th</sup> Sept 2015

Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich

Dear Councillor Hyland,

Thank you for your reply to our letter dated the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2015, in which we ask that you stand down from your position as a member of the Planning Board. In our letter to you we argue that your position on the Planning Board represents a clear conflict of interest with your current political role as Leader of the Council.

You defend your position by stating that, "the statutory guidance recommends a member with responsibility for the development plan should have a seat on the board". As you are no doubt aware this recommendation is met fully with the inclusion of Councillor Danny Thorpe, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration. The inclusion of the Council Leader runs counter to the intention of the guidance and leaves the Planning Board open to the accusation that they are pursuing politically driven Council policy. Our point is that there is a conflict of interest between these two important roles. This is evidenced by the fact that you are the only Leader of a London Council that has sought to occupy a Planning board position.

Your assertion that that planning decisions are not made along party lines is of course welcomed (and frankly expected), but that is just an assertion and the issue here is one of transparency. In point of fact, we do not dispute political proportionality in the make-up of the Board, only the proportion of Abbey Wood Councillors (from the Leader's own ward) and the overbearing presence of senior policy makers. We are surprised that you would not concede that given the overwhelming majority of Labour within the Council, the presence of the Leader on the board, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and fellow Abbey Wood Councillors leaves you open to the assertion that this is a Planning Board vulnerable to political influence. Given the make up of other Planning Boards across the London Boroughs, other Council Leaders implicitly agree with our position.

With reference to the cruise liner terminal, the key point of conflict here was on the request for a deferral, something you were very vocally against. There were many issues of concern that in the interests of transparency should have been given a full and proper hearing. Not least the underlying assumption that air quality issues could not be considered relevant in this case, as the 2010 application had already been granted for the Cruise terminal. This is in spite of the fact that the mode of operation and the scale of the "new" terminal under this application was significantly different from the original 2010 permissions. This is evidenced by the developer's need to apply for permission to build three tower blocks of luxury flats in excess of 30 stories high to "fund" the new terminal layout. Surely this point was worthy of at least a question from the board?

Finally, you make the point that the Planning Board considered the Cruise Liner Terminal application in detail over three hours. This is indeed true, but alarmingly no questions were forthcoming from the Board to the presenting objectors, and only five minutes was spent considering the financial viability study (an addendum to the main application), the single most important document in the application. In fact, in your summing up you made the rather inflammatory remark that a 30 story tower was “nothing” to be concerned about. You then went on to conclude that in your most recent trip to Southampton (a current cruise terminal site) that you didn’t notice there to be “any issues with air quality or pollution!” These are two extraordinary statements to be made in relation to a decision of such importance to the local community and London as a whole, and they underline how out of touch you are with your electorate and the broader debate about the levels of pollution currently impacting the health of city dwellers in general and Greenwich in particular. As it transpires, it would seem that the London Mayor’s view on the issue of air quality for the Cruise Terminal run counter to your own. Answering questions from Assembly Member Jenny Jones relating to the Cruise Terminal, he said, “ that the [cruise liners] will unquestionably in my view be adding to mono nitrogen oxides (NOx) and to other pollution in the area”. Further, he states: “The Borough wants it to go ahead”. Herein lies the problem, the Council indeed wants this scheme to go ahead, at all costs, and stands rightly vulnerable to the accusation of pushing this scheme through on political grounds without due regard to substantive planning and health issues riased by its residents.

In short, Greenwich Council has a responsibility to its electorate, not only to do the right thing but also to be seen to be doing the right thing. Unfortunately Councillor Hyland your style of leadership and interactions with your electorate have led to a breakdown of trust in the latter. It is surely in the best interests of transparency that you follow the example set by your fellow London Borough Council leaders and remove yourself the Planning Board and mitigate this obvious conflict of interest.

Yours Sincerely

Executive Committee East Greenwich Residents Association