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Save Ekin Road response to Cambridge City Council's Ekin Road proposals of 14 May 2024

To the Cambridge City Council,

Save Ekin Road is aware of the documentation relating to Ekin Road released by the Council on 14 May 2024, namely the following three documents:

1. JLL – Ekin Road Final Report (Stage 2 and 2b):
ekinroad.co.uk/news/jll-ekin-road-final-report-stage-2-and-2b
2. BPTW Urban Design Narrative Appendix:
ekinroad.co.uk/news/bptw-urban-design-narrative-appendix
3. Summary of community feedback May 2024:
ekinroad.co.uk/news/summary-of-community-feedback-may-2024

We have now had an opportunity to review the 200+ pages of documentation above, and to consult our members. Given the fact the Council wishes to put this proposal to a vote at the Housing Scrutiny Committee on 18 June 2024, we wish to provide the following initial response to these documents. We reserve the right to provide follow-up responses in the future.

We note that the “JLL – Ekin Road Final Report (Stage 2 and 2b)”, hereafter the “JLL report” for brevity, puts forward a recommended option for the estate that is houses-led, that retains only the 14 semi-detached houses on the southern edge of the estate (odd-numbered houses 33-59 inclusive), and that demolishes all other dwellings on the estate.

We welcome a houses-led development of Ekin Road, and we welcome the retention of the 14 houses on the southern edge of the estate. However, this does not go far enough. We have repeatedly asked the Council to preserve all 32 semi-detached houses on the estate; the proposal in the JLL report only preserves 14, which is less than half. We cannot accept this.

Having reviewed the documents above, including the proposed new designs for the estate, and having consulted our members, we now wish to make the following two requests to the Council, which we believe are reasonable and justified, with reasons to follow below:

Request 1:

We request that the 6 semi-detached houses in the north-east corner of the estate (odd numbers 13-23 inclusive) be retained in the redevelopment of Ekin Road, in addition to those 14 houses on the southern edge of the estate.

Request 2:

We request that the Council prioritise rehousing all those council tenants from houses that are to be demolished in the retained council-owned houses, making use of those which currently house temporary residents or are void.

Our reasons for request 1 are as follows:

- The majority of the residents in those houses have expressed a strong desire to keep their homes, and some have been in theirs for over 40 years. These are well-loved family homes, and there are no intrinsic reasons to take them down.
- Several of the residents in those houses have physical, or mental, health issues, for which their house is their lifeline. To forcibly remove them from their home will substantially reduce their quality of life, in ways that, for many, will be irreversible. We will not articulate their (very personal) circumstances here; the Council has already been made aware of these directly from them.
- There is a strong sense of community even within those 6 houses. Many residents are very close, and have been family friends for decades. There is also a community connection to the remainder of the estate, with some of those residents having relatives who live in the retained 14 houses on the southern edge of the estate.
- As per page 6 of the BPTW document, full redevelopment of the north-east corner would only lead to a net gain of 3 houses compared with retaining those 6 existing houses and “building around them”. Thus, it is extremely wasteful and unnecessary to carry out so much demolition.
- The remainder of the design plans for the estate are undisturbed if those 6 houses in the north-east are retained. Again, as per page 6 of the BPTW document, all that would change is the layout of that north-east area, and nothing else.
- We are aware of various protected species which live in the gardens of the houses in the north-east corner, whose habitats would be destroyed if those houses are demolished.

Our reasons for request 2 are as follows:

- There is absolutely nothing wrong with the houses in the centre block and northern edge (numbering 12 in total). They are merely “inconveniently placed” for the redevelopment that the Council is proposing. As such, those residents are paying a significant personal price for the redevelopment that the Council wishes to carry out, and so should be assisted to the fullest possible extent.
- Several of those living in these houses as council tenants have been in them for decades, with the longest-standing council-resident having been in theirs for over 50. That's half a century where this person has made that their home, has diligently paid rent, and has cared for their home and raised their family in it. If these residents are to be forcibly moved from their longstanding homes, then the harm to them should be minimised by offering them a near-identical house on the same street, given that such housing is indeed available.
- Residents in those houses have strong ties to the area, and to the local community, including to those living in the 6 houses in the north-east of the estate, and the 14 houses on the southern edge. It adds insult to injury to not only take these people's homes, but also take them out of the community they have known and adored for most of their lives.

We hope the Council can see that our requests above are a significant concession from our group, as we are no longer calling for the retention of all 32 semi-detached houses on the estate, but rather for this reduced set of 20 houses. Having looked at the plans for the estate we believe that, with the changes outlined in Request 1 and the harm-minimisation actions outlined in Request 2, this might become a proposal that our group can openly support.

Our request is that the Council makes the rather minor revisions to its proposal for Ekin Road as outlined in request 1, so as to preserve the 6 semi-detached houses in the north-east corner of the estate, in addition to the 14 already being preserved on the southern edge. And to implement a resident rehousing strategy that allows for the residents in the 12 houses that are to be demolished to be rehoused in the spare capacity within the council houses that are retained. We expressly reserve the right to consider taking further action if these requests are not accepted by the Council.

Kind regards,
Save Ekin Road