



Open letter to Councillor Denise Hyland

Royal Borough of Greenwich

The Woolwich Centre
Wellington Street
Woolwich
SE18 6HQ

20 August 2015

Dear Councillor Hyland

We are writing to you on behalf of the residents of East Greenwich to formally express our deep concern regarding your presence on the Royal Borough of Greenwich's planning board.

We welcome the recent changes which finds the board with a new Chair and the introduction of new members on to the Committee, but there is one element, particular to Greenwich, which undermines our confidence in the board's decisions and has done for some time.

Research we have conducted has identified that Greenwich is the only borough in London on which the leader of the Council sits as a permanent member of the planning board. It is also one of six boroughs of the 33 that includes the regeneration cabinet member. The attached Excel spreadsheet provides evidence of our findings.

Guidance published by the Local Government Association's planning advisory service in 2013 to ensure probity in the planning process states that decisions should be made with impartiality, sound judgement, without predetermination and for the benefit of the wider public interest. It also states that decisions cannot be made on a party political basis in response to lobbying.

As you are of course aware, the composition of the planning board is overwhelming represented by Labour councillors with twelve members and two Conservative members. We are concerned that your presence as council leader alongside the regeneration cabinet member 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. This concern is reinforced by your tendency and Councillor Thorpe's tendency to sum up and make your positions known before voting takes place. The recent decision on the cruise liner terminal is a good case in point.

Furthermore, we are alarmed by the fact that all three councillors from your own ward of Abbey Wood sit on the planning board. There are 17 wards in our borough and it would seem wholly inappropriate for all three ward councillors from Abbey Wood to be represented whilst there is no representation from the Greenwich Peninsula ward. The Peninsula is undergoing rapid transformation and is the site for the biggest regeneration project in Europe. We estimate that the planning board has already approved some £6 billion worth of construction projects for this ward.

The residents of East Greenwich welcome the sustainable regeneration of our area and we want to see the area improve. In fact, we are raising money and seeking funding so that we can do our own bit to enhance East Greenwich.

In truth though, our community feels extremely frustrated at the way in which our attempts to raise legitimate concerns over the development of our area are not being taken seriously and are being batted away through a process that is less than scrupulous at times and is susceptible to what we perceive as potential political interference.

We call on you to restore our confidence in the borough and the decisions it makes and we formally request that you step down from the Planning Board. We need to have confidence that our borough is making the right decisions for the right reasons and operating in the same way as other London boroughs as part of the statutory process.

Yours sincerely

The Executive Committee of East Greenwich Residents Association