

NOT DECENT! THE EVOLUTION OF RADICAL TORY SOCIAL HOUSING POLICY

KEY EXTRACTS FROM HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

At the beginning of June 2009 Hammersmith & Fulham Council published its draft Local Development Framework (LDF) for consultation. The LDF, which is the Council's planning strategy, declared that several council estates across the borough, containing 3,500 homes, are "not decent neighbourhoods".

<http://lbhf-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/csojune09?pointId=641029>

How did this concept of a "not decent neighbourhood" originate? The following material is key extracts selected from 9 of more than a hundred documents recovered through an FOI request made by Andrew Slaughter MP to Hammersmith & Fulham Council.

1. Presentation by Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh, Leader of Hammersmith & Fulham Council, to Eric Pickles MP, Chairman of the Conservative Party and Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government, and to Grant Shapps, Conservative Shadow Minister for Housing

"Social Housing= Welfare Housing= Ghettoes of Multiple Deprivation

Public spending is high but with poor returns.

Hammersmith – an example. There is no return on asset value. Government has received no benefit from £billions invested in grant in LA and RSL sector and social housing remains largely the destination for millions of households who are condemned to live in multiple deprivation." [and who] "add to the welfare cost of Government far beyond the £20bn direct cost of support to social housing.

Principles of reform.

Only provide homes for those who are unable due to age, infirmity or disability from using welfare subsidy to provide for themselves.

Provide housing welfare payments to households based on need, not rent paid (eg. Individual adults only need to rent a room in a shared house).

Over 5-10 years shift capital funding to increased welfare payments to allow social rents to rise to market levels."

2. Presentation by Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh to James O'Shaughnessy, Director of Policy and Research, The Conservative Party (14/1/09)

"What is needed? A solution to concentrations of deprivation."

3. "Mixed communities round table" to 'peer review' Principles for Social Housing Reform (published by Localis April 2009): Email from Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh to senior Council Officers and Localis, a right wing Conservative think tank (18/2/09)

"1. How do you transform a problem estate into a mixed community – Fulham Court

2. How do you deliver a new build mixed community in a deprived area such as W12 White City Opportunity Area land to east of Wood Lane.

We would need to provide photos and briefing notes to set out where we are today in both areas. Then formulate a series of topics to get ideas on how to deliver mixed communities."

4. **“Creating mixed communities in concentrated areas of deprivation – Programme for Round Table Discussion”**: Invitation sent jointly in the name of the Council and Localis using material prepared by senior Council Officers for the event hosted by Localis and held on 3/3/09

“The aim of this roundtable is to identify practical steps that councils and Registered Social Landlords can take that can help to deliver mixed communities rather than concentrations of welfare housing.

5.25 Case Study 1 – Fulham Court – Building a mixed Community Over Time – Facilitator: Nick Johnson, Chief Executive (H&F Homes)

Fulham Court is a deprived inner city estate with poor physical environment and prospects for increasing resident satisfaction.

6.05 Case Study 2 – White City Regeneration Area – Creating New Communities through Physical Regeneration – Facilitator: James Reilly, Director of Community Services (H&F)

7.10 Canapes and wine provided”

5. **“Notes of discussion” by John Moss (4/3/09), co-author with Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh of Principles for Social Housing Reform, Localis April 2009**

“Estate is typical of 'barracks for the poor'.

What is a 'Poor Person'?

Need to manage behaviour of tenants as well as physical property.

Intervene on long-term aspirations, gentrification will benefit their children.

The bulldozer argument does not recognise the strength of every tenant as a resident occupying a home.

Funding needed for political problem of management.

Hard to get rid of people.

The Sacred Cows need to be shot!"

6. **“The first Summary of Round Table”**: Email from Richard Blakeway, the Mayor’s Housing Advisor, to Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh, 5/3/09

“V interesting. My big point, which the front bench know, is units not being tied to tenure. This means PPS3 reform. Are you thinking of reconvening this group again? Impressive group. One option might be to use the next stage of the mayor’s housing strategy and/or tory green paper, so just before the summer.”

7. **“Summary of Round Table”**: Email from James Reilly, Director of Community Services, Hammersmith & Fulham Council to Nick Johnson, Chief Executive of Hammersmith & Fulham Homes, 5/3/09

He [Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh] made some mention of an early opportunity to push it with other more senior colleagues and I think this is behind the rush. John Moss has returned his notes first, Chris is working on it but you and I will need to work on the exec summary and conclusions with Stephen.”

8. “Creating Mixed Communities in Concentrated Areas of Deprivation”: Material prepared by senior Council Officers and published by Localis 16/3/09

“Winning over tenants, and involving them in the redevelopment process is one key to success. However, Councils should not be put off taking forward plans by a vociferous minority.

Create an equal market between the private and the social rental sectors by lifting rent controls. Reform restrictions on tenure and move towards a level playing field on price to create an open market.

It was generally agreed that “Porteresque” accusations of gerrymandering or social engineering needed to be faced head on pointing to the urgency of needing to act to address failing neighbourhoods.

Clear message was that regeneration should not be stymied by a very few who object on spurious or ideological grounds.

Case Study 1 – Building Mixed Communities Overtime

“It is not a place it is a barrack for the poor”

Creating New Communities Through Physical Regeneration

“This is an easy one!”

WCOA [White City] was identified as a large area awaiting significant development and improvement. It is an area of high potential and as one speaker put it the ideal place to develop and deliver a ‘master plan’.

Need to deal with level of political risk in terms of local and also “concerned citizen” disaffection.

Views were expressed that only a very few people required some form of rented housing which in effect would become supported housing for the most vulnerable (A small sector possibly less than 10% of the nations stock). If reforms (many outlined below) were implemented this could well be a consequence.”

9. “A decent neighbourhood”: Email from Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh to the senior Council Officers including the Chief Executive (25/3/09)

“I wanted to share with [you] the final draft of proposals to reform social housing. The paper authored by John Moss and myself has been peer reviewed by many housing professionals, developers and leading inner city Conservative politicians who know the problems inside out.

We propose to balance deregulation (“Right to Manage”) with a statutory duty to create a decent neighbourhood – a place where people want to live and they have pride in – in areas of concentrated deprivation.

We need to create mixed communities in concentrated areas of deprivation.”

Concluding remarks

It is for readers to reach their own conclusions on the process and content revealed by these documents. (A much fuller extract of the documentation is provided separately.)

Perhaps, having spent the past week compiling this information, I have become too close to it. However, as someone who was closely involved in opposing and exposing the gerrymandering by Dame Shirley Porter and Westminster Council, and also as a reader of, and graduate in History, I suggest:

- 1. It is not lawful for a local authority to engage in and to fund the party political activity revealed in these documents.*
- 2. The language of discourse, let alone its content, is, to say the least, unfortunate.*