

## Key Voices Meeting Summary notes

Barkantine Hall, E14 at 6:30pm

15 September 2015

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**Present from One Housing:** Mick Sweeney  
John Gregory  
Alan Williams  
Martin Heys  
Catherine Kyne

**Residents and observers:** 11 residents – Barkantine Estate  
4 residents – Kingsbridge Estate  
7 residents – Samuda Estate  
10 residents – St Johns Estate  
1 resident – independent  
5 observers

**Chair:** Jan Bros – Area Board Chair (Island)

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### Chair's introduction

The Chair opened the meeting, thanked residents for attending and the Barkantine Hall Management for use of the building. Following a full introduction of all the Executive Members present, the Chair outlined the meeting agenda. It was agreed that the notes of the meeting would be translated and circulated. The Chair also informed the meeting that the session was being filmed with the intention that the recording would be published for the wider benefit of residents who could not attend.

### CEO opening summary

Mick Sweeney (MS) welcomed guests and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to address rumours circulating about 'Project Stone' and to agree an engagement process with residents that will begin restoring community relationships.

He outlined the key myths circulating and confirmed that:

- no blocks/buildings will be demolished before Christmas or indeed anytime soon
- One Housing is not about to submit any plans for approval
- every resident will enjoy security of tenure
- every tenant will retain the same rent regime
- every leaseholder will receive market value or a fair equity share for their property
- no resident will have to move away from the area

MS apologised to residents for the way in which engagement had begun and acknowledged that rather than start with the Cross Island Conversation, OH should have started with talking to residents and sharing concerns and ideas for the future of the Island estates. He outlined the history of OH's involvement in the stock on the Island and advised that the capital works programme was a 'done deal' when One Housing took on the four estates. He acknowledged that the programme had been unsatisfactory on a number of fronts and explained that One Housing would have done things differently, if that option had been available from the start. He went on to explain that the programme was effectively catch-up fixes agreed at stock transfer and that these were not designed to address the long-term sustainability issues present in some of the properties.

He explained that across the estates as a whole, One Housing now spends more on maintenance than it collects in rent and that, simply put, the situation is not sustainable. He explained that some buildings are nearing the end of their natural life and that processes need to be put in place to assess the long-term future of the four estates.

The purpose of the Cross Island Conversation was to gather residents' views about the area they live in and to help shape OH's thinking. It was anticipated that all the information gathered would be used to inform credible and realistic plans for improvement.

A leaked document appeared in the public domain and was misconstrued as a 'plan'. MS confirmed that this was not the case and that it was one of many feasibility studies produced to consider available options. It is also standard practice to scope out options to understand and inform future plans.

The organisation has listened to the criticism and its aim going forward will be to work more directly with residents through its current staff team so that any future plans will be informed by their views. He explained some of the potential gains for residents, which included more social housing and bespoke elderly living schemes. Resident involvement will be integral to understanding the needs of the local community.

MS stressed that from One Housing's perspective, doing nothing is simply not an option because of the underlying faults with some of the estates and the fact that over the next 30 years the expected loss is around £20m if nothing changes due to the growing cost of upkeep. For leaseholders, the potential costs of contributing to the upkeep or major refurbishing of buildings will be high and unaffordable to many. One Housing want to understand what residents feel the future of the four estates could look like.

MS asked the resident representatives present to have discussions with their respective members on how they want the consultation process to look, and to bring their ideas back to the organisation within three weeks. One Housing will then develop an encompassing engagement strategy within a further two weeks after receiving that feedback.

The Chair then opened up the meeting to questions from residents. A summary of the key questions and answers is attached.

The meeting closed at 8:15pm.

**Mick Sweeney**

**CEO – One Housing**

## Key questions and answer summary

A number of questions were asked by residents, a summary of these are detailed below. Where the same question was asked by more than one person, these have been grouped together for ease of reference. There were also a variety of comments made - some have been included to give an idea of residents' thoughts on the evening. A video recording of the meeting is available at <https://youtu.be/6soqppjHSts>

**Q Why is the Group Board Chair not present?**

**A** MS advised that it was not necessary for the Group Board Chair to attend the meeting. The CEO and Executive Board are present and while the Group Board sets the organisation's overall strategy, the CEO and Executive Board are responsible for its delivery and so are best placed to answer and inform residents.

**Q Residents asked about the timescales for consultation and changes.**

**A** This meeting is intended to be the start of a series of meetings to engage with residents and understand their ideas to inform any future proposals. Any major redevelopment would take 15 - 20 years to complete.

**Q Is One Housing going to demolish our homes?**

**A** Rumours that we are going to knock down any buildings by December are untrue. The leaked document is not a plan – it is one of a number of feasibility studies carried out. This kind of background work is normal before any kind of redevelopment. Tower Hamlets Council advised OH that some initial proposals needed to be created before any discussion about redevelopment could take place. The whole process including consultation will take many years.

**Q We are concerned about future sales, how will the value of our properties be maintained?**

**A** One Housing is not running down the estates as suggested. We accept that there are some service weaknesses and we are working hard to address these. We are currently spending more on services than we collect in rent. The major works programme did not address the long term design flaws and we hope going forward we can work with residents to address these issues. One Housing guarantees that full market value will be paid should that option be chosen by leaseholders.

**Q Residents have no faith in the management of services and this is shown clearly in the findings of the Cross Island Conversations. How will action be taken to rebuild relationships with residents and improve services and what assurances will you give residents on this?**

**A** One Housing acknowledged the lack of trust amongst residents towards the organisation and the task ahead to rebuild this. Using consultants to carry out the Cross Island Conversations was following what is generally considered to be 'good practice'. This however, was the wrong approach and One Housing should have spoken more directly to residents about our concerns and ideas for the future. Today's meeting is the start of a new process and residents can have confidence that they will be speaking to and getting answers from One Housing directly in future. One Housing will respond to every criticism and will work to improve services. Residents need to accept that it is impossible for OH to be the best at everything as no organisation could achieve that, but the commitment to continually work hard to improve from One Housing's perspective is steadfast.

**Q Will residents actually have any power to influence changes to their area?**

**A** Yes, this meeting is intended to be the start of a series of meetings and processes to engage with residents and understand their ideas to inform any future proposals. One Housing is committed to exhausting the consultation process before any actual plans are finalised and will share our information and ideas on how we think properties could be improved. Island residents are invited to visit other One Housing regeneration projects and meet the people who live there. There are several other communities that were equally concerned or suspicious at the start of a project, however they

are happy and settled now and One Housing would be happy to arrange visits if residents were keen to do it.

**Q Residents want a binding vote with the same weighting for residents from different tenure types.**

**A** Every resident has an equal voice in our plans to move forward. However we are not sure about a vote at this time due to the legal responsibilities that One Housing has to its regulators and funders. However we will investigate this.

**Q We are concerned that One Housing will not take our views into consideration around building accommodation for families and the elderly and want assurance that regeneration will not just be more tower blocks.**

**A** One Housing is happy to hear all views on what type of properties residents want. Much of Tower Hamlets suffers from overcrowding and it is possible, with the right design, to reduce this or even double the amount of social housing on the Island. While private sales units (such as those found in tower blocks) are important because the money they raise in sale funds the construction of new social housing, One Housing is keen to look at how both family and bespoke housing for the elderly can be incorporated.

**Q Residents believe an independent stock survey needs to be done.**

**A** A full stock survey is required along with consultation as the whole process is about the development of a 20 year plan. One Housing is keen for residents to understand the reality of the condition of the stock as there are issues with structural and design quality. One Housing is optimistic that any redevelopment should be a shared vision from residents, although give and take on both sides will be needed to achieve that.

**Q Can One Housing guarantee that new homes will have similar room sizes?**

**A** While it is too early to give a definitive answer, this and issues such as the need for storage space, are exactly the kind of things that residents' views are needed on once the work begins on more detailed plans (which will be shared with residents). Visits to other schemes could also help show the kind of homes OH has recently built, as well as hopefully, reassure people that OH can deliver on its promises.

**Q Residents asked for written assurance that consultation will influence future plans as residents' views were not considered during the major works programme.**

**A** The major works programme was inherited and as such, it was difficult to fully take on board all residents' comments about the major works. Many of the discussions that took place were after the works had been specified and started, and it was hard in practice to change these. However, One Housing greatly appreciated the way many residents engaged with us about the major works and hopes to work with those residents moving forward by fully involving them from the outset. One Housing will give written assurance that no plans will be formulated until consultation is exhausted and all issues are addressed.

**Q Residents raised issues relating to cleaning on their estates, the estate inspection process and the lack of action taken around restoring communal lighting. A number of residents on the evening presented examples and this included a photograph of an outside walkway.**

**A** One Housing accepted the criticism of the estate inspection process and agreed to review this. All the individual issues raised will be fully investigated and responded to. Although a new bulb replacement process (through residents engaging with One Housing about the services they receive) has been implemented to address communal lighting, we accept that this has not fully resolved the problem. The issue of rubbish disposal at Kelson House is noted and a thorough investigation will take place. It is important that both One Housing and all residents work together to address the unacceptable actions of some residents, such as disposing of nappies from tower block windows.

**Q A resident raised issues relating to a Thames Water dispute.**

**A** This is a long running and complex dispute that would be better addressed outside this meeting. Assurances were given that a member of staff would take this forward.

**Q Does One Housing understand the excellent and important role of community centres?**

**A** As a housing association, One Housing wants to build what is a shared vision of what residents want around accommodation and all the other amenities such as community facilities, shops, medical facilities and schools. One Housing is positive that residents' views will be taken into consideration, although any design will be decided by Tower Hamlets (who are in the position to make decisions about this) through the elected ward councillors when that point in the discussion is reached.

**Q How will the plans affect stock on the Island that is not owned by One Housing?**

**A** One Housing has no plans at this stage of the process, however, while this level of detail is not available, it is entirely the purpose of resident consultation to ensure that residents' views are heard and understood and used to appreciate the impact of any future projects on local communities.

**Q Does One Housing understand the effect of the rumours on the local community, without any information available other than a leaked document, residents are understandably upset and worried. Many of these are older residents who do not want to move. One Housing has a poor reputation and any suggestion that homes are to be demolished is alarming.**

**A** One Housing does not underestimate the size of the task ahead and stands by the promise that no plans will be formulated until consultation is exhausted and all issues are addressed. Redevelopment is only one of a range of options available to be explored. As stated at the start of the meeting, no resident will have to move out of the area if they do not want to.

**Q Residents want to know what the consultation process will look like and stressed the importance of having a number of options available for giving meaningful input.**

**A** One Housing asked that TRAs and other key voice groups present go back to their residents and gather their views on how best we can design a new consultation process and to let One Housing know within the next three weeks. We will then review the ideas that come forward and draw up a suggested programme that we will present back to residents within two weeks. One Housing acknowledged that only around 30% of residents took part in the Cross Island Conversation and that more work will be done to expand and increase on the number of residents included on the consultation process going forward. One Housing will also be speaking to elected ward councillors about their role and views on consultation.

**Q How will the impact on freeholders be considered, along with possible increases to council tax & service charges.**

**A** Freeholders would be in the same position as leaseholders. One Housing needs feedback from residents across all tenure types. The level of detail required to inform the other issues highlighted is simply not available yet as there are no plans on what the future of the estate will look like. One Housing needs residents' views to inform any future design for the area.