

Press Release

23 September 2004

PART OF HISTORIC DEPTFORD PARK TO BE SOLD TO DEVELOPERS

Lewisham Council is planning to sell off part of London's historic Deptford Park so that a four-storey block of flats, car park, and other buildings can be built in the park.

The proposal, contrary to Lewisham Council's own planning guidelines, was put forward to the Council by the housing association, London & Quadrant.

Local residents are furious and have formed a lobby group to fight the proposal. More than 1,600 people have already signed a petition against the development and legal action is being considered.

The Chairman of the Deptford Park Resident's Association (DPRA), Justin Dowd, said today "The actions taken by London & Quadrant and the decision to grant initial planning approval by Lewisham Council are a disgrace. We fully support affordable housing in London but there needs to be a balance between housing and park land which has not been struck in this case. This is a small and heavily-used park in one of the highest density populations in London. It should be protected for the local community, not destroyed."

London & Quadrant is adamant the development should go ahead on the grounds of providing affordable housing. However, in an internal memorandum, the housing association's communications director, Maggie Gebbett, wrote "How much long term income will these 38 dwellings bring to L&Q? You probably sense that while I am often willing to fight a corner I just wonder about going into battle with this lot ...".

This statement directly contravenes other public statements made by London & Quadrant concerning its motivation for proceeding with the development. In DPRA's view, this highlights the cynical and dismissive approach taken by London & Quadrant to the needs of the local community.

London & Quadrant has also asked Lewisham Council to consider building on a memorial garden in Deptford Park where a family perished during a bombing raid in World War II.

London & Quadrant is a major developer in the Deptford area. It has a number of developments under construction and has plans to build more than 3,200 new homes in and around Deptford Park. These developments, once completed, will increase the local population by more than 50 per cent within the next ten years.

In an effort to find a solution, DPRA has met with Joan Ruddock, MP for Lewisham, and London & Quadrant. At a recent meeting, David Gannicott, Group Director of the South East Thames Region for London & Quadrant, conceded that their consultation in support of the development was flawed and did not represent the views of the local community.

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Local Labour councillor, Heidi Alexander, wrote to DPRA admitting "Whilst in principle, I am opposed to development on green spaces, I am afraid I feel unable to support your objection ...I agree that ideally, this development would be taking place on a brownfield site (of which there are many in this area) but am also aware that in terms of site assembly this is a less complicated site than many."

Initial planning approval for the development has been given and Lewisham Council and London & Quadrant are currently negotiating the final details for the development to proceed. Lewisham Council has written to John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State, to have the plan approved. He has said he will not intervene and that it is a local matter for Lewisham Council to decide.

DPRA believes the proposal contravenes Lewisham Council's own planning laws as well as breaching the Mayor of London's plan for green space in London. Councillor Darren Johnson AM, Green Party Member of the London Assembly and a member of Lewisham Council's Planning Committee, is opposed to the development and is supporting local residents. He has agreed to raise the matter with London & Quadrant and Ken Livingstone at the next full meeting of the GLA in October.

Deptford Park Residents' Association is convinced the development should not proceed and that the park must be protected. Justin Dowd said "London & Quadrant and Lewisham Council have the opportunity to correct a massive error in judgement by reconsidering the development in Deptford Park and, in so doing, generate an enormous amount of goodwill with the local community. We encourage them to do so. However, London & Quadrant and Lewisham Council should be under no illusion that, if necessary, DPRA will take this decision to a judicial review to ensure that the interests of the community are protected".

Ends.

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Visit the Media Centre on our website: www.deptfordpark.com

Deptford Park Residents' Association (DPRA) was formed in March 2004 by concerned local residents responding to a variety of issues affecting their community, including the plans put forward by Lewisham Council and London & Quadrant to build on Deptford Park. DPRA meets monthly and membership is free. More than 100 local residents belong and membership is growing steadily. DPRA's aims are to allow all locals to have their say in improving what is happening in and around Deptford Park for the benefit of the whole community.