

## Home Group – Concorde Close Residents Association (CCRA) Meeting (March 19) Minutes

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**Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019, 18:30, Hounslow Community Centre**

### Attendees

- Fran Smith (FS) – CCRA
  - Dan Smith (DS) – CCRA
  - Emma Murgatroyd (EM) – Home Group
  - Anthony Malek (AM) – Home Group
  - Clarke Heron (CH) – Field Consulting
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**18:30 – Item 1** – CH opened meeting noting two specific requests from the CCRA at the previous meeting (28/01/19):

#### **1. Home Group Stock Locations**

- AM provided two indicative maps showing Home Group stock, the majority of which are flats in locations across London and more widely in England and Scotland. The maps are yet to be finalised and do not identify voids available on each site but show a predominance of stock in the London boroughs of Harrow, Brent, Croydon and Hillingdon (and only two locations in Hounslow) and in the North East of England.
- AM informed that Concorde Close customers will have a priority on voids within Home Group stock ahead of local authority nominations.
- AM advised that Home Group were currently developing a graphical interface model of their stock. When complete Home Group will arrange a meeting or session with customers to present the finalised maps, so they are familiar with Home Group stock in London and across England.

#### **2. Disturbance Payments**

- Further to a request at the previous meeting from the CCRA, Home Group has sought to find alternative solutions for customers who may struggle to prepay for some moving costs.
- AM advised that for those customers moving prior to planning that Home Group would be unable to arrange prepayment of reconnections etc. However, Home Group will pay for removal and moving costs.
- Regarding planned temporary moves (as a result of the regeneration) for those households in hardship, Home Group would arrange for a partial (approx. 10%) pre-payment of the statutory Home Loss Payment (less any arrears) that could be utilised to pay for disturbance costs. This would then be reimbursed.
- At the request of DS, details on reimbursable costs is as below:
- The 'Land Compensation Act 1973' states "the amount of a disturbance payment shall be equal to the reasonable expenses of the person entitled to the payment in removing from the land from which he or she is displaced"

Reasonable expenses commonly include, but are not limited to:

- Removal costs (which we offer to arrange and pay upfront)
- Mail redirection from old to new address (redirection for up to six months)
- Disconnection and reconnection of services (utilities, phone, internet, satellite/cable TV)
- Disconnection and reconnection of appliances (i.e. gas or electric cookers)
- Removal day loss of earnings (limited to one adult per household - to be certified by an official letter from employer)

Home Group would normally take a view on any expenses claimed that are not listed above in order to determine if they are “reasonable expenses.” VAT receipts will be required to process repayment.

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## Item 2 – Home Group Update / Ongoing Engagement

EM and CH provided an update on the engagement undertaken by Home Group since the last meeting. This included meetings with Council planning and housing officers, a meeting and site visit with Counsel and a meeting with the Leader of Hounslow Council.

EM advised that that Home Group are waiting for the recommendation and report from Counsel, which will hopefully be received in the next fortnight. EM also stated that officers had been positive and were committed to working with Home Group to address the concerns regarding the refused scheme.

CH advised that Council Leader Steve Curran was unable to explicitly advise Home Group but had expressed anger and disappointment at the decision to refuse Concorde Close, citing Labour’s manifesto commitment to 5,000 new homes, of which Concorde Close was a part. EM advised that Cllr Curran also noted the need (however Home Group move forward) for customers to be as vocal in support of the scheme as the neighbours had been in opposition to the application.

- FS agreed that the CCRA and Home Group need to work together moving forward and that customers had been shocked by the decision. FS noted that neighbours have confirmed their intention to fight any appeal or future application.
- FS updated that the CCRA has been in contact with Councillors but have largely been ignored until the CCRA considered making a complaint against members, at which point Cllrs became re-engaged. Cllr P Grewal has probed about any update from Home Group and noted that Home Group has not informed Cllrs of their next steps.
  - EM advised that this was because Home Group was committed to discussing the next steps with customers before members and that no decision on next steps has been made yet.

FS asked how engagement with the GLA has progressed?

- EM advised that Home Group have a meeting with the GLA in the coming weeks, however that the GLA has agreed to support a new scheme and to provide grant for socially rented units, if a new application is brought forward.

FS noted CCRA concerns about safeguarding, in particular of young children and the need for extra security measures. As recognised by Cllr Nisar Malik, the estate is in need of replacement and the CCRA view the regeneration as the long term solution for the issues impacting the estate.

EM advised that Home Group has to consider what option is in the best interests of Home Group and their customers. The feedback received from customers, officers, elected members and Counsel will form part of a wider Risk Report to the Home Group Board that outlines the risks and opportunities of each of the potential options for Concorde Close going forward including appeal or a new application. This will then be used to make the final decision on how Home Group proceed.

EM noted that a key argument that had been lost at committee (and which gained significant traction) was the regeneration versus refurbishment one. Cllrs focussed on the refurbishment element, despite the report indicating that this was not a viable option.

- DS noted that members frustratingly didn't read the Committee Report and admitted so at the Committee.

In order to undermine the refurbishment argument Home Group has commission a full Building Survey that will begin next Tuesday (19/03) with visits to 8 properties on the estate. The surveyor is also considering methods of accessing the roofs of the estate or photographing the roofs for the purpose of the survey. Home Group issued letters to customers informing of the building survey on 11/03. A further letter will be issued to advise of the date of the external element of the survey, indicatively set for Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> April.

AM advised that the previous Coffee Morning was attended by only two customers and that forthcoming Coffee Mornings (27<sup>th</sup> March and 24<sup>th</sup> April) would continue as planned. AM also advised that Home Group would, with agreement of the CCRA pause Coffee Mornings after April until a more comprehensive update is required. The CCRA would continue to have a dialogue with Home Group maintenance and regeneration teams as appropriate.

- FS advised that the change from Tuesdays to Wednesdays was likely a reason for the poor turnout (along with the estate day the week previous) and agreed with the decision to pause Coffee Mornings from April on.

AM advised that Home Group would be alarming all void properties in the very near future, which would include a silent alarm that would be monitored on a 24hour basis. Further additional measures aimed at reducing ASB included changing of external plugs so they cannot be used by non residents and provision of another security camera.

- EM advised that Home Group also has the opportunity to place guardians (highly vetted, often young professionals) on short term leases in some of the voids through a partnership with VPS Guardian Services. Home Group wished to seek the views of the CCRA on this opportunity.
- Detail the guardian scheme is set out below:

VPS currently manage over 50,000 sites across the UK and Europe, providing 'protection through occupation,' keeping properties safe, secure and maintained to a high standard.

Guardians are carefully vetted in the selection process. To qualify to become a guardian, candidates must have:

- DBS (formerly CRB) check

- 2 years of references
- Credit and employment history check
- Employment status checks: Guardians must be employed and earning a salary in excess of £16,000 per annum
- Additionally, all candidates will be interviewed by VPS to gauge character

Guardian screening is carried out by Experian and conducted to BS 7578 standard.

Properties will be cleaned and secured prior to letting. Guardians will occupy the property as normal and VPS must provide guardians with at least one month's notice period when the time comes to vacate the property. Guardians will then be rehoused by the security company elsewhere.

- FS agreed that CCRA would discuss with customers and welcomed that any guardians would be in addition to, rather than instead of alarms.

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### Item 3 – CCRA Update

FS advised that engagement with customers via post should continue and suggested that a more visual newsletter like that previously circulated from Home Group be distributed to update customers.

- EM agreed and requested that the CCRA provide some elements of content for the newsletter to work together with Home Group and engage customers more fully.

FS advised that the CCRA held their AGM where customers raised a number of questions regarding the development and regeneration, including the nature of future engagement if there were any amendments to the proposals and if these could be held in a more personal setting.

- CH advised that Home Group will continue to engage and inform customers regarding any possible changes should a new application be brought forward. Home Group would continue to be flexible in particular with customers where there are difficulties attending meetings, however in the interests of transparency it is preferable to hold a smaller number of larger meetings rather than a series of individual meetings to ensure that there is a transparent and consistent dialogue with customers.

FS asked why customers were unaware of the initial prospect of a 12 storey development at Concorde Close?

- EM advised that this was very early stages prior to the design workshops and was based on a different and much larger potential land holding, including the four properties to the front of Concorde Close on Lampton Road and the development at Thames Vale on the other side of Lampton Road. This was a simple sketch to test 'what if' scenarios and was never progressed any further. CH advised that this is standard practice in the planning process.

FS asked if comments from customers had been removed from the Committee Report?

- EM and CH advised that Committee Reports rarely include all comments but rather include extracts of comments or grouped themes.

FS asked for Home Group to outline how homes would be allocated, including those possibly requiring a household split with adult children?

- AM advised that Home Group follows an allocation process which would phase the moves off site, with priority given to those customers with the longest unbroken tenancy, with other factors including mobility and disability and young children (up to the age of 3). This would require proof documents including contacting GPs etc.
- AM also advised that household splits are not guaranteed, with 'spare' units in any new development passed to the Council for nominations, however until that point Home Group would look at each case on its merits and could potentially undertake a household split.
- AM also confirmed that in the event of a household split the tenants would remain in their same rental category, as this would be agreed as part of any Section 106.

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#### Item 4 – Next Steps

CH advised that Home Group expect to receive the Counsel's recommendation in the next fortnight and would be undertaking and then reviewing the building survey in the coming weeks.

FS advised that CCRA would continue to liaise with Home Group maintenance team regarding ongoing issues.

It was agreed that the indicative date of the next meeting will be **Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April** (taking into consideration Easter Monday on 22<sup>nd</sup> April), by which point Home Group hope to provide a clear steer as to next steps for Concorde Close.

With agreement of the CCRA Home Group may change the date if it allows for time required to give the clarity the CCRA desires.

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#### Item 5 – AOB

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**19:50 – ENDS**

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