

## Summary notes of the meeting with Berkeley Homes on May the 22nd re 'The Happy Man Tree'

Daniel Massie and Justin Tibaldi from Berkeley Homes (BH)  
Peter Buckingham and Paul Powlersland representing the 'Petition Community' (PC) and friends of The Happy Man Tree

BH had in previous correspondence laid out the reasons for the removal of the tree and mitigation they're doing. This is attached in appendix for information

BH then talked about some of the process and planning consultations leading up to the planning decision in April 2020 to allow the tree's removal. In summary these were Master plan drawn up and outline done 2009. This hasn't changed in much detail. This was reviewed 2014. Detailed planning phase 3 2015 revised plan 2020. None of them retained the tree.

BH highlighted their efforts to compensate for the loss of the tree and their general company efforts to increase biodiversity throughout the development both now and in the future. They said it felt a little unfair to be labelled as uncaring given the work they had done in this area. They also said they felt the petition was a little unfair as it didn't describe the mitigations and their side of the story thereby asking people to make their own minds up before signing. They stated that often when people knew more they became more understanding and dropped their objections.

Delay.

BH then talked about the difficulty they are now in if they were to try and change any of the design. They estimate that there would be a 15 month delay as a change of design would need all the due processes or planning to go through getting environmental impact studies and consultation etc. they went on to say that this would have an impact upon people waiting to be moved into new homes from the home as they are currently living in in the estate. This would not just be people in phase three but it would impact on all the other phases which would in turn be delayed because they decant phase four people into phase three development while phase four is being built etc so there is a knock on impact of delay into other sections of the development. They also highlighted such a delay would result in unemployment with people working on the site at the moment.

Petition Community (PC) picked up the timings of the original master plan and plans from 2009 onwards and began to try and sketch out a framework as to why PC were in this room right now. And to do this from a personal story as follows.

***Pete (of PC) then made a personal statement with PP input***

*"My own journey to this room is very surprising for me as if you'd asked me this about is 3 or four years ago I would not believe this to be possible.*

*I used to work in the film industry for 40 years and then something began to awaken me about the way that I had run my life in relation to the ecological crisis of the planet. I'm not just referring to climate I'm referring to the whole way that we have engaged with the planet and the resulting threat to the way we live or would like to live. I changed direction in*

*my work. Alongside that I seek to become more and more aware of and in touch with a wider relationship to nature.*

*When I read about the Happy Man Tree something happened with in me. Myself and Kay my partner are both local residents who live about half a mile from the tree. Something clicked and broke in some way and we decided that we had to do something about it and so completely on our own we went to the tree. We began to make signs. We spent about half an hour by the tree and talked to people each day. We began to post about it and we started a petition. We never expected to create any traction we were just doing something , we felt compelled to do it.*

*We're not natural activists. This is the first time we've done anything like this it's not easy to do and there are many times when I say to myself I'd much rather not be doing this or having to do this. (There are also moments of great joy when being with the tree)*

*As you know by now, this has resulted in a huge amount of support and interest from the local community and wider and it's that I would like to speak to.*

### ***Deep changes in thinking in society***

*It feels from my life experiences, being on the ground locally, from the petition plus everyday reading, that there really is a sea change in the way that people view our world. How we viewed things when the master plan was being thought up may be different now. There is a feeling that more change is needed more urgently around the environment and what we do to it. (The rise of groups like Extinction Rebellion are part of this sea change) many people are believing that we must think again and act with different priorities in our world. For example a number of local campaigners are mothers with children at local schools. Their argument is a fierce one because they say that we're teaching children to engage, respect and understand nature and yet on our doorstep they can see something happening, which is counter to these teachings, as this tree is expendable. This creates conflict and dissonance which can be summarised in "Enough is enough this has to stop" - no matter what the reasonable process was that led to this point.*

*Something may also be changing around Covid. There is a general feeling that we just don't want to go back to many things that we used to have and took for granted. The doors have opened up for a new way of thinking and acting. And from conversations on the ground this is resulting in the same feeling, that enough is enough. We're not going to allow for things to be exactly the same and that when we live in a world where things that we value are threatened we're going to start believing that they don't necessarily have to disappear and we don't necessarily have to accept it. In many businesses and organisations and in individuals I think it might take a time for us to understand and to move from one sense of what normal is and business as usual and begin to operate in a slightly different one. I wonder if we might be in this time at this moment. It might be that to operate from a framework of thought that existed 10 or even 5 years ago and framed the designs is in danger of meeting a different reality when it is enacted. This could be happening here.*

### ***The meaning of the Tree.***

*There is a difference in language that's used about the tree. The tree has meaning for people whereas the council for example argue about its value. Meaning means that people*

*see it as part of them, their memories' and as part of their life now. They played around it as children, smoked around it by the pub, they know its roots because it announce its position on the ground and it is used as a guide for a blind person to know where they are on the street. So many people talk about it in emotional terms and what it's meaning is to them. Even if there are not long memories to call upon, the tree still has deep meaning for them as perhaps many ancient trees do. People mostly don't talk about its value.*

*If this tree falls, people lose its meaning. Value is not something that resonates with them as easily. Meaning does, so if the tree goes the meaning that they hold at the moment that's around the tree is going to be replaced by other feelings, most notably a great sadness and quite a lot of anger.*

*The final thing I want to say is that I don't think the community will forgive you easily if the tree goes. We are being and will continue to be in our language incredibly careful about demonising yourself or Hackney council because we will not blame or shame as a principle. We're constantly looking to build dialogue. However, and there is a however here, we will feel anger as well as sadness, and forgiveness may take a long time to come. In other example of tree protest most notably Sheffield the Labour council won every legal fight against protesters But they lost their reputation and eventually power and trees were saved. This is one tree. But we suggest that the process and time taken will be very public and damaging to BH and Hackney and it will result in arrests and physical confrontations which might be costly to BH for a long time afterwards.*

*I realise that the gap here across the table feels wide. I understand your position and the difficulties you are in here. You have been part of a long process and have reached the point where you believe that your process is fair and reasonable and it's time to move on and the delay is difficult and might be difficult for other people. Equally I would ask you to understand how the tree has meaning to people of all persuasions. And that it might be a focus of some of the deep changes of thinking which are going on at the moment in society, and that the position you started off on this 2, 3 maybe 10 years ago and assumptions made about the way people think and want to relate to the world may no longer be as valid. Basically, we know this tree has to remain."*

PC then asked if it might be possible to fast track the design process to 6 months or less. And said they were willing to work with anyone and everyone to see if this could happen and help persuade other partners to allow for this to happen

It was felt people were getting 'strapped in' to their positions and we are still able to unstrap and get out but the opportunity for that was narrowing.

BH and PC agreed to reflect on the conversations we had had. BH said they would respond to PC's position.

### **Reporting the meeting.**

It was agreed that there would be a jointly agreed text that would be used for communicating to other people. PC stated that their forms of communication would be

through website and social media. PC also restated the no shaming or blaming principles in any communication and as always to seek dialogue.

## Appendix

BH arguments sent by e mail to PB

*The tree has been identified for removal since the beginning of the regeneration, as set out in the original masterplan in 2009 that informed a subsequent master plan review in 2014, and detailed planning applications for Phase 3 in 2015 and 2020 both of which have been granted. Despite extensive public consultation, at no time since the regeneration started in 2009, has the issue with removal of the tree been raised by anyone.*

- *The latest planning consent, granted early this month was actually due to go to Committee in November last year. However, following concerns being raised by local councillors, and the local community, we withdrew the application and worked with members of the local community and the Council to look at mitigation measures.*
- *After an extensive review, it was determined that the application being proposed gave the best possible outcome for the community in terms of place making and delivery of new homes, and was not as has been suggested by some quarters as it was too expensive or too complicated.*
- *As part of the review we further enhanced the landscaping proposals and introduced more new trees. The revised proposal now delivers 175 new trees, including 7 additional mature trees across the phase, 36 additional pleached trees on Seven Sisters Road and 5 lime trees on Woodberry Grove. An independent report commissioned by the council concluded that the five lime trees, which are replacing the London Plane, improve air quality and are better for biodiversity.*
- *The consent also delivers a significant new public open space, including a new park and a green street lined with trees and plants.*
- *The latest consent increases the net bio diversity of the site by over 150%, which means it is much better for local wildlife, and will further enhance the adjacent wetlands nature reserve which we supported with funding in an earlier phase of the redevelopment.*

*For the reasons set out above, we feel that the proposals we have developed over the past 2.5 years, in consultation with the local community and the Council, provide the best possible outcomes for the community.*