

Essex and Eastwood Wharf – a report by the Lea Valley Federation

Planning Application for high-rise residential development by Sheerygreen Homes in partnership with A2 Dominion (London)

Approved by the Planning Committee of LB Waltham Forest, Tuesday 4th January 2011

The Council Chamber and gallery were full to capacity with opponents of the Planning Application to build high-rise residential units on the site of Essex and Eastwood Wharf at Lea Bridge, on the east bank of the River Lea.

The LB Waltham Forest Planning Officer, Jon Price, made his statement about the application. It included a number of 'typos' concerning the number of units and rooms in the proposed development, which he read out to the Committee – rather crucial information, one would have thought, that should have been circulated before the meeting. He concluded by recommending to the Planning Committee that they should approve the application.

[It was admitted afterwards, that it never occurred to the Planning Control Dept to put the application forward to the Planning Committee recommending refusal, so that the Councillors would have had to over-ride Officers' advice. One wonders if it would have affected the outcome.]

He was followed by five speakers opposing the application; each was allowed three minutes, during which they stated their compelling cases against the application very eloquently:

David Rees – on behalf of the Lea Valley Federation (LVF);

Joe Ward – on behalf of New Lammas Lands Defence Committee (NLLDC);

Del Brenner (a member of the British Waterways Commission) – on behalf of Regents Network;

Barry Buitekant (Councilor, LB Hackney) – on behalf of Millfields Users' Group (MUG); and

Stephen Wilkinson (Head of Planning, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority) – on behalf of the Park Authority (LVRPA).

Stephen Wilkinson stated that, if the application was approved, the LVRPA would consider using its power under the 1967 Lee Valley Regional Park Act, to call in the Secretary of State to make a decision on Essex Wharf through a Planning Inquiry. He has since confirmed to the *Waltham Forest Guardian* (their reporter attended the meeting), that it intends to do so.

[The LVRPA can do this because the development is completely within and surrounded by the Regional Park and completely undermines the purpose of the Regional Park to maintain the Lea Valley as a "green wedge" of open land on a par with Green Belt land.]

Luke Emerton, agent for the developers, then stated his case for the applicants – with no restriction on the time he was allowed. There was no opportunity for any of the opponents to question his statements. One of these statements announced that the LVRPA had sold land to the developers in the sum of £150,000 – suggesting the the LVRPA were in collusion with the developers, despite the fact that LVRPA had opposed the application. No one picked up on this point, but it could have influenced the Planning Committee.

Then a member of the Planning Committee, after stating to the onlookers' dismay that we should accept the fact that the site would be used for residential development, went on to give another

compelling statement against the proposed development. He had also spotted another 'typo' in the number of rooms and units (which Jon Price accepted); and he queried the legitimacy of approving an application in which Section 106 agreements had not be fully confirmed (a factor that had been used in the past to dismiss a number of applications). The latter was hesitatingly explained as now being permissible under new regulations.

The final speaker was LBWF Officer for Housing. After explaining that she was not feeling well but would do her best, she delivered a largely irrelevant speech about her experience as a Hackney resident (before she moved to Waltham Forest), the quality of water in the River Lea, the unpleasant appearance of (what was then) an industrial site on the opposite bank of the river from Hackney which she saw every day when she walked her dog, and homeless people in the borough. She then advised anyone who wished to inspect the site, not to do so by boat, and proposed that the Committee should approve the application. This was then seconded and approved by a show of hands.

The LVF have asked for an explanation from the LVRPA about the sale of land.