From: Thomas Muirhead
Sent: 05 April 2024 10:42
To: Elaine Quigley; Eddie Hanson (Cllr); Nanouche Umeadi (Cllr); Lloyd Hatton (Councillor)
Subject: Alexandra & Ainsworth heating: letter to the CNJ

Dear Elaine and Councillors

It has been suggested that I forward this letter to you. Please ensure it is included in the comments to the planning application

Regards

Tom

Tricks but no consultation

❑ EVERY EU member state is legally committed to retrofitting their stock of residential buildings, with initiatives like grants and tax breaks now in motion to accelerate the transition away from gas.

With wind, solar, and hydraulic already making electricity the cheapest energy source, the EU is shifting to new electric heating technologies.

This large programme necessarily begins with insulating everywhere; it is already creating thousands of jobs and delivering significant economic benefits.

As Europe moves forward, the UK, particularly in Camden, falls behind, with our council still clinging to outdated reliance on gas. The proposed replacement heating system at the Alexandra and Ainsworth Estate reflects this outdated mindset. Engineered as if from 50 years ago, it threatens to tie us to a retrograde system that would hinder future alignment with the progressive approach the EU has already adopted.

Hundreds of written objections from knowledgeable residents have vehemently opposed Camden's planning application. Not only would the proposed new system be inefficient and fail to reduce heating costs; it also threatens irreversible harm to our listed buildings and endangers the unique features of our flats, which have Grade II* listing and protection.

PHOTO: OXYMAN (CC 3.0 SA) DETAIL

The famous estate

Camden is legally required to safeguard this listed masterpiece, but its clumsy heating project is a disheartening departure from the vision of the architect Neave Brown, mentioned by your correspondent (March 28) and who must surely be turning in his grave.

Camden's new tactic: manipulate residents into withdrawing their objections, even though these objections have been formally submitted and are now being considered by the officers.

The council's in-house engineers are belatedly scrambling to defend the application by resorting to propaganda. In what I can only describe as a sneaky attempt to persuade the planning committee that the engineers have been "listening", they've begun distributing colourful leaflets that make unsubstantiated promises about the supposed benefits of the new heating system. Available only in English, these leaflets further highlight how discriminatory and disengaged Camden's engineers are from the residents; undermining the hard work of our councillors.

The deceptiveness of these propaganda leaflets is evident in how Camden's project team describe a replacement heating system that would be implemented in two phases: phase 1 would squander up to £100million of our money on the unsustainable, inefficient, gas-burning system we don't want, posing harm to our listed buildings. This would then be followed, supposedly, by a dubious phase 2 in 20 years' time, which they claim would make the system sustainable by "bolting on" additional elements that would magically upgrade it to something resembling today's standards.

A correct professional approach to designing a 21st-century heating system, one that effectively addresses climate change now and remains viable into the future, is to ensure it is properly designed from the outset. We have seen no details of what this illusory phase 2 would actually consist of, or what it would cost on top of phase 1; only vague promises that it would not cause additional disruption to residents. What is not correct, and which as a professional myself I must say I find shocking, is to push ahead with a poorly designed, antiquated, unsustainable, system and then bat away objections by vaguely promising – for propaganda reasons – that it might be improved by an imaginary phase2 20 years from now. Playing tricks on people is not consultation.

So far, Camden's in-house engineers have responded to residents' objections by closing ranks and doubling down in defence of their indefensible application.

As their approach to consultation becomes more and more of an embarrassment, they should put their hands up, acknowledge that they've got it wrong, withdraw the application, and work in genuine collaboration to devise a significantly better solution: an energy retrofit that preserves the integrity of our listed estate and aligns with European climate change standards: something Camden should enthusiastically embrace and of which it could be proud.

TOM MUIRHEAD, NW8