

## **Serpentine Court Steering Group**

Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020

### **Minutes**

Residents: Danielle Slaymaker (Chair), Sharon Jordan (Deputy Chair), Shannon McCaul (Deputy Chair), Cassy Elliott ((Deputy Chair), Robyn Goodwin, Ronke Oludapo, Joan Forsyth, Pauline Wright, Stacey Coleburt, Sebastian Power, Sandra Mavunga, John Pearce (observer), Jean Wallace (observer), Clive Wallace (observer), Sue Kettle (observer), Margaret Prescott (observer – Lakes Residents Association), Sue Evans (observer – Lakes Residents Association), Liz Jenkins(observer – Lakes Residents Association), Tina Harper (observer – Wind in the Willows Nursery),

Staff: Anne Bircham (Milton Keynes Council), Phil Chandler (Milton Keynes Council), Kevin Farrell (Tpas)

Apologies: Mercy Zvenyika, Mohamed Rohim, Nasteexo Cabdi, Mariee Wymer (observer – Locals of the Lakes), Cllr Emily Darlington

#### **1. Welcome and introductions and ground rules**

Danielle opened the meeting with a welcome and introductions. She announced that the planning application had been approved for submission at Cabinet, the night before. This is another major milestone for the project, and Danielle thanked all concerned for their hard work in getting the application ready.

#### **2. Minutes of 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019**

Agreed as a true record.

Matter Arising – page 2 – MKC procurement team to meet with Tpas and DS. Carried forward.

Matter Arising – page 2 – the draft Local Lettings Policy has been circulated by MKC. Dawn Wilson (Housing Access Manager, MKC) to attend the February SCSG meeting.

Matter Arising – page 3 – MKC to organise a rents and welfare benefits workshop. Carried forward.

Matters Arising – page 3 – HTA to organise a design walkabout for SCSG to look at the development sites in early 2020.

3. **Draft Home Loss Payments & Disturbance Compensation poly – Phil Chandler (MKC)**

Phil shared the latest draft of the policy with SCSG and highlighted the main points. He pointed out that the Home Loss payment is reviewed by government once a year in October and it was increased by £100 in October 2019. Phil drew the SCSG's attention to the clause (2.5) which states that the Council reserves the right to seek to debit part or all of the Home Loss Payment to settle outstanding debts owed by council tenants. SCSG had debated this point on a number of occasions during the preparation of the Resident Charter and supports this clause, as way of helping tenants to become debt-free.

The following questions were raised:

Q: If a tenant has rent arrears, will the Council insist on taking the amount owed out of their Home Loss compensation.

A. Yes, that is what clause 2.5 in the policy is saying.

Q. Will compensation be paid to tenants and residents on the wider Lakes Estate for all the disruption they will experience due to the building works?

A. Good question, and I don't know the answer, so I will check and report to the next SCSG meeting. **Action: PC**

Q. Can I begin to make enquiries with DWP about receiving the Home Loss Payment, and how it might affect my benefits, now?

A. The latest advice we have received from DWP is that a one-off payment will not be treated as income, but I must stress that the DWP's policy could change in the future. The recipient will be expected to inform Housing Benefit, Council Tax etc, too. There is no need to contact DWP now, but it's up to the individual.

Q: Will we have to inform HMRC about our Home Loss compensation payment?

A. It is a non-taxable payment, so tenants will not need to inform HMRC.

Q: Thinking about tenants who may have their Home Loss

compensation greatly reduced by outstanding rent arrears. Will the new homes have carpets and floor covering?

A. Yes, the plans include floor coverings in some rooms, and this is stated in the Resident Charter. (KF)

Q. With reference to clause 2.10, 3 months is a long time to be out of pocket and to wait to receive a payment from MKC.

A. MKC intends to process the payments quickly, and they should not take 3 months. There is likely to be a dedicated member of staff working on the payments.

Q. Do we have to pay for disturbance payments first and then claim the money back? That could add up to a lot of money.

A. MKC is intending to sign contracts with major companies such as the utilities providers, to make direct payments, so that tenants don't have to pay and claim back. There will inevitably be some costs that the individual will have to pay and claim back.

Q. Our household insurance may rise as we move from Serpentine Court to modern homes. Will MKC pay the difference.

A. No, MKC will not be willing to pay for the difference. However, there is also the possibility that insurance premiums will reduce, because doors, windows and locks will be more secure than existing flats and the neighbourhood should be safer by design.

Phil agreed to consider the points that had been raised and report to the next SCSG meeting with an update on drafting of the policy. He reiterated that the document is a draft and the final version will have to be approved by Cabinet. **Action: PC**

#### 4. **Project update**

Anne confirmed that the January public exhibition will be held on Sunday 26 (1pm – 4pm) and Monday 27 January (10.30am – 7.00pm). She asked SCSG members to consider volunteering to help run the events. She thanked the volunteers who had been carrying out the leaflet drop. The Neighbourhood Team, Asset Management Team, and Tenant Involvement Team, Michael Kelleher (Head of Housing & Regeneration and Cllr Nigel Long will all be attending the events at some point.

Work on the planning application, which runs to over 270 pages, continues, with the aim of making the submission by the end of February 2020. SCSG asked for a breakdown of how the planning process works for Phase A, and a who's-who for the next meeting

**Action: AB**

The project timeline has not altered since it was presented to SCSG and sent to the residents of Serpentine Court before Christmas 2019.

The draft Local Letting Policy will be presented to SCSG at the meeting on 4 February, by Dawn Wilson of MKC.

Anne announced that the theme of the project for 2020 is 'Working Together' and that includes all the residents of the Lakes Estate and the relevant MKC teams (see item 6).

#### 5. **Reports from Project Board and Cabinet**

Anne reported on proceeding at the Cabinet meeting the night before. Cllr Long and Cllr Darlington spoke in support of the planning application and lavished praise on the SCSG and Tpas for the work that had been done to involve the community. Cllr Darlington also spoke about the need for socio-economic regeneration. The BBC Politics Show is planning to show an item about the project at the end of January.

Sharon and Kevin gave a brief report on the Project Board meeting that had been held that morning. Most of the items on the agenda had already been discussed at tonight's SCSG meeting. However, Sharon had spoken during the item on Commercial Units and expressed support for an express supermarket with a post office counter. SCSG discussed the type of shop units that members would like to see in the new commercial centre. Kevin reported that Aniekan Umoren (Head of Regeneration), has proposed that MKC carries out further consultation with Lakes residents to try and establish the community's needs and desires.

#### 6. **Tpas – Independent Advisor report**

Kevin led an exploratory session about how resident involvement in

the regeneration of the Lakes Estate might broaden during 2020. He noted Anne's point about 2020 being the year for working together and posed some questions to the members.

There was consensus that the SCSG is still needed, and its role will be to help steer the elements of the project that directly affect Serpentine Court residents. It was suggested that groups such as the following may like to be included in a broader group:  
SCSG (Chair); LRA; LIP; Youth Network; LOL; the Police; faith organisations; schools; local councillors; other community groups (still to be identified).

In terms of the purpose of such a group, the following suggestions were made: information sharing; acting as a critical friend; safeguarding community interests; encouraging the sharing of knowledge and resources; sponsor of surveys and other community feedback mechanisms.

The meeting then went on to explore the idea of forming a Lakes steering group, in recognition of the fact that all residents will now be affected by the new-build sites. There was a general consensus in support of the formation of such a group during 2020.

**Action (AB):** Report SCSG's views to Aniekan Umoren with a view to working up a proposal for a new model of resident engagement for 2020.

7. **Any other business**

The Police Forum will be taking place on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January, 7pm at Spotlight.

8. **Date and times of future meetings**

Tuesday 4th February - 6.30pm – 8.00pm at Spotlight