

## Southend Central Area Action Plan

### Response to Additional Question 18 - Baxter Avenue

Initially I will respond to the answers in general terms and then approach each of the three submissions separately.

First of all (and this may just be 'semantics') I object to the word '**decant**' which is utilised four times in the responses. To '**decant**' means to '**pour liquid gently so as not to disturb the sediment**'.

'**Decant**' used in GHA terms indicates that the tenants are contained (in homes that they want to demolish) and will offer no resistance to being 'poured' into another container (home?). Sorry, as far as I am aware, only wine/liquid can be 'decanted' not people. The terminology desensitises Genesis and dehumanises the residents.

Secondly, however gently the process is implemented, the 'sediment' was disturbed at the outset, so there is no hope that we can be moved without being 'stirred up'. As we all know any 'shaking up' will disturb the 'sediment'.

Next GHA uses the term '**financial viability**' twice in their responses and again I take exception to it.

Genesis has funded much of the research that has influenced government policy regarding the reduction in the provision of social housing. They are now, in no position, at any time, to implicate the government's policy after they have sponsored the 'think-tanks' that are responsible for that policy. This is a deliberate, profit-driven strategy that Genesis and other Housing Associations have been following for some time. So as a profit making organisation Genesis will only be aware of the financial implications/viability of any scheme they undertake and they will certainly not initiate any plan that will make the Association a loss.

Advisors will ensure that they make a profit - that's 'good business' So having carefully considered the 'financial viability' for Genesis - who, if anyone will look at the financial implications for the residents?

Most residents will be on low pay/with little or no prospect of a pay increase/or on pensions or on benefits/some working three jobs (certainly in the past) to keep a roof over their heads) but as the CEO of Genesis has reportedly said that ***housing low-income families 'won't be my problem'***, whose problem is it?

In terms of 'financial viability' **refurbishment** rather than **regeneration** has been shown to be significantly more cost effective.

It may appear odd that many of the residents do not raise concerns regarding the re-development (although a number have done so at the first **Meet and Greet** sessions (1st and 5th July): but their experience of the way in which Genesis has handled this whole situation is far from satisfactory.

I had, at the meeting on 25th May 2017 highlighted my own difficulties in attempting to contact Genesis: add to that:-

- Some residents are still not receiving information regarding regeneration from Genesis
- The flyers (and the posters around the site) sent to residents contained contact details for Lillian Jameson: I used the email address given in this document: but was not surprised when I did not receive a response (that is usually what happens anyway). When I raised it as an issue at the meeting 1st July, I was told by Gordon Brewer, (Genesis Rep,) that the information (the email address) was incorrect: It beggars belief.
- in addition, when residents arrived at the 4 p.m. meeting on 5th July, they were told that no-one from Genesis would arrive before 6 p.m. Which led to

some frustration although Gordon Brewer did arrive at about 4.15. There was clearly some feeling of discomfort among the representatives making the presentation.

- On the presentation photographs, which were on display at the Meet and Greet Sessions, **Alexandra Court** is still referred to as **Alexander Court** - it doesn't inspire confidence. Getting the names of the buildings right, would seem to me to be a given, in any communication; or you may be led to believe that they have no real knowledge of the development they are about to demolish: so, absolutely no idea at all about the people who inhabit these homes.
- General difficulties in contacting anyone at any time (not just in connection with this proposed 'regeneration').

Some residents may well feel as if they are not heard/they count for nothing/are disposable/will be part of social cleansing, therefore there is no point in saying anything, because the 'big boys' will do what they want any way.

**Now on to the responses:**

***i What is the proposed tenure split/splits between market and affordable housing.....***

This question as we know was raised at the meeting on 25th May 2017 (Jubilee Room, Civic Centre) and there being no details available, more information was requested.

But the response given is still intangible.

I find it difficult to believe that Genesis have not been able to produce even 'a ball park' figure which would at least give a clue as to the answer to this question.

We are living in straitened times (some much more straitened than others) and Genesis is looking to the 'main chance' to make some money without regard to the individuals involved. Baxter Avenue is described as an 'opportunity site': Whose opportunity?

We are aware that the newest Genesis development of 52 flats on the corner of Harcourt Avenue and Victoria Avenue are part of the shared ownership plans or 'affordable' \* housing; so that the percentage of Social Housing in that particular development will be 0%.

Social Housing is consistently being replaced with 'affordable' housing. The rental cost of an affordable unit at an equivalent size to the Social Housing flat would be at least twice (probably more) the cost.

**GHA are 'seeking to provide some low cost home ownership[ (shared ownership) which having looked at research, does not seem to me, to be a 'viable' (using Genesis terminology) option for most people. I sincerely hope that anyone taking on 'shared ownership' reads the small print extremely carefully. Most of the people living in the Baxter Avenue development would not be able to access this type of accommodation.**

***ii Will all existing residents who occupy properties in the Baxter Avenue site have the opportunity of moving into the proposed new accommodation.....***

GHA's response to this question is guarded, and as such lacks substance, phrases like 'will seek to offer' /'subject to financial viability'/' we are expecting to....' 'Protected rents will be time limited', are 'weasel words/ phrases' that are designed to give GHA the maximum 'wriggle room'

Genesis have a gamut of professionals advising and guiding them every step of the way, presumably with relevant information; the residents are left by themselves with only 'Orwellian Newspeak'. Words without substance.

At this juncture, I return to my assertions that Genesis representatives are mercurial, or equivalent 'to nailing jelly to the ceiling': the very people who should be able to offer some

support are 'unavailable', so that residents feel absolutely over-whelmed/totally stressed/ extremely anxious and worried.

Research shows that, if the Baxter Avenue 'regeneration' goes ahead, there will be little or no provision made for social housing (only 1 in 19 social housing units are replaced in regeneration programmes). The Baxter Avenue development consists solely of Social Housing (over two hundred units) so if the site is decimated there could be about 10 homes classified as social housing to replace them: although I suspect that even 10 units of social housing are not on anyone's agenda. Certainly not GHA or the Local Authority or the Government.

***iii What are the proposed arrangements for temporarily re-housing existing residents.....***

This response deals with the temporary re-housing of existing residents: In many instances we are looking at a group of people in Baxter Avenue, most of whom are middle aged to elderly and vulnerable, with quite a number having health issues, but Genesis believes that moving such residents twice is an acceptable solution: which adds to residents feeling of not being heard/valued.

Again Genesis, are still in a state of 'flux' saying, this still has to be determined. I find it incomprehensible that Genesis, a Housing Association, of some experience, have not previously gone through this process (in fact I believe that something similar is happening in Colchester)and would therefore have some indication of outcomes.

**Conclusion:**

I do not feel that the responses proffered by Genesis add anything to the paucity of information given at the meeting on the 25th May or the subsequent 'Meet and Greet' Meetings. There should be a foundation of information which residents could build upon, currently there is nothing substantial in any of their responses.

Having never been involved with type of 'debate' before. I am unsure if their responses are acceptable to anyone: if they have used this method previously with so little substance, I

can completely understand why the current situation regarding social housing has been allowed to proliferate, to the disadvantage of those requiring social housing.

*Affordable: Dictionary definition: believed to be within ones financial means/not expensive*