

Myatts Field North - Health & Safety Update

Lambeth council takes any allegations about breaches of health and safety very seriously.

This is a summary of the findings of an inquiry into such claims carried out over the past six months.

Working with partners in the Myatts Field North redevelopment including Pinnacle PSG, Rydon Maintenance and Higgins Construction, the council has completed an inquiry into allegations of Health and Safety breaches on the estate raised in a report from Dr Stuart Hodkinson of Leeds University in June 2014.

The council, its partners, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and politicians were informed of "...very serious allegations about health and safety made by a former employee of Rydon Maintenance Ltd." relating to the Myatts Field North estate. These allegations had been passed to Dr Hodkinson and formed the substance of a 33 page report co-authored by him and several members of the Myatts Field North Residents Association and PFI Monitoring Board.

The redevelopment of Myatts Field North (MFN) is an award winning £150 million investment project that incorporates the demolition of 305 homes; 808 new homes and 172 refurbished homes, construction of a combined heat and power plant and new community centre over a 25 year partnership term.

The report focused on just 14 residents and their grievances, along with anecdotal and photographic evidence to support their allegations and concerns and stated: "Residents on Myatts Field North Estate have continually expressed concerns since the start of the project that there has been no overall health and safety team or department run by Regenter or Lambeth council to oversee and supervise...implementation of health safety standards and management."

The report, and its seven page covering letter, used highly emotive language and it was unclear whether it was intended to critique Private Finance Initiatives within the London Boroughs of Islington, Newham and Lewisham – or highlight legitimate concerns about Lambeth and its MFN residents. Although the document was supposed to have technical expertise and academic merit behind it, the authors failed to match alleged breach of health and safety to the attendant legislation covering that breach.

What was clear from Dr Hodkinson's letter and the report is that 14 residents were aggrieved and in that aspect was valuable as a source document about resident dissatisfaction.

However, the document did not mention the daily consultation with residents themselves; more than seven years consultation with private and public bodies; the rigorous application and evaluation of contracts; the monitoring and compliance of all parties concerned with the major refurbishment and rebuilding of a community.

The Health and Safety Executive visited MFN and sought clarification on some points and were provided with evidence from contractors and partners. The HSE raised some minor points but none that indicated anything remotely close to the level of concern suggested by Dr Hodkinson.

What was clear was that we needed to improve the way residents' concerns were dealt with and reassure them that we work within the boundaries and spirit of health and safety legislation. One direct action was to instigate centralised and computerised 'certification' so there is a clear chain of responsibility and approved contractors work on specific problems with current information and then, in turn, update the central database.

A recent independent survey of just under 100 Myatts Field North residents found:

- 80% of residents in the new properties agree that the estate is cleaner and tidier than it was two years ago
- 80% of residents in the new properties agree that they feel safer on the estate than they did two years ago
- 82% of residents in the new properties agree that the estate is a nicer place to live than two years ago
- 88% of residents in the new properties agree that their property is a nice property to live in
- 80% of residents in refurbished properties agree that their property is a nice property to live in
- 89% of residents in the new properties will recommend the estate as a nice place to live
- 73% of all residents agree that, when complete, the regeneration project will have improved the lives of residents
- 80% of residents in the new properties agree that overall their accommodation is better than two years ago
- 74% of residents in refurbished properties agree that overall their accommodation is better than two years ago
- 96% of residents think the new community centre is an improvement on existing facilities.
- The most popular item raised as being better about the estate was that it had a better appearance (cleaner/tidier/generally nicer/buildings look better – 64%)