

London Borough of Lewisham Response to “Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign FACT SHEET”

1. The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign say: “Lewisham Council wants to demolish decent council homes” The 87 homes in the Achilles Street area are all structurally sound and meet the Council’s ‘Decent Homes’ standard. So why does Lewisham want to demolish them when there is a chronic shortage of council housing in the borough?”

ACHILLES STREET FACT 1:

No decisions have been made yet and there are two options for building new homes on the estate. These are to build a small “infill” block on disused land, or to undertake a more comprehensive rebuilding of the whole area.

The infill option is likely to create around 25 new homes.

The comprehensive option has the potential to provide around 350 new homes, new shops and a range of other benefits to the wider place, including better access to Fordham Park from New Cross Road and improvements to the area fronting New Cross Road.

Equally importantly the comprehensive option is likely to provide a better solution to the problems that Council tenants have raised in this exercise. These include persistent damp and vermin problems, and are issues that result from the design rather than the quality of existing blocks.

While no decisions have been made, the reason we are considering a comprehensive rebuilding of the area is because it will provide more homes of all types, more Council homes, a better local environment, and could resolve problems raised by tenants about their homes.

2. “The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign say: “Lewisham isn’t interested in anything other than demolition - At the four token ‘consultation’ events Lewisham have held about the redevelopment, the only option presented to residents, businesses and the local community has been demolition and the building of a high rise, high density housing complex. This is a top-down plan that is being imposed on residents, businesses and the local community by the Council. Lewisham’s plan also totally disregards The Mayor and Greater London Authority’s Draft Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration, which states that ‘demolition should only be followed where.....all other options have been exhausted’. As far as the Achilles Street area is concerned no option other than demolition has been considered.”

ACHILLES STREET FACT 2:

That is completely wrong.

First, no decision has been made.

Second, the consultation to date has showcased the range of options available, and future consultations and decision making reports will do the same. At the consultation event held in February 2017 three options for the future of the Achilles Street area were displayed:

1. The first is to maintain the estate as it is, which causes the least disruption but does not provide any additional new homes, or any replacement new homes for current residents.

2. The second option being considered is infill on the estate. Design work carried out in 2014 indicated that 22 new homes could be provided on the current site of the garages next to Azalea House along Achilles Street. This option would provide some new homes, but no replacement new homes for existing residents and would limit the possibility of improving the issues that residents have identified on the current estate.
3. The third option is to rebuild the Achilles Street area as set out in the proposals the Council are currently developing. As set out above this would provide new high quality homes to all existing Council tenants and resident leaseholders, provide between 300 and 350 much needed new homes, provide an increased number of Council Homes, and allow for the creation of new public realm and comprehensive strategies to deal with traffic, parking and security on the estate.

The Council's proposals for rebuilding the Achilles Street are fully in line with The Mayor and Greater London Authority's Draft Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration. The full quote from page 11 of the draft guide that is partially given above reads:

"The Mayor believes that, where demolition and rebuilding is chosen as part of an estate regeneration, this should only happen where it does not result in a loss of social housing, or where all other options have been exhausted."

The Council is proposing to increase the number of social homes that are provided in the area, as well as re-providing all of the 55 social homes that are currently on the estate.

3. The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign say: "Lewisham won't consider the option of infill and refurbishment - Whilst Lewisham has spent a lot of time and money working up its plans to demolish the Achilles Street area it hasn't spent a penny on developing any other options. Infill, refurbishment and landscaping is widely accepted to be a lot less expensive and a more environmentally and socially friendly way to redevelop an area. However, Lewisham isn't prepared to put infill and refurbishment forward as an option and give residents, businesses and the local community a real choice in how best to improve the area."

ACHILLES STREET FACT 3:

There are three options being considered for the future of the Achilles Street area, and no decision has been made.

However, and as set out above, it is likely that the comprehensive option will provide a wider range of benefits overall, including to the existing Council tenants, than a smaller infill option.

4. The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign say: "Lewisham Council has failed in its duties as a landlord and managed the decline of the Achilles Street area - Lewisham has failed in its responsibilities as a landlord to maintain and upkeep the buildings (homes and businesses) in the Achilles Street area. When buildings become run down because a landlord has neglected them it is called 'managed decline'; and this is what Lewisham has done to the Achilles Street

area. The Council is now using its own failings as a landlord as an excuse to demolish the decent and structurally sound homes and businesses in the area.”

ACHILLES STREET FACT 4:

The homes around Achilles Street continue to be managed and maintained by Lewisham Homes. All repairs are carried out when they are reported to Lewisham Homes. The work that the Council is doing to look at proposals to rebuild the Achilles Street area has no impact on the management and maintenance work that Lewisham Homes carries out which is continuing as normal.

5. The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign say: “Lewisham’s plans for the Achilles Street area have been designed by private property developers - Lewisham’s plans for the Achilles Street area are based on a report by Savills (a private property developer), which was submitted to the government in 2016. In the report Savills argue that local authorities should go into partnership with the private sector (meaning property developers like themselves) to ‘redevelop’ housing estates in prime locations across London. Savills idea of ‘redevelopment’ (most people call it social cleansing and gentrification) is to demolish so-called ‘sink’ estates and in their place build high rise, high density ‘urban villages’. The designs that Lewisham have presented at the four token ‘consultations’ are identical to case studies in the report by Savills. So why Lewisham (a Labour council?) wants to destroy a long standing community and participate in a ‘redevelopment’ project that is first and foremost designed to boost the profits of private property developers, is only a question that they can answer.”

ACHILLES STREET FACT 5:

The Council’s assessment of the options for Achilles Street are based on the Council’s own agreed set of strategic priorities. It is not based on the view of Savills or any other external agency. The key strategic document for the Council is the Sustainable Community Strategy, which can be found at the link below. This was created through extensive consultation with Lewisham’s communities, adopted in 2008, and continues to shape the work of the Council today.

<http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/mayorandcouncil/counciljobs/executive-recruitment/Documents/SustainableCommunityStrategy2008-2020.pdf>

This sets out a range of commitments at pages 40-45 that are relevant here, all grouped around the theme of creating places “where people live in high quality housing and can care for and enjoy their environment”

We are committed to working with Achilles Street’s vibrant community, and we will only take forward redevelopment proposals that keep the community intact.

We have already committed that redevelopment will only go ahead if we can ensure that:

- All current Council tenants who wish to stay in the new development will be able to do so with the same rent levels and tenancy conditions that they have today;
- Any resident leaseholder who wishes to will be able to remain in home ownership on the new development;
- We will build as many new Council homes as possible, to be let at social rent levels;

- In addition to new Council homes, more affordable homes of other types, such as shared ownership, will also be provided when any additional homes are built.

We have committed that all affected businesses will have the opportunity to take some of the new commercial space created if the redevelopment goes ahead and we are also working with the BWA Islamic Centre to ensure they are a central part of our proposals.

We believe that these commitments mean that the fantastic community around Achilles Street can be preserved if there is a redevelopment of the area in the future.

6. The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign say: “Redeveloping the Achilles Street area will not address the shortage of council housing in Lewisham - To redevelop the area Lewisham will have to go into partnership with a private property developer. This means the vast majority of the new homes (currently estimated to be between 350 and 450) will be private, for sale and rent at market rates. Private property developers always use ‘viability assessments’ to reduce the percentage of social/‘affordable’ housing in any new development; and this has consistently happened in projects across London. The Lewisham Gateway project, for example, had a target of 20 percent ‘affordable’ housing and through viability assessments property developers managed to get away with building no ‘affordable’ housing at all. This was in spite of the fact that the property developers for Lewisham Gateway were given the land for nothing by the Council and on top of this they received £22 million of public funding (£20 million from the Homes & Communities Agency and the Greater London Authority and £2 million from Lewisham Council). So by going into partnership with a private property developer to redevelop the Achilles Street area Lewisham could ultimately end up reducing the number of council homes in the borough.”

ACHILLES STREET FACT 6:

As stated above the Council’s proposals for rebuilding the Achilles Street area will mean re-providing all of the 55 Council homes that are currently on the estate and also building as many new Council homes as possible. We are also proposing to build other types of affordable housing such as Shared Ownership or Living Rent homes which provide genuinely affordable housing options for people that not eligible for social housing.

There will be new market housing built to fund the rebuilding of the estate, but the aim of our proposals is to increase total number of affordable and Council homes provided in Lewisham.

7. The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign say: “Anyway, ‘affordable’ housing isn’t affordable - Lewisham Council defines ‘affordable’ housing as follows: rent is linked to the London Living Wage and it assumes that two earners occupy each flat, each paying 35 per cent of their net income on rent. This would require a household income of £37,140.80 per annum; and the rent would be £879.32 per month.”

ACHILLES STREET FACT 7:

There are many ways to define affordable housing. The one set out above is not used by the Council to define affordability, but it is close to one type of affordable housing that the Council is developing elsewhere. The Council does not use an assessment of market prices to define housing affordability. That is, it does not believe that homes at 80% of market rent are necessarily affordable to the people who need them most. A better way of defining housing affordability is to look at the income of the resident in question. As a rule of thumb the Council uses the Shelter definition, which is that residents should not pay more than 35% of their net income on housing costs. This definition is guiding some of the Council’s work to make the private rented sector more affordable and secure for low income renters who don’t qualify for social housing. More relevantly though the Council has an extensive programme of building new Council homes for social rent, and this is the driver for the Achilles Street project too. By the end of 2018 the Council will have 500 new Council homes, let at genuine social rents and available on secure tenancies either finished or under construction. These are the first new Council homes for a generation, and we hope that that Achilles Street area can provide a good number of these homes. For reference, the average monthly rents for Council homes in Lewisham are currently:

Property Size	Average Monthly Social Rent
One bedroom	£368.20
Two bedrooms	£414.01
Three bedrooms	£484.51
Four bedrooms	£541.19
Five bedrooms	£ 620.92
Six or more bedrooms	£648.74
Average of all dwellings	£417.47

These sorts of rent levels will be maintained in any new Council homes that are built as part of rebuilding the Achilles Street area.

8. The Achilles Street Stop and Listen Campaign say: “Lewisham Council doesn’t care about residents, local businesses and community organisations - In recent years Lewisham Council has been happy to sell off and transfer land to private property developers (land, which belongs to the people of Lewisham). This has happened across the borough, in New Cross, Deptford, Lewisham Gateway and Catford to name but a few places (this was also the Council’s plan for the land around Millwall, until Millwall fought back). The only people to benefit from these redevelopments have been the property developers, who have made big profits by building thousands of homes; and selling them at prices the vast majority of Lewisham residents can’t afford. This is what Lewisham wants to do to the Achilles Street area”

ACHILLES STREET FACT 8:

From the start of working up proposals for rebuilding the area around Achilles Street, the Council has been in extensive contact with residents and other local stakeholders to discuss what they liked and disliked about the Achilles Street area, and our proposals have responded to, and benefitted greatly from resident involvement. The main aim of the Council’s proposals to rebuild the area around Achilles Street is to

provide new homes, and within that to provide as many new Council homes as possible.

There are currently over 9,600 families on the housing register waiting to be adequately housed, and of these over 1,850 families are homeless and will spend the night in temporary accommodation, waiting for permanent homes. It is only through building as many new Council homes as possible that this situation can be meaningfully addressed, and to do that the Council needs to look at every available place where new homes can be built.

The Council is committed to rebuilding the Achilles Street area in a way that also benefits the existing residents, and will provide all Council tenants and resident leaseholders with new high quality homes on the rebuilt estate. The proposals also include improvements to public spaces, and will mean that current issues on the estate such as traffic, parking and security can be properly addressed.