



## **OPEN LETTER to Rye Lane Councillors David Parton, Jasmine Ali and Esme Dobson**

(cc All Southwark Councillors)

**13 January 2025**

Dear Rye Lane Councillors,

The Southwark Housing and Planning Emergency (SHAPE) coalition was established to put a spotlight on the housing crisis and demand Southwark Council does more to address it. We were created in response to the growing number of approved and proposed developments in our borough which provide a pitiful number of genuinely affordable homes and are harmful to local communities in many other ways. SHAPE was formed by Aylesham Community Action, Southwark Defend Council Housing, 35% Campaign, Latin Elephant and others, and there are now 13 groups signed up in support.

We welcome your decision as the three Labour Councillors in Rye Lane Ward to go public on your call for an increase in “affordable” housing on the Aylesham Centre scheme (“Councillors back calls for 50 per cent affordable housing in Peckham town centre development” – Southwark News 12.12.2024), where you stated that “...our community won’t accept anything less”.

You’ll be aware that since your letter to residents of Rye Lane ward Berkeley Homes reduced their affordable housing offer still further – from 35% to 12% i.e. from 270 so-called affordable homes to just 77. We regard this offer as a deep insult to the people of Peckham and Southwark, and we invite you to join our campaign against it. We invite you to join our demonstration on 1 March 2025, and to speak on our platforms in favour of homes for people, not for profit. This and further protests we shall be

calling, seek to defeat this proposal and others, like Borough Triangle, which aim to increase the number of luxury flats and displace the local traders, much like the already approved development at Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre.

We want to be clear that we believe the only form of **genuinely affordable** housing is social rented housing, and council housing is the gold standard, being the most affordable form of social rented housing, with secure tenancies and a degree of democratic accountability. We support any increase in “affordable housing” if it leads to a greater proportion of social rented housing. But like most people with half an eye on this debate, we understand that when the developers say “affordable” what they mostly end up building is anything but.

We were grateful for the support of Lib Dem Leader Victor Chamberlain and Green GLA Member Zoe Garbett who both spoke on our protest outside the Council Assembly on 20 November 2024. We did invite Labour Councillors too, but they declined. We hope this will change in 2025.

In justifying the Council’s support for Berkeley Homes’ development Cllr Helen Dennis, cabinet member for housing stated, “The reality is that the current model, where the sale of private homes helps fund the affordable homes, needs to be profitable”. In other words, we must allow developers to profit or there will be no “affordable housing”. But it is precisely this reliance on market forces that has left us in a situation where there are now over 18,000 on the Council’s housing waiting list, growing by the day. The housing crisis is not improving. It has become an emergency.

The Council even recognises this itself. Its report “Securing the future of council housing” has been backed by 100 other councils and makes the obvious point that government funding to the tune of several £billion to councils is needed to provide a mass programme of council housing, the only real solution to the housing emergency.

So we find Southwark Council’s position contradictory and unsustainable. Either Councillors accept the grim “reality”, or they fight to change it. What else is political office for?

Whilst we welcome any uplift in the overall amount of so-called “affordable housing” the SHAPE coalition is calling for 50% council housing on any private scheme, including the Aylesham Centre. This recognises the central

role council housing must play in the solution to the housing crisis, and indeed it is the only tenure with the potential to provide enough secure, decent and genuinely affordable housing on a mass scale. We do not believe developer profits should be prioritised. That's why our slogan is "Stop overdevelopment, homes for people, not for profit".

We call on you and all local Councillors to join our campaign, speak on our protests, and vote for refusal if developers' proposals fail to support our communities and meet our needs. We hope you will join us soon.

**Signed by SHAPE supporters:**

Siobhan McCarthy, Ann Lalic, Aylesham Community Action

Eileen Conn, Peckham Vision

Tanya Murat, Southwark Defend Council Housing

Jerry Flynn, 35% Campaign

Sophie Rebecca Wall, Latin Elephant

Southwark Notes

**Background**

SHAPE's demands are

1. No to overdevelopment - Is it too high or too dense? NO!
2. 50% council housing on private land. 100% council housing on council land
3. No more fake consultations. We want genuine tenant, resident and local peoples' involvement in the plans
4. Stop unsafe and poorly built development
5. Stop the demolition and sell-off of council housing - Refurbishment not demolition
6. Requisition or acquire empty homes
7. Protect and improve our estates, community facilities and town centres
8. Employ direct labour - give workers the power to challenge unsafe building work
9. Act on the Climate Emergency now. No unsustainable building, no loss of green space
10. Stop displacement of traders for unaffordable housing

Contact SHAPE

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