

Deputation to Cabinet Meeting on 12.11.25
10.11.25

Redevelopment of Regents Park Estate North

The report before Cabinet recommends that the flats at the northern end of Regents Park Estate are demolished and rebuilt, through the cross-subsidy funding model, most probably by a private developer. In this case the 159 existing flats are proposed to be replaced with 505 new flats. These will inevitably take the form of high-rise towers.

The report asked the Cabinet to approve Option 4. The proposal has many risks which are not evaluated by the Camden CIP:

- Much larger quantity of carbon emissions and ecological damage driving climate change and species extinction
- Increased risk of gentrification as existing communities are pushed out
- Poor quality housing conditions

The basis of the report is the same as used in previous decisions by this Council to proceed with estate demolition instead of refurbishment and retrofit. It is based on a high-level cost benefit analysis that is not fit for purpose and includes statements that are factually incorrect.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The report does not include a proper environmental assessment, despite the requirement of Camden's Constitution following the Council's declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency. It only allocates 15% of the weighting in the appraisal to sustainability, which is inadequate. It makes no reference to the need to carry out development in a way that respects planetary boundaries.

Whole Life Carbon

The cost benefit analysis does not consider the Whole Life Carbon for the different options, which is easy to estimate and enables a proper environmental assessment. A decision based on least environmental harm over a 60-year period would clearly favour the refurbishment option. Yet the 'sustainability' performance of all options is judged greater for the demolition and rebuild scheme, which is **incorrect**.

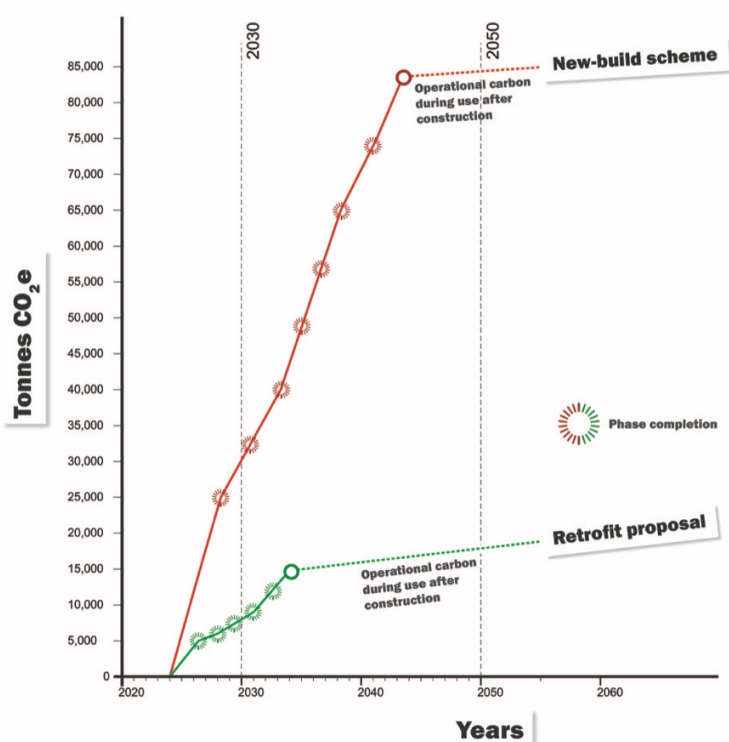
Refurbishment of existing buildings results in less up-front carbon emissions caused by construction; now that the UK's electrical energy supply is largely decarbonised, the carbon emissions from heating and powering the building are much less significant. Refurbishment also reduces the amount of material extraction which causes pollution and environmental damage.

By far the largest cause of carbon emissions in construction is the extraction, manufacture and transportation of building materials, which mostly relies on burning coal and oil. 33% of the global carbon emissions results from construction, and the carbon footprint of the construction industry is [predicted to double by 2050](#). In the UK 50,000 buildings are

demolished every year. Many of these can and should be retained, upgraded where necessary and re-used

The WLC for the cross-subsidy model of development proposed by the council is exacerbated by the production of additional private market homes that are not needed but are produced just to fund the scheme.

The refurbishment option is always significantly cheaper, quicker and results in lower carbon emissions compared to demolition and rebuild (see extract from AECOM's [report](#)). The following graph shows the carbon emissions associated with the regeneration of West Kentish Town Estate, although the same will apply for any cross-subsidy estate regeneration scheme. Even if a new build is marginally more energy efficient, this will not outweigh the colossal energy use/ carbon emissions caused by its construction:



Camden Local Plan

The huge saving in carbon emissions from refurbishment compared with new build is the reason why Camden's Local Plan prioritises it.

The Policy CC2 of the new plan states:

"Retaining, re-purposing, refurbishing and extending existing buildings should always be seen as the starting point when considering development options for a site, as this will usually be the most sustainable option and make an immediate contribution to the Council's objective of being net zero carbon by 2030."

"The Council will expect developers to prioritise the retention and improvement of existing buildings over demolition."

The presumption in favour of retention, refurbishment and retrofit is ignored in the report. The CIP team expect to be able to override planning policy as they have done previously

Camden's Climate Action Plan 2020-25

Camden's Climate Action Plan commits to the following action (see extract page 26):

- 6 By 2021, introduce a new requirement for all future Community Investment Programme development to include a lifecycle carbon impact assessment (retrofit versus new-build) as part of the pre-feasibility appraisal.

CIP has not carried out a WLC assessment and is therefore failing to meet the Council's requirements.

CIP has also not carried out an initial feasibility study to see what improvements could be made to the existing buildings. The existing buildings at Regents Park Estate can be upgraded to a good standard. They are already externally insulated, though this does need cleaning and maintenance.

The report gives a list of specific issues that it claims compromise the existing homes. This looks like a copy and paste of some other report as some of the issues do not apply. This type of negative framing would commit most of Camden's existing housing stock to demolition.

"Aspect"

The existing flats are dual aspect and will have better than a high-rise which is likely to be single aspect.

"Flat size"

The existing flats do not meet current housing standards, but this can be remedied by altering the layouts to change the number of bedroom and occupancy. ie. a 5 person, 3-bedroom flat becomes a 4 person, 2-bedroom flat.

"Ceiling heights"

The existing ceilings are lower than current standards, but this is offset by the shallow floor plate, meaning light penetrates from both sides.

"Accessibility"

The lifts are not to current standards. Accessible housing could be provided by converting the ground floor units and providing newbuild homes on under-used areas of the estate.

"Airtightness"

The flats are airtight by virtue of external wall insulation and double glazing. The latter will need to be replaced, at which case airtightness can be further improved.

"It would be the most expensive option for the council and residents might have to be temporarily rehoused."

This is not proven. Given the fact that the estate is mostly unoccupied, this can be easily managed at little cost. In addition, Camden can access funding for retrofit measures, ie. decarbonised heating and improved ventilation, and for bringing vacant homes back into use.

An outline feasibility study should be carried out before ruling out the refurbishment option. For example, although most of the blocks have two staircases, not all flats are served by them, so an additional means of escape staircase would need to be added in some instances, which is not difficult to do. This would then provide a model for upgrading the

remainder of the Regents Park Estate. Otherwise the assumption is that Camden would want to proceed with the demolition of these buildings also.

HOUSING CRISIS AND GENTRIFICATION

By approving this report's recommendations, the Council will be committing to high rise- potentially up to 25 storeys- with over-dense development.

This will cause bad housing conditions for future residents, including social isolation, risk of lift breakdown, and single aspect flats. A recent LSE study of new high-density housing in London observed:

"The layouts of flats in the new schemes were strikingly similar: most had open-plan kitchen/living rooms, floor-to-ceiling windows in the main rooms, and small balconies. Window size and floor plans mean there is often only one possible furniture configuration, and it may not be straightforward to move or add walls."

The viability of delivering 50% affordable housing through the cross-subsidy model has not been proven by Camden CIP, in fact the opposite. The most that can be achieved is 40% with direct delivery and 25% with private development agreements. What is stated in the report about housing numbers and tenure mix is knowingly incorrect.

What happens with these developments is that public land is sold to the developer on a very long lease, and then the social housing is sold back to the Council. The responsibility for maintenance of the social housing is not clear, and the maintenance of high-rise market-sale homes is also in jeopardy as developers sell on their assets. Council officers are prepared to risk all this for the sake of avoiding the effort of 'direct delivery'. It should be resisted by members.

Some claim that building new market homes will reduce the cost of housing as people will move out of existing homes into them, freeing up existing stock. However, this is contested, and even its proponents recognise it only works in a market which isn't being manipulated by suppliers. It does not apply when the new homes are very expensive, as existing communities will not be able to afford to buy them. Market flats at Regents Park North will be bought by people moving into the area, by overseas buyers or as long-term investments.

An example of where the over-provision of expensive flats for sale has driven up rent generally is the area around the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, which has seen some of the highest house price inflation in the UK over the last decade. Studies and reports confirm that rental costs in the surrounding area have shot up dramatically, with some residents facing increases as high as 24% in a single year and average increases of around £1200 a month on an average property since the Olympics.

The type of development resulting from estate demolition and rebuild schemes does not deliver neighbourhoods that enable existing communities to stay in the area, which is why we are seeing the fall in birthrate in the borough as wealthier, more mobile populations move in.

We call on the Cabinet to reverse the trend that will cause immeasurable harm to the London Borough of Camden. Even if you don't prioritise efforts to reduce carbon emissions and ecological harm caused by extraction, providing a lifetime neighbourhood for existing communities should be your concern.