

The Happy Man Tree post: "The meeting with Berkeley Homes" Friday 22nd May

Today was the day we visited the Managing Director of Berkeley Homes Justin Tibaldi and the person responsible for delivering the project Daniel Massie. Two of us had written a letter to all the executive directors of Berkeley homes directly, a copy of which we attach at the end of this blog. As a result there was a short email exchange with Justin Tibaldi and we were invited to meet him and Daniel Massie of Berkeley Homes at 8:00 AM on Friday the 22nd of May. Two people attended from the Friends of the Happy Man. We have agreed a protocol of that meeting and it's reporting and the summary of this meeting is attached as a separate blog here. <https://www.thehappyman-tree.org/post/summary-notes-of-the-meeting-with-berkeley-homes-on-may-the-22nd-re-the-happy-man-tree>

In a follow up e mail Justin emailed saying he was grateful for the points raised and they were helpful but there was no change to their position. We are very grateful to both Justin and Daniel for their time and it was good to meet them and begin a conversation. We thank them for their warm attitude and for listening to us.

Reflecting on this a couple of things have emerged.

First: What's incredibly important was the admission by Berkeley (and Hackney Council separately) that trees had never been properly noticed when planning the regeneration back in 2009. By noticing we mean trees must be seen as essential not expendable. This is the heart of the issue that faces us. We often don't take enough notice of our environment by respecting it properly. Properly here means that trees exist with us. When we are planning things, rather than assuming that they are in the way and we can get rid of a tree to achieve whatever it is that we want to achieve, we work with and around the tree and incorporate it into our plans and lives. Berkeleys and Hackney Council did not do this. From the outset they assumed that trees could be expendable in planning the regeneration. Berkeleys comment that no one raised the trees as an issue until recently reveals that they did not properly notice the trees when they were doing their plans. Frankly it's not down to us or is it our responsibility to notice that they had removed so many trees in planning the regeneration project. They need to start from a different philosophy so we don't have to keep watch.

Secondly, it is not clear from our meeting that Berkeley have really got this point. We don't get the feeling that their philosophy towards trees and design will fundamentally change in the future. On the Woodberry Down scheme or indeed on any of their other redevelopment sites. There is a feeling (and this is a feeling) that if they can 'get away' with it here, that the tree can come down and the fuss is limited, then their fundamental attitude towards design and the fate of trees within that design will be unchanged. It feels fundamental that as part of this process in fighting to save the tree, Berkeley and Hackney Council now thoroughly incorporate mature trees into whatever design and planning they are considering in whatever project they are doing in the future. If they don't then there are going to be more and more of these kind of conflicts because so many people have had enough in watching irreplaceable mature trees being destroyed because of a 'more important' reason.

Copy of original letter sent to all executive directors

Berkeley House
19 Portsmouth Road
Cobham
Surrey
KT11 1J
20th May 2020

Dear Mr xx.xxx

Re: Berkeley Homes - Community relations and Environmental reputation.

We are writing to you on behalf of the people who have signed the petition pleading for the tree known as 'The Happy Man Tree' at Woodberry Grove N4 2SB not to be cut down by your company. The number of signatures is now over 12,000 with approximately 3 more people signing every minute

We are local Lordship Road residents (34 years) who cannot believe that in the ecological crisis we find ourselves in, it is still possible to countenance the destruction of such a fully mature tree for any reason. Which is why we started the petition.

We understand that there have been extensive discussions about the design with the local residents and that there was hope that this venerable 150 year old London plane tree would be kept alive. However discussions have somehow broken down and unfortunately we seem to be at a point of very public conflict.

Yesterday when we turned up to the tree there were police there with your employees trying to erect fences. We managed, as the local community to stop this. We now have a permanent 24 hour presence at the tree and a person in its branches to safeguard it. The authors of this letter are two people aged 64 and 63 and we have never done anything like this form of direct action before, but we feel we have no choice.

There is so much at stake here for everyone concerned not least the many reputational and financial risks to you, such as cost of a breakdown in the relationship of Berkeley Homes with the local community for this and next phases of the development.

Thank you for reading this letter and for your attention. We would be very grateful if you might consider what intervention you might be able to make that can resolve this conflict and meaningful dialogue can start. Thank you.

Regards

Peter Buckingham and Dr Kay Trainor

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