

Complaint form

If you have not already done so, please read our leaflet *Complaint about the council? How to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman*. You can download it from this website (see the section 'How to complain').

When you have filled in this form, print it and send it (with the monitoring form, which follows) to the office of the Ombudsman who deals with your area. The addresses are at the end of the document. Or you can send it as an email attachment to the email address given.

Please delete or cross through options as appropriate.

- 1 ~~Mr/Ms/Mrs/Miss~~ or Other: (*please insert*) Mr
First name: Del
Surname: Brenner

- 2 Your address: 20 Oval Road
 Camden Town
 London
Postcode: NW1 7DJ
email address: secretary@regentsnetwork.org

- 3 Daytime contact phone number: 020 7267 7105

Note: Please put in the telephone number where we can contact you between 9am and 5pm. Tell us if it is your home or work, or the number of a neighbour or friend. If you do not have a daytime contact number, please put down a number with an answerphone where we can leave a message during the day. If you do not have any of these, please leave this section blank.

- 4 Your special requirements:** If anything makes it difficult for you to use our service, for example if English is not your first language or you have a disability, please use the space below to tell us how we might help you.

None

- 5** Which council or authority are you complaining about?

London Borough of Camden

Note: Please write the name of the organisation you want to complain about. It may not be a council. The list of organisations and authorities we can deal with is on page 3 of our leaflet 'Complaint about the council?' This is in the How to complain section of this website.

- 6** Have you complained to the council or authority?

No, I have not made a written complaint about this specific issue, but Camden is well aware of my beliefs and objections, not least as they have had considerable local press coverage. As the buildings concerned are at risk of fairly imminent demolition, I hope you will consider this an emergency.

Note: In most cases, before we can investigate a complaint, **the council must have a chance to answer it.** If you have not complained to the council, please do so. You can find out how to complain from the council's offices or you can ask a councillor to help. If you are not satisfied with the answer, or if the council does not give you an answer within a reasonable time, you can complain to the Ombudsman for your area. In some urgent cases, including education admission appeals, we may be able to deal with your complaint straight away.

- 7** If you know, please say when you complained to the council or authority.

8 What do you think the council or authority did wrong?

This is the latest part of a long-running saga of what I feel to be maladministration, beginning with a poorly chaired and wrongly advised Development Control meeting in March 2006 at which Camden gave outline planning consent for the King's Cross Central site (this is now the subject of a Judicial Review filed by a number of local community organisations).

My complaint concerns two of the listed buildings on the site, Stanley Buildings North and Stanley Buildings South, one of which is earmarked for demolition and the other of which will be incorporated in a larger building. They belong to the Borough itself. They were originally acquired as part of a slum clearance scheme in, I believe, 1936 but in fact provided valuable accommodation until they were emptied in 2001 and the buildings handed to London & Continental Railways while work took place on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Camden stated in their planning document 20492 (attached), regarding the sale of Stanley Buildings, that "the cost or repair and refurbishment to provide affordable housing would be very high and would not be cost-effective for either the Council or a Housing Association" (Para 5.2 ii). I do not believe this statement was ever tested, or the buildings offered to a housing association.

On completion of the CTRL work earlier this year the buildings were returned to Camden. Camden then agreed to sell them to Argent, the developers of the King's Cross Central site, for £3m. The same document 20492 says "It was anticipated that Argent would be in a position to pay a better price reflecting the development value which would be released if they owned the buildings (assuming planning permission was granted), and this price would be significantly higher than the existing value of the buildings to the Council or to any third party purchaser" (Para 5.2 i).

There was only one valuation, and the figure appears to be based on the buildings' use as housing, rather than development land which they become under the Argent plans.

Camden's Scrutiny Committee disagreed with the disposal procedure and voted

on 24th April 2007 to obtain a further valuation but was over-ruled by the Executive the next day. An independent developer working with the King's Cross Conservation Area Advisory Committee (a statutory consultee), estimates that the value of the site of the two buildings is more like £7m. I was under the impression that local authorities generally disposed of surplus assets by auction to ensure the best price; Camden has certainly done that in the past. In this case there was no other potential buyer. The reason for refusing a second valuation was that the development would be held up.

I and the other objectors to the development proposals believe that the best use for these listed buildings would be to retain them as badly-needed housing. However, if they are to be lost, it is surely the duty of the local authority to get the best return on them.

An over-arching concern throughout the King's Cross Central proceedings is that Camden's lawyers and advisors appear to be acting on behalf of the developers rather than on behalf of the community. The over-ruling of the Scrutiny Committee endorses this belief.

The DCLG has in fact declined to endorse the sale until the outcome of the Judicial Review is known; but whatever the decision I believe Camden has been guilty of negligence and possibly impropriety.

9 How has this affected you?

As a resident and council tax payer, I am concerned that my local authority has lost in the region of £4m by refusing to obtain a proper valuation for its property. Similarly, as a resident, I am concerned about the loss of affordable housing in King's Cross; the housing proposed to take its place will not be built for some 10 years (at the end of the development period of King's Cross Central) and will be less conveniently sited.

10 What do you think the council or authority should do to put things right?
They should obtain a wholly impartial valuation and deal with the developer accordingly, openly and above board.

A second option would be to engage in honest negotiations with a housing association for the reuse of the buildings, with funding from the Borough if necessary.

A more radical third option would be to make use of the powers in ODPM's Circular 06/2003 and dispose of the buildings for a peppercorn to a local community group or to a buildings preservation trust which could restore them on proper conservation lines in keeping with their listed status and return them to housing use.

By doing none of these, Camden has deprived its residents of either funds or housing, or both.

It will help us deal quickly with your complaint if you send us copies of any letters or documents about it. Please say if you would like them returned when we have finished looking at your case.

Yes/No

Your signature: Del Brenner

Date: 15th May 2007

To be signed by the person making the complaint