

Councillor James Murray
Executive Member for Housing and Development
Labour Member for Barnsbury



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Dear Mr Sweeney

21st July 2015

Islington Park Street Community, 44 Islington Park Street, London N1 1PX

I am writing on behalf of the residents of 44 Islington Park Street.

As you know, I and my colleagues at the council are very disappointed that One Housing has recently given the residents notice to quit their homes. We are concerned that this means a unique and long-standing community, which in particular offers a high degree of informal support to its more vulnerable members, is threatened with being broken up.

On 25 June 2015 a meeting of the full council voted unanimously to support the residents of 44 Islington Park Street. I attach a copy of the motion that was agreed by the council, and urge you to pay attention to what it resolved.

I have been particularly surprised and disappointed that One Housing began the process of evicting the residents when (by its own admission) it has no firm plans for the future use of the building. I therefore welcome your colleagues' recent agreement when we met them that they would carry out a desktop option appraisal over the future of the building whilst the residents are still in situ – and that once this is complete, you will be open and honest with the residents and the council about your plans for the building.

Ahead of you completing this option appraisal, I would like to draw to your attention to recent application for a Certificate of Lawfulness that has been received for 44 Islington Park Street and that may inform your work. Following my commitment and a petition at full council, a senior planning officer visited the building and spoke with some of the residents. On the basis of this meeting, the planning officer is of the firm opinion that the building is in use as a large house in multiple occupation (HMO) and that it has operated as such for a considerable number of years.

To establish the use beyond doubt the residents have recently submitted an application for a Certificate of Existing Lawful Use and the council is now determining that application. You will of course be aware that large HMOs are unclassified by the Use Classes Order and are in a class of their own (known as 'sui generis'). Planning permission would therefore be needed to convert the building (or develop the land on which it sits) for any other use including conventional housing.

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that the council has adopted planning policies to resist the loss of good quality HMOs, recognising the important role that they play in housing people on low incomes in our borough. Even if the loss of an HMO were to be considered to be acceptable, we would expect any replacement housing to meet the needs of local residents in acute housing need.

I would expect that this planning situation would impact on your option appraisal, since converting the building away from its current use would require planning permission and could conflict with our planning policies.

I would also reiterate my and my colleagues' request that you withdraw the notices to quit that you have served on the residents, to allow you better to work with the council and the residents of 44 Islington Park Street in a spirit of cooperation to secure their long term future of this community.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Murray', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Councillor James Murray