



Ince Central Estate Newsletter Number 8 Wednesday 5th May 2004

Dear Resident,

Latest Developments

In this newsletter I would like to provide you with an update on the work that has been carried out since the last newsletter on 15th April and outline proposals to deal with the contaminated land on the estate that were agreed by the Council's Cabinet on 29th April.

Analysis of Samples taken from the Foundations

We reported that a specialist contractor took samples from concrete floor slabs in 7 empty properties on 13th April. The samples were analysed to find out whether they were showing any signs of being affected by sulphates that we know to be present in the ground in some parts of the estate. We have received the preliminary results of the analysis and can inform you that 6 of the 7 properties did not show any signs of chemical damage to the concrete. The one property that had signs of chemical attack was the house at 17 Leaway where the tenants have been moved out because of longstanding defects in the floors.

This small sample suggests that there is unlikely to be a significant problem with damage to concrete foundations on the estate from sulphates. We have, however, mentioned in previous newsletters that the foundations on the estate are built on filled materials. Settlement and structural damage has occurred in the past and properties have had to be demolished due to foundation failures. There are signs of settlement on many properties on the older part of the estate that were built before the war. The properties built after the war do not show the same signs of movement but are built on shallow foundations and the foundations could be affected if soil was removed from the gardens around those properties.

Wigan Council Cabinet Meeting – 29th April 2004

The Cabinet considered a report that provided information about the possible options available to the Council to tackle the land contamination. The report contained details of the options available and explained the potential difficulties that would be involved with whichever course of action the Council chooses to follow.

The following is a summary of the main conclusions that the Cabinet has reached:

- The Council has no option but to do something about the contaminated land. It recognises that this will mean a great deal of disruption for residents but this cannot be avoided.
- There is no easy solution and any solution will involve the whole estate.
- We now need to look more closely at all the options. When a solution is finally identified, in consultation with the community, the financial costs will be very high. The Council will need to seek financial assistance from the Government or other agencies to fund the works.
- The next phase is to employ different consultants who are specialists in solving problems of this kind. They will also be helping us to identify where the funding might be found.
- The community needs support to help them through this vital stage of developing a solution. This option appraisal will involve the community and we will be employing a specialist to help you. The Cabinet has agreed to fund an Independent Adviser to work with residents to assist you to put forward your views and ideas. We will be consulting the Residents Group on how you want to go about this.
- The consultants will be required to liaise with residents when developing the options, provide briefings for residents to explain the options and consult each household to allow residents to express their views.
- The Cabinet recognises that there is considerable concern amongst residents about the future of the estate and the possible risks to health from the contamination. A solution needs to be developed and progressed as quickly as possible. The Council is, therefore, seeking to appoint the consultants and the Independent Adviser urgently.
- The Council has committed to developing a solution with the community to resolve the land contamination problem. We know that the problem affects the whole estate and so involves over 300 households. We now need to work out a plan for the estate that can be supported by residents. This is specialist work and that is why we have chosen to appoint the consultants and the Independent Adviser to concentrate on developing the plan with the community.
- When the plan has been worked up we will look to the consultants to help us to apply for the funding. We believe that using independent experts will give us the best chance of getting the money needed.
- All this, particularly sorting out the funding, will be very complicated and is likely to take several months.

Summary Position

Stage	Work Involved	Planned Dates
Phase 1	Complete investigation into land contamination and foundations.	October 2003 – Spring 2004
Phase 2	Carry out detailed assessment of the options. Identify possible sources of funding for each option. Getting residents views about each option.	Spring 2004 – Autumn 2004
Phase 3	Get agreement for the chosen option from all concerned including the community, the Council and the Government. Producing detailed plans and start delivering the solution.	Autumn 2004 – Summer 2005

Residents Liaison Group

The Residents Liaison Group has met with Ward Councillors and officers and it has been explained how the Council has reached this stage in the investigation. The Group will be involved in developing the preferred option with the consultants and will be supported by the Independent Adviser who will also be working with other residents within the community.

The group agreed that the Council should proceed to advertise for the consultants and an Independent Adviser immediately. The Stock Investment Committee of Wigan and Leigh Housing will appoint the consultants and oversee their work. The Committee consists of Wigan and Leigh Housing Board Members, including Council tenants. It appointed the contractors carrying out improvement works on Council estates and is responsible for monitoring their performance and the progress of the improvement programme. It was agreed that one tenant and one owner from the Ince Central estate together with a local Councillor should join the Stock Investment Committee and be involved in the shortlisting, interviews and appointment of the consultants. They would then continue with the Stock Investment Committee and monitor the consultant's progress with the development of the preferred option for the estate.

The group also agreed that 3 tenants and 3 owners should be involved in the shortlisting and interviewing of the Independent Adviser. Wigan and Leigh Housing will provide an officer to assist residents with the preparation of questions and the administrative arrangements for the interviews.

The Residents Group is collecting names from residents who are interested in being involved in both of these selection processes. If any resident would like to put forward their name through the Advice Team, Phil Brown or Mike Sollars will ensure that their name is passed on to the Residents Group.

The Residents Group has also arranged a meeting with Ian McCartney MP on Friday 21st May when he will listen to residents' views about the way that the investigation is progressing.

The Residents Group raised several rumours that have been circulating on the estate and asked that they be cleared up in the newsletter. The rumours and the facts are listed below:

Rumour The whole estate is going to be demolished.
Fact A solution has not yet been found and we cannot say, at this stage, whether demolition will be necessary.

Rumour The Council has sold off the land to a private developer.
Fact There is no truth in this. The Council has not considered this option.

Rumour The Council has bought houses at Spring View or Hindley to move everyone off the estate.
Fact Private developers are building properties for sale in both Spring View and Hindley but the Council has made no arrangements to purchase any of those properties.

Enquiries

We are now reaching the stage where we can begin to develop a plan for the estate in consultation with residents. We will advise residents as soon as we have appointed the consultants and the Independent Adviser.

The Residents Group thought that it would be helpful if we could set up a drop-in surgery on two evenings during the next two weeks to allow people who cannot get to the Advice Team during the day to call in and ask any questions. We have booked a room at Ince Community Centre on Manchester Road, Ince on the following evenings:

Tuesday 11th May 5.30pm to 7.00pm
Wednesday 19th May 5.30pm to 7.00pm

In the meantime, Phil Brown or Mike Sollars will continue to provide advice and information via the Surgery at Ince Town Hall from Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 4.30pm. The freephone telephone number is 01942 828436.

Peter Gee
Chief Executive
Wigan and Leigh Housing