

The London Borough of Merton (Eastfields No. 1) Compulsory Purchase Order 2022 (APP/PCU/CPOP/T5720/3303017)

The London Borough of Merton (High Path No. 1) Compulsory Purchase Order 2022 (APP/PCU/CPOP/T5720/3303018)

The London Borough of Merton (Ravensbury No. 1) Compulsory Purchase Order 2022 (APP/PCU/CPOP/T5720/3303020)

Summary Proof of Evidence of Iona McConnell

dated 26 January 2024

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Qualifications and experience

1.1.1 I, Iona McConnell am the Head of Merton Regeneration for Clarion Housing Group (**Clarion**). I have been in this role since April 2022. In my role I am responsible for the customer facing aspects of regeneration within the borough of Merton. This includes consultation and engagement with residents, buying back homeowner interests, and supporting tenants to move. I manage a team of Regeneration Managers and a Communications Manager to achieve this. I previously worked as Head of Housing in North London for Clarion. Accordingly, I have extensive experience in social housing and have worked in this industry for approximately 19 years.

1.1.2 This summary proof of evidence is made in support of the London Borough of Merton (High Path No 1) Compulsory Purchase Order 2022 (the **High Path CPO**), the London Borough of Merton (Eastfields No 1) Compulsory Purchase Order 2022 (the **Eastfields CPO**) and the London Borough of Merton (Ravensbury No 1) Compulsory Purchase Order 2022 (the **Ravensbury CPO**) (together the **CPOs**) in connection with the wider Merton Estates Regeneration Programme (also referred to in this summary proof of evidence as the **Scheme**).

1.2 Involvement with the Scheme

1.2.1 In Section 1.2 of my evidence I discuss what my role at Clarion entails in order to progress the Scheme. I explain that I lead a team who work on the Merton Estates Regeneration Programme, who in turn work with tenants and help homeowners to move into their new homes and further that I play a key role in carrying out resident engagement and consultation. I explain that I am also the lead for the CPOs and work closely with the London Borough of Merton (the **Council**) and our professional advisors.

2 **GENERAL ENGAGEMENT WITH RESIDENTS AND INTEREST HOLDERS**

- 2.1 In Section 2 of my Proof of Evidence, I explain that Clarion first started discussing the future of the Estates and their possible regeneration with residents in 2013. I explain that the key principles for consulting with residents are: venue accessibility ensuring there are activities for children and efforts are made to hold events on the weekend to ensure as wide an attendance as possible. I explain that an attendance record is taken at consultation events and that Clarion prepares a report outlining the key feedback from such events.
- 2.2 In paragraphs 2.1-2.3 of Section 2 I give a comprehensive account of the extensive consultation and engagement that has taken place on the Estates since 2013 in respect of the Scheme, including in relation to the CPOs, which is ongoing. I explain that these events have been held in local venues and include workshops, visits to other regeneration schemes and exhibitions. I explain that online consultation events such as webinars have been held and that a new online tool called EBrik has also been successfully utilised with high numbers of users and views. I explain that residents have also been kept up to date via regular newsletters.

3 EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE WITH INTEREST HOLDERS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 In Section 3.1 of my Proof of Evidence, I explain that the negotiations with interest holders in respect of all three Estates were initially led by the previous Head of Regeneration. This was following a period of significant consultation with the residents so that we could ensure we fully understood the uncertainties and challenges for residents before we established "Clarion's Offer". I further explain that each Estate has a dedicated Regeneration Manager and they are the first point of contact for all of Clarion's residents on the Estate and that additionally, we also have a Regeneration Manager who works across all buybacks.

3.2 Clarion's offer

3.2.1 In Section 3.2 of my evidence I discuss what Clarion's Offer for the Scheme comprises. I explain that Clarion's Offer relates to resident homeowners, non-resident homeowners and tenants.

3.2.2 I explain that resident homeowners (who meet the criteria) can opt for the Replacement Home offer, Shared Equity option or can move away from the relevant Estate. In all cases, I explain that they will receive a 10% homeloss payment. Non Resident Homeowners are offered the value of the property plus an additional payment. For residents, I confirm that Clarion will pay a £3,000 disturbance allowance and cover removals. For all homeowners, I also confirm that Clarion pays the costs of conveyancing (legal fees, disbursements, SDLT etc.) and any surveyor fees.

3.2.3 I further explain that negotiations have gone well and, in some detail, explain the efforts Clarion has made to progress negotiations with interest holders.

3.2.4 I am satisfied that a strong offer has been made that treats residents fairly and ensures communities can remain consistent and cohesive after the regenerations which is reflected in the fact that we have successfully acquired a large proportion of property interests.

3.3 Residential interests acquired to date

3.3.1 In Section 3.3 of my Proof of Evidence, I set out that Clarion has voluntarily acquired 134 freehold and leasehold interests since April 2013 (as of 19 January 2024) in respect of Eastfields Phase 1, High Path Phases 2 and 3 and Ravensbury Phases 2 to 4.

3.4 **Residential interests outstanding**

3.4.1 In Section 3.4 of my evidence, I set out that 50 freehold and leasehold interests remain outstanding in respect of Eastfields Phase 1 (32 property interests), High Path Phases 2 and 3 (15 property interests) and Ravensbury Phases 2 to 4 (1 property interest).

3.5 **Conclusion**

3.5.1 In Section 3.5 of my Proof of Evidence, I conclude that Clarion has gone to a great deal of effort to engage with homeowners and to create Clarion's offer which is generous and which reflects feedback from homeowners. Clarion has been open and fair in its negotiations. I state that the strength of Clarion's Offer and its efforts to negotiate with interest holders in respect of the CPOs is reflected in the progress that has been made in acquiring the interests to date. Notwithstanding this, I further state that I do not believe that the Scheme could progress without the CPOs due to remaining resident and non-resident homeowners who have not substantively engaged with Clarion on all Estates despite the extensive efforts Clarion has made, albeit there is now just one interest left to acquire in on the Ravensbury Estate.

4 **RESPONSE TO OBJECTORS**

4.1 In Section 4 of my Proof of Evidence I set out my responses to the objections which remain outstanding in respect of the CPOs and this outlines my extensive and direct involvement in discussions and negotiations with these objectors, over a long period of time, seeking to ensure their concerns regarding the Scheme are met.

5 **CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 In the conclusion of my Proof of Evidence, I explain that my role has involved leading the frontline teams who work directly with the tenants and homeowners on the Estates and how I have had a particular focus on leading the negotiations to acquire outstanding interests.
- 5.2 I further explain that whilst negotiations have proved successful as a result of our strong offer, I consider that the use of compulsory purchase powers are necessary to acquire both the outstanding interests and the new rights in connection with the relevant phases on the Estates, as it is unlikely that we will be able to reach agreement within an acceptable timescale without the CPOs.