

Council rules out vote for future of Heygate

THE ATTITUDE of Heygate Estate residents towards moving from their current council run homes to a social landlord will be gauged through public meetings, market research and questionnaires, the council has said.

By Anthony Phillips

The council executive will then make a decision on whether to go ahead with the demolition of the Elephant & Castle estate and the construction of new homes, run by social landlords, on the basis of the evidence presented to them from the results of such consultation.

Chris Horn, the director of the area's regeneration scheme, has told the 'News' this is currently what the council is looking at. The estate is so central to the entire area's regeneration scheme, he said, that a single issue 'yes' or 'no' vote on moving from council housing to social landlord is not appropriate.

Horn told the 'News' this week that residents are not just being asked to consider such a move, as the regeneration of the whole area is in the bargain too. This means changing the Elephant and Castle into a 'shopping and entertainment district', changing the currently over-dominant traffic system.

The most effective way to gauge Heygate residents' feelings on the entire scheme is, he said, through public meetings and research. The alternative, he said, is to hold votes on all issues, such as the housing move, changing the traffic

system, and so on, which is not the way ahead.

The 'News' revealed in February that residents of the estate will be faced with a choice between moving to a social landlord or staying in their current flats. The entire estate would be demolished under Southwark's current plans, and residents re-housed in newly built homes at different sites in the area and Kennington. The new homes will be run by social landlords, as government subsidies no longer allow for the mass construction of council housing.

As the proposal is not technically one of 'stock transfer', when council homes are transferred to a social landlord without demolition, there is no legal requirement to hold a vote. Currently, Chris Horn said, Southwark is meeting with a board of residents representatives on a fortnightly basis to keep locals informed on what is happening and to receive feedback. Focus groups are also being engaged by a market research company on various issues.

And in May, he said, the development framework for the regeneration scheme is expected to be given the go-ahead for officers to launch a more wide-ranging and detailed public consultation on the project details. If the overwhelming attitude towards the scheme is negative, the entire project will have to be down-sized.