



Sian Berry AM
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
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To Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, and
Top Copley, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development
Via email

8 April 2020

Dear Sadiq and Tom,

Reducing non-essential building work and options for unoccupied homes in London

I am writing with a number of questions about the work you and your teams are doing to reduce non-essential building work in the city and to bring unoccupied homes back into use to support Londoners during the Coronavirus crisis.

I appreciate the force with which you have called on the Government to be clear about both defining non-essential building work and prohibiting it so that contract terms do not lead to unnecessary travel and risk for workers.

In this context, the letter to the construction industry from central Government on 31 March was spectacularly unhelpful in pushing in the opposite direction and encouraging even construction work that had been paused as a precaution to continue.¹

There is a clear difference in the value and necessity of building projects of different kinds, and many projects, even if providing homes or infrastructure, could be paused or delayed for several months if it were to help save lives and reduce virus transmission and risk both to construction workers and to essential key workers who have to use our transport system.

However, despite the current advice from Government, I believe there are more schemes in London where the GLA does have significant influence where construction work could be paused at this time. These are schemes where we could give assurances on contract terms either through direct involvement, GLA funding relationships with projects, or through our good relations and co-operation with borough councils.

Examples I have been given in reports from residents, where work is continuing on schemes that you could potentially influence, include the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, and sites



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being developed by Croydon's development company Brick by Brick. Residents of the Ebury Bridge estate in Westminster have told me contractors have been clearing out fixtures and fittings from decanted flats to prepare for the planned regeneration scheme there.

Please could you consider intervening directly to help pause more of these kinds of construction projects over which you have influence, and write back to me with any actions you have taken in these and other cases?

The Ebury Bridge example raises another issue, which is the potential for empty decanted homes to be brought back into use during the crisis, rather than put out of commission by preparatory works. The flats on this estate are in good condition and currently suitable for habitation, and include a number of ground floor, accessible flats. If development projects on estates like this could be paused, many similar flats could potentially be used for temporary accommodation for rough sleepers and people in need of homes.

Could you tell me what work you are doing with councils to get flats like these back into use, where homes have been decanted and blocks of flats are waiting regeneration?

Finally, I believe there is a further opportunity to house people in need, both through development schemes that the GLA is involved in supporting and in the wider private development situation.

Across London, a range of projects are reaching completion or already have completed unoccupied homes at various stages of being sold on the property market. I can envisage a number of ways in which these unoccupied or unsold homes could be used, either as temporary accommodation for those in housing need, or as more permanent affordable rented homes. Schemes such as your rough sleeping initiative that is using hotel spaces, council homelessness services, and the co-operative Capital Letters scheme for bringing homes longer term into council-brokered affordable rent, could all make use of these unoccupied homes. I would like to ask whether any of these options are being considered, or any talks taking place with private developers about these ideas?

Please consider these issues and write back to me as soon as you are able with your responses.

Yours sincerely,



Sian Berry
Green Party Member of the London Assembly



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ⁱ Letter from The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP Secretary of State Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy to everyone working in the UK's construction sector, Mar 2020

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877074/secretary-of-state-letter-construction-industry.pdf



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