Lambeth Council
Lambeth Town Hall
Brixton Hill
SW2 1RW

10th July 2015

Dear Cabinet Members,

**Cressingham Gardens; Report Number: 41/15-16**

I am writing to register our very strong objection to the proposals to demolish Cressingham Gardens to be considered at your meeting in Lambeth Town Hall at 7pm on Monday 13th July. [see http://moderngov.lambeth.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=29000#mgDocuments].

In our view, the whole of Cressingham Gardens is of special architectural and historic interest and its planning is a remarkable example of a model village layout designed with great imagination and care to provide attractive community living.

The proposal is the more disturbing in view of the strongly expressed desire of many of the residents to remain in their homes.

We understand your council seeks to use the land to create a greater density of housing. However to begin by vacating and demolishing such a large group of homes, which the residents evidently enjoy, is entirely mistaken and also counter-productive.

Equally relevant and important, the proposal is completely contrary to current government policy. This policy is set out in the attached written statement to Parliament dated 16 January 2015 issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government. This statement is of general relevance, but also relates to a comparable large-scale proposed demolition of 439 homes in Liverpool. These were also neither listed nor in a conservation area but still deemed by the Minister to be of architectural and historic interest.
I quote the relevant passages below:

The Coalition Agreement outlined this government’s commitment to introduce a range of measures to get empty homes back into use, reflecting the 2010 general election manifesto pledges of both Coalition parties. We want to increase housing supply, remove the blight that rundown vacant properties cause and help support local economic growth from refurbishment and improvements.

This government is championing a series of policies to get empty buildings back into use. We have:

- Provided over £200 million to fund innovative schemes run by community groups, councils and housing associations up and down the country to create new homes from empty properties, both residential and commercial.
- Rewarded councils for bringing 100,000 empty homes back into use through the New Homes Bonus.
- Given councils new powers to remove council tax subsidies to empty homes, and use the funds to keep the overall rate of council tax down. HM Treasury have also changed tax rules to discourage the use of corporate envelopes to invest in high value housing which may be left empty or under-used to avoid paying tax.
- Taken forward the best practice recommendations produced by our independent empty homes adviser, George Clarke – such as refurbishment and upgrading of existing homes should be the first and preferred option, and that demolition of existing homes should be the last option after all forms of market testing and options for refurbishment are exhausted; we have embedded these principles in our housing programme funding schemes.
- Cancelled the last Administration’s Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder programme which imposed targets on councils to demolish homes.
- Amended national planning policy through the National Planning Policy Framework to encourage councils to bring back empty properties back into use.
- Reformed Community Infrastructure Levy rules to provide an increased incentive for brownfield development, and extended exemptions for empty buildings being brought back into use.
• Lifted the burden of section 106 tariffs on vacant buildings being returned to use.
• Introduced a Right to Contest, building on the existing Community Right to Reclaim Land, which lets communities ask that under-used or unused land owned by public bodies is brought back into beneficial use.
• Funded a new re-occupation business rate relief to help bring empty shops back into use.
• Reformed permitted development rights in a number of ways to free up the planning system and facilitate the conversion of redundant and under-used non-residential buildings into new homes.

If your council is minded to proceed with its proposals to demolish we will call for a Public Inquiry on the following grounds, amongst others:

First, the architectural and historic importance of Cressingham Gardens.

Second, the national significance of its model layout in terms of design, type and period.

Third, the very strong opposition not only locally, but amongst national bodies concerned with the environment.

Fourth, the fact that Lambeth Council has failed to apply government policy on demolition.

A further reason for a very strong objection is the failure to designate a conservation area, and indeed to carry out an initial assessment for a conservation area. Historic England has supported the designation of a conservation area. This, combined with current government policy, should lead your council to reverse its policy for the site and invest in a scheme of refurbishment and improvement.

There are also important considerations in relation to Brockwell Park. This, in terms of its landscape and design, is one of the most historic landscape parks in south London, and in London as a whole. The Cressingham Gardens estate is remarkable as it is almost invisible from the park, for the reason that it is designed not to rise above the trees.

Your new proposed development is to be of such density that it will rise above the tree line and thus destroy the sense of country-in-town (sometimes known as rus-in-urbe), which is such an important quality of this and other London parks.

If your council proceeds with the proposal to demolish Cressingham Gardens it will cause appalling distress to many of the residents and is likely to be very strongly contested, a process that will involve an enormous amount of time, energy and money.
Earlier government policies of demolition areas of historic housing have now been reversed and refurbishment is now the preferred option. We strongly urge you to adopt this approach.

Should your council advance the argument that the properties are too difficult or expensive to repair we will commission evidence from engineers, architects and surveyors assessing the practicality and cost or repair and refurbishment. This we did at the Welsh Streets Inquiry and the evidence was accepted by the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely

Marcus Binney CBE Hon FRIBA

Executive President