

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA

9 May 2013

Dear Boris

Barking Riverside –Site Infrastructure Front-Funding to deliver Free Schools

A request has been made by Barking Riverside Ltd (49% owned by the GLA) for the Council to front fund the infrastructure required for the new Free School at Barking Riverside.

As you are aware the need for school places in London is extremely pressing and Barking and Dagenham in particular has seen a 50% increase in 0 – 4 year olds in the past ten years - the highest in England and Wales and we also have the highest percentage of residents aged 1-19 (at 31%). The Barking Riverside development offers an opportunity to deliver an already funded (£26m) Free secondary school by 2015 together with a Special Educational Needs school (currently in the final stage in the bidding process for a Free School) by 2016 and potentially (subject to a future Education Funding Agency bid) a further new Free primary school.

Through the S106 (planning) agreement, Barking Riverside Ltd (BRL Ltd) is not obliged to provide a serviced site for the school until 1500 homes have been built and occupied. Currently, 228 homes have been built and occupied and a further 458 are under construction. It is unlikely that BRL will get to the 1500 figure much before 2018. The increased birth rate has multiplied need for school places meaning we just cannot wait until 2018. BRL are unwilling to fund the £5.5m costs of site preparations in advance of their obligations.

The £26m of funding awarded from the Government is solely for the construction and fit out of Free School. The Free school is intended to provide places for 10 FE or 1500 students and employ 190 staff. There is an expectation for the new school to be open by September 2015, meaning that construction would have to start no later than December 2013. The Special School would provide places for an additional 170 students along with full time jobs for 170 staff and a new 3FE primary school would provide places for 630 students and jobs for 280 staff. The benefit of helping to deliver this site translates into delivering school places for 2300 students and new jobs for 640 teachers and school related staff. However, without the upfront £5.5m funding towards site preparation works, the delivery of these free schools remains uncertain.

It is very disappointing that BRL Ltd, an organisation which is part owned by the GLA, is threatening to undermine the ability of the Free School to deliver the much needed school places at a time when demand for school places is increasing at an exponential rate and sites are either not available or too costly to acquire. This site is ideal, identified for a school and well positioned to deliver school places in a location where demand is going to increase. It would also add value to the Barking Riverside area and should assist with housing sales in the area.

Given your recently stated commitments to the delivery of free schools and your commitment to housing delivery and utilising GLA assets to deliver these objectives, I would urgently request that you consider what role you could play in addressing this short term funding issue.

There are no costly land and property acquisition costs; the GLA holds a 49% stake so can strongly influence when BRL undertake such works; you have sufficient funds to front-fund such infrastructure works; and, you have clearly stated commitments to supporting the delivery of Free schools. Bearing all this in mind, I hope you would urgently consider funding such infrastructure works now in order to help facilitate the provision of potentially 3 Free schools further supporting the housing potential for Barking Riverside and London.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Liam Smith', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Liam Smith
Leader of the Council