

Drayton, Abingdon: Residents of a New Housing Development Let Down by District Council

Vale of White Horse District Council has broken a commitment to the residents of The Dovecote, a Bloor Homes development in Drayton, by signing off their freehold development without involving the most important stakeholder affected: the residents themselves.



The Dovecote a new-build development in the heart of South Oxfordshire

Up until March 2022, the Residents' Association had been working closely with the council's planning team on preparations for handing over the public open space, when the planning team had to take a step back due to a council reorganisation. The public open space is subject to a Section 106 agreement between Vale and Bloor Homes, which is a significant part of a successful planning application for a large development like The Dovecote. It was obvious in March 2022 that the development was not ready for handover and the residents made that clear to both the council and the developer.



The Dovecote site plan – a Bloor Homes development

The chair of The Dovecote Residents' Association said: "Our focus has always been to protect residents' interests and to avoid incurring unnecessary costs in today's cost of living crisis. Our aim is to ensure that Bloor Homes completes its delivery obligations in full, handing over the completed development to a residents-run management company. We hope to avoid slipping into the clutches of a developer-imposed estate management company called FirstPort, with the inherent risk of escalating year-on-year charges for servicing the large public open space.

"Considering FirstPort has already attempted to start passing on unjustified expenses in the form of service charges, when they act for a management company holding no responsibility for the public open space, this is shocking. Luckily, we have a knowledgeable community, able to argue the legal case that the developer is responsible for all costs prior to full handover. Residents have successfully recovered FirstPort-imposed expenses from Bloor Homes and that precedent has now been established."



<http://dovecotedrayton.co.uk>

Whilst the Residents' Association has been chasing the council for the past 18 months to restart work on handover, Vale has been holding inspection meetings with the developer without engaging with residents. In early summer, the council issued a Certificate of Practical Completion to Bloor Homes, which started a 12-month maintenance period, leading up to residents being forced to take on financial responsibility for the public open space, even though elements of the delivery remain incomplete or unmaintained. It was only by accident that the Residents' Association recently uncovered this deal had taken place. The council didn't even advise the residents about taking this significant step along the handover process.

A local resident reported: "This feels like a kick in the teeth when the residents were so engaged and motivated in the handover process. Bloor has been trying to offload its responsibility for The Dovecote's public open space for years. The council's planning team was seen as the residents' guardian and for a while it seemed the relationship between Vale and the Residents' Association was evolving into a great team. Clearly not!

"As to whether Vale may have been coerced by the developer into acting rashly, without local residents' best interests at heart, is an interesting question. There's a good argument for an inquiry to be held to get to the bottom of all this skulduggery."

Looking forward, the Residents' Association is thinking positively about taking back control of its progression toward accepting full responsibility for the public open space. It's also keen to encourage the parties involved in this challenging period to learn lessons about how to manage these Section 106 agreements and keep residents engaged.