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All sides play to win in the regeneration game

IN THIS ISSUE I have the rare privilege of touching upon the recent general election while having absolutely no idea of its outcome. This is because my deadline for this column precedes the vote but by now we already know who has won and I hope you are content... although somehow I doubt it.

Of one thing I can be absolutely certain whatever the result. Those whose chosen party lost will be screaming that the winning party lied, lied and lied and that those who voted for them were too lazy, too stupid or too selfish to realise before pencilling their voting slip how catastrophically wrong was their choice.

In Milton Keynes, another very important vote has taken place, in which selected residents of Fullers Slade decide whether their homes would be partly demolished and massively infilled, partially demolished and somewhat restored or left alone. Funnily enough, they chose partly demolished and massively infilled. This includes the demolition of 94 homes and 392 new builds. However, might they expect Milton Keynes Council to now build far more than 392 new homes if what has happened at Serpentine Court in Bletchley is extended to Fullers Slade? In Bletchley, residents voted for full demolition of 200 flats and around 400 new build homes. These have now, magically, turned into 659 at planning stage more than a year later.

According to outputs given to Fullers Slade, affected homeowners and tenants will only be informed that their home is to be demolished and will only receive individual offers regarding the planned changes to their homes "following the ballot, depending on the outcome."

So, vote first then learn what you voted for. Seems reasonable. Not.

The vote went like this:

- No redevelopment: 110 votes
- Refurbishment + new homes: 61 votes
- 392 new homes, refurbishment and estate-wide improvements: 209 votes
- Turnout: 65pc

Many residents of Fullers Slade apparently believe that those in the 453 homes affected who got a vote (while residents in 163 homes outside the red line on the estate map did not) were arguably susceptible to being unduly influenced by piecemeal information and perhaps unfair inducements. The green and empty as well as redeveloped higher-density land released by their vote is expected to raise enough to fund the extensive densification: 453 homes will become 751 (453 - 94 + 392). However, only 58 new council homes and 55 new affordable homes, capped at Local Housing Association rents, will be available.

So let's look at these wild, unsubstantiated claims of undue

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influence and unfair inducements by some who lost the vote. Let's start with how it was that not everybody in Fullers Slade got a vote. The vote excluded Fullers Slade's residents living in 163 homes outside the red line because, as the council claims, they will not be directly affected by the changes. Even if they will be living next door to building

sites for at least the next seven years and the roads will be churning with mud, ripped up or closed. So completely unaffected, then...

The council says the road layout will be changed while the 94 homes are demolished and 392 homes built. "Option Three will take between six and seven years to be completed, following the submission of a planning application in 2020," it adds. And that planning application could take years.

In those households that got to vote, every resident aged 16 or over could easily outvote the sweet old widow with her cat living alone in a privately owned house in which she thought she would spend her final days but which will be compulsorily purchased from her and demolished.

But what about the words 'unfair inducements'? I accept that no one at the council has done so in order to get the desired vote. That would be unconscionable and I would never support that accusation in any way.

However the Secretary of State, Kit Malthouse, exercising powers conferred by section 30(5) of the Land Compensation Act 1973, enabled the Compensation: The Home Loss Payments (Prescribed Amounts) (England) Regulations 2019 in July last year. These offer those displaced from council accommodation, for instance, or home owners made to move, home loss payment of between £6,400 and £64,000.

Only about 58 council tenant families whose homes are to be demolished will receive statutory home loss compensation and disturbance costs (legal fees, removal costs etc). The 36 homeowners whose homes will be compulsorily purchased and demolished will receive market value plus 10pc statutory home loss compensation and disturbance costs. Working out the 'market value' of your home after its value has been blighted by plans to demolish it will be fun, won't it?

You can see how freebies like compensation could turn the heads - and votes - of those facing grinding government cuts elsewhere in their lives. It could mean a new car or essential nursery fees or food or new iPads on the table. You get the idea.

Those officially affected have been told they will be temporarily moved out for six weeks within Fullers Slade but this is at best unlikely. They will be moved to temporary accommodation which could be nowhere near their schools, places of work or worship. I hope they enjoy their government 'disturbance costs' because they are going to need them.

Are we out of Europe yet, by the way? Oh, and happy new year. Cheerio.

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UK construction and a Conservative majority: A positive result... providing Brexit does get done

Following the Conservative victory in the general election, Brendan Sharkey, head of construction and real estate at MHA MacIntyre Hudson, believes confidence will return to the ailing sector but that it could prove fleeting.

"Construction and real estate should feel relieved following the Conservative win. Work has been drying up, especially for civil engineering, and the construction sector - dependent as it is on government infrastructure projects - was suffering due to political drift.

"Now fruitful reforms, such as changes to Stamp Duty and general business rates, should come to the fore. Worryingly, the larger infrastructure projects such as Heathrow Airport and HS2 have no political headwind but investment in schools and hospitals should now see funding move through the pipeline



Brendan Sharkey

and this will provide a much-needed stimulus to the sector. The industry is crying out for commitment... the larger the better.

"The great unknown will be whether the next stage of the Brexit negotiations will suck up political energy and sap confidence, just as the ratification of the Withdrawal Bill has.

"If so, the economy will get closer to a recession and business confidence will suffer, and the situation in one or two years' time might look very similar to the malaise and drift we are experiencing now."



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