

MEETING WITH MARK FIELD, MP

I explained to Mark the origins and development of the Westminster Housing Commission.

He explained:

- his constituency contains rather more Council housing than one might expect;
- the constraints set by central government (eg duties toward homeless families) and by the GLA (eg in relation to planning quotas) meant that decision-making at the local authority level was limited. (I noted that Westminster City Council does not see its role particularly in relation to public housing but rather as enabling activity in the private sector and through other agencies);
- most Council estates, following the Right-to-Buy, are now very mixed; but housing associations are buying back some of the resold RTB properties (possibly recreating the stigmatised housing of before);
- the Intermediate Housing Market is Westminster's key issue: the gap between those in social renting and those able to buy has grown wider. (Even a dual-earning, high income couple are sure to move out if they want somewhere suitable for bringing up children.)
- the Dolphin Square Trust purchase, whereby those who opt to stay will get their rent covered by Housing Benefit, should mean that residents do not face hardship.

Mark undertook to keep in touch as the Commission's work proceeds and to give me any thoughts on ways of easing Westminster's housing problems.

Richard Best
10 November 2005