Statement to the Aylesham Public Inquiry

I'm Dr Anna Minton, I'm a writer and Reader in Architecture at the University of East London and am speaking in my capacity as an academic. I am the author of Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the 21st Century City, published by Penguin, which is about the privatisation of the public realm and the impact that has on cohesion in the city. I am also the author of Big Capital: Who is London For? which is about the housing crisis.

I will make brief comments about housing, before focusing on the impact of the proposed development on the public realm. The appellant has referred to the catastrophic drop off in house building. A very significant reason for this is primarily because the changed economic context after Brexit means that foreign investors are no longer buying these homes, meaning there is a large oversupply of luxury apartments already built or under construction in London. According to Knight Frank, there were more than 3,500 complete and unsold units in London in June 2025. There is no reason to believe that this is going to change, indicating that many of these homes would remain empty, as is the case in other developments.

I will now turn my attention to Berkeley's commitment to provide enhanced public realm and civic space. The Southwark Plan states that development should complement the town centre and improve the quality of local open spaces and squares. The appellant's Statement of Case acknowledges that the town centre has a vitality and vibrancy which gives it a character that is distinctive from other town centres. They add that the development will provide 1.2 hectares of public realm and civic space that will be open and accessible to all. In recent years the great success of Peckham has been in part due to its ability to nurture genuinely public space that is thriving and open to diverse uses and activities and the special ecology of the retail offer already referred to.

My contention is that Berkeley's approach to the public realm, evidenced in their other schemes across London, is not in keeping with this approach. In common with many, but not all developers, they create privately owned public space which fosters a covert sense of exclusion which means much of the community which uses the shared space of Rye Lane and the centre of Peckham will not feel welcome, challenging the public sector equality duty. Alongside the different character of the higher end retail operators in the scheme already referred to, privately owned public space places restrictions on access and behaviour and is characterised by high levels of security and surveillance, which are out of keeping with the surrounding area. Most such developments employ uniformed security and are characterised by defensible architecture such as bollards. Restrictions on behaviour include skateboarding, rollerblading, filming, photography and political protest, which are banned in privately owned public space. These restrictions on activities and behaviour create a different civic culture and public life and one which does not complement the existing character of Peckham, as seen in

existing public spaces on Rye Lane and Peckham Square. The covert exclusion of the privately owned public realm of the scheme mirrors the exclusivity of the proposed housing.