

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
5 December 2012 (7.30 - 9.15 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Damian White (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair), Wendy Brice-Thompson, Michael Deon Burton, Osman Dervish, Garry Pain, Linda Trew, June Alexander and +Denis O'Flynn

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Paul McGeary

+ Substitute members; Councillor Denis O'Flynn (for Paul McGeary)

18 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman with the following alteration.

Item 17 should read;

Members noted that the borough's parks and open spaces were maintained by the Council's in-house team.

19 DISUSED LAND ADJACENT TO MELVILLE ROAD ALLOTMENTS, RAINHAM - REQUISITION OF CABINET DECISION

Simon Parkinson, Head of Culture and Leisure Services, advised that the report that had been presented to Cabinet on the 7 November 2012 concerned a site comprising of 2.13 acres of land adjoining Melville Road allotments that had remained unused for 24 years.

Cabinet had agreed that the land was surplus and that 1.53 acres be disposed of for residential development and an area of 0.6 acres be retained for the creation of additional allotment plots.

Members noted that two surveys were carried out each year to determine levels of interest in taking up an allotment plot. At present there were 4 people on the waiting list for a plot at the Melville Road site.

Members were advised that any disposal of land would be subject to the approval of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

With its agreement, the Committee was addressed by Mr James Green who was a plot-holder at the Melville Road site. Mr Green advised that he knew of at least 27 people who wanted a plot at the site and that most of those people wanted full plots and not half sized plots that were currently offered.

During the debate members questioned as to whether the needs of the community had been considered before any decision had been taken and that careful consideration needed to be taken on the balance of need for residential housing and those who wanted plots on the allotment.

The Committee voted **NOT** to uphold the requisition by a majority of 7 votes to 2. Councillors O'Flynn and Deon Burton voted in favour of upholding the requisition. Councillors White, Brice-Thompson, Dervish, Pain, Trew, Alexander and Hawthorn voted against upholding the requisition.

20 **TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION**

Nigel Young, the Council's Regeneration Manager, gave a presentation on the regeneration of the borough's town centres.

Members noted that the town centres in Havering were split into three groups as follows

Metropolitan

Romford

Major District

Upminster
Hornchurch

Minor District

Hilldene
Rainham
Collier Row
Elm Park

Romford comprised of over 228,000 square metres of retail and service floorspace which equated to over 345 retail outlets. Vacancy rates in retail units in Romford were currently around the 8% mark which was below the national average of 14%.

Members noted that the Romford Urban Strategy had been agreed in 2005 and launched in 2007. The strategy's main focus was on the area inside of

the ring road and its aim was to create a vision for the future to attract visitors, workers and residents whilst also building on existing strengths, reinforcing historic identity and capitalising on its strategic location.

During the last few years improvements had been made to Romford town centre across four strands;

▪ **Connecting Romford**

- Variable Message System (VMS)
- Movement Study and associated outcomes
- North Street and Main Road Corridor Studies
- Romford Pedestrian Signage
- Romford Map
- Subway refurbishments
- Havering Cycling Strategy
- Romford Station Access

▪ **Cultural Destination Romford**

- Visitor Centre
- Romford Leisure Development
- Romford Market Strategy
- Havering Museum
- Safe and Sound
- Specialist Markets
- Local Development Order (LDO)
- Romford Library Refurbishment
- Romford Heritage Walk
- Romford Conservation Area Management Plan

▪ **Commercial Romford**

- Investment in shopping centres
- South Street Environmental Improvements
- North Street Repaving
- Marketing and Event Programme
- New office development

- Havering Skills Academy
- Promoting Romford Market
- Romford Promotional Campaign

▪**Liveable Romford**

- North side development
- Rubicon
- Axis
- Western Road Development
- Quadrant Arcade
- Oldchurch Phase 1

Members noted that significant advertising campaigns promoting Romford had taken place during the summer and were also planned for the Christmas period which included newspaper advertisements in newspapers, billboards, JC Decaux boards, bus backs and posters at train stations.

The Romford Town Centre Partnership, where the Council joined forces with commercial partners such as The Liberty, The Brewery and The Mercury enabled jointly funded advertising of the town centre as a whole to take place.

In reply to a question regarding empty units such as the former Littlewoods and TJ Hughes sites, officers advised that progress was being made in re-letting the units but re-occupation was often held up by legal agreements being drawn up and put into place.

During the debate members discussed the poor state of Romford Station and commented that it was an off-putting site for anyone visiting the town centre.

Mention was also made of the parking gridlock that the town centre suffered from every Christmas time. It was suggested that the former park and ride scheme could be re-introduced, however officers advised that this particular scheme was no longer viable and would only receive little take up.

Members also suggested that it may prove useful if a representative from Transport for London (TfL) could be invited to a future meeting to discuss traffic management issues that affected the town centre.

It was agreed to discuss the other town centre regeneration programmes at the next meeting.

21 **MONITOR OF CABINET REPORTS**

Following a brief debate members agreed to take updates on the following Cabinet reports at the Committee's next meeting

Community halls managed by Culture and Leisure Services

Napier/New Plymouth House, refurbishment schemes

Chairman