

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Main Road, Romford RM1 3BD
28 September 2023 (7.00 - 9.00 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS 8

Conservative Group John Crowder, Dilip Patel and +Christine Smith

Havering Residents' Group Laurance Garrard (Chairman), Reg Whitney (Vice-Chair) and Bryan Vincent

Labour Group Jane Keane

Also present at the meeting were Councillors Graham Williamson and Philippa Crowder.

An apology was received for the absence of Councillor Ray Best. Councillor Christine Smith substituted for Councillor Best.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

27 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

28 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29 PROPOSED DATA CENTRE CAMPUS AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT

The Committee received an update on the proposal for a data centre campus comprising a number of buildings containing information technology infrastructure. The purpose of the report was to update the Members on the work undertaken on the project since the previous briefing. It is envisaged that the total floorspace of the data centre buildings would be in the region of 330,000 sq m, which at the time of writing would be the largest data centre in Europe.

The Committee noted that the proposal also includes the following:

- Technology-led horticulture/research facility in building(s) of circa 40,000 sq m.
- 50,000 sq m of battery storage or grid balancing infrastructure or Green open space, including visitor facilities, biodiversity,

- research areas - in total covering about half of the site (105 hectares)
- A new vehicular accesses to the site would be formed.
 - The level of parking is to be confirmed, but each building would have its own parking and loading areas. Details of cycle parking provision are to be confirmed.

The update re-iterated that this report does not mean that an LDO (Local Development Orders) will be made. As it was previously stated, that decision can only be reached at the end of a detailed process which fully considers all of the material planning issues. As it was set out in the report to the committee in June 2023, the decision that has been taken results in efforts now being channelled into the LDO process. The following progress was detailed:

Appointment of specialist advisors

The Local Development Authority (LPA) has since appointed a number of specialist advisors who will work with the LPA to progress key aspects of the project.

- Ramboll – a global engineering, architecture and consultancy company have been appointed to undertake the Environmental Impact Assessment for the project on behalf of the LPA. Ramboll are highly experienced and qualified EIA specialists.
- Adams Hendry Consulting Ltd – a chartered town planning consultancy have been appointed as planning advisors. Adams Hendry have extensive LDO experience and will support the LPA in fully considering all of the material planning issues. If an LDO is progressed, Adams Hendry will work with the LPA to prepare the LDO documentation.

Alongside the specialist advisers, programme management resource has also been made available to the Planning Team. It is the intention to appoint a dedicated planning case officer to the project.

It was stated that Officers have carefully considered the level of information that would be needed to be available to ensure that the consultation, despite its informal status, would still be meaningful for stakeholders and residents. The conclusion reached was that it is more appropriate to concentrate efforts on analysis and document production ahead of any formal consultation rather than consult prematurely, within limited information, on an informal basis. This also means that the Committee would have more detail available at the point at which the decision to begin formal consultation is sought.

The Committee also noted that consultants have been appointed, the next step is to formulate a draft Statement of Reasons, informed by all the current information about the proposal, including survey work together with a policy assessment of the scheme and identified further survey information. The draft Statement of Reasons will allow a decision to be made whether to follow the LDO route. Running parallel to that will be the preparation of the Environmental Statement described above.

The Committee noted the content of the report.

Chairman