

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
9 December 2015 (7.00 - 9.25 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	+Ray Best, Steven Kelly, Robby Misir, Dilip Patel, Viddy Persaud and Carol Smith
Residents' Group	June Alexander, Nic Dodin and Barbara Matthews
East Havering Residents' Group'	Gillian Ford (Chairman) and Linda Hawthorn
UKIP Group	Lawrence Webb (Vice-Chair)
Independent Residents' Group	+Michael Deon Burton and Graham Williamson

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Linda Trew.

+Substitute Members: Councillor Ray Best (for John Crowder) and Councillor Michael Deon Burton (for David Durant).

Unless shown all decisions were taken with no votes against.

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

33 CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION OF ROMFORD MARKET TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

Councillors Ray Morgon and Keith Darvill addressed the Board and gave the reasons for the call-in of the Cabinet decision.

Councillor Morgon commented that the report lacked considerable detail and did not show that the money would be well spent. Councillor Morgon also commented that the Market continued to decline as shopping habits were changing with more purchases now made online rather than from bricks and mortar stores.

Councillor Darvill commented that the aim was to achieve a successful market and Members needed to ensure that the proposals represented value for money. Councillor Darvill also commented that the timescale for the implementation of the proposals appeared to be fairly rapid and that the

report did not contain a lot of important information. Councillor Darvill concluded by commenting that the surveys that had been carried out appeared not to show where respondents had come from and showed a lack of engagement with the current traders. Improvement to the Market was needed but Members needed to see more detail of the proposals.

The Chairman advised that she had submitted a number of questions to officers which had been responded to and Members would be emailed a copy of the replies following the meeting.

The Council's Head of Economic Development and Business Development Manager then took members through a presentation of the proposals for the transformation of the Market.

The presentation highlighted the current market profile and the opportunities that were available for members to consider. The presentation also highlighted how the Market could establish a brand identity and vision for the future and also how the operational management of the Market would be handled in the future and how the market could attract new traders.

The requisition had stated that no evidence had been provided that clearly demonstrated that changes to the Market would attract new shoppers and traders and in response officers provided statistics that had been compiled from surveys that had been carried out in the town centre.

The presentation showed that the statistics had been taken from 690 face to face interviews and Members questioned as to why the number of respondents was so low from a borough with a population of nearly a quarter of a million people. Members also wished to know how many of the respondents lived within the borough as it had previously been stated in similar surveys that approximately seventy percent of visitors to the town centre were from outside of the borough.

Officers advised that from surveys carried out by Cosgrave Property Group, the owners of the Liberty Shopping Centres, showed that the town centre received approximately 22 million visitors a year and that the aim of the transformation was to get visitors into the Market from the town centre. The presentation also showed Members examples of transformations that had taken place at other markets across the country.

The requisition had queried that there was no evidence that the consultants employed by the Council, 20.20, had a track record in improving markets and footfall.

Officers advised that 20.20 was a leading strategic design consultancy with experience of working with a number of commercially successful growth strategies, particularly in the retail and leisure sector. 20.20 had been chosen because of their experience and strong track record in retail and because there had been a need for a "fresh pair of eyes" on the Market to bring it into the 21st century.

Officers also advised that they had wanted an independent evaluation of 20.20's report and had employed Alan Ottey to be a "critical friend" of the recommendations put forward by 20.20. The report had been shown to be fully validated and included very robust proposals.

In response to questions regarding the costs of employing the two consultants, officers replied that 20.20's work had cost £60,000 and that Mr Ottey's work had cost the Council £3,500. Members again questioned as to whether there was a need for 20.20 to be involved in the process as they had no experience of working within a market environment. Officers advised that the process had gone out to tender and tenderers with experience in retail and some with experience in markets had expressed their interests.

Members questioned whether traders from other markets across the country would have been better placed to give their views on what made a good market and how they attracted new traders.

Mr Ottey had reviewed the 20.20 report and had mostly agreed with what had been said, save for a couple of changes regarding the dwell space and layout of the market stalls.

Cabinet had previously agreed to officers continuing their work on attracting GLA grant for additional funding to progress the scheme.

In response to the requisition question highlighting that no evidence had been provided to show that market places in London boroughs were growing in demand the presentation gave several examples of London markets where transformations had taken place and those markets were now going concerns.

In response to the statement that no evidence had been provided that new socio-economic classes would be attracted to the Market, the presentation detailed the key consumer or "Mosaic" groups in the Romford area. The presentation highlighted the target groups that needed to be attracted to the town centre and although there were large populations of these groups in Romford the report had found that these groups were currently under represented within the Market.

Some Members commented that the market had historically had a poor record of ethic trading and that there had been examples of new traders being bullied by existing traders.

Officers responded by advising that a new pledge would be introduced that ensured new traders would be well treated which would help attract existing traders that were currently trading elsewhere. Introductory rent free periods would also be introduced to encourage new traders onto the Market although some Members felt that reduced/free rents would harm the revenue generation figures that had been quoted in the report. There were also concerns over offering reduced fees and the perception from existing traders

The report had also suggested the possibility of seven day trading and members questioned whether the loss of parking revenue from the Market Place would be offset by the additional trading. Officers replied by commenting that one of the extra proposed trading days was Sunday and that at present no parking charges were levied on Sundays. Other additional trading days may see only part of the market Place being used therefore allowing some parking.

In response to a question regarding the use of consultants the Council's Property Services Manager advised that the Council had previously employed Quarterbridge Project Management Limited who had had experience of transforming markets but their recommended improvements had not really worked and regular health-checks of the Market had borne this out. 20.20's work had looked at the Market from a different approach and suggested a different proposal to take the Market forward.

New traders were needed, as unlike in the past where there had been a history of trader succession, this was no longer the case. Traders that traded in the right commodities tended to trade well on Romford Market.

The introduction of this year's Christmas trading village, which was an in-house idea, had provided a buzz around the Market and the traders but it had long been felt that if no long term improvements were made then the Market would be lost.

The presentation also highlighted the costs, both Revenue and Capital investment, that would be required to introduce the project. Members were advised that the Capital investment would need to be costed along with possible loss of parking revenue and brought back to Cabinet for its approval.

Discussions were on-going with catering providers to ascertain what fees they would be willing to pay to secure places on the Market.

The presentation concluded with a brief business case for the proposals that included proposals for the increase in traders and financial margins.

Some Members felt that the money was being spent in the wrong areas such as the "dwell area" and that more money should be spent on encouraging catering ventures into the area.

Officers advised that meetings had taken place with Cosgrave Property Group who had shown interest in re-developing areas of the town centre particularly in Western Road and Swan Walk following the Council's pledge to invest in the Market Place and on the new leisure centre.

Councillor Morgon commented that he had still not heard compelling evidence that the transformation was the right thing to do and that the report had been poorly written and still lacked clarity.

During discussions Members discussed previous attempts to rejuvenate the Market which had been met with opposition from traders who had sometimes shown an appalling attitude and were resistant to any form of change yet complained that the Market was disappearing.

Members felt that the current provision of merchandise was very poor and that all age groups needed to be targeted in encouraging people to use the Market not just the ones highlighted in the presentation.

Member's felt that the investment in the "quiet/dwell" areas was inappropriate and that attracting traders that would sell a wide range of quality merchandise and the additional provision of quality catering facilities was more suitable towards a successful transformation of the Market.

Member's comments also included that the report had no substance and showed that the proposals were unfunded, uncosted and un-defined. The report also claimed that external funding played a large part in the transformation and Members expressed concerns that if such funding was not forthcoming then what back-up plans were in place for the future of the Market.

Members commented that the loss of parking revenue needed to be shown more clearly in the report and again criticised the report for being vague in areas to the point that the report probably needed re-writing and that it needed to be re-presented in a more persuasive and measured way.

Members also questioned why the proposals had not been considered by the Towns & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee as it fell within its Terms of Reference.

Members felt that there needed to be greater interaction with the current traders but acknowledged the engagement issues that had previously hindered attempts to develop the Market.

Councillor Darvill commented that other markets particularly those on the continent, particularly those in countries such as France, Belgium and Germany which were seen as shopping experiences and attracted shoppers from all over Europe.

Councillor Darvill also commented on the scant information that was available on Romford in the promotional material and advised that all Councillors needed to promote Romford and that the proposals in the report needed to be researched more thoroughly before any money was spent. Councillor Darvill concluded that call-in was felt to be justified and that the call-in should be upheld and the matter referred back to Cabinet for re-consideration.

Members commented that all Councillors wanted to see a more vibrant Market as if the Market declined then Romford declined but the report

needed more detail in how this would be achieved and at what cost to the Council.

Generally Members felt that something needed to be done to improve the Market experience however more detail was required to know if the proposals agreed by Cabinet were the right way forward. In some support of the proposals it was commented that change was needed and that procrastination would only lead to a further decline of the current Market provision.

Members questioned whether a more holistic approach could have been taken to see whether the retail element of Romford was significant enough to attract visitors to the town centre and subsequently to the Market.

In a brief summation the Cabinet Member for Environment commented that a little more research was perhaps required but overall the proposals would ensure that the Market would move forward and prove to be a valuable asset to the Council. The Cabinet member also echoed an earlier comment that procrastination would only lead to a further decline of the current Market provision and possibly lead to a loss of GLA funding.

At this point the Cabinet Member for Environment left the room whilst the Board voted on the decision as to uphold or dismiss the call-in of the Cabinet decision taken on 18 November 2015.

The vote for the decision as to whether to uphold or dismiss the call-in was carried by 8 votes to 4 with 2 abstentions.

Councillors Ford, Hawthorn, Williamson, Deon Burton, Webb, Dodin, Alexander and Matthews voted to uphold the call-in.

Councillors Misir, Smith, Persuad and Patel voted to dismiss the call-in.

Councillors Best and Kelly abstained from voting.

It was **RESOLVED** that the call-in of the Cabinet decision taken on 18 November 2015 be upheld and referred back to Cabinet for its re-consideration.

