

Leader's speech to Full Council – 21 March 2018

Madam Mayor,

There are a number of items I would like to update members on this evening.

Estate regeneration announcement

Firstly, I would like to congratulate officers, particularly Neil Stubbings and his team, for all the hard work on the estate regeneration project. Last week, we announced Wates Residential as our preferred development partner for the scheme, which is one of the most ambitious in London.

The project will see an overhaul of Havering's existing Council accommodation. Delivering improved provision, the regeneration will increase council rented accommodation by 70 per cent and build 400 low-cost home ownership properties. By doubling the amount of affordable housing on the 12 estates, this project delivers much-needed affordable homes for borough residents that are truly affordable on local income levels.

The scheme will see the Council's current stock of 856 homes replaced to create 3,112 homes of mixed tenure, encouraging more integrated communities.

This is a unique initiative as all Council funding for the project will come from the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This is in addition to funding from Wates and the GLA.

Havering will receive £33m grant monies from the GLA, to deliver new estates where 40 per cent of the homes will be affordable.

The scheme will also create a lasting legacy for the community through investment in skills, training and education. Working with Wates, the Council predict the social value benefits from Phase 1 will be worth around £6.8 million. Commitments include the creation of a Construction Academy through a partnership with Havering College and the Construction Industry Training Board and delivering around 165 apprenticeships over the life of the scheme.

An extensive consultation exercise, which started 18 months ago, continues. To date, this has involved 741 residents across the 12 sites, 154 group meetings and 82 newsletters. There have also been over 600 one-to-one meetings with tenants. Feedback has shown strong support for the project from the majority of residents, who will soon be involved in the design of their new homes.

Extensive support is being provided to all residents on the estate to help them find new homes which will allow the redevelopments to begin.

The right to return is guaranteed to every existing resident on the estates being regenerated. Any housing that requires rebuilding will be done on a like-for-like basis to ensure no loss of existing affordable housing.

This has been hailed as the most exciting and ambitious Council home building programme in London, and our new partner will be able to help us deliver our future vision for the borough.

Forming this joint venture will allow us to provide high-quality new homes for existing residents and young people who want to stay in the Borough.

Sapphire Ice and Leisure and Central Park Leisure Centre

The Council's investment in sport and leisure also continues to make a significant impact on our communities. Sapphire Ice and Leisure has attracted more than 60,000 visitors in its first month since opening. Around 650 people have enrolled on learn to swim scheme, and 300 on the learn to skate lessons. Also, fitness memberships are already at 1,200.

Since the extension at Central Park leisure centre opened back in October, the centre has exceeded its 10-year target, and now for the first time, has 5,000 members, with 1,000 of those joining since the extension opened.

These figures alone show that residents, if given the opportunity, want to take responsibility for their own health and fitness, which will of course lead to better outcomes all round, for individuals, families and communities.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those who were involved in delivering these facilities, both on time and on budget.

London Plan

However, although we are doing as much as we can to improve housing provision and facilities in the borough, we do still have grave concerns about the proposals contained in the draft London Plan.

Recently published by the Mayor of London, the Plan proposes a housing target of 1,875 new homes per annum for Havering over the next ten years, which represents a 60 per cent increase on the figure included in the draft Havering Local Plan (1,170). Mayor Khan's target is higher even than the 30,000 needs assessment over 22 years given previously to us which equates to some 1300 a year. The Mayor's target is totally unacceptable, unachievable and unsustainable to the point of changing the unique and open character of our borough for the worse.

We have now responded to the consultation, setting out our concerns in the strongest possible terms and highlighting the fundamental flaws underlying the housing targets in the draft London Plan, which are both unrealistic and unachievable for Havering (and many other London Boroughs).

The draft London Plan does not properly recognise nor make provision for the timely and effective delivery of the social and community infrastructure, which is a fundamental component necessary to support the growth of sustainable communities and needed to ensure that individuals have health, well-being and a high quality of life

The draft Plan also fails to recognise that the transport circumstances in Outer London Boroughs like ours are very different from Central and Inner London. The Mayor of London's approach to matter such as modal shift and car parking provision must recognise that private car use will remain higher than in other parts of London because there is not the public transport infrastructure to support more journeys being made by this mode.

It has also failed to recognise that key strategic transport infrastructure is necessary in Havering.

It was also reported to London Councils yesterday that Mayor Khan is seeking an amendment to pending legislation to give him Permitted Development Rights to place electric car charging points in any road or street. Such rights would override any residents' consultation and indeed any council planning powers to prevent these installations even in the most inappropriate locations. It would seem that even Labour London councils will be with us in opposing this misguided proposal.

Fair funding

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is undertaking a series of consultations on the future of local government funding that will affect all local authorities from 2020/21. The consultation on the Fair Funding review is one in a series of such consultations.

The consultation sets out MHCLG's proposed approach to the new needs assessment formula which proposes a simplified and more transparent approach, which is comprised of a foundation formula and some service-specific formulas.

We responded to the consultation on 12 March on the specific questions, drawing upon analysis jointly commissioned from LG Futures, working collaboratively with other outer London Boroughs who represent the nine lowest funded London Boroughs, and also work undertaken by London Councils on behalf of the whole of London.

We recognise that this the first stage of the consultation process, which focuses only upon the relative needs assessment. However, we stressed the equal importance that should be placed upon relative resources and transitional arrangements. Havering has been adversely impacted by inadequate funding settlements over several years due to the flaws within the current formula funding system. We are therefore keen to understand how Government intend to address the inequality in resourcing that has resulted from the existing needs formulae.

It is important that Government provide clarity of its intentions and consults in relation to the whole system on a timely basis, rather than on a piecemeal basis.

Restoration Project for the Windmill and the Visitor Centre

Now moving on to the restoration project for the Upminster Windmill and Visitor Centre. The Visitor Centre building works are complete and the IT equipment is being installed. The building is now being used for organised groups and meetings ahead of the opening of the Windmill.

The restoration works on the Windmill are progressing well. Over the last couple of months the Millwright has been working on the repairs to the Cap Frame in his workshop in Holland. When it is completed it will be dismantled ready for transportation back to the UK. This work will continue until the new components of the wall frames have been completed. These will be transported back to the UK towards the end of this month. Very extensive works are required to the existing smock tower timbers due to their poor condition.

The Millwright is expected to finish the repairs on the Windmill at the end of December this year. External works and the fit out of the interior of the Mill will follow with a view to opening both buildings to the public at the end of April 2019.

Schools

Since our last full council meeting, we have also had some good news in relation to our schools. 95 per cent of Havering primary pupils are now attending a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' school in the borough, above the national average of 90 per cent (as at 31.01.2018). This recent increase is directly linked to James Oglethorpe Primary school and Langtons Infant both being awarded a 'Good' Ofsted rating.

Ofsted inspected both schools during January 2018 and recently announced their positive findings. The inspections recognised the schools many strengths and that governors, staff and parents are focused on achieving the very best for pupils and families.

Since August 2015 Havering has improved the percentage of children attending an 'Outstanding' or 'Good' primary school by 15 per cent, compared to the national increase of five per cent. Working with schools our aim is for even further progress.

Thanks to the Retiring Members

Finally, Madam Mayor, as this is the last council meeting of the term I would like to thank those councillors who are not seeking re-election for your service. It is not appropriate to refer to everyone until nominations close.

I would however like to mention specifically two members who have made it known that they will be retiring.

Firstly, may I thank you, Madam Mayor for your achievements this year in your civic role and for all your past work. More would of course be said about your mayoral year at the Annual Council Meeting.

Secondly, I thank Councillor Barbara Matthews for her exceptional record of 32 continuous service. During that period, she has been group leader and served on countless committees and on outside bodies. She was made honorary freeman. She has also stamped her character on our proceedings. Although that has not also been comfortable for my colleagues and myself I congratulate you on such a record of service.