

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Main Road, Romford RM1 3BD
22 January 2026 (7.00 - 9.40 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group Ray Best and Timothy Ryan

Havering Residents' Group Reg Whitney (Chairman), Robby Misir (Vice-Chair) and John Crowder

Labour Group Jane Keane

Also present were Councillor Judith Holt, Councillor Matt Stanton and Councillor Viddy Persaud.

There were about 25 members of the public present for parts of the meeting.

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

10 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Councillor Tim Ryan declared an interest in the following matters before the Committee:

1. Crowlands Golf Centre, Rush Green
2. Former Debenham Store

11 MINUTES

Members agreed for the Chairman to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2025.

12 W0154.25 - FORMER HOMEBASE, DAVIDSON WAY, ROMFORD

The Committee received a presentation on the proposed demolition of the existing building, followed by a residential-led redevelopment of the site, with some ground floor commercial and community spaces, and the creation of a primary school

The application site comprises a large brownfield site located just south of the Romford Ring Road (Oldchurch Road), east of Rom Valley Way, north of the Seedbed Centre site and west of the River Rom. Within the 1.9 hectare site is a large vacant retail store (formerly Homebase) with the

remainder of the site laid to hardstanding which used to function as Homebase's car park and external storage areas.

The proposed redevelopment seeks to provide 584 homes, approximately 200 sqm of commercial floorspace, a new public park and space set aside for a new primary school.

A Member queried flood risk mitigation, noting potential vulnerability at ground-floor level. Officers confirmed most of the site lay outside flood zones and that mitigation measures included minor level increases, bank naturalisation, and increased watercourse capacity, to be secured through conditions and the Flood Risk Assessment.

A Member asked whether the provision of a school formed part of the proposal. Officers confirmed no school was included in the application, but land was safeguarded for future provision through a Section 106 agreement.

Members raised concerns regarding parking provision, particularly disabled parking, and suggested this be increased if possible. Affordable housing was welcomed, though Members queried why only the minimum policy level was proposed and encouraged consideration of additional provision, including for key workers.

The Committee expressed concern about cumulative parking and traffic impacts arising from multiple developments coming forward concurrently. Members urged a coordinated approach with relevant bodies to ensure parking and transport arrangements were workable in practice.

Members welcomed increased public open space but raised concerns about limited connectivity to the town centre, station, and hospital, and the barrier effect of surrounding roads. Officers confirmed pedestrian routes were provided within the site and that contributions would support wider connectivity improvements, including future crossings.

Members raised concerns about graffiti, littering, and long-term management of the river corridor. It was suggested that improvements to areas along the river wall and Old Church Road be considered as part of the development works.

The Committee raised concern about the proposed height of up to 16 storeys which was considered to be at the upper limit of acceptability. Members requested further information on internal layouts and apartment sizes.

The following points were agreed as a summary of the Committee's views on the development:

1. The importance of fully addressing and mitigating flood risk was emphasised, with a request that all mitigation measures are clearly explained and fully set out in any future application.

2. Concerns were raised regarding the division and scale of the school, alongside wider discussion about parking provision, including whether sufficient and safe parking spaces are proposed. Members also highlighted the potential cumulative impacts of surrounding developments.
3. Consideration was requested as to whether the street design could accommodate informal or on street parking, as a means of alleviating potential parking pressures arising from the development.
4. The provision of affordable housing was welcomed, with a question raised as to whether there may be opportunities to increase affordable housing, particularly given the site's proximity to the hospital.
5. The increase in public park and open space provision was welcomed; however, questions were raised regarding the necessity and design of the proposed entrance feature, as well as concerns about the lack of connectivity, particularly along the river corridor and between the site and surrounding areas.
6. Members highlighted the importance of pedestrian connectivity, including strong links to the hospital, nearby community facilities and adjacent sites. There was also a request to explore opportunities for community involvement and stewardship of the river corridor, to help foster a sense of ownership and responsibility.
7. Concerns were raised about the height of the proposed development, with the view that it pushes policy boundaries and risks normalising taller building heights across the wider area, contrary to policy expectations of varied building heights.
8. While acknowledging that policy provides some flexibility on height, Members requested further detail on internal space standards, including floor plans, ceiling heights and levels of daylight.
9. Finally, attention was drawn to the area at the northern end of the river where the sewer emerges near the road, with a request to explore opportunities for environmental improvement and to clarify land ownership and responsibility for that area.

13 W0152.25 - CROWLANDS GOLF CENTRE, CROW LANE

Councillor Tim Ryan declared a Non Pecuniary Interest on this item. Councillor Ryan remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion. Councillor Ryan stated that he is a Ward Member and had made comment on the development recently.

The Committee received a presentation on the proposed full planning application for the mixed-use development of the site, including full details for a total of 1,253 affordable homes (100%), a 720 sqm sports hall, a 450 sqm community centre/boat house, 164 sqm of neighbourhood retail floorspace, together with associated landscaping, parking provision and cycle storage, the delivery of over 3.5 hectares of public open space and 1.5 hectares of children's play space, and the introduction of a new bus route linking Crow Lane and Wood Lane.

The Committee noted that the application site comprises the existing Crowlands Golf Centre, extending to approximately 22.5 hectares of land located to the south of Crow Lane and to the north of Wood Lane and Rush Green Road. The site spans two London boroughs, Barking and Dagenham and Havering, with the majority of the land situated within the London Borough of Havering. It is understood that the entire site is in the ownership of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The site is designated as Metropolitan Green Belt in both the Havering and Barking and Dagenham Local Plans, and part of the site is also designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) of Borough Importance.

The report stated that the land is currently in use as a golf centre, comprising a 9-hole golf course, driving range, lake and clubhouse, and is arranged in an L-shape around the West Ham United training ground, which occupies a substantial area to the south and east. The site is bounded by school playing fields and existing residential development to the west, with a rugby club located to the north-east. In terms of accessibility, the site has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) ranging from 1a (very low accessibility) in the north near Crow Lane to 3 (moderate accessibility) in the south near Rush Green Road. No part of the site lies within reasonable walking distance of a rail or Underground station, with Chadwell Heath and Romford stations both located more than 2 kilometres from the nearest point of the site. Public transport provision is limited, with Rush Green Road served by frequent bus routes, while Crow Lane is served only by the westbound 499 bus route, which operates at low frequency and has no bus stops along the site frontage.

With its agreement, a ward Member, Councillor Viddy Persaud addressed the Committee and raised objections to the proposal, stating that there was strong opposition from residents to development on the site which was described as Green Belt land and a valued open space. Councillor Persaud highlighted the importance of the area for community wellbeing, recreation, wildlife, and environmental benefits and warned that development would set a harmful precedent leading to the gradual loss of protected land. While acknowledging the need for housing, it was argued that Green Belt development should be a last resort particularly given the availability of nearby development sites and underused brownfield land. Concerns were also raised about pressure on local infrastructure including roads and health services and the potential environmental impacts. Councillor Persaud urged the Committee to reject the proposal and demonstrate that residents' views had been heard.

During general discussions, Members sought clarification on whether the site was designated Green Belt or Grey Belt. Officers advised that the site is designated as Green Belt in the adopted Local Plan. It was noted that recent changes to national planning policy have introduced the concept of Grey Belt, which requires a site by site assessment until a borough wide review is completed. Officers confirmed that a formal conclusion would be reached within the officer report, applying the relevant policy tests at the time of determination.

Members queried the historic landfill and ground conditions on the site. The Committee was advised that desk based assessments and borehole investigations had been undertaken, identifying historic inert construction waste in limited areas only. Further site wide investigations were ongoing, with no evidence of hazardous or toxic materials identified to date. It was confirmed that all findings would be submitted with the application and reviewed in consultation with the Environment Agency.

Members discussed the relevance of housing need to the proposal. Officers advised that housing need was a material consideration but would not, in itself, outweigh Green Belt policy. Concern was expressed that the proposed housing mix did not sufficiently address the need for larger family accommodation. It was confirmed that four bedroom units were included within the scheme and that full details of the accommodation schedule would be provided.

Members raised significant concerns regarding parking provision, traffic impact, and access arrangements, particularly given the scale of development and cumulative impact of nearby schemes. It was noted that car dependency remained high in the area. Concerns were also raised regarding pressure on local infrastructure, including roads, healthcare provision, and Queen's Hospital and Members requested that these matters be carefully assessed as part of the application.

Members raised concerns regarding the impact of the development on biodiversity and wildlife and requested further information on ecological assessments and proposed mitigation measures.

Members queried how the development would be managed given that the site spans two London boroughs. The Committee was informed that the site would be subject to a single estate wide management arrangement to ensure consistent maintenance, with statutory services delivered by the respective boroughs.

Members sought clarification on the definition of social rent and key worker housing. The Committee noted that rent levels would be agreed with the Council's housing department in accordance with London wide policy. Members also queried the proposed sports hall. The Committee was advised that discussions were ongoing with local sports organisations regarding its future management and community use.

The following points were agreed as a summary of the Committee's views on the development:

1. Members expressed the view that there needs to be clear direction on the future status of the site, including whether it should be considered Green Belt or Grey Belt.
2. Members emphasised the importance of confirming that the land is not contaminated, seeking further clarity on historic landfill use and whether this poses any ongoing or future risk.

3. Members noted comments regarding the provision of four bedroom dwellings and requested that the applicant clarify whether the proposed housing mix adequately meets identified local housing needs.
4. Members raised questions regarding the management of spaces between the buildings. It was noted that estate wide management would be in place, with borough responsibilities limited to statutory services such as refuse collection.
5. Concern was raised about the proximity of some buildings to the site boundaries and the potential impact on existing residents, particularly in relation to the overall scale and quantum of development.
6. Members queried whether the level of parking proposed would be sufficient to serve the number of future residents.
7. Members raised concerns regarding existing biodiversity on the site and requested reassurance that ecological impacts, including protected species, would be adequately addressed.
8. Concern was expressed regarding the capacity of existing infrastructure, particularly GP provision and the local hospital, to accommodate additional residents.
9. Members requested further consideration of vehicular access arrangements, including whether the proposed access points would function effectively and avoid congestion at peak times.
10. Members sought clarification on rent levels for social and affordable housing, as well as responsibility for the management and operation of the proposed sports centre and associated facilities.

14 W0214.25 - FORMER DEBENHAMS, 56-72 MARKET PLACE, ROMFORD, RM1 3ER

Councillor Tim Ryan declared a Non Pecuniary Interest on this item. Councillor Ryan remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion. Councillor Ryan stated that he recently started working with the a Councillor and that he also undertake consultancy work for the Member who was part of the Developer Team presenting this evening.

The Committee received a presentation on the proposed residential-led, mixed-use redevelopment of the former Debenhams site to provide a hotel (Class C1) with commercial space (Class E) at ground and upper floors fronting Market Place, alongside two residential buildings to the rear, connected by a communal amenity podium with commercial uses (Class E) at ground level, and a new public plaza with a freestanding commercial building (Class E), widening and landscaping works to Swan Walk.

The proposal would provide 155 homes within two towers positioned at the southern end of the site, which would be connected by a podium at lower levels, whilst the hotel at the northern end of the site would have 118 rooms.

The Committee was informed that two residential blocks at the southern end of the site are proposed at 12 and 14 storeys, with the taller of these two

buildings in the south-east corner. The hotel block facing Market Place would be of a similar height to the existing Debenhams building, at 6 storeys (noting that the existing building has very high floor-to-ceiling heights and the revised scheme incorporates more floors within the same broad envelope through reduced floor-to-ceiling heights).

A Member expressed concern that the proposal did not sufficiently reflect the Masterplan vision for the Market Square. In particular, concern was raised that the frontage appeared overly uniform and modern, lacking reference to the historic medieval market context or a civic presence. It was noted that the hotel entrance represented a missed opportunity for a more distinctive and characterful design. Further concern was raised regarding the scale and bulk of the two rear buildings, which were considered overly dominant. The Member felt that further design work was required to enhance the character of the Market Square.

A Member queried the level of disabled parking provision within the scheme. Officers confirmed that five Blue Badge spaces were proposed, equating to approximately 3 per cent of provision. The Member asked whether this could be increased slightly, noting the high level of activity within the Market Square, particularly on market days.

Members queried the absence of parking provision for hotel guests and sought clarification on policy requirements. Officers advised that there is no minimum parking standard for hotels under the London Plan. Given the highly accessible town centre location and proximity to public transport, parking provision should be limited to disabled, servicing, and operational needs only. Officers explained that additional guest parking would be contrary to sustainable transport objectives and would not be supported by the GLA.

Members noted concerns that hotel guests travelling by car could place additional pressure on existing town centre parking, particularly where public transport services are unreliable. Officers reiterated that the policy approach seeks to discourage private car use in town centre locations.

Members queried the lack of general parking provision, beyond disabled and operational spaces. Officers advised that, under the London Plan, this town centre site should limit parking to disabled, servicing, and operational needs only. There is no requirement to provide parking for hotel guests, and additional parking would conflict with sustainable transport objectives. Members noted the explanation.

Members expressed concern that the proposed design and materials lacked civic presence and sufficient reference to the historic town centre context. It was suggested that greater consideration be given to active ground-floor uses, signage, and a more distinctive or artistic treatment to enhance the streetscape.

Members noted that while hotel guest parking could be accommodated elsewhere, consideration should be given to drop-off and pick-up arrangements as part of the scheme's operation.

The following points were agreed as a summary of the Committee's views on the development:

- Concern that the proposals do not align with the approved masterplan and fail to adequately reflect the historic marketplace and its established character.
- The design was considered to lack a strong civic presence, with the hotel in particular missing an opportunity to contribute positively to a civic or landmark character.
- Concern regarding the height and massing of the development, particularly in relation to the rear buildings.
- Issues raised in respect of parking provision, including whether parking levels should be increased and the absence of dedicated hotel parking or a drop off facility.
- Comments were made regarding the hotel waiting and arrival areas, as well as the choice of materials, with a view that warmer and more cohesive materials could better enhance the overall design.
- Questions were raised as to whether the ground floor design should operate at a more human scale, reflecting the character of a historic town centre, including consideration of active frontages and a clearer shopfront strategy.

Chairman