

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Main Road, Romford RM1 3BD
23 October 2025 (7.00 - 10.00 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group Ray Best and +David Taylor

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

Labour Group Jane Keane

There were about 35 members of the public at the meeting.

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

37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

An apology was received for the absence of Councillor Timothy Ryan, Councillor David Taylor substituting.

38 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Councillor Jane Keane disclosed a Non-Pecuniary Interest - by virtue of being a board member of the Havering Museum.

39 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40 W0210.24 - LIBERTY SHOPPING CENTRE, ROMFORD

The Committee received a presentation on the proposed redevelopment of the Liberty Shopping Centre and surrounding buildings. The scheme involves partial demolition and comprehensive redevelopment to deliver a residential-led, mixed-use development comprising approximately 700 new homes. Full planning permission is sought for Plot 1, with outline consent for the remaining plots to be delivered in phases over several years. Plot 1 has evolved through pre-application discussions and Quality Review Panel

feedback, changing from three separate towers of 16–20 storeys to a single 25-storey building flanked by two wings of 10–11 storeys. The proposal includes new public realm created by removing the roof over parts of the shopping centre, with ground-floor retail and commercial units facing onto these areas to maintain a town centre character. A flagship retail unit is proposed on the Western Road corner.

Plots 2 and 3, fronting Market Place, will feature lower-rise buildings (5–6 storeys) with taller elements behind (10–14 storeys). These plots aim to create a food and beverage hub along Swan Walk to support the evening economy. The applicant is in discussions with the owner of the former Debenhams store to coordinate development and is considering incorporating Mercury House into the scheme, subject to acquisition. The redundant car park roof will be repurposed as “Makers Place,” a creative hub for start-ups, adding vibrancy to the town centre.

Members raised several points during discussion. Concerns included the policy basis for the proposed 25-storey building, its impact on Romford’s character, and microclimatic effects such as wind. Clarification was sought on which parts of the roof would be removed and how architectural variation would be achieved along Market Place to avoid uniformity. Questions were asked about fire safety, lift reliability, and provision of multiple exits for tall buildings. Members expressed differing views on car parking, with some highlighting the need to retain spaces for visitors and others noting London Plan restrictions and evidence of oversupply. The applicant confirmed that public parking provision will remain unchanged, with only derelict or non-public areas affected.

Further discussion focused on affordable housing, rental levels, and service charges, with members stressing the need for homes to be genuinely affordable for local residents. Requests were made for details on unit mix, phasing, and measures to minimise disruption to businesses during construction. Members also asked about community facilities such as health services and prayer rooms, and raised concerns about antisocial behaviour, security, and weather protection in open spaces. The applicant confirmed engagement with police and counter-terrorism officers and outlined design measures to improve safety and surveillance. Microclimate testing and wind mitigation will form part of the planning submission.

Members welcomed the intention to support independent retailers and local food businesses, alongside national brands, and encouraged discounted rents for start-ups. The Committee noted the importance of lessons learned from other developments and requested reassurance that these will inform design. There was general support for revitalising the town centre, but members emphasised the need for clarity on phasing, architectural quality, and integration of services.

The following considerations were summarised as the points raised by the Committee at the meeting:

- Clarification requested on changes to retail floor space:
 - o What exists now versus what is proposed in the future.
 - o A full breakdown of all floor space in the development.
- Concern raised about whether there will be sufficient food and beverage floor space.
- Questions on tall buildings:
 - o Policy support for the tallest building proposed.
 - o Concern that no clear policy exists for this height.
 - o Whether the master plan has been properly considered.
- Request for more detail on microclimatic impacts and practical effects.
- Clarification sought on which parts of the shopping centre roof will be retained and which will be removed.
- Comments on architecture:
 - o Desire for variation in design along Market Place.
 - o Avoid uniformity similar to the opposite side of Market Place.
- Fire safety concerns:
 - o Clarification on provision of exits and reliability of lifts in tall buildings.
- Height and character:
 - o Ensure building heights are appropriate and in keeping with Romford town centre.
- Parking considerations:
 - o Take account of residents and visitors who still wish to drive to the town centre.
- Affordability concerns:
 - o Homes should be affordable for local residents.
 - o Avoid hidden service charges.
- Request for a physical or digital model to better understand the development layout.
- Details on phasing:
 - o How construction will be managed to allow the shopping centre to operate.
 - o Impact on footfall and local businesses during works.
- Clarification on Mercury House:
 - o Whether demolition or integration is planned.
- Affordable housing:
 - o Request for details on social rent levels and proposed unit mix.
- Community services:
 - o Consider inclusion of health facilities, prayer rooms, and other amenities to support residents.
- Community safety concerns:
 - o Prevent antisocial behaviour and intimidating spaces.
 - o Ensure open areas are protected from adverse weather.
- Design lessons:
 - o Apply learning from previous shopping centre developments to avoid past issues.
- Reassurance requested that all these concerns will be addressed in the planning application.

- Support expressed for provision of smaller retail and food units for independent businesses, not just large chains.
- Additional phasing point:
 - o Understand construction impacts on nearby businesses and how disruption will be minimised.
- Parking flexibility:
 - o Explore whether residents can purchase or rent spaces in existing multi-storey car parks.

Members were reminded to email any further comments or considerations to the Head of Strategic Planning within a week of the meeting.

41 W0210.25 - YMCA THAMES GATEWAY, 29 RUSH GREEN ROAD, ROMFORD RM7 0PH

The Committee received a presentation on a proposed development at the YMCA Rush Green site. The scheme involves constructing a six-storey building comprising 184 supported accommodation units, with shared living, dining, and kitchen areas, an on-site laundry, and flexible ground-floor spaces for residents and public use. The new building will form part of the wider YMCA campus, which currently provides 148 supported housing units and 61 move-on flats alongside a gym, nursery, and café. It was stated that existing residents will decant into the new development, and the current tower will be refurbished at a later stage, subject to a future planning application.

The applicant explained that the existing accommodation is outdated and does not meet modern standards. The YMCA has been a key community facility for over 100 years, hosting numerous local organisations and services. However, the current building is in poor condition, with inadequate facilities such as shared bathrooms and limited kitchen access. The proposed development aims to provide high-quality accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness, with improved amenities and communal spaces.

The presentation outlined the design approach, including flood mitigation measures, landscaping, and ecological enhancements. The scheme seeks to naturalise part of the River Rom edge and provide green spaces, courtyards, and communal areas. The building will activate the Rush Green Road frontage and include sustainable features such as PV panels and energy-efficient materials. Public consultation has informed design changes, including setbacks to retain existing trees and improved accessibility.

The Committee raised questions about the impact on existing residents during construction, protection of Rush Green Road residents, and the viability of naturalising the river. Concerns were expressed about courtyard size, overlooking, and ensuring the relationship with Grenfell Park is maximised.

Members also queried flood management strategies and how the proposed creek would avoid becoming stagnant water. The applicant confirmed that construction would not involve demolition of the existing building at this stage and that detailed management plans would address contamination risks and protect ecological buffers.

The Committee welcomed the proposal, noting the pressing need for supported accommodation in the borough and the improved space standards. Members emphasised the importance of delivering the naturalisation works and maintaining community access to facilities during construction.

The following considerations were summarised as the points raised by the Committee at the meeting:

- Clarification requested on what happens to the existing accommodation and café facilities during construction, and how these will be affected.
- How residents on Rush Green Road will be protected during construction.
- General welcome for the proposal, noting the space is much needed in the borough and adjoining areas.
- Positive feedback on the standard of accommodation proposed.
- Concerns raised about courtyard size and function, and how these spaces will work for residents.
- Question on how the scheme will improve the relationship with Grenfell Park, which should be seen as an asset for residents.
- Clarification sought on the role of the SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation) and how the development contributes to it.
- Assurance requested that the River Rom will be protected from contaminants during construction.
- Further query on courtyard design and layout, ensuring there is no undue overlooking between units and courtyards.
- Question on the viability of river naturalisation, and whether it will actually be delivered as proposed.
- Concern about the flood mitigation strategy, particularly the proposed creek, and ensuring it does not become stagnant water over time.

Members were reminded to email any further comments or considerations to the Head of Strategic Planning within a week of the meeting.

42 W0312.24 - FORMER ATIK NIGHT CLUB, 108 SOUTH STREET, ROMFORD

The Committee received a presentation on the proposed redevelopment of the former ATIK Nightclub site. The scheme involves the complete demolition of existing buildings and construction of a new development ranging from six storeys on South Street to nine storeys in the north-west corner, with two intermediate eight-storey sections. The proposal comprises

285 co-living units designed for single-person households, offering private rooms with kitchenettes and bathrooms alongside shared facilities such as co-working spaces, lounges, a gym, and a concierge service. The ground floor will include active frontages, a café, and community spaces, with external amenity areas provided on roof terraces at various levels. The development will be car-free, except for one wheelchair-accessible parking space, and will provide extensive cycle storage.

The applicant explained the rationale for co-living, highlighting demand among young professionals and single households, and the lack of professionally managed shared accommodation in the borough. The design aims to activate Havana Close and the Battis, creating a new public square and improving connectivity. Engagement with local stakeholders and public consultation has informed the design, which includes measures to integrate the scheme into the community, such as partnerships with local charities and provision of co-working spaces accessible to residents and the public.

The Committee raised several points during discussion. Concerns included the future location of delivery bikes currently on site, the viability and usage of proposed co-working spaces, and the need to reflect the site's cultural and social history, given its iconic status as a former nightclub. Members suggested engagement with the Havering Arts and Culture Strategy and local museum to preserve heritage through design and interpretation. Questions were asked about room sizes, accessibility for disabled residents, and evacuation procedures. The applicant confirmed that 10% of units will be wheelchair-accessible, with level access, lifts, and compliant layouts, and that a management plan will address security and concierge provision.

Further issues discussed included community safety, integration of residents into the town centre, and the importance of robust security measures, including controlled access and surveillance. Members emphasised the need for soundproofing due to proximity to the railway and requested details on Network Rail engagement and construction safety. The applicant confirmed that noise and vibration assessments will form part of the submission and that agreements with Network Rail will be secured. The Committee also noted the importance of ensuring the development contributes positively to the town centre rather than functioning solely as a dormitory building.

The following considerations were summarised as the points raised by the Committee at the meeting:

- Concern about future location of delivery bikes and how this will be accommodated going forward.
- Request for assurance on the use and effectiveness of proposed co-working spaces.
- Strong plea to acknowledge and incorporate the site's historical and cultural significance, including its iconic corner and social heritage.
- Emphasis that the building and its residents should contribute to the town centre, not function solely as a dormitory block.

- Concern regarding room sizes, with a request for detailed information on dimensions and layout.
- Questions on accessibility for disabled residents, including wheelchair access, parking provision, and overall design compliance.
- Related concern about evacuation procedures for disabled residents, particularly in emergencies.
- Suggestion to engage with Havering's recently launched Arts and Culture project to reflect the site's history.
- Clarification sought on reasoning for courtyard location on the Battis and its relationship to Havana Close.
- General community safety concerns, with emphasis on engagement with Police and Environmental teams.
- Need for 24-hour concierge presence and robust security measures, including secure windows, doors, and roof access.
- Assurance requested on safe access for residents with disabilities, including potential improvements to station access and surrounding areas.
- Concern about noise and vibration impacts from the railway, and request for details on mitigation measures.
- Engagement with TfL and Network Rail regarding station access and construction safety.
- Confirmation sought on security staffing arrangements, including whether dedicated personnel will be present alongside concierge services.
- Suggestion to explore visibility improvements and accessibility enhancements for the wider area as part of the application.
- Need for a permit system or alternative solution for vehicle access to Havana Close for disabled residents to avoid fines.

Members were reminded to email any further comments or considerations to the Head of Strategic Planning within a week of the meeting.

Chairman