

# Public Document Pack

## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD Council Chamber - Town Hall 13 February 2025 (7.00 - 8.50 pm)**

**Present:**

### **COUNCILLORS**

<b>Conservative Group</b>	Dilip Patel, Keith Prince and David Taylor
<b>Havering Residents' Group</b>	Philippa Crowder, Laurance Garrard (Chairman), David Godwin, Bryan Vincent and Julie Wilkes
<b>Labour Group East Havering Residents' Group</b>	Jane Keane and Matthew Stanton Martin Goode

Councillors Judith Holt and Jacqueline McArdle were also present.

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

### **27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mandy Anderson (Jane Kane substituting).

### **28 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

**4. REQUISITION OF CABINET DECISION - OFFICE TO RESIDENTIAL CONVERSION TO ACCOMMODATE HOMELESS FAMILIES - EASTGATE HOUSE.**

Councillor Jane Keane, Non Pecuniary, is Trustee of Havering Museum.

### **29 REQUISITION OF CABINET DECISION - OFFICE TO RESIDENTIAL CONVERSION TO ACCOMMODATE HOMELESS FAMILIES - EASTGATE HOUSE**

The representative of National Housing Group (NHG) confirmed that planning permission for 35 flats on the site was approved in September 2024. All relevant building regulations would be met and warranties provided.

The Director of Living Well added that the Public Liability Insurance covered the directors of Mercury Land Holdings (MLH) only for the current MLH operations. The MLH directors were not able to take on any further risk.

Housing in Eastgate House would be affordable and rent levels would be based on Local Housing Allowance rates operating in Basildon. The letter from the Leader of Basildon Council had now been responded to on behalf of the Chief Executive and Leader. Meetings had also taken place with Basildon Council officers in order to give assurances re build quality and the level of support available to tenants. NHG were made aware of the letter's contents and had input into the response.

Havering would retain a responsibility to tenants housed in Basildon until they wished to transfer to Basildon Council. No households with children in need would be placed in Basildon. Tenants had the legal right to approach Basildon after two years of residency but their right to be rehoused by Havering remained for 7 years. Social care responsibilities would be retained by Havering for two years following any move by a tenant to Basildon.

Tenants' Council Tax would be paid to Basildon so they would have access to local schools etc. Both Havering and Basildon were net importers of households. The current housing crisis had meant that Havering was no longer an affordable place to live. The proposal to move people to Basildon was within the law but was considered a last resort. Residents moving to Basildon would be those currently living in bed and Breakfast accommodation and hotels and this would reduce the level of costs to the Council.

Officers confirmed that a statutory assessment would be undertaken before any decision on moving people to Basildon was taken. An appeals process was available and residents also had the option to make a legal challenge if necessary. With a relatively small number of flats on the site, it was expected that sufficient people would wish to move to Basildon.

Members felt it was important that informal objections to the move should also be considered as some residents may not have capacity to undertake a formal appeal. Whilst it was confirmed that the flats would have windows that opened, some Members remained concerned over the quality of the build.

There would not be support for residents based directly on site in Basildon. This would be supplied by the temporary accommodation management team and the housing allocations team would also be involved. Members were welcome to visit the site once building was under way.

Amenities were close by the development and there were main and side entrances to the block. One entrance was shared with a gym business. No noise had been heard emanating from the gym when officers had visited. Officers agreed that the private rented sector was a challenge to the provision of affordable housing. It was therefore important that the Council had schemes like Eastgate House in order to reduce exposure to private landlords. NHG representatives confirmed that the company had constructed many different projects including a very similar scheme in

Aylesbury. Properties would be well insulated and would also meet standards for fire proofing. The main contractor being used was also familiar with office to residential conversions.

The project would be a stand alone part of the Eastgate Shopping Centre in Basildon. Residents would pay Council Tax to Basildon and have the same rights as other local residents. Havering would however also be able to speak on residents' behalf. The management of the building and housing would be the responsibility of Havering. Residents would need to approach Basildon as regards local schools etc. Representations could be made to Basildon if necessary but officers did not anticipate any issues. There was no extra cost to Havering of staffing to support the development. Housing benefit was being recovered for families in hotels with some £1.2m being recovered this year.

Members raised concerns that some flats in the plans were too small to accommodate two people and sought assurances that only one person would be housed in these. Officers from NHG confirmed that adjustments could be made to the plans to increase the size of individual flats. Officers accepted that the scheme was not a perfect quality solution but was required to assist with the Council's housing issues. Eastgate House would however consist of good quality, affordable housing. All flats would be larger than those in the planned Family Welcome Centre. Officers from NHG had held discussions with Havering residents currently living in temporary accommodation.

If the number of units on the site changed, this would impact the amount the Council paid to NHG. More details of the scheme could be brought to the Board once these were finalised. Officers were also happy to arrange for Members to visit the site once work had commenced.

Officers felt that the priority for savings had to be increasing the supply of family accommodation and hence removing families from hotels. The construction of larger, three bedroom units was not financially viable for NHG but other options were being considered for accommodation of this type.

Residents would be assured short hold tenants of the QLM management company. Council staff would manage the property on behalf of QLM. Welcome documents would be provided to tenants and these would be tested to remove jargon. Face to face communication with tenants would also be in plain language. Support such as an educational psychologist was already provided at Royal Jubilee Court and this could potentially be transferred to Eastgate House if necessary.

Play facilities were provided by Basildon in the vicinity of the development and further details could be provided. The Eastgate scheme would not be entered into unless officers were assured it was of sufficient quality. Maintenance of the building would be undertaken by the Mears company. If

tenants wished to move into the private sector, the Council could assist with this.

If social care needs developed while people were housed in Basildon, these would be met by Basildon, using that Council's criteria. The building was already clear of asbestos but agreements on people moving in would be entered into subject to required works being carried out. It was aimed to carry out moves of families during school holidays where possible in order to reduce the impact on children's schooling. A Member added that both a hospital and a Further Education College were close to the site of the development which was positive.

It was likely that the Council would be exempt from paying Stamp Duty on the development but confirmation of this was awaited from HMRC. Some units were DDA compliant but the provision of any adaptations required would be considered on a case by case basis.

The development was based initially on a 10 year relationship with NHG. Officers accepted that an exit strategy would have to be developed for the end of the lease and consultation with residents would be undertaken at this point. There was a break clause after 8 years and an option to extend the lease.

The Board **AGREED** not to uphold the requisition by 7 votes to 4.

Councillors Martin Goode, Dilip Patel, Keith Prince and David Taylor voted in favour of upholding the requisition.

Councillors Philippa Crowder, Laurance Garrard, David Godwin, Jane Keane, Matthew Stanton, Bryan Vincent and Julie Wilkes voted against upholding the requisition.

Thanks were recorded to the representatives of the National Housing Group for their attendance at the meeting.

The following comments were **AGREED** by the Board to be passed to Cabinet for a response:

- 1. That informal representations from tenants who wish to appeal against a move be considered. A mechanism should be established for achieving this as vulnerable tenants may not have the capacity to deal with a formal appeals process.**
- 2. The Board would seek reassurance that the size of flats in the development meet the legally required minimum and that two people are not placed in a property designed for only one.**
- 3. Clarity should be given on the precise number of units in the development or the Cabinet report and any subsequent**

**communications, should not refer to a specific number of dwellings until this has been confirmed by the developers.**

- 4. New tenants should be advised of the location of essential services and play and recreation facilities so that moving into their home feels welcoming.**

---

**Chairman**

This page is intentionally left blank