



CABINET

10th December 2025

Subject Heading:

Future proposals for former library premises

Cabinet Member:

Councillor Graham Williamson

ELT Lead:

Neil Stubbings, Strategic Director of Place

Report Author and contact details:

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Policy context:

The proposals in this paper align with the objectives within the Asset Management Plan, to keep the use of assets under ongoing review and to promote the release of assets when no longer required for operation use.

Financial summary:

Capital approval of £230,000 is sought to demolish two of the existing library buildings. This expenditure will defray interim costs and will be recovered in the medium term in the form of reduced development costs achieved from a cleared site.

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes - significant effect on two or more Wards

When should this matter be reviewed?

November 2026

Reviewing OSC:

Place Overview & Scrutiny Sub Committee

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

People - Supporting our residents to stay safe and well
Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy

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SUMMARY

Following the Cabinet decision in February 2025 to close three branch libraries as part of the wider budget-savings requirements, this report summarises subsequent actions and proposals for each site emerging from the Asset Review process, with relevant approvals sought, as appropriate, in each case.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet are asked to:

- Approve in principle the re-purposing of the former Gidea Park Library site for the development of a 6-person accommodation facility for children with disabilities, subject to a separate business case being submitted by the Director of Starting Well.
- Endorse a request for capital expenditure in the sum of £120,000 and approve the submission of any related planning application for the demolition of the former library building at Gidea Park, to provide a cleared site.
- Note the ongoing evaluation of the proposal received from the Harold Wood Foundation in respect of use of the former Harold Wood library premises.
- Agree to the disposal of the former South Hornchurch library site, as identified in Appendix A, at a value representing the best consideration reasonably obtainable to the Council.
- Endorse a request for capital expenditure in the sum of £110,000 and approve the submission of any related planning application for the demolition of the former library building at South Hornchurch – the final decision to demolish will be subject to the evaluation of offers received following marketing of the site and premises.
- Delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Regeneration & Place Shaping, in consultation with the Deputy Director of Legal and Democratic Services to conduct all appropriate steps to progress and conclude the asset disposals in a manner that satisfies all legal/regulatory requirements. This delegation to include any appropriation of the assets for planning purposes.

REPORT DETAIL

1. At its meeting on 5th February 2025, Cabinet:
 - Agreed the closure of the following three branch libraries with effect from 1st April 2025:
 - Gidea Park
 - Harold Wood
 - South Hornchurch
 - Agreed that the three branch libraries would be mothballed from 1 April 2025 and delegated to the Strategic Director of Place the authority to use the branch library buildings for any appropriate meanwhile use, provided that any proposals for the disposal or long term use of the branch libraries be brought to a future Cabinet meeting
2. All three libraries duly closed at the end of March, following which books were re-distributed and to remaining 7 libraries and equipment/fittings removed over the subsequent weeks. Temporary relief from business rates was granted for the first three months following closure, expiring at the beginning of July 2025.
3. Future options for the three library sites have been considered by officers and Cabinet Members under the Area-Based Asset Review process. A summary of each is set out below

Gidea Park library

4. The former Gidea Park library premises occupy a site of 0.29 acres (0.118 ha), located on Balgores Lane, immediately adjacent to forthcoming Balgores Special School, which is due to be developed and available for the first intake of pupils in August 2027. A site plan is provided in Appendix A
5. Whilst disposal of the site to generate a capital receipt has been considered, the Asset Review process has identified that the site might be more favourably developed to accommodate a 6-person accommodation facility for children with disabilities, satisfying a specific need identified by the Starting Well team.
6. An initial feasibility study has already been commissioned from the same architects developing detailed proposals for the Balgores School, ensuring a holistic design approach for both projects. The accommodation proposal is currently the subject to a capital funding bid to NHS-E and it is understood that their regional team are supporting the bid in principle, prior to consideration by the NHS-E national team – the result of the funding bid will be known in early 2026.

7. A separate, detailed business case for the proposal, including capital cost projections and funding proposals, will be brought forward to Cabinet by the Starting Well service, but initial financial projections suggest that the facility could achieve significant annual cost savings when compared with current expenditure incurred across care, accommodation and transport for out-of-borough provision.
8. Interim use of the former library building by the contractors appointed for the Balgores School development has been considered, but their requirement for the premises would result in the building standing empty for some time prior to their use.
9. In order to mitigate building risks and associated costs in the interim, it is proposed to demolish the existing library, the capital cost of which will effectively represent a saving against the subsequent development cost of the accommodation proposal, which can be costed and progressed in due course with a cleared site. Work on the 6-person facility is projected to commence in August 2026, following external funding and planning approval, with the aim that the premises will be ready for occupation by August 2027.
10. Cost estimates have been sought for the demolition work and Cabinet are asked to endorse a request for a capital allocation in the sum of £120,000 for this purpose.

Harold Wood library

11. The former Harold Wood library premises occupy a site of 0.32 acres (0.132 ha), located on the junction of Station Road, Avenue Road and Arundel Road. A site plan is provided in Appendix A.
12. An interim use proposal from the Harold Wood Foundation (a community-based charity) is currently being considered, proposing a series of community-based initiatives that could potentially be delivered with the support of a variety of partners. The plan is still formative at this stage and is the subject of further evaluation to determine financial viability and other aspects. The proposal envisages a lease being granted by the Council and details of rental value have been supplied to the Foundation for the purpose of their business case
13. In the meantime, the Foundation has successfully applied to register the former library building as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) under the Localism Act 2011. The Council has confirmed that the application satisfies the relevant criteria with the result that the community has the right to be informed of a decision to sell the asset, has six weeks following notification to decide if it wishes to bid, and a further six months to prepare a bid.
14. The Asset Review process conducted between council officers and Cabinet Members identified a preference towards pursuing a redevelopment of the former library site for housing, ideally by the Council or its housing company,

Mercury Land Holdings, in preference to disposal to a third party. The existing war memorial would be retained in the event of any redevelopment. In light of the ACV registration referenced above, a community bid for the site will need to be considered in the event of a redevelopment proposal involving a disposal of the asset.

15. The Friends of Harold Wood Library group was established in response to the library consultation exercise undertaken by the Council in summer 2024. The community engagement team continue to liaise with the group regarding any emerging proposals for the building.

South Hornchurch Library

16. The South Hornchurch Library site is located on the A125 Rainham Road, on a site of 0.4 acres, adjacent to South Hornchurch Community Hall and Fledglings Day Nursery. A site plan is provided in Appendix A.
17. Now surplus to operational requirements, the Asset Review process has identified this site as appropriate for freehold disposal for either for re-purposing the existing building to an alternative use, or for redevelopment, subject to planning.
18. Cabinet Members have also expressed a wish for part of any capital receipt generated from a disposal to be set aside for the purpose of funding improvements to improve community facilities within the adjacent community hall. A separate feasibility study is in progress to consider options and related cost estimates to achieve this, though the final scope and sum to be invested are yet to be determined at this point.
19. Whilst estimates for demolition have been obtained in the order of £110,000 (for the purpose of limiting holding costs pending disposal) it is proposed that marketing of the asset is conducted to identify whether the existing buildings are likely to generate a more favourable offer than the cleared site. Marketing will be undertaken whilst the planning application to demolish the existing buildings is determined. Subject to the receipt of planning permission, a final decision on demolition can be taken once offers for the site/premises have been evaluated.

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the decision:

The Council has a fiduciary duty to deal appropriately with assets that have been declared surplus to current operational requirements.

The recommendations within this report seek to address:

- emerging service needs and cost pressures, as is the case with the Gidea Park site, recommended for re-development to serve the priority needs from Starting Well
- the ongoing need to identify opportunities for capital receipts, as is the case with the proposed disposal of the South Hornchurch library site
- statutory obligations, such as the Localism Act 2011, whereby the Council is considering the merits of the meanwhile use proposals and the registration of the former Harold Wood Library premises as an Asset of Community Value, prior to taking any longer term decisions on the asset.

At the same time, the recommendations seek to mitigate any avoidable holding costs in the interim.

Other options considered:

Gidea Park:

- *Disposal of former library site* – disposal of the site would generate a capital receipt that would support the capital strategy. However, as identified within the report, the potential level of cost avoidance achieved through developing a residential facility for children with disabilities is likely to generate a significantly stronger financial business case than a one-off capital receipt. The disposal option is therefore not recommended in this instance.
- *Retention of existing building on site, pending redevelopment* – temporary use by the contractor developing Balgores School has already been dismissed within the report as their accommodation requirement does not arise immediately. The existing building continues to generate a business rates liability, plus other potential financial and security liabilities. An interim use may mitigate these risks to a limited extent, but given the short-term nature is unlikely to attract interest/generate adequate income to cover these costs in full. Taking all factors into consideration, early demolition is considered to be the most pragmatic approach to minimising cost/risks whilst also presenting future savings in redevelopment costs by providing a cleared site.
- *Development of the site for other purposes* – the site could potentially be developed for other residential purposes, but the proposed use a) meets a strategic need, b) offers scope for significant cost avoidance, c) provides potential synergy with the SEND school facility to be developed immediately adjacent

Harold Wood:

- *Demolish the former library premises, as recommended for the former Gidea Park library site* – this action would be inappropriate given the recent registration of the building as an Asset of Community Value.
- *Disposal of the former library site* – whilst this has not been entirely dismissed as a future option, as an Asset of Community Value, the community would be notified of any intention by the Council to dispose of the asset and provided with a 6-month window within which to formulate a bid. The Council is not obliged to accept the community bid, but to consider it alongside any others received for the asset.

South Hornchurch:

- *Retention of existing building on site, pending redevelopment* – the existing building continues to generate a business rates liability, plus other potential financial and security liabilities. An interim use may mitigate these risks to a limited extent, but given the short-term nature is unlikely to attract interest/generate adequate income to cover these costs in full. Taking all factors into consideration, the site/premises will be subject to marketing to assess the value of offers received, prior to confirming demolition.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

Former Gidea Park Library

20. The proposal is to seek in principle approval to demolish the existing building to make way for a future development on the land. The cost of which is earmarked at £120,000 from the capital programme.

- a. The paper identifies a potential development scheme, subject to a future business case, to construct a 6-person accommodation facility for Children with Disabilities. A financial appraisal of this option will be required.

21. It should be noted that there is a reasonable risk that the expenditure, should this go ahead before a business case is considered, will be classed as revenue expense, not capital. This is because the demolition would be more likely linked to the removal of an old asset no longer required. There are no firm plans to develop the site either way at this point. The only argument potentially, would be if demolition increased the value of the site subject to a future disposal decision. However, the current indicative proposal is to not dispose of the site.

22. Should the expenditure be approved, this would require financing most likely from a General Fund reserve. It is noted that demolition would alleviate the need to incur ongoing costs associated with the existing building.

Former Harold Wood Library

23. The current upkeep of the closed building is estimated at £13k per annum.

Former South Hornchurch Library

24. The intention is to seek approval to demolish the existing building, subject to the evaluation of potential offers for the site and premises. This report sets out the potential cost at £110,000, however, the criteria to meet the threshold for capital expenditure would need to be reviewed.
25. Therefore, there is a risk that this may require funding from the revenue budget, where no provision exists, and so funding would be required from an appropriate reserve.

Legal implications and risks:

26. The Council is empowered under several statutory provisions to support the recommendations in this report:
- a) The recommendation of this report accords with Havering general power of disposal enshrined in section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972; The legislation gives all local authorities in England and Wales the power to dispose of land in any manner it wishes provided the land is disposed of for the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained. However, this rule has exceptions, such as "short tenancies" (less than seven years) and certain disposals for less than market value that are deemed to improve the area's economic, social, or environmental well-being of its area. The council exploring the closure of the three libraries and use/dispose the libraries buildings for any appropriate meanwhile use/housing use and provided the disposal is based on an open market valuation, the disposal will satisfy the best consideration test. The Council must ensure that it complies with normal and prudent commercial practices.
 - b) The Council also has a general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011; this is the power to do anything an individual can do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation. The Council may exercise the General Power for its own purpose, for a commercial purpose and/or for the benefit of others.
 - c) In addition, the Council also has the power under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 to do anything (whether or not involving the

expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions.

- d) Section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows appropriation for planning purposes. Appropriation in this context simply means transferring the allocation of the land from one purpose to another.

Local authorities usually allocate land for specific purposes under different statutory powers. They may have acquired the land pursuant to a statute which then regulates how the land must be allocated or managed (i.e. under the Public Libraries Acts 1892 to 1919, applicable to said three subject library sites) If the local authority decides that it needs to transfer land from one purpose or function to another, perhaps for redevelopment then it may appropriate the land under s.122 LGA 1972. Please note the procedural requirements relating to Appropriation Under Section 122 Local Government Act, Section 122 LGA 1972 provides that:

“The council may appropriate for any purpose for which the council is authorised by statute to acquire land by agreement any land which belongs to it and is no longer required for the purpose for which it is held immediately before the appropriation.”

The key procedural points are as follows:

- a) The land must already belong to the council,(b) The land must be no longer required for the purpose for which it is currently appropriated; and (c) The purpose for which the council is appropriating must be authorised by statute.

An appropriation memo will have to be drafted and authorised by Mark Butler or appropriate authorised officer citing the Cabinet Decision, delegated powers authorising the land to be appropriated and exercising the powers available under section 203 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 (HPA 2016).which empower to override easements and other third party rights in relation to land that has been acquired or appropriated for planning purposes.

27. With regard to the three former libraries (Gidea Park, Harold Wood, South Hornchurch), there are no Asset of Community Value implications in relation to the proposed development of the three libraries, as can be inferred from the decisions of some case laws, notably The Ship case in South Norwood which closed as a pub, where it was stated inter alia that *“the primary purpose of Asset of Community Value listing is to afford the community an opportunity to purchase the property, not to prevent otherwise acceptable development”*. Reason being that an Asset of Community Value listing or nomination did not outweigh the benefits of providing additional housing and a viable use for the building, and appeal was allowed and permission was granted for the change of use/ development. The proposed redevelopment of the three libraries to deliver new homes should not deter the libraries designation / nomination as Asset of Community value or impede redevelopment of the libraries

Human Resources implications and risks:

There are no HR implications arising from this decision

Equalities implications and risks:

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

An EqHIA (Equality and Health Impact Assessment) is usually carried out and on this occasion this is not required.

The Council seeks to ensure equality, inclusion, and dignity for all in all situations.

The proposal to develop a 6-person residential unit for children with disabilities on the site of the former Gidea Park library is intended to address an identified and specific in-borough need for such a facility, providing a benefit to the residents and their families who currently have to travel out of borough for this provision. The subsequent business case from the Director of Starting Well will expand further on the positive equalities aspects of this proposal.

Health and Wellbeing implications and Risks

By augmenting the provision of residential facilities for children with disabilities, the proposal to develop a 6-person residential on the site of the former Gidea Park library will have a positive impact on the well-being of that client group and their families, who currently have to travel out of borough for this provision.

Subject to the further evaluation of meanwhile proposals for the former Harold Wood library premises from the Harold Wood Foundation, there may also be scope

to reduce health inequalities as a result of some of the initiatives proposed e.g. men's mental health.

The proposal to re-invest part of the capital receipt generated from disposal of the former South Hornchurch library site should facilitate improved and/or expanded facilities within the adjacent community hall, to support the health and well-being of local residents.

Environmental and Climate Change Implications and Risks

Any subsequent development proposals for the former library sites will be subject to current building regulations as a minimum requirement

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Cabinet – 5th February 2025: Library Consultation Cabinet Report

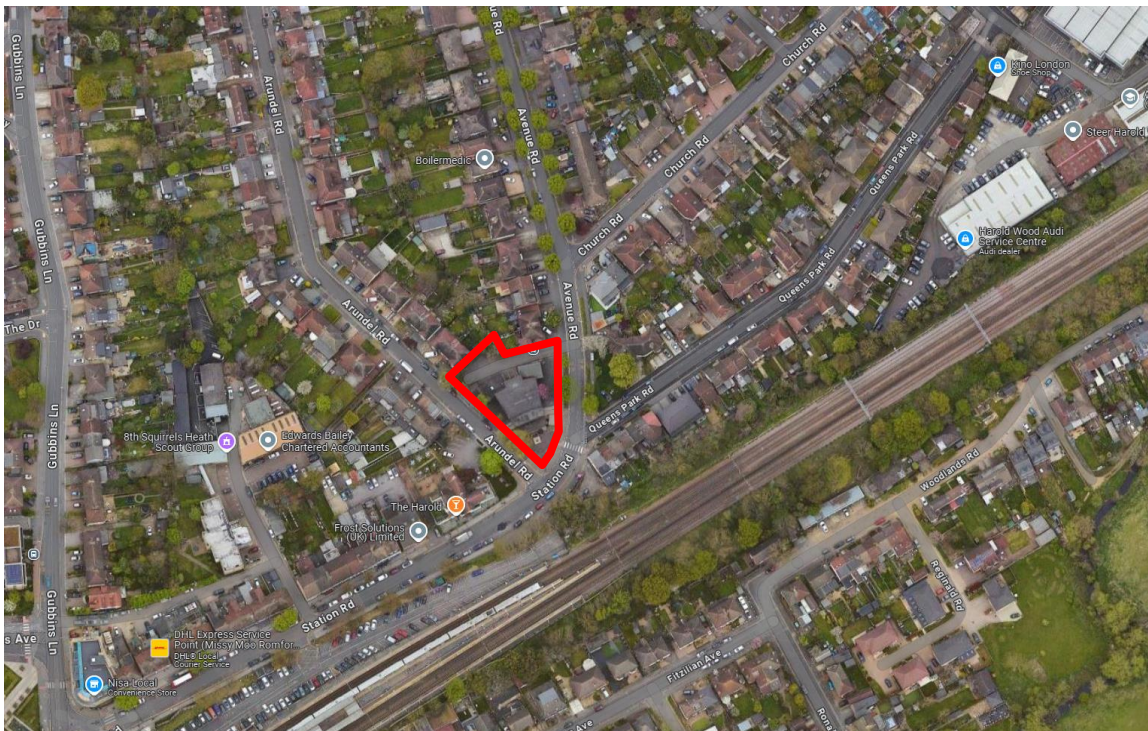
[\(Public Pack\)SUPPLEMENTARY 2 AGENDA ; Library Consultation Cabinet Report – Recommendations to Cabinet Agenda Supplement for Cabinet, 05/02/2025 19:00](#)

Appendix A – site plans

Gidea Park – former library



Harold Wood – former library



South Hornchurch – former library

