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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Main Road, Romford RM1 3BD
26 February 2026 (7.00 - 8.40 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	Timothy Ryan
Havering Residents' Group	Reg Whitney (Chairman), Robby Misir (Vice-Chair) and John Crowder
Labour Group	Jane Keane

Apologies were received for the absence of Councillors Ray Best.

Also present for part of the meeting were Councillors Gillian Ford, Laurance Garrard and David Godwin.

There were about 20 members of the public present at the meeting.

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

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

15 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no interest disclosed at the meeting.

16 MINUTES

The Committee agreed for the Chairman to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2026.

17 W0198.25 - LAND NORTH OF BENETS ROAD, HORNCHURCH (CRANHAM/EMERSON PARK)

The Committee received a presentation on the a proposed development site, comprising approximately 570 homes and some ancillary non-residential floorspace. The developable areas would be concentrated across the central and western parts of the site, whilst the eastern half of the site would be used as areas of open space. This results in a scheme where approximately 12 of the 24.5-hectare site would be built on.

The scale of the proposed development includes buildings of heights increasing from two and a half storeys around the periphery of the site, up to four storeys in the centre, with intervening heights of three storeys, to gradually step up away from the site boundaries.

Members held a detailed discussion on the proposed development at Benets Road, focusing primarily on the site's Green Belt status and questioning why this location had been selected for housing given its protected designation and limited transport links.

Concerns were raised about the lack of sustainable travel options, with only one bus route serving the area, and Members queried the impacts of introducing between 470–500 new homes on local highways, existing congestion, and junction capacity.

Environmental issues featured prominently, including potential loss of biodiversity, impacts on wildlife, protected woodlands, the Ingrebourne valley, and the vulnerability of the river corridor and SINC. Questions were asked about tree loss, woodland retention, and whether wildlife movement would be restricted.

With its agreement, a ward Member, Councillor Laurance Garrard addressed the Committee. Councillor Garrard stated that the proposal to build up to 500 homes on the fields behind Benets Road and Wingletye Lane poses a serious threat to the semi-rural character of this part of Havering. Although labelled by developers as “grey belt,” the land is in fact a vital part of the Green Belt, preventing urban sprawl, preserving openness, and maintaining the distinct identities of Hornchurch and Upminster. The area contains productive agricultural land, woodlands, and key parts of the Thames Chase Community Forest, as well as the River Ingrebourne—an important wildlife corridor supporting species such as badgers, foxes, bats and owls. The proposal is seen as speculative and developer driven rather than part of a strategic, plan led approach. Concerns were also raised over the Council's initial decision not to require an Environmental Impact Assessment. Residents depend on the Green Belt as essential natural space, and once reclassified it is lost permanently. Councillor Garrard called on the Council to oppose the proposal, reject any future application and protect Havering's Green Belt and local character.

During general debate Members highlighted that the site comprises Grade 2 agricultural land and lies within a minerals safeguarding area, raising concerns about sterilisation of mineral resources and long term land protection. The applicant outlined their view that parts of the site constituted “grey belt” rather than Green Belt and described their assessments of Green Belt purposes, sustainability, and housing need. Members remained concerned about walking distances to stations, the realism of transport assumptions, and the sustainability of the site overall.

Questions were also raised regarding public feedback received, construction phase impacts, drainage issues, flood zone risks under climate

change scenarios, and how the scheme would protect nearby residents during development. Members additionally sought reassurance that areas kept open for ecological or drainage purposes would be legally secured against future phases of development. The importance of inclusive play provision for children with special educational needs was emphasised and Members asked for a commitment to engage specialist groups. The discussion concluded with references to the 2016 Green Belt Study, which classifies the wider parcel as making a significant contribution to Green Belt purposes and Members noted concerns that the delay in updating the Local Plan had contributed to the policy tensions now arising.

The following points were agreed as a summary of key issues raised by Members of the Committee:

Green Belt and Planning Policy

- Members noted that the entire application site lies within the Green Belt, raising significant concerns about the principle of development in such a highly protected area.
- Reference was made to the 2016 Green Belt Study, which identified the site as having substantial Green Belt value.
- Members suggested that the Local Plan update should be brought forward given the pressures and policy challenges relating to Green Belt release.

Sustainability of the Location

- Members questioned the suitability of delivering approximately 570 homes in a location considered unsustainable, with very limited public transport options.
- It was noted that the area is served by only one bus route, raising concerns about reliance on private vehicles.
- Members queried the accuracy of walking distance calculations to the nearest rail stations.
- Clarification was sought on rail service frequency.

Transport and Highways Impacts

- Members asked how the development would avoid generating a significant increase in car traffic, given the limited transport infrastructure.
- Concerns were raised about potential adverse impacts on the local highway network and what mitigation measures would be required.

Environmental and Ecological Considerations

- Concerns were expressed about potential impacts on:
 - Local wildlife
 - Protected woodlands adjacent to the site
 - River ecology, including risks of contamination to the river corridor and the adjoining Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)
- Members noted that the site includes high grade agricultural land and has previously appeared in records as a possible minerals site.

Climate Change and Flood Risk

- Members queried how future climate related flood risks would be addressed, including the potential for wider areas of the site to fall into higher flood risk zones under future climate scenarios.
- Further details were requested on proposed mitigation measures.

Construction Impacts

- Members sought clarification on how the developer intends to minimise the adverse impacts of construction, including:
 - Construction traffic
 - Noise
 - Site access management
 - Environmental disturbance

Public Engagement

- Members asked for an update on the public engagement responses received to date, and how these have influenced the development proposals.
- Members encouraged the developer to continue engagement with local groups throughout the plan's evolution.

Inclusive Design and Community Facilities

- Members stressed the importance of providing inclusive play facilities, fully accessible for children with special educational needs.
- Suggested that developers work with appropriate community support groups as the proposals develop.

Procedural and Background Matters

- A Member referred to an earlier Council notice indicating that the applicant had sought a screening opinion for the site.
- Members also noted that the Council website confirms that the site is wholly within the Green Belt, a highly restrictive designation intended to preserve openness and the rural urban fringe.

Members of the Committee were advised that further comments or considerations could be emailed to the Head of Strategic Planning within a week of the meeting.

18 **P1297.25 - LAND BOUND BY WATERLOO ROAD TO THE EAST, THE GREAT EASTERN MAINLINE LINE TO THE SOUTH, COTLEIGH ROAD TO THE WEST**

The report before the Committee sought planning permission under Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to vary Conditions 5 (Approved Plans) and 9 (Parameter Plans) of planning permission ref. P0761.20 in order to amend the approved development parameters for Plots 9 and 10 of the Waterloo Estate masterplan. The proposed changes comprise modest revisions to building footprints, heights and layout, including a reduction in maximum building heights, consolidation and simplification of massing, rationalisation of core arrangements, and minor realignment of buildings within the approved plot envelopes. The amendments are intended to improve deliverability and compliance with

updated building regulations while maintaining the approved land use, housing quantum, and overall design principles of the consented scheme.

The amendments can be summarised as follows:

- Reduction in overall building heights across both plots:
 - Plot 9: Maximum height reduced from 8 storeys to 6 storeys.
 - Plot 10: Uniform height of 4 storeys introduced, replacing stepped 4–5 storey massing.
- Refined parameter dimensions:
 - Overall building lengths and widths updated to reflect consolidated massing.
 - Plot 9: 41.5m and 55.1m length blocks (previously split 41m + 59m).
 - Plot 10: Increased maximum length (now 74m) and more consistent form, previously 69.5m
- Reduction in total building mass and footprint complexity:
 - Consolidation of multiple smaller blocks into a single, more coherent building on each plot.
 - Simplified building forms supporting more efficient delivery.
- Rationalisation of core strategy:
 - No buildings now exceed 18m in height, avoiding "high-risk" classification.
 - Removal of dual-core buildings, reflecting updated building layouts.
- Improved closest separation distances to site boundaries and surrounding development:
 - Plot 9: Northern boundary increased to 7.75m (previously 5m).
 - Plot 10: Minimum southern boundary increased to 6.3m (previously 5.8m).
- Improved contextual response:
 - Setbacks adjusted to better respect proximity to St Andrew's Church and Cotleigh Road.
 - Enhanced public realm interfaces and daylight/sunlight conditions.
- Minor repositioning within plot boundaries:
Realignment of building footprints within approved plot envelopes for design optimisation.

The Committee was provided an overview of the material planning considerations for the current application. The case officer explained that the proposal seeks minor amendments to the approved scheme, primarily involving adjustments to building footprints and heights. The previously approved layout was shown in blue, with proposed changes highlighted in red. Overall, the building footprints remain largely the same, with some

modest reductions. The blocks have been redesigned into a more linear form.

- Block 10 (to the north) has shifted slightly northwards but remains in keeping with the settlement pattern.
- Block 9 (to the south) retains much of its original footprint. Members were informed that the amendments reduce building mass and bulk, distributing it more evenly and linearly across the site.

Building Heights

- Plot 9 (South) was previously approved at 8 storeys. The proposal reduces this to 6 and 4 storeys, representing a significant reduction in height and visual impact.
- Plot 10 (North) was previously part 2, part 5 storeys. The proposal rationalises this into a single linear building of consistent height.

The Case Officer detailed the following material planning considerations the Committee:

- Principle of Development: Already established under the earlier approved scheme (ref. 076120). The proposal complies with current planning policy and the agreed masterplan.
- Visual and Landscape Impact: Improved due to reduced heights and a more modest massing approach, aligning with the masterplan vision for the area.
- Neighbouring Amenity: The reduced heights lessen the impact on sensitive residential receptors, particularly those to the west and in Collier Row.
- Housing Quality: No material change. The scheme remains 100% affordable, comprising 70% social rent and 30% intermediate, delivering 107 units. An increase in dual aspect units was highlighted as a positive.
- Ecology and Biodiversity: No material changes.
- Transport and Parking: Unchanged from the previously consented scheme.

During general debate a Member queried the nature of public comments received. Officers confirmed that two formal objections were submitted. Additional correspondence from statutory consultees was recorded as comments rather than objections. It was noted that an objection related to concerns about a 16-storey height on the wider site; officers confirmed this does not form part of the current application.

Members welcomed the reduction in building heights, noting it addresses previous concerns that earlier proposals pushed the acceptable height limits for Romford.

A Member raised a reservation regarding floor to ceiling heights, noting these had changed outside the committee process and may affect living conditions. On a positive comment, Members noted the increased number

of dual-aspect units, which was viewed as an improvement in residential quality.

The Committee commended officers for their ongoing engagement with residents, acknowledging the extensive consultation undertaken and the responsiveness shown in shaping the revised scheme.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to **GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION** under Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to vary Conditions 5 and 9 of planning permission ref. P0761.20, to allow amendments to the approved parameter plans and associated plan references in relation to Plots 9 and 10, subject to the conditions listed in the report.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the application.

19 **P1293.25 - LAND BOUND BY WATERLOO ROAD TO THE EAST, THE GREAT EASTERN MAIN LINE TO THE SOUTH, COTLEIGH ROAD TO THE WEST**

The report before the Committee sought approval of reserved matters following outline approval P0761.20 (Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and Scale) for Plots 9 and 10 of the Waterloo Estate to provide residential units, community use, public realm, private amenity space, car parking and associated works pursuant to Condition 2 of Planning.

It was stated that the reserved matters submitted included detailed information on appearance, scale, layout and landscaping and has been prepared in accordance with the approved Design Code and Development Specification.

The case officer provided further detail regarding the proposed development, focusing on appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale. Members were directed to the elevation drawings, noting the block to the south west which presents a stepped height of 4 to 6 storeys.

The officer highlighted key references on the drawings, including Queen Street and St Anthony's Church to the south, which help show how the development integrates with its surroundings. The development continues to reflect the principles established in the design code, with a series of well-articulated buildings forming a coherent layout.

It was stated that in terms of overall appearance, the officer confirmed that the architectural approach, materials, and detailing remain of high quality and consistent with both the design code and the previously approved parameters. External finishes will comprise a mixture of light buff and darker brick tones, providing variety while maintaining cohesion across the blocks. Building services and drainage features have been carefully incorporated into the design to ensure a tidy and well-resolved external appearance.

For Plot 10, the officer explained that the proposal introduces a uniform four storey building to the north, replacing the previously approved varying heights. This simplified form still sits comfortably within the approved massing envelopes and respects the scale of the wider context. The heights and massing across the scheme are considered appropriate and are expected to result in a reduced visual impact compared with the original hybrid permission.

The case officer also addressed layout and amenity. The site retains the approved circulation routes, open spaces, and separation distances between buildings, ensuring acceptable amenity levels for both future occupiers and neighbouring properties. Parking and access arrangements remain consistent with those already approved under the hybrid scheme and assessed again under the Section 73 application. Landscaping proposals include structured planting to enhance the public realm, support biodiversity, and improve place making across the site. Officers noted particular interest in enhancing planting at the southern edge of the development and confirmed that conditions have been included to secure further improvements at detailed design stage.

During discussion, a Member commended the applicant for listening to residents over an extended consultation period. They expressed appreciation for the significant height reductions, which aligned with longstanding community requests. Members raised concerns previously expressed by residents about the community gardens, noting that these had been addressed in the revised proposal. They asked that continued engagement with residents of Collier Row be prioritised in the next stages, particularly given earlier issues where gardens had not been accessible to the local community. A Member welcomed progress with St Andrew's Church, acknowledging ongoing discussions and the steps taken to accommodate the church's needs within the site layout.

Following the discussion, the Committee **RESOLVED** to **GRANT** Reserved Matters subject to the granting of permission for the s73 application (P1297.25 - including the deed of variation) and the conditions set out in the report.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the application.

Chairman