

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2019 starting at 7.00 pm
(Extract)

Present:

Councillor Colin Smith (Chairman)
Councillors Graham Arthur, Peter Fortune,
William Huntington-Thresher, Kate Lymer, Peter Morgan
and Diane Smith

Also Present:

Councillor Vanessa Allen, Councillor Aisha Cuthbert,
Councillor Ian Dunn, Councillor Simon Fawthrop,
Councillor Josh King, Councillor Stephen Wells and
Councillor Angela Wilkins

**103 BECKENHAM LIBRARY AND CULTURAL VENUE -
AUTHORITY TO PROCEED TO PROCUREMENT
Report DRR19/051**

The Executive considered a report assessing the potential for using the Beckenham Library site for housing, and moving the library to a more central location in the town centre at Beckenham Public Halls, an under-utilised asset with huge potential.

Councillor Josh King addressed the Executive on behalf of Clock House ward councillors. He contended that this was a bad scheme which would result in a significant reduction in the provision of facilities in Beckenham, a reduction in the rooms available for public hire at Beckenham Public Halls, a smaller library space and the breaking up of the well-established and well used educational, sports and amenity hub of the Library, the Spa and Venue 28. It would also result in the destruction of the late art deco library building, which made a positive contribution to the Elm Road Conservation Area – he read out the conservation area description. He described the Leader as scaremongering about local housing targets, and that only a modest increase to 774 dwellings from the 641 in the Local Plan had been proposed. The Library site had never been allocated for housing in the Local Plan and housing targets could be met by positive engagement with developers to optimise the land already allocated in the Local Plan. Neglect by the Council of the Public Hall and the Library leading to a substantial backlog of maintenance could not be used to justify the scheme. He stated that the scheme was very unpopular with residents and Residents Associations – there had already been a demonstration and a petition against it had gathered over 4,000 signatures with 400 signatories adding their own comments.

In response, the Leader commented that he wasn't the local PPC who was 'scaremongering' misleadingly on Twitter that Beckenham Library was being closed and he pressed Councillor King as to whether he held private information he wished to share with the Committee confirming that the Mayor for London had abandoned his published housing target of 1,424 dwellings per year across the Borough. Councillor King responded that he did not.

The Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing, Councillor Peter Morgan, read a statement addressing the following issues (a copy is attached to these minutes as Appendix B) –

- Moving the library- there was no intention of closing the library, and it would only be moved if the study being commissioned showed that the new library would be at least as large and contain at least as many books. Previous schemes at Biggin Hill, Orpington and Penge had been very successful.
- The refurbishment of the public halls – transforming an under-utilised arts and craft building and increasing both library and community use.
- Housing – the Council had 1,600 families on the housing register, and was focussing on its own under-utilised land. 50% of new housing on the library site would be affordable.
- Design – the drawing of a possible development on the library site was only a space study and if the project was progressed an architectural competition would be held to produce a suitable design.
- Allocation of Land – although the site was not identified as a specific site allocation in the Local Plan, the Local Plan did state that the Council would make provision for housing including at sites becoming available due to public sector restructuring.
- Covenants - the Council was aware of the covenants relating to the land.
- Consultation – the report merely sought initial approval to proceed to procurement for concept designs. If the scheme was found to be viable then there would be public consultation before a final decision to proceed was taken.
- The Lambert Smith Report – this report was solely concerned with delivery methods for the Council and not specific sites.
- The Clock House Shops – a residential development would potentially provide more customers for the shops than the current library.
- A temporary library location – the old library would only be vacated once the new library space was available.

He concluded by stating that the report was solely about appointing consultants to prepare a viability assessment and drawings for the Public Halls – only once this was done would the Council consider moving to the next stage and carrying out a wide public consultation.

Councillor Angela Wilkins complained that the second recommendation in the report appeared to mean that the Council was making a final decision to use

the library site for housing. The Leader confirmed that this was not the case, and that if the proposals for the Public Halls did not proceed the library site would not be sold.

Councillor Stephen Wells addressed the Executive as a ward councillor for Copers Cope. He was concerned that investigations into the Public Hall should be carried out quickly, and that the study should include the whole of the building, including the parts currently let until 2024 on a commercial lease. He commented that it was possible to put a modern library into an old building, and that it was worth seeing whether a library with flexible spaces and better transport connections could be provided at the Public Halls as a town centre hub. The Leader endorsed the need for the answers to be provided quickly, while other councillors confirmed that the library move in Orpington had worked well.

Councillor Simon Fawthrop reminded the Executive that the Executive, Resources and Contracts PDS Committee had recommended that an open tender process be used to procure the multi-disciplinary team, rather than the ADUP (Architecture, Design and Urbanism Panel) framework, so that the Council's normal 60/40 price/quality weighting could be retained.

The report had also been scrutinised by the Renewal, Recreation and Housing PDS Committee on 5th November 2019, and the Committee had supported the recommendations.

RESOLVED that

(1) Proceeding to procurement for the appointment of a multi-disciplinary team to develop a scheme for Beckenham Public Hall up to RIBA Stage 2 in the first instance, at an estimated cost of £70k, be agreed, using an open tender process, rather than the ADUP framework.

(2) In principle, the existing Beckenham Library site be used for housing - the approach taken to deliver the housing will depend on the outcome of the review being undertaken by Lambert Smith Hampton and any subsequent agreement of a housing delivery vehicle - this will be subject to a further report.