

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND
ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE****28 MARCH 2007**

Chairman: * Councillor Stanley Sheinwald

Councillors: * Graham Henson * Narinder Singh Mudhar
* Ashok Kulkarni * Phillip O'Dell (2)
* Jerry Miles * Dinesh Solanki (1)

* Denotes Member present
(1) and (2) Denote category of Reserve Member

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**43. **Appointment of Chairman:**

RESOLVED: To note (1) the appointment of Councillor Stanley Sheinwald at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 March 2007 as Chairman of the Sub-Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2006/07;

(2) the changes in the membership for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2006/07 agreed at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 March 2007.

44. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Mrs Vina Mithani	Councillor Dinesh Solanki
Councillor Ms Nana Asante	Councillor Phillip O'Dell

45. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interest made by Members in relation to the business transacted at this meeting.

46. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

47. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2006 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

48. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8.

49. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9.

50. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 10.

51. **References from Council and Other Committees/Panels:**

RESOLVED: To note that no reports were received.

52. **Question and Answer Session with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Enterprise:**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Enterprise to the meeting. Members put their questions to the Portfolio Holder. Members also asked supplemental questions, which were duly answered.

Question 1: *What can the Council do to stop the trend amongst developers of demolishing houses in order to construct flats, many of which are unaffordable to the residents of Harrow who most need them?*

The Portfolio Holder responded to the question as follows:

- the role of planning committees was to decide each planning application on its own merit and that such applications could only be refused on planning grounds and not personal preferences. However, such applications in conservation areas could be treated differently. The Portfolio Holder added that some areas benefited from homes being converted to flats or demolished to build flats;
- with regards to the issue of affordability, it was market forces that influenced the price of property, not Government. The Portfolio Holder stated that the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) required an element of housing to be provided. The Council ensured such provision for 'key' people. She added that the London Plan had set the Council a target of 4000 additional units to be provided between 2008 and 2016 and that the policy was sound. It was noted that eventually the Local Development Framework would replace the Unitary Development Plan when certain policies would be deleted. However, the policy on affordable housing (H5) would be retained.

In response to a supplementary question, the Portfolio Holder reiterated that it was necessary for each planning application to be judged on its merits and that rudimentary policies could not be developed to protect the character of the area where public houses and petrol stations were being replaced by housing.

In response to another question, the Portfolio Holder agreed to provide the number of affordable houses provided in Harrow; annual targets for affordable housing were however thought to be approximately 150-200 units per calendar year. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that an increasing amount of higher density homes had been built in Harrow but that they had been design led.

Question 2: *What are the Portfolio Holder's views on the transfer of certain local development control powers to the Mayor of London?*

The Portfolio Holder considered this move and the process to be undemocratic as there was no right of appeal against the Mayor's decision. In response to a supplementary question, the Portfolio Holder did not agree that there were certain advantages as the Mayor had a pan-London view. The Portfolio Holder stated that it was critical that local elected representatives with local knowledge decided on local issues, including planning applications, for the benefit of their constituents. The Portfolio Holder highlighted the current situation where she stated that she believed there was an open democratic process. It was noted that London Councils had submitted a motion against the transfer of powers.

Question 3: *How might the Council's planning service and transportation department work together to fully assess the impact upon the local community of the planned developments at the Prince Edward Playing Fields and the Hindu School at the William Ellis Playing Fields?*

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the proposed development at Prince Edward Playing Fields had been granted planning permission subject to the Environment Agency withdrawing its objections. The Portfolio Holder also confirmed that officers in the transport and planning departments worked closely together and that transport issues were factored into reports on planning applications. In response to a supplemental question, the Director of Planning Services confirmed that previously, the Traffic and Road Safety Advisory Panel received reports on planning applications. However this situation had changed. The Director noted that it was for the planning committees to decide planning applications and that these committees could not be fettered by decisions reached by other committees. Good governance and the timelines of decisions to meet targets were of importance.

Question 4: *How will the changes made to the Local Development Framework (LDF) affect the granting of planning permission for the conversion of houses in Harrow into homes in multiple occupation (HMO)?*

In response, the Portfolio Holder stated that the changes made to the Local Development Framework would not affect the granting of planning permission for the conversion of houses in Harrow into HMOs, as appropriate policies were contained in the London Plan. In response to a supplemental question, the Portfolio Holder stated that, on the advice of officers, policies H9 and H12 were deleted from the LDF to ensure consistency. The Portfolio Holder was comfortable there was now the right balance of policies in the LDF, which was supported by the policies contained in the London Plan.

Question 5: *What steps is the Portfolio Holder taking to ensure that new developments in the borough are environmentally sustainable, and that developers follow best practice in the field, and are provided with incentives to innovate to maximise energy efficiency and minimise their environmental footprint?*

The Portfolio Holder stated that every effort was made to promote environmentally sustainable developments. The policies in the LDF had not been 'saved' because they were old. However, the policies in the London Plan were sufficient. The Portfolio Holder added that she was exploring possible incentives for people who made their homes environmentally friendly and that the Council would do everything it could to ensure that developments were carbon neutral and environmentally friendly.

The Portfolio Holder mentioned that the Council would explore ways in which residents living in older properties could be encouraged to apply for grants and make their properties carbon free. The Council would progress the Nottingham Agreement and she would report back on the agreement's details. A report would be submitted to Cabinet setting out the intent of the Council and an action plan devised thereafter.

Question 6: *What is the current position regarding the process for the approval of plans for redevelopment of sites in the town centre?*

The Portfolio Holder stated that Urban Initiatives (UI) had been appointed by the Council to prepare a strategy for Harrow Town Centre. She added that no planning applications had yet been considered by the Council. There had been a stakeholder meeting on the proposals from UI, which would culminate in a public consultation exercise in May 2007. It was intended to have the Gayton Road site, to include an arts centre and a library, developed by 2010.

In response to a supplemental question, the Portfolio Holder stated that, in order to tackle the problem of vacant shops in the Town Centre and the negative perception this created, a number of initiatives were being explored. It was intended to de-clutter the Town Centre and she hoped to encourage businesses in the St. Ann's Centre to extend their opening hours. These initiatives might bring about confidence for investment. However, it was not the responsibility of the Council to subsidise private business but to create the right environment to attract and encourage businesses to grow. The creation of Business Improvement Districts might also help.

In response to another supplemental question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that development was unlikely on the open space across from Harrow College. The Portfolio Holder and the Director of Planning Services stated that it was intended to transform the Town Centre into a distinctive and attractive environment and that investment from the Council would help encourage business to locate in Harrow. The Town Centre looked 'tired' and 'old fashioned' and the creation of a café culture and piazzas might help rejuvenate the area.

Question 7: *What support is the Council putting in place to support social enterprise in the Borough and raise awareness of the value of ethical business?*

In response to this question, the Portfolio Holder responded that the Council supported social enterprise. However with regards to ethical business, the Portfolio Holder stated that while the Council could encourage such businesses, it was not for the Council to tell businesses what they could sell. In response to a supplemental question, the Portfolio Holder explained how as part of her economic development remit, there were ways of encouraging small businesses to develop in Harrow. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council was facilitating negotiations on the Kodak site in Harrow and that she was keen to develop incubator units for small businesses on various sites in Harrow together with larger units when businesses grow. Apart from providing such

units, both Harrow in Business and the University of Westminster provided support to businesses in various ways.

In response to a further question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council wanted to open up Wealdstone High Street to traffic. However, this was subject to the agreement of Transport for London (TfL). It was hoped this would bring back the 'footfall' and improve the area.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Enterprise and the Director of Planning Services for responding to questions.

53. **Preliminary discussion on 2007/08 Work Programme:**

Following a discussion, Members suggested that the following areas be included in the work programme for 2007/08:

- a light touch review of the program in the Local Development Framework (LDF);
- developing the demography project.;
- transport, in particular the 140 bus route, which would benefit from an in-depth review.
- housing and its performance indicators;
- homelessness;
- promoting grants for people who adopted environmentally friendly practices;
- encouraging businesses to establish in Harrow.

RESOLVED: That (1) the above be noted;

(2) that the Portfolio Holder for Housing be invited to the next meeting for a question and answer session.

54. **Scrutiny Annual Report for 2006/07:**

Members thanked scrutiny officers for their work and it was

RESOLVED: That the wording of the annual report, as attached in Appendix 1 to the officer report, be agreed.

55. **Any Other Business:**

Councillor Richard Romain

Members thanked the outgoing Chairman of the Sub-Committee for his valuable contribution to its work programme and

RESOLVED: That this message be conveyed to him.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.18 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR STANLEY SHEINWALD
Chairman