

COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 15 November 2022

Minutes of the meeting of held at Guildhall at 3.30 pm

Present

Members:

Ruby Sayed (Chair)	John Griffiths
Joanna Tufuo Abeyie	Alderman Ian David Luder
Deputy John Absalom	Alderman Christopher Makin
Caroline Addy	Alderman Bronek Masojada
Munsur Ali	Benjamin Murphy
Jamel Banda	Jason Pritchard
Anne Corbett	Naresh Hari Sonpar
Aaron Anthony Jose Hasan D'Souza	Deputy Philip Woodhouse
Mary Durcan	
Deputy John Fletcher	

In attendance:

Deputy James Thomson – Chair of Police Authority Board
Oliver Sells – Member of Capital Buildings Board

Helen Fentimen (Deputy Chair) – *joined the meeting remotely*

Officers:

Jason Hayes	- Community and Children's Services Department
Mark Jarvis	- Chamberlain's Department
Deborah Cluett	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Julie Mayer	- Town Clerk's Department
Paul Murtagh	- Community & Children's Services Department
Chandni Tanna	- Communications Team, Town Clerks

Before commencing the business on the agenda, the Chair advised Members that a report for information on this agenda, in respect of the allocation of funds for housing purposes, had been approved by the Finance Committee earlier in the day. However, this had been a 'non-public' report but could now go into the public domain. The Town Clerk advised that the Committee's web page would be updated to reflect its public status, and copies were made available for members of the public in attendance. NB. The report referenced at item (4) in this set of minutes.

The Chair thanked the Chair of the Middlesex Street Residents Association for an email, posing a series of questions to the Committee. This had been circulated to Members and relevant officers ahead of the meeting, and the Assistant Director would seek to address the questions during the presentation of the reports at agenda items (3) and (4).

Members and residents in attendance were reminded that this was a 'meeting held in public', and not a public meeting, and residents would not be able to address the Committee in person.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Helen Fentimen, Deputy Chair – who joined the meeting virtually; Matthew Bell; James Bromiley-Davis, Sophie Fernandes; Marianne Fredericks; Steve Goodman; Florence Keelson Anfu; Frances Leach; Natasha Lloyd-Owen; Timothy McNally; Henrika Priest and Ceri Wilkins.

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no declarations.

3. MIDDLESEX STREET ESTATE - AREAS OF CAR PARK AND SIX SHOP UNITS

The Committee considered a report of the of the Chamberlain, City Surveyor and the Executive Director of Community and Children's Services, to consider whether areas in the Middlesex Street Estate are no longer required for housing purposes and may be appropriated for other use. Members noted that the report included responses from estate-wide consultation and recommended the areas as not being required for housing purposes, for the next 20 years, subject to a capital sum being ring-fenced for housing purposes.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director made the following points:

- The recommendations in the report are specific to the Community and Children's Services Committee (CCS): i.e. the areas identified as no longer needed for housing purposes, and not matters relating to the City of London Police. The Capital Buildings Board would take a decision on appropriating the asset, if CCS agrees that it is surplus to requirements.
- Whilst understanding that the Section 105 process had been confusing, the process was followed in accordance with regulations. However, it had not been possible to address some of the concerns raised about Police related matters. The City of London Corporation's Chair of Policy and Resources had attended a residents' meeting on 1st November 2022 and explained and apologised for this.
- The City Solicitor defined 'surplus for housing purposes' and explained that it covers both dwellings and ancillary uses, such as garages and storage, which were included in the Section 105 Consultation. The City Solicitor also confirmed that the City of London Corporation (COLP) had fulfilled its obligations as Landlord and Housing Authority, and any proposals for Police use are a separate matter.

The Assistant Director went through the questions in the email from the Chair of the Residents' Association, as referenced above, and offered to take any supplementary questions.

1) No tangible benefit to residents:

This should be addressed by releasing the non-public report referenced above, in respect of allocation of funds for housing purposes, into the public domain. There would also be an opportunity now to undertake long overdue works to the podium and general upgrades in respect of security, lighting and linking pedestrian areas.

2) Flawed "consultation" and Lack of Transparency:

The Section 105 process had a specific, albeit narrow, remit in terms of future non-housing use, as explained above.

3) Report to Committee is one-sided and misleading:

The Assistant Director, who is also the report author, is satisfied that the report is genuine and, as confirmed by the City Solicitor, meets Section 105 regulations. He reiterated that it is not intended to deal with the City of London Police (COLP) proposal.

On a separate point, a funding application was in hand for electrical vehicle charging points across all social housing estates, including the Middlesex Street Estate.

4) No serious consideration of alternatives:

The City of London Corporation (COLC) had looked extensively at opportunities for residential use. For example, in 2015, a proposal for an extension to the Petticoat Tower rooftop was aborted due to structural issues and potential loss of right to light. In 2015, 24 new homes were developed on the Middlesex Street Estate, and a further 10 in 2019; re-utilising space from commercial properties. Further opportunities for redevelopment had been explored but, as the first floor car park has no natural light, options are limited and building upwards is not feasible for structural reasons. A marketing Exercise in 2020 received 8 bids for commercial uses; one of them being the development of office space on the first floor of the car park.

5) No "trickle down" economics: This is addressed by the response to No. 1

6) Paltry Financial "Compensation": This is addressed by the response to No. 1

7) Capital expenditure by the City Police vs Residents' Interests: This is addressed by the response to No. 1

8) Failure to learn lessons: This is addressed by the response to No. 2

9) Space is only supposedly "vacant" due to City's own poor planning:

The decision to remove the ramp from the car park was taken many years ago, in order to improve the look and appearance of the Estate. Officers have been working with colleagues in the Department of the Built Environment to improve amenity but progress was affected by Covid. The team had run a series of 'drop-ins' in October 2022, resulting in positive feedback from residents, and the architects were re-drafting proposals.

10) No Neighbourhood, No Plan:

The COLP is investing £95m in its social housing estates. The Assistant Director is currently working on a Housing Asset Management Plan, which will include the Middlesex Street Estate, and will bring a full report to this Committee in 6-8 months' time.

The following points were noted during supplementary questions:

- a) Commercial tenants will be protected under the under the Landlord and Tenant Act, regardless of any decisions taken, which will not affect any such protection.
- b) The capital sum agreed by the Finance Committee, of £3.4m, will be ringfenced to the HRA, for CCS Committee to re-appropriate for housing purposes (including the Middlesex Street Estate) including accelerating improvements.
- c) Any resolution declaring the car park areas as surplus cannot take effect until the necessary relocation and adaptations have been made. If Planning Permission is not granted, then the appropriation in terms of the car parking areas will not materialise. (The resolution in respect of the retail units would take effect imminently)
- d) Whilst noting the above explanations, and the apology from the Chair of Policy and Resources, commercial tenants and residents remained disappointed at the consultation process. Furthermore, commercial tenants had not been invited to the meeting on 1st November 2022.
- e) Residents had shared a lot of positive ideas in respect of community use, which were listed in the report. The feedback from the consultation also indicated a lack of support for the area being declared as surplus to housing need, and a lot of objections to 'alternative use', which the report did not appear to address. Members felt, therefore, that a decision was being sought at a premature stage.
- f) Residents would continue to be tenants of the City of London Corporation (CoLC), who will retain responsibility for providing adequate parking spaces, garages and storage.
- g) Concerns had been raised about inappropriate parking of police vehicles, which block couriers and deliveries.
- h) There are currently 109 car parking spaces on the Middlesex Street Estate. In the basement there are 76 spaces; comprising 38 for the Police, 29 for residents and 9 spaces available. On the ground floor there are 29 spaces; comprising of 5 for residents, and 24 spaces available. Also in the basement there are 31 garages, 24 for the police and 6 for residents, with

1 space available. The Assistant Director was not aware of any residents waiting on a parking spaces and/or disabled spaces but agreed to check and feed back to the Committee.

- i) At the meeting on 1st November 2022, the Commissioner had pledged to listen to residents' concerns, be 'good neighbours' and improve the area and security as a result of the Police's presence. The Commissioner confirmed that a further meeting with residents would be arranged shortly.
- j) In the longer term, there would be no Police parking in Bishopsgate, but there is currently a shortage of parking spaces. However, the Commissioner had undertaken to work with residents to seek short-term solutions, and fully appreciated the concerns about their homes and amenity.
- k) It was suggested that the Committee should defer taking a decision, in order to give officers time to respond to the concerns raised by residents, both at the meeting on 1st November 2022 and at this meeting. The City Solicitor confirmed that it was open to the Committee to seek this, notwithstanding the fact that Section 105 obligations had been fulfilled. Members also understood that, in taking a decision to defer, it would be on this understanding.
- l) The City Solicitor further advised that the deferred decision would still be part of the 2 stage process; i.e. (1) a decision of this Committee on whether ~~is~~ the land is required or not; and (2) after this decision, proposals for the land (other than for housing) would be considered by other relevant Committees (with opportunity for input into those considerations by this Committee) Members were asked to be mindful that further consultation in respect of this Committee's decision would not be about the end use, any such consultation would follow this Committee's decision if it decided the areas were no longer required for housing.
- m) The Town Clerk advised that, if the Committee is minded to defer, then it should take place ahead of the next scheduled CCS Committee on 23rd January 2022. It was also suggested that no less than two to three weeks be allowed for responses to further consultation.
- n) Whilst the 'Neighbourhood Plan' fell within the remit of the Planning and Transportation Committee, the Chair (of CCS) advised that she had lobbied for more input into planning processes directly affecting residents.
- o) The Interim Executive Director of Community and Children's Services asked if the Chair of the Residents' Association could please set out what they are seeking in terms of the next round of consultation.
- p) It was suggested that recovery of legacy debts, owed by commercial tenants affected by the recommendation, be deferred pending clarification of future arrangements. Whilst fully empathising with the position, the Chair

reminded Members that the Committee has a responsibility for debts to the HRA but asked if officers could exercise sensitivity.

It was proposed by Alderman Ian Luder, Seconded by John Fletcher and RESOLVED, unanimously that - a decision to declare the areas in the car parks and the six Gravel Lane shop units, proposed for non-housing use at the Middlesex Street Estate (together called the "MSCP"), as no longer required for housing purposes; noting that they may be appropriated for other use, be deferred, noting the advice of the Town Clerk and City Solicitor, as set out at (l) and (m) above, and on the understanding that obligations under the Section 105 Consultation framework had been complied with.

In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked Members for a productive debate, and residents for taking the time to attend. The Portsoken Members reminded the Committee that they are bilingual, and very happy to help with one-to-one communications with residents, working with the Residents Association and commercial tenants. The Chair stressed that implementation of any housing-related proposals, for the areas under consideration, would need to be funded from the HRA. However, she remained confident that we could move on positively with a view to enlivening the community and generating income for the Estate over the next 20 years.

4. MIDDLESEX STREET ESTATE - ALLOCATION OF FUNDS FOR HOUSING PURPOSES

Members received a report of the Chamberlain in respect of the Middlesex Street Estate's allocation of funds for housing purposes. At the start of the meeting, the Chair had advised Members that this had originally been a 'non-public' report, approved by the City of London Corporation's Finance Committee earlier in the day. It was also reference when the Assistant Director responded to questions submitted by the Residents' Association.

The Chair invited Members to address any further comments to the Property Projects Director, before the meeting is reconvened, copied to the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

5. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED, That - under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

6. MIDDLESEX STREET ESTATE - AREAS OF CAR PARK AND SIX SHOP UNITS - APPENDICES

The committee noted the non-public appendices in respect of agenda item 3.

7. MIDDLESEX STREET ESTATE - ALLOCATION OF FUNDS FOR HOUSING PURPOSES - APPENDICES

The committee noted the non-public appendices in respect of agenda item 4.

The meeting ended at 5pm

Chairman

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