

## Minutes

### PETITION HEARING - CABINET MEMBER FOR RESIDENTS' SERVICES

23 November 2023



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p><b>Committee Members Present:</b> Councillor Eddie Lavery</p> <p><b>Ward Councillors Present:</b> Councillor Tony Burles Councillor Jonathan Bianco</p> <p><b>LBH Officers Present:</b> Beth Rutherford, Head of Parking Services Darren Deeks, Head of Libraries and Cultural Services</p> <p><b>Also Present:</b> Councillor Naser Abby Councillor Scott Farley Councillor June Nelson Councillor Sital Punja</p>
6.	<p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING</b> <i>(Agenda Item 1)</i></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
7.	<p><b>TO CONFIRM THAT THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE IN PUBLIC</b> <i>(Agenda Item 2)</i></p> <p>It was confirmed that all items of business would be considered in public.</p>
8.	<p><b>TO CONSIDER THE REPORT OF THE OFFICERS ON THE FOLLOWING PETITION RECEIVED:</b> <i>(Agenda Item 3)</i></p>
9.	<p><b>PETITION REQUESTING THE REVERSAL OF THE ABOLITION OF 30 MINUTES FREE CAR PARKING FOR NON-RESIDENTS</b> <i>(Agenda Item 4)</i></p> <p>The Cabinet Member considered a petition requesting the Reversal of the Abolition of 30 minutes Free Car Parking for Non-Residents.</p> <p>There were no petitioners in attendance therefore the Cabinet Member made the following resolutions in their absence:</p> <p><b>RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Member for Residents' Services:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Noted that the decision to amend the parking fees and charges had been approved by Full Council on 24 February 2022 and 23 February 2023; and</li></ol>

2. Noted that the decision to abolish the 30 minutes free parking for non-HillingdonFirst cardholders would be reviewed as part of the budget setting process for 2024/2025.

10. **PETITIONS REQUESTING THE REVERSAL OF THE PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE UXBRIDGE LIBRARY TO THE CIVIC CENTRE** (*Agenda Item 5*)

The Cabinet Member considered three petitions requesting the Reversal of the Proposal to Relocate Uxbridge Library to the Civic Centre.

The lead petitioner for the Change.org petition was in attendance and addressed the Cabinet Member. Key points highlighted included:

- In the proposed new library, capacity would be reduced from six floors to one floor;
- The proposed library would be located at the far end of Uxbridge in an office block rather than at the heart of the town;
- A library was not just for borrowing books – it was an essential hub for education, culture and social interaction which was well used by students – the proposed reduced space would not be conducive to study;
- In the proposed new library, there would be insufficient space for impactful free exhibitions;
- It seemed likely that the number of activities and events for senior members of the community would be reduced;
- The current library was easily accessible by bus, train or car whilst only a few buses stopped outside the Civic Centre. Access in bad weather would be challenging for those with mobility issues and for parents with young children;
- Under the new proposals, it was unclear where the local studies and archives area would be situated – the old market area and Old Windsor Street were a reminder of local history and should be on show;
- It would be impossible for the proposed reduced library space to house a large book collection as promised; and
- The current library had been refurbished in 2014. It could be made more carbon neutral by installing solar panels and energy efficient heating and lighting – this would be a more cost-effective option than relocating it.

A petitioner representing the North Uxbridge Residents' Association petition was in attendance and addressed the Cabinet Member. Key points highlighted included:

- Uxbridge library was a valued resource with discrete areas which could be subdivided naturally so groups could work without interference. The current library could cope with surges in demand from students, large activity classes and talks of over 100;
- The library was a surge demand service which was particularly busy in the evenings and at weekends. Large numbers of students visited the current library during GCSE revision time and sometimes had to sit on the floor due to lack of space. The proposed new library would have insufficient capacity to cope with such surges. There would also be insufficient space to accommodate large class sizes for community activities;
- On the evening of Monday 20 November 2023, 72 residents had been in the library using the PCs, laptops or studying / reading. This did not include those in the display or children's areas on the ground floor. It was estimated that the new

library would have a total of 47 spaces therefore some 35% of users would have no place to work / study;

- Students used the study spaces in the current library to study alone, in pairs or in groups of up to 9. The planned library would not accommodate group work which was an invaluable part of learning;
- In the new library there would be no discrete reading spaces for residents needing a quiet space to escape from life's stresses;
- It was estimated that the planned library would have 75% of the current shelving space. The proposed shelving layout was not wheelchair friendly;
- The planned library would not have capacity to cope with current user surge volumes, users' learning practices or their social patterns and needs;
- The community reach of the library was an important aspect of its modern role. The proposed space would reduce capacity for evening talks which were currently often oversubscribed;
- The planned multipurpose space leading to the library was divided by a walkway which split the area into one third / two-thirds spaces on either side. The one third space could accommodate "working from home" residents whilst the two-thirds space would be for group activities. However, the space would not be able to accommodate Chairobics classes which required substantial room between participants;
- The bookable meeting room would only be adequate for very small group meetings;
- The proposed site of the library was unsuitable for seniors and those with toddlers. Urban planning typically placed libraries in town centres to encourage attendance and participation. The current library was within the main shopping areas and close to transport links;
- It was felt that the Civic Centre could be unsafe given the stabbing incident and the difficult issues some clients presented with; and
- The current library played a pivotal role in community activities, education, and culture across all age groups and should therefore be respected and supported.

The lead petitioner for the paper petition received was in attendance and addressed the Cabinet Member. Key points highlighted included:

- The lead petitioner had previously worked as a qualified librarian and had been an Associate of the then Library Association. She had worked for Hillingdon Library Service for over 20 years;
- There had been no prior information about the proposal to downsize Uxbridge Library and move it to the Middlesex Suite;
- The phrasing of the Library Strategy was laudable as an overall approach but was very general and easily overlooked as a defined plan;
- The Leader, Councillor Edwards, had stated that there would be no public consultation on the proposal. Apart from the petition hearing, the only other opportunity to comment would be in response to a possible future planning application. It felt like a done deal rather than a proposal with a new staff structure already in place, layout plans designed and a £2m contract awarded to refurbish the Middlesex Suite;
- The removal of the library from the centre of Uxbridge would have a devastating effect on an already struggling town centre;
- A Brunel University report "The Voice from Uxbridge" had been commissioned by the Council as part of the Town Centre Masterplan initiative. In the report many glowing references were made to the important role of the town centre library;

- The proposal was too precipitous, had not been widely discussed in relation to the rest of the Council's plans for Uxbridge Town Centre, had not sought the views of residents or the Uxbridge business community, was unlikely to have a public consultation and had not considered alternative solutions to the perceived problems with the current library building; and
- The Cabinet Member was requested to delay, consult and reconsider the proposal.

Uxbridge Ward Councillor Tony Burles was in attendance and spoke in support of petitioners. Councillor Burles felt the proposal was ludicrous and should not go ahead. He noted that work on adapting the Middlesex Suite had already begun and two planning applications in relation to the Middlesex Suite had been submitted in the previous week. Councillor Burles commented that the current library had level access to the front and lifts to the upper floors. It was well located close to the underground station and bus routes, whereas the Civic Centre was further from the tube and could only be accessed via a steep ramp or steps hence was less accessible to those with mobility issues. Councillor Burles suggested that the current library could be re-fitted and modernised to preserve the embodied carbon invested in the structure. It appeared that this had not been considered in the proposals – there were no current plans for the future use of the building hence carbon emissions could be even higher in the future.

Councillor Burles expressed concern that the proposed relocation would damage the library as a social hub. He noted that the new library would have less computers at a time when more Council services were going online. Moreover, it appeared that no consideration had been given to the footfall the library generated for the High Street. The plan to cut the number of books was disappointing as access to quality, trusted information was a key role of a library - in future many books would only be available to those who could afford to buy them. Councillor Burles suggested that the key motive behind the proposed move was to raise money by selling the library site.

The Cabinet Member listened to and acknowledged the requests and opinions of the petitioners and Ward Councillor. He confirmed that a planning application would be required for the proposed new library, but no applications had been submitted to date.

The Cabinet Member noted that three petitions had been received hence it appeared that a considerable number of people were already aware of the proposal. It was confirmed that the Cabinet report had not yet been finalised and it was likely that there would be a further period of consultation built into the end of the Cabinet report.

The Cabinet Member understood people's concerns but noted that the library would not be moving very far up the High Street. In terms of accessibility, he acknowledged that some people would be better off while others would not. The current library was spread over six floors which was not ideal – in cases of power failure, people could be trapped for some time on the upper floors – this had already happened on one occasion. A single floor library was preferable as it was fully accessible to all.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the planned library would be one of three flagship libraries and would continue to be the largest in the Borough. It was evident that there was a considerable amount of book stock that did not move and had not moved for over two years. He advised the petitioners present that their concerns regarding events, student study space and other matters would be fully considered as part of the final plans for the library and the subsequent Cabinet report. He also acknowledged the points raised regarding surge capacity and confirmed that this matter would be thoroughly checked.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Cabinet Member:**

- 1. Met with petitioners and listened to their request to cancel plans to relocate Uxbridge Library;**
- 2. Noted that the Council had yet to agree on the proposals, but that the Library Service Strategy referenced exploring relocation of services to make them sustainable; the Strategy had been agreed by Cabinet in May 2023; and**
- 3. Was minded to continue with the preparation of the Cabinet paper noting that the paper may not be ready to be presented to Cabinet in December as further research may be required in relation to the matters raised at the hearing.**

The meeting, which commenced at 6.00 pm, closed at 6.40 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Liz Penny on [epenny@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:epenny@hillingdon.gov.uk) Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.