

Extraordinary Council

Meeting held on Monday, 2 March 2020 at 9.05 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

- Present:** Councillor Maddie Henson (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Hamida Ali, Muhammad Ali, Jamie Audsley, Jane Avis, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Sue Bennett, Margaret Bird, Simon Brew, Alison Butler, Jan Buttinger, Janet Campbell, Robert Canning, Richard Chatterjee, Sherwan Chowdhury, Luke Clancy, Chris Clark, Pat Clouder, Stuart Collins, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Mario Creatura, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, Felicity Flynn, Clive Fraser, Maria Gatland, Lynne Hale, Simon Hall, Patricia Hay-Justice, Simon Hoar, Yvette Hopley, Karen Jewitt, Bernadette Khan, Shafi Khan, Stuart King, Toni Letts, Oliver Lewis, Stephen Mann, Stuart Millson, Vidhi Mohan, Michael Neal, Tony Newman, Oni Oviri, Ian Parker, Andrew Pelling, Jason Perry, Helen Pollard, Tim Pollard, Joy Prince, Badsha Quadir, Helen Redfern, Scott Roche, Pat Ryan, Paul Scott, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Andy Stranack, Gareth Streeter, Robert Ward, David Wood, Louisa Woodley and Callton Young
- Apologies:** Councillor Humayun Kabir, Mary Croos, Nina Degrads, Steve Hollands and Steve O'Connell

PART A

90/20 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interests.

91/20 **Matter for Consideration by Council**

Madam Deputy Mayor informed Council that a requisition signed by 19 Members of Council had been received and that in the absence of the Mayor, she had agreed that an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council could be held.

The Chief Executive was invited to read the requisition:

“In light of Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield (“Westfield”) reporting that it has removed the proposed redevelopment of the Whitgift Centre from its development project portfolio, the following Members of the Council greatly regret the current Administration’s incompetence in losing this opportunity to regenerate Croydon’s Town Centre.

The town centre is now suffering from considerable blight and a much reduced retail and leisure offer. It is vital that there is a plan in terms of meanwhile use and to encourage the return of a vibrant town centre of which all Croydon residents can be proud. It is time that the Administration shared with the public what this plan is.”

Madam Deputy Mayor invited Councillor Perry to propose the motion.

Councillor Perry explained that the Extraordinary Council meeting had been requested to discuss the challenges faced by the Westfield scheme and the news that it had been removed from the project pipeline. It was stressed that this was not about talking down the town and its talents. However, there was no belief in the ability of the Labour Administration to deliver the development.

The Westfield scheme was described as the final piece of the puzzle to hold the regeneration of the town centre together and that the scheme was a once in a generation opportunity to achieve a step change. Councillor Perry noted that the Conservative Group had always supported the development and the original proposal had been initiated under its Administration. The withdrawal of the scheme had caused shockwaves and the risk of town centre blight. The Extraordinary Council meeting was therefore being held to ensure Westfield was on the agenda; to allow discussion of a major scheme and the implications for the town.

Councillor Perry described how the Opposition was supporting the Westfield development and wanted to see it succeed. It was highlighted that not enough was being done to talk-up the scheme. It was suggested that the Administration needed to do more to work with the developers. Uncertainty about the development risked doubt setting in which would lead to difficulties for the local economy.

It was noted that Westfield had not featured on the agenda of a Full Council meeting for a year and that this vacuum was creating space for rumours to take hold. The Opposition wanted it on the agenda and built. Councillor Perry noted the reassuring *Twitter* messages that had been issued by the *Croydon Partnership*. The updates provided were welcomed with the request for more to be made to bolster the image of the town.

The Council was called on to facilitate *meanwhile uses* of the existing site to showcase Croydon's many talents. Councillor Perry stressed that the need for the Administration to show leadership rather than leaving the future of the Westfield development to others. It was in the shared interests of all for the Administration to be proactive. However, Councillor Perry noted that there had not been one mention of Westfield during the recent discussion of the *Growth Zone* at Cabinet. This was despite there having been a meeting with the *Croydon Partnership* on the same day as the Cabinet meeting. It was asked why the Administration had not taken the opportunity to reassure residents. Councillor Perry called for Westfield to be on the agenda and discussed regularly to ensure all members could be involved and informed of progress. Councillor Perry concluded by moving the motion.

Councillor Tim Pollard seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak

The Leader, **Councillor Newman**, spoke in opposition to the motion citing that it was riddled with factual inaccuracies. The statement made by the *Croydon Partnership*, on the same day as Council, was read in full:

“The challenges in the retail industry are affecting developments across the UK. Despite this, the Croydon Partnership recognises the opportunity to create a vibrant, mixed-use development for Croydon.

We are reviewing the development to ensure it meets the future needs of the community, including a viable mix of retail, dining, leisure and uses such as a hotel, offices and residential space.

We are working closely with Croydon Council, the Greater London Authority and local stakeholders to develop the right masterplan. Croydon Council, the Greater London Authority and the Croydon Partnership held a productive meeting to discuss the time-intensive, future planning support needed for a large and complex scheme and the delivery of a more sustainable development, phased over time, which includes the refurbishment of some existing buildings. We will continue to consult with businesses and residents on their needs for the town centre which will also inform the review. The Croydon Partnership is still committed to ensuring a dynamic town centre and will work together with all stakeholders and the community to support its existing assets in Croydon.”

The Leader explained how the Westfield scheme when it was originally envisaged approximately eight years previously had been considered as one of the first pieces in the regeneration of the town centre. It was accepted that it would now be one of the final pieces of the redevelopment to take place. This demonstrated that other elements of the regeneration such as Fairfield Halls and East Croydon station were being successfully delivered. In fact, Croydon was lit-up by cranes at night.

It was stressed that meetings about the Westfield scheme were being held. However, that it had also been acknowledged that the scheme was being affected by other changes. Dropping a huge retail hanger into a town centre was no longer feasible and Westfield, along with other retail sites, had seen a downturn in demand reflecting the 20% increase in online shopping. This meant that a new development had to be designed that reflected the changes in consumer needs.

The Leader described how a new design would need to be developed based on widespread consultation and that the Administration was clear that it wanted to consult residents. The crash in retail had caught up with the reality of the previous scheme which had been formally acknowledged. The Administration shared the frustrations this caused but this meant that the town centre had narrowly missed ending up with a scheme that very quickly would no longer be fit for purpose. A mixed used facility was needed that included

offices, leisure and retail delivered using a sustainable scheme. It was highlighted how the new governance model would be used to listen to residents, gain their involvement in the new scheme and deliver a Croydon in which there could be shared pride.

Councillor Skipper welcomed the statement from the *Croydon Partnership* and highlighted the importance of delivering the right scheme. It was the responsibility of community leaders to go out and give people confidence in the scheme and demand that more be achieved. Whilst Councillor Skipper acknowledged that she shared the frustrations of others she also stressed that it was not the right scheme and that she could not support a development that was no longer right for the town centre. Councillor Skipper called for a dynamic scheme with sustainability at its heart delivering a town centre that responded to the climate emergency and could be shown off. It would need to include places to play and socialise. The development was described as the final piece of the regeneration jigsaw and that the *Croydon Partnership* needed to be pressed for investment. It was described how residents and local stakeholders would be consulted to understand what the development should look like. Councillor Skipper concluded that Croydon was the best place to live because the Administration was there to make it so.

Councillor Creatura noted that it was seven years since the development was first envisaged and that, with such a long time having passed without any progress, people were doubting that it would happen at all. The importance of the development was stressed; the definition of social and economic development was the uplift this brought to people's lives and the additional investment this attracted. Councillor Creatura reported that it was over two years since Westfield had been discussed at Council which was causing concern.

The recent announcement that the development was no longer in the project pipeline had led to worry. Residents were asking questions; when would the development happen, how long would it take, when would it start? Councillor Creatura called on Cabinet Members to urgently publish criteria by which to judge whether progress was happening and to use Cabinet Member announcements at Council to provide updates on what they had personally done to achieve progress. Councillor Creatura concluded that he wanted to help get progress reported and help deliver an appropriate Westfield scheme.

Councillor Scott, the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport & Regeneration (Job-Share) described how work was continuing with the Mayor of London, partners and the developers to progress the scheme. However, the town centre was changing fast and *Brexit* was stifling investment. As a result, it was not surprising that the plans for the development were having to be rethought. Councillor Scott explained that there was a need to ensure the development was sustainable, long term and vibrant.

It would be the partners that would determine how the scheme went forward. Planning and logistics were already being considered and a workshop was being held to consult on the Westfield quarter. This envisaged streets and

squares, homes and leisure, recycling and reuse of existing structures alongside travel including cycling and walking. The development would be achieved through a phased delivery and it was only part of the redevelopment of the town centre. This was already underway with Queen's Square, Fairfield Halls and the surrounding area including the modular build on George Street, which would have a taller tower next to it, and East Croydon Station that would see two further towers developed on the site. Councillor Scott expressed his pride in the *Growth Zone* and called for this not to be talked down. Rather the focus should be on positive civic spirit and working together.

The Leader of the Opposition, **Councillor Tim Pollard** explained that the Opposition was seeking action on one of the Borough's most pressing emergencies. It was described how a few years earlier the town centre had been on the edge of a massive development. However, instead of this the high street had 100 ft of empty shop frontage. Whilst this had not resulted from any deliberate action it was stressed that it had happened on the Administration's watch. Councillor Tim Pollard hoped the Administration would be able to deliver the development; it was contemplated that a third iteration of the scheme might work. Regardless, completion of the scheme was at least six to 12 years away. The regeneration of the town centre needed to be more than just housing. The aim of the motion was to get the Administration to begin talking about the scheme again. The Administration was called on to act to stop the empty shop frontages shouting out decay. Whilst it was not the role of the Administration to deliver such schemes it could maintain the pressure on the developers. There was a need to send a message that there was a credible plan in place to deal with the situation.

Madam Deputy Mayor moved the vote which fell and the motion was not carried.

92/20 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This item was not required.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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