



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr. Ray Morgon
London Borough of Havering
Town Hall
Main Road
Romford
RM1 3BD

20 May 2024

Dear Ray,

I write to object to the proposals by the Residents' Association-Labour coalition in the Town Hall to close up to four libraries in Havering, including the Harold Wood and Elm Park libraries within my Hornchurch & Upminster constituency.

Our libraries, as you will know, play an important community role that extends well beyond traditional book-lending. Besides the rich educational and cultural contribution libraries make to the lives of residents of all ages, but especially young children, our libraries provide neighbourhood hubs across the borough from which people can access computers, book meeting rooms, scan and print documents, and access certain council services.

The proposed closures have been primarily justified by the Council's financial position. You will know from our many discussions, and from the support I have given the Council in presenting its case, that I am sympathetic to the aspect of Havering's funding challenges that relates to the Local Government Funding Formula. Through our bipartisan work together, we have managed to secure additional financial support and we are also working on a longer term project to increase the borough's business rates receipts very substantially.

Within this context, I believe the coalition's plan for libraries to be shortsighted and I am writing to register my objection to them. By your consultation's own admission, the plans would save very little money compared to the huge loss of community assets and services that the closure of four libraries would entail. We have also discussed previously the relatively low running costs of the borough's libraries, which you have compared to a single high-needs social care case.

My assumption, therefore, is that the Council's motivation in budgetary terms is to sell the library sites for redevelopment. Without more detailed information about the Council's plans, it is difficult for any resident to make an informed contribution to your consultation.

I would therefore like to ask some questions about the plans:

- What discussions has your Cabinet had about the use of sites once any library has shut?
- What valuation has the Council been given for each of the proposed closure sites?
- What assessment has the Council made of the feasibility of reinstating library facilities on any redeveloped sites, and could any capital cost be offset by developer contributions?
- Would any changes to your projections of future business rates receipts in the coming months alter your decisions about proposed library closures?



You will be aware of my long-running campaign to save Hornchurch Police Station because of its importance to neighbourhood policing, not least as it houses the Havering Joint Task Force. To keep a police presence on that site, the previous Conservative administration had made a deal with the Met to buy the site. However, there is now a very real possibility of the Met retaining the base in its estate following our campaign, negating the requirement for the Council deal. I received a response recently from the Met Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, to say that we can expect a decision on this in the summer.

Within the recent Budget-setting process in the Town Hall, proposed amendments submitted by the Conservative Party Group included the deferral of nearly £3m for the purchase of the Hornchurch Police Station site. Should the Met decide to retain Hornchurch Police Station, I would ask that you divert any saved funds to retaining the existing library estate in my constituency. This alone would provide enough savings for the £1m worth of maintenance the Council states your libraries need over the next five years and will off-set several years of savings from the proposals.

Thank you for your consideration of my library consultation response. I look forward to receiving answers to the questions I have posed so that constituents are able to understand your plans in greater detail well in advance of the consultation's deadline.

With best wishes,

Julia

Member of Parliament for Hornchurch & Upminster