

Labour Group amendment to the motion ‘Working from Home threat to the finances of Tower Hamlets’

Proposer: Cllr Motin Uz-zaman

Seconder: Cllr Candida Ronald

Added text underlined

Deleted text scored out

The Council notes:

- That in the MTFS for 2021 39% of the Council's income, £134 million is due to come from Retained Business Rates;
- The permanent closure of a range of retailers and restaurants in the Canary Wharf estate;
- Reports that in the future businesses may dramatically reduce the number of people visiting offices each day and that some may change their model to work from home;
- That the national shift to recommend working from home wherever possible continues to be a vital part of efforts to tackle Covid-19;
- When properties are left empty they can only claim a three-month business rates exemption but must otherwise be paid but that when there is no demand for a property, the property will command no annual rent and it may be removed from the rating list or subject to a reduced rateable value;
- That demand for new build property in Aldgate, Whitechapel and E14 is predicated in large part on their closeness to the employment centres of the City of London and Canary Wharf;
- That new build property contributes substantially to the Council's affording housing targets and the delivery of substantial sums of money in the form of CIL, New Homes Bonus and new Council tax;
- The decision by developers like Ballymore to delay opening their sales office for Millharbour Village;
- The large number of Tower Hamlets residents employed (formally or informally) in the services sector dependent on workers as well as tourists visiting Tower Hamlets.

This council further notes:

The GLA is currently undertaking research into the future of Central London, including Canary Wharf, looking particularly at the long term – what new challenges and opportunities will be created by the more lasting cultural and economic changes arising from or exacerbated by the pandemic. This, and other research from a range of organisations will help inform thinking about what the pandemic, lockdown and the aftermath means for the area in the medium to longer term.

That a Financial Times article on the 16th September 2020 was titled;

“Canary Wharf has a flood of new homes but only a trickle of returning workers
Prices and sales have fallen in the London financial district and bankers and lawyers are staying away”

It went on to say

"Though the area is rapidly changing, Canary Wharf and the surrounding Docklands are often criticised for being a little soulless: an employment district with flats attached.

~~When finished, these apartments will arrive into an area awash with newly built homes. Tower Hamlets, in which Canary Wharf sits, has more unsold homes under construction than any other London borough, according to Molier. By the end of June, the number was just under 4,000 — around a third of the total in inner London"~~

~~And another Financial Times article titled "How Covid-19 is altering Canary Wharf's purpose~~

~~London's Docklands is used to being reinvented — it just wasn't expecting to be so again quite yet"~~

~~Which said~~

~~"More pertinently, will we yearn to live in them? To find ways of inhabiting this now-endangered archetype, the tall office tower, which once looked like the future and now looks suspiciously like the past?~~

~~"Now, walking around a bleak, almost empty Canary Wharf on a rainy day in what not so long ago would have been rush hour, I could not help thinking whether the same might happen to the area's~~

~~office blocks... It was the question that struck me as I wandered between the towers and beside the waterways, and noticed that the only real activity was construction. Just as the towers are emptying out, new ones are being built, most intensively at Wood Wharf, to house exactly the workers who are no longer working in the other towers"~~

This Council believes:

That working from home maybe a greater significant threat to the economy of Tower Hamlets, particularly in the context of the economic fallout of then Brexit (which is also an issue), the pandemic and Government austerity cuts to local authority funding, if it reduces the desire for office space and new build apartments in Tower Hamlets. However we clearly recognise the importance of the 'work from home' instruction in the national efforts to tackle Covid-19.

That employment led growth in Canary Wharf and the City of London has led growth in Tower Hamlets for a generation now.

That all of that maybe at risk now, making the Councils ambitions ever harder to achieve.

We need to ~~re-invent the Tower Hamlets model that we can no longer rely on growth arriving and copy look closely at what our neighbouring Boroughs to the east are doing~~ who have had to be more pro-active in attracting new businesses like barking and Dagenham recently attracting a £300 million investment in a film and TV studio.

This Council therefore recommends:

We maintain our A-clear focus on making the growth areas in Tower Hamlets more attractive places for businesses, workers and residents, to retain those we have and to attract new ones, for example through our Local Plan and our regeneration framework.

Our current capital delivery program seeks to deliver a number of improvements across the borough.

That like other Boroughs we will need to be more pro-active in creating great places that are not “soulless” but which rather offer the best combination of business, leisure and sports opportunities.

That we aspire to having the best of everything, spending the S106, CIL and New Homes Bonus ~~for example on (but not limited to)~~ to help deliver projects and improvements that will benefit the residents of Tower Hamlets, for example in leisure, attracting new industries and businesses, developing walking/cycling routes, playground equipment and parks, other public facilities, and more.

- ~~Rebuild leisure centres like St George's and Tiller road to offer the best combination of physical exercise in large purpose-built attractive buildings;~~
- ~~Attract new industries to Tower Hamlets by doing everything we can to encourage health research or information technology in Tower Hamlets;~~
- ~~Develop attractive walking & cycle routes along the river Lea with bridges to Newham;~~
- ~~Sailing in the Thames from the DSWC and by the Sea Scouts;~~
- ~~Swimming in the docks for those working at Canary Wharf as well as local kids;~~
- ~~The best playgrounds in Europe so that residents from other Boroughs travel here rather than go to Greenwich;~~
- ~~Support great organisations like Mudchute Farm with CIL money so that they have nice toilets, and CCTV to keep the animals safe;~~

To continue to have a clear focus on making Tower Hamlets the best place to live and work in London.