Dear Ms Lopez,

Thank you for your letter of 20 May. I am sorry for the delay in reply.

I share your sentiments about the value of public libraries to the wellbeing and prospects of residents across the borough. Our libraries are successful and in particular have risen to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than doubling visitor numbers in the last 3 years.

While it is a matter of great regret that we are having to make these proposals, it is realistic that we must do so given the financial climate in which we operate. The proposals still provide for a comprehensive and efficient library service in Havering and the savings delivered by the proposals are realised within the next two years. I am aware that there are many other avenues which might provide longer term solutions, but the problem that confronts us is one that is very much on our doorstep now.

I am grateful for your sympathy for the financial position we are in and am equally grateful for your work in ensuring that our cause has been presented to Government. However, we are in a position that requires more than sympathy and incrementalism and it is very much in this context why we have had to take responsibility for the savings proposals we have made.

In response to your specific questions:

**What discussions has Cabinet had about the use of sites once libraries close?**

There have been no discussions to this effect as yet. This is because we have made no decision about which of the five sites at risk of closure will actually close. Each is distinct and sits within its own local context and amenity.

**What valuation has the Council been given for each of the proposed closure sites?**

We have neither asked for nor received a commercial valuation of the land on each site as yet. That process will begin once we have decided with clarity and based on the library needs assessment and EQIA which of the sites will unfortunately have to close. Once that decision has been taken the land and asset will be progressed within our Asset Management Strategy.

**What assessment has the Council made of the feasibility of reinstating library facilities on any redeveloped site, and could any capital cost be offset by developer contributions?**

We have made no assessment as yet. A much broader piece of work is underway looking strategically at the public estate in the borough which will identify opportunities for mixed use facilities in future. I am not however confident that in the short term such opportunities will exist that provide a return equal to or greater than the savings delivered within the next two years by our proposals to very reluctantly close four libraries.

**Would any changes to your projections to your projections of future business rates in the coming months alter your decisions about proposed library closures?**

We have always said that any significant change in the business rate regime that would benefit the council financially would put us in the position of being able to identify savings proposals that might not need to happen, so potentially yes, but I am concerned that the pace of making those projections certainties will move much slower than we have to move in order to deliver savings in the here and now. The library proposals very much fall in to the latter category.

You will be heartened to know that the consultation is proving extremely popular and we are closing on 3,000 responses to it at time of writing.

In relation to Hornchurch police station, we are of the same understanding as you, that the police station will now remain in active use, however your understanding of the financial impact is not correct. Actually, the police station not being available to the Council will result in loss of a potential income stream which could have help the budget position.

Yours sincerely