

Report to the North Weald Airfield Strategy Cabinet Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting: 28 July 2008

Portfolio: Planning and Economic Development

Subject: North Weald Airfield – Future Options

Responsible Officer: Derek Macnab (01992-564260)

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992-564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That Members reconsider the six Options previously identified within the Drivers Jonas Report and identify any that they wish to explore in more detail;**
- (2) That if Members wish to proceed with further feasibility work, a scoping report and brief be developed, and expressions of interest be sought from suitably qualified consultants to undertake the work; and**
- (3) That a supplementary CSB estimate be sought to cover the costs of undertaking any such study.**

Executive Summary:

Members are asked to reconsider the options for the future use of the Airfield identified by Drivers Jonas and determine whether there is a need for further feasibility work and if so to seek a supplementary estimate to engage a consultant.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Drivers Jonas report needs to be updated to reflect changes in the policy, planning and general economic context that currently prevail.

Other Options for Action:

Take no action at this time in relation to the future use of the Airfield.

Report:

1. In 1999 the Council, after a competitive process, commissioned Property and Valuation Consultants, Drivers Jonas, to undertake a review of potential options for the future of North Weald Airfield. The Council initiated the study at a time when it was being subject to development pressures, by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. In addition, a number of aviation related studies were being undertaken by the DETR – Airports Policy Division, in relation to the potential growth of business aviation in the South East.

2. After a period of research and review, which included transport and infrastructure studies, Drivers Jonas identified six potential Options. These Options were subject to public consultation. As a result Option 6b emerged, largely being promoted by existing airfield tenants, who considered that a Business Aviation Option would be viable.

3. In the event, whilst some low level operational issues were pursued, with respect to safeguarding, the feasibility of extended operating hours and the collection of landing fees, the Council elected not to proceed with taking any of the Options forward. The rationale behind this decision was in recognition of the fact that the East of England Plan 2000-2021 was being developed at this time. As such, it would have been premature to pre-empt any potential outcome of this Regional Spatial Strategy.

4. With the potential for Regional Planning Guidance, compelling the Council to develop alternative uses for the Airfield now largely removed, there is scope for a longer-term view of the Airfield to be undertaken.

5. The Options previously identified by Drivers Jonas are listed below, with the relevant plans attached.

Option 1A – Do nothing/Incremental Development:

This option envisages EFDC continuing to operate the airfield as at present. Opportunities for further development and income generation would be assessed on an ad hoc basis. The moratorium on further development by the tenants would be lifted and all outstanding planning consents would be implemented.

Option 1B – Do nothing/Incremental Development (Housing):

This is a development on the previous option assuming greater residential development on the eastern flank. In addition to the dwellings proposed in the previous option, further areas of land are released for residential uses.

Option 2 – Disposal of Airfield

This assumes that EFDC dispose of their interest in the short term. This is similar to the previous option in as much as the value that the market would put on the airfield would be based on an assessment of the current income and the development opportunities that the airfield offers at the current time. In addition, a purchaser would make an assessment of 'hope value' based on the probability of obtaining the necessary consents to increase the development potential of the site.

Option 3 – Develop Airfield for Aviation and Other Commercial Uses:

Continued use and development of the airfield for either executive or general aviation is combined here with the development of surplus areas of the airfield. In particular, it is envisaged that large scale light industrial (B1) and storage distribution (B8) uses are developed; the existing industrial estate tenants benefiting from long leasehold interests remain in occupation but that the vacant industrial sites are developed for housing; and, as with the incremental option, land to the east of the peripheral road is sold for housing and hotel use.

Option 4 – Consolidate Aviation Use and Develop Other Uses:

This involves the shortening of Runway 02/20 to allow the release of more land for

development. The land closest to the runway would be developed for B1 and B8 uses and residential development would take place on the land closest to the existing settlement. The long leasehold tenants would remain in occupation of their units with the remainder of the estate being developed for residential and retail uses. It is anticipated that over time the long leaseholders could transfer their interests to food and non-food retailers thereby forming a core retail centre in North Weald.

Option 5 – Close Airfield and Develop Mixed Use Site:

This option requires the closure of the airfield to allow for the development of mixed use 'new settlement'. Within this option there are two main sub-options:

- Housing Led Development
- Commercial (B1/B8) Led Development.

Option 6 – Develop Airfield with Adjoining Land:

This considered the merits of incorporating adjoining land ownerships to facilitate development of the airfield. Rather than consider a larger area for development (the airfield is already sufficiently large enough to accommodate different mix of development) consideration should be given to how adjoining land ownerships can facilitate development on the airfield itself. In particular, the advantages of incorporating land to the north-west of airfield, currently in agricultural.

Potential Way Forward

6. Clearly the analysis of the Drivers Jonas report is approaching 10 years old, and would need to be updated to reflect changes in the policy, planning and general economic context that currently prevails. However, Members may wish to utilise the original Options to assist deliberation, of what they feel the most appropriate future for the site may be.

7. If any options are ruled out, it would assist in focusing any future additional feasibility work that members may wish to commission. The Council does not currently have the expertise and capacity to undertake such a complex property review. If Members are minded to pursue any Option, it would require the commissioning of further specialist advice, for which no current budgetary resources exist.

Resource Implications:

Need for supplementary estimate if members wish to engage a consultant to undertake feasibility work.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None at this stage

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None at this stage

Consultation Undertaken:

None

Background Papers:

Drivers Jonas Report

Impact Assessments:

None required at this stage.