

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD AVIATION INTENSIFICATION
STUDY

JULY 2009

BRIEFING DOCUMENT AND INVITATION TO BID FOR
CONSULTANCY SERVICES – FIRST STAGE

Introduction

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.

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.

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.

The Commission

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

To this end, the Council is seeking to engage suitably qualified consultants to undertake further strategic feasibility work. The brief is to examine the intensification of aviation use, with limited business or other uses including leisure, as required to make it economically viable.

It is envisaged that the study is undertaken in two stages. Firstly, an initial review of current aviation activity (to include safety and security issues) along with an assessment of potential options to expand. Secondly, if after evaluation of the outcomes, the Council were minded to proceed with any aviation led proposal, then a further second stage will be commissioned. This would seek further more detailed assessment of planning, property and development issues to establish the best means of delivering intensification of aviation, whilst maximising the financial benefits to the Council.

Historical Background

North Weald was established as a military aerodrome during the First World War. It continued to be used by the military between the wars, with permanent accommodation being added. North Weald was an important Royal Air Force Fighter Command Station during the Second World War, where it achieved prominence during the Battle of Britain, as one of the vitally important airfields, forming part of the air defence of the United Kingdom.

The advent of the jet age post 1945 saw North Weald in continued use by the Royal Air Force. However, as fighter aircraft developed, they required facilities that could not be provided at North Weald. The Royal Air Force withdrew from active use of the airfield in the late fifties, and it reverted to a reserve status on a care and maintenance basis, eventually becoming surplus to the Ministry of Defence requirements. Epping Forest District Council purchased the airfield in 1980 from the Government, for the sum of £660,000. North Weald Airfield is the single largest landsite in the ownership of the District Council.

Size, Location and Access to the Airfield

The Airfield is approximately 384 acres in size and is currently used as a general aviation airfield and for a range of other commercial and leisure uses. See the site plan at Appendix ?.

The airfield is located adjacent to the village of North Weald Bassett. The A414, via the Talbot Roundabout, connects the village to Junction 7 of the M11 motorway. The airfield's eastern boundary fronts the M11. The M11 provides access to Central London, in particular the City, as well as the Home Counties and the rest of the UK via the M25.

Rail Transport to the area is provided by the Central Line, which terminates at Epping about 3 miles away. The nearest main line station is located in Harlow with links to South London and Liverpool Street and North to Stansted Airport and Cambridge.

Description of current general use

The Council acquired the airfield in a very poor and run down condition. The only flying in 1980 was the Essex Gliding Club and North Weald Model Flying Club. The first aviation tenants arrived in 1983 to include Aces High, the British Aerial Museum and North Weald Flying Services (the Squadron).

The airfield has two runways. The main runway (02/20) runs North South and is approximately 1920 metres long. The second runway (13/31), which has been divided into two, is used for aviation on the open half (650m) and other non aviation uses on the closed half. This totals 1300 metres in length.

A safety fence is located 110 metres to the east of runway 02/20 centreline running the full length of this runway. This prevents inadvertent access by vehicles or persons onto the operational areas of the airfield, which are used for aviation purposes.

Small amounts of incremental development over the last 29 years have included the building and extension of some hangars and industrial units on parts of the airfield, and permission for a housing development on the former parade ground site.

The present tenants on the site, some of which have runway licences, use the facilities for a variety of aviation uses. Most of their hangars are located on the eastern part of the site, which adjoins the M11.

There are several warehouse/industrial units on the southern part of the site, which are let to a range of tenants. These form the North Weald Industrial Estate. Access to these units, depending on their location, is either through the Airfield or Merlin Way. Some of these buildings date back to World War Two (in particular Hangar 1). However, there are some more recent additions, such as the rebuilt Hangar 3 and the Booker Cash and Carry warehouse.

Fly-ins are held at the site during the summer months as well as various other outdoor event activities, some of which necessitate the cessation of flying. The site is also used at other times for HGV and advanced driver training.

In addition to a range of one-off outdoor events, the airfield has been home to what is believed to be the Country's largest open-air market, since 1989. This takes place on most weekends and some bank holidays. The market operation is the primary source of income for the airfield. It is located on the concrete envelope on the south side of the site, north of the industrial estate. The market attracts 20,000-35,000 people depending on the time of the year. Most shoppers reach the site by car or in specially chartered buses that pick-up from nearby towns including Harlow, Bishops Stortford and Chelmsford.

The land surrounding the airfield is also used for a variety of other leisure uses. These include a golf driving range, rifle club and gymnasium. All of these leisure uses are located on the eastern part of the site and are accessed from Merlin Way.

Summary of Current Aviation Operations

North Weald Airfield is not licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority, and consequently, neither pilot training nor public air transport purposes are permitted. Current flying operations at the aerodrome do not require licensed status, and are permitted from 0900 each day until 1900, or sunset if earlier. Night operations are not permitted and the runways are not equipped to support night flying.

An Air/Ground Radio System operates at the Airfield, staffed by Council Operations Officers, who are based in the control tower. The Operators are not permitted to exercise direct control over air traffic, but in an emergency may do so.

The airfield is in fairly close proximity to Stansted Airport and its associated controlled airspace. Controlled airspace also lies above the airfield. Thus, aircraft operations are necessarily constrained both laterally and vertically in order to keep clear of these restricted areas. Temporary licensing of the airfield is arranged when special events such as "Fly-ins" are staged, particularly if they involve increased volumes and higher performance aircraft.

Two runways are in operation, runways 02/20 and 13/31. The runways are used by both fixed wing powered aircraft and by gliders. Radio controlled model aircraft also use an area of out of use runway, for their operations.

Circuit directions are arranged so as to reduce noise nuisance as far as is practicable with the avoidance of populated areas wherever possible.

Powered fixed-wing operations mostly consist of light aircraft movements by single and twin engined propeller driven aircraft. Some of these are relatively high performance ex military aircraft, Spitfire, Mustang etc. Other vintage aircraft are also based at North Weald, again consisting mostly of ex-military planes. Other jet powered aircraft also operate at the airfield. Mostly these are light aircraft (less than 5700kg/12,500lbs), but in the past, heavier aircraft have operated at the airfield, under the lease terms of some of the tenants.

The maximum permitted aircraft weights allowed to operate at North Weald by tenants is up to 45372kgs/100,000lbs. A report on the condition of the runway is one of the supporting documents. This survey suggests that, in areas the current runway pavement strengths are insufficient to accommodate the maximum permitted weights stated in some tenants' leases.

Gliding operations still occasionally take place at North Weald although the previous resident club, Essex Gliding Club, have largely relocated due to controlled airspace restrictions on their activities.

In the past, the Airfield was well used by paragliders, but as a result of a safety review which constrained their opportunities to flying, this activity has largely ceased. A major consideration of the paragliding safety review was the mix of aviation activity particularly the presence of helicopters. In the last twelve months the Hertfordshire Air Ambulance has been based at North Weald with Essex Air Ambulance Service also considering a potential move to the airfield.

The various tenants all have an upper limit placed on the total number of aircraft movements that they are permitted to make. A North Weald movement consists of a take-off and a landing paired together. This contrasts with normal aviation practise where a movement is defined as either a take-off or a landing.

The movements are a valuable commodity and are used to provide business income for the tenants. For example, if hangar space is sub-let the letting would appear to confer the right to use some of the assigned movements. Similarly, membership of a club under the auspices of North Weald Flying Services allows a free landing at the airfield. Epping Forest District Council currently derive no landing fee income from aircraft landings.

The majority of movements usually occur at weekends. At other times the movement rates are normally lower, unless particular events have been arranged.

A breakdown of the number of permitted movements per annum for each tenant is detailed at Appendix ? along with a summary of the total number of movements at North Weald over the last five years.

Summary of Duties Required of Consultants

As highlighted in the to this briefing document, the Council has made provision to engage specialist consultancy support to examine the intensification of aviation use with limited business or other uses, including leisure as required to make it economically viable.

Over the last 10 years a number of studies have been undertaken on behalf of the Council in relation to the range of activities hosted at the site and potential future development options. In addition, a number of regional planning and aviation studies have similarly been undertaken, which have had implications for North Weald. These are listed at Appendix ?. Copies will be made available. These represent useful reference material, but as they are now dated, it is incumbent on any successful appointee to ensure that they utilise the most current information available, on which to base their findings and recommendations.

The Council is now seeking to review, in the current economic and planning context, options for increased aviation activity at North Weald Airfield.

It is anticipated that the study will specifically cover the following key areas of enquiry:

1. An analysis of the current aviation use of the Airfield and in particular the establishment of the costs attributable directly to aviation activity at North Weald, identifying the current levels of subsidy provided by the Council. This exercise will be to establish a benchmark against which future potential intensification/development can be assessed in terms of economic viability and return to the Council.
2. A review of safety and security arrangements at North Weald, with particular reference to the level of fire cover deemed appropriate for the current aviation activity, accepting that North Weald is currently unlicensed but does host a varied mix of high performance and jet aircraft. The safety and security review should clearly identify costed solutions for any recommended improvements. This is required for the Council to assess its future financial liabilities even if the level of flying activity was to remain at the status quo.
3. An assessment of future aviation options for the airfield, which clearly identifies the key considerations in terms of economic benefit and potential environmental impact. Previous reports have speculated at the potential strategic importance of North Weald in terms of meeting runway capacity problems in the South East. However, the economic climate has had a significant impact on commercial aviation and other Airports in the South East have developed since these studies. The Council is therefore seeking to identify realistic proposals which reflect current market conditions.

Any options identified should be supported by, at this stage, indicative capital costings and revenue projections, taking into account the current infrastructure of the airfield, (in particular the pavement strengths of the runways) and the existing lease and runway licence arrangements. Previous public consultation has demonstrated strong local support for the continuation of aviation at North Weald and indicated that a degree of intensification would be acceptable. However, any future option for increased aviation

activity should be supported by an assessment of the potential environmental impact and effect on the local community, for example, noise, number of movements, longer operating hours etc. The Council is seeking to identify a balance between increased activity which could have economic benefits in terms of employment/reduced subsidy and the environmental impact.

4. An indication is sought for any aviation intensification option, on the degree of enabling development required to make proposals viable, what type of development would be most compatible with aviation and the recommended procurement and management options.
5. North Weald Airfield has a valuable and treasured heritage, with significant local interest and concern about its future. The Council purchased the Airfield to protect it from development and has sought to maximise the site for leisure and community use. It is a requirement of the brief that the feasibility study is undertaken in a consultative way, drawing on the ideas and experiences of the tenants, users and management of the Airfield. In addition, there are a number of historical and resident groups who take a keen interest in the site as well as the Parish Council, who represent the local community. Whilst there is not at this stage a requirement to undertake whole-scale public consultation, it is expected that the successful consultant enters into dialogue with these key local stakeholders.

Appointment Procedure

The Council will invite expressions of interest from experienced consultants wishing to be considered. Each applicant will be issued with a questionnaire, which will be employed to establish which firms are to be invited to bid for the commission.

Consultants who satisfy the selection criteria will be sent a detailed brief and be invited to submit a fixed priced fee bid together with a method statement consisting of no more than 4 sides of A4 text clearly detailing how they propose to undertake the commission.

After due consideration of the fee bids and method statements received, firms will be invited to interview which will include a presentation against a pre-set question to a panel of elected Members and Officers. This will be followed by a question and answer session.

Notes at the interviews will be taken and a copy will be appended to and form part of the Agreement. The decision of the interview panel will be conveyed to all consultants and contract formalities will then be concluded.

Within 20 working days from the date of appointment, the successful consultant is required to present to the Council a statement of understanding of all matters pertaining to the site (as detailed in the section headed Duties Required) prior to identifying the aviation intensification options available to the Council to achieve realisation of the maximum potential of the site.

Due to the importance of this commission, the Council's North Weald Airfield Cabinet Committee will oversee the study and to whom the consultants are required to report.

The Consultant's commission will be deemed to be completed following a satisfactory presentation of their findings (as approved by the Council's North Weald Airfield Cabinet Committee) to the Cabinet Committee of the Council.

Requirements and Selection Criteria

The bid submitted is to be based on the following requirements and selection criteria:

Requirements

- (i) Bids are invited on a fixed fee basis including all travelling and other expenses;
- (ii) The Terms and Conditions of Appointment will be set out in the Contract between the Council and its Consultant which shall be under seal.
- (iii) Consultants will be required to maintain Professional Indemnity Insurance in sum of £1,000,000 on an each and every claim basis, for a period of twelve years from completion of their services. Comprehensive details of the Professional Indemnity held shall be detailed in the bid submission.
- (iv) The Council reserves the right to terminate the contract at any time on giving of one month's notice, in writing. This provision is primarily intended to cover the situation where the Council decides to postpone or abandon the project but may cover other situations also.
- (v) Professional fee bid shall be fully detailed on the proforma provided and returned in the envelope provided by no later than noon (Date TBA) together with a method statement and comprehensive CV for all staff to be engaged on the project.
- (vi) Consultants will be required to submit comprehensive monthly reports and attend meetings on a regular basis at a frequency to be agreed. As an extra duty consultants may be required to attend evening meetings in order to present reports and respond to questions from Members. A separate fee, inclusive of all travelling and other expenses should be quoted on the basis of a rate per meeting for each evening meeting required to attend.
- (vii) The Council does not bind itself to accept the lowest or indeed any bid as a result of this invitation and any appointment offer will be made following a decision by the interview panel as to the firm who has submitted the most economically advantageous offer in terms of price, quality, experience and presentation.
- (viii) Consultants should name the Lead Consultant for the commission and members of support team if any and submit with the Method Statement a comprehensive CV for each person who is to be involved. If, subsequently invited for interview, those persons should be present and take part in presentation.
- (ix) Consultants must be able to satisfy the Council that the firm is able to commit or engage sufficient, suitably experienced professional resources to meet all requirements of the brief and form a view on all activities currently undertaken on the site or likely to impact on the site.

Confidentiality

The Consultant shall not without the written consent of the Employer during the term of the contract or at any time thereafter make use for their own purposes or disclose to any person any information or any material provided to the Consultant by the Employer pursuant to the Contract, or any information acquired by the Employer or in connection with the provision of the Services, all of which information shall be deemed to be confidential save as may be otherwise required by the general law.

The findings and final report of the Study, along with the supporting research shall be the sole property of Epping Forest District Council and shall not be disclosed to any other parties without the written consent of the Council.

Stage Two

Successful appointment to the first stage of the Study does not guarantee any entitlement to undertake Stage Two which will be covered by a separate brief and competitive appointment process.

Appendix

List of Supporting Documents:

1. Site Plan of North Weald Airfield.
2. Report on Runway Pavement Strengths and Condition.
3. Annual and Permitted Number of Movements per Tenant.
4. Copies of Previous Consultancy Documents.
5. Current Lease and Licence Information.