

Report to the North Weald Cabinet Committee



Report reference: **NWA-004-2008/09**
Date of meeting: **27 July 2009**

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: **Finance and Economic Development**

Subject: **Depot Facilities**

Responsible Officer: **John Gilbert (01992 564062).**

Democratic Services Officer: **Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).**

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To note the status of current Cabinet decisions on the Langston Road depot; and**
- (2) To note and consider the key factors linking the agreed disposal of the Langston Road depot with the strategic review of North Weald Airfield; and**

Executive Summary:

Cabinet has previously agreed that the land, currently used for a depot in Langston Road, Loughton, should be marketed for an alternative use and that the depot should be relocated, possibly to land adjoining North Weald Airfield.

The land under consideration is also identified (in part) within the gypsy & travellers consultation exercise as a site for both a transit and permanent traveller site.

There has been interest from the Essex County Council in respect of the provision of joint depot facilities in this location, since the County do not have a long term legal interest in their current highways depot located at Hastingwood, near to Junction 7 on the M11.

Other current leaseholders, namely the operators of the golf driving range have expressed an interest in divesting themselves of their current leases to enable alternative uses.

Whilst the rationalisation of depot use within the District falls under the remit of the Depot Working Party, Chaired by the Chief Executive, the proposed review of the overall strategy for North Weald Airfield should include the relevant adjoining land and its usage and this report seeks to set out the key factors which align this review with depot rationalisation

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To update the Cabinet Committee on the status of previous decisions regarding Langston Road depot and to set out the linkages between potential decisions on the disposal of the depot site and consequent relocation of existing users and the strategic overview of the future of North Weald Airfield.

Other Options for Action:

In terms of this report, there are no other options for action

Report:

MAPS WILL BE PROVIDED AT THE MEETING TO ASSIST MEMBERS WITH THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES

1. The Council utilises depots located within the district, as follows:

Location	Users
Langston Road, Loughton	Waste Management (Officers and Sita) Grounds Maintenance Fleet Maintenance and MoT operation Essex County Council Meals on Wheels Museum store
Epping	Housing Maintenance
Burton Road, Debden	Parking (Officers and Vinci Park)
Town Mead, Waltham Abbey	Country Care Waltham Abbey Town Council

For the purposes of this report, reference will only be made to the depot at Langston Road, Loughton

2. Back in 2005 it had been agreed to close down the fleet operations at Langston Road. However, for a number of reasons, this decision has not been implemented. In November 2007, Cabinet agreed to appoint consultants to submit a planning application in respect of the depot site for Class B1, B2 and B8. This application was submitted and was approved by the Area Planning Committee South at its meeting on the 2nd of July 2008 (decision notice attached).

3. Cabinet, at its meeting in September 2008 received a report from the Director of Corporate Support Services recommending that no action be taken in respect of the closure of Fleet Operations until such time as the strategic review of the Council's depots had been completed. That recommendation was accepted by Cabinet (Cabinet minute attached).

4. Whilst the formal strategic review of depot accommodation has yet to commence, it is important to give early consideration to the future use of the depot at Langston Road, since decisions in that regard have the potential to impact upon land use at or adjoining North Weald Airfield. The primary drivers for this early consideration are:

- (i) the possible asset value of the Langston Road depot;
- (ii) the operational benefits of a depot located at North Weald airfield including the benefits of extending the depot to include a waste transfer or handling facility;
- (iii) economies of scale which might arise through joint depot arrangements with another party, such as Essex County Council;
- (iv) the gypsy & traveller consultation exercise; and
- (v) the impact such a development might have upon the future development of the Airfield for aviation or mixed use

5. Taking each of the above in turn:

(i) It is the Council's declared policy to make the best use of its capital assets primarily to generate revenue to support or develop existing and new service provision. The land adjoining the depot site (known as T11) was sold for development for just over £6 million. It has planning consent for B1, B2 and B8. It is reasonable to assume that the existing depot site, with its planning consent, will be of interest to potential developers, although the current economic climate will clearly have an impact on values and developers appetites for the acquisition of land for development. However, for the site to be disposed of, the current Council users would need to be relocated with leases for non Council businesses being brought to an end. For some users this may well be straightforward with other land in the Council's current ownership being available for use, but for others it could be problematical. Furthermore, there would have to be a clear financial benefit to the Council after the costs of disposal and constructing new depot facilities have been taken into account.

(ii) The existing depot, with its mix of uses, is not entirely suitable for use as a waste management facility, although parts of it are licensed for that purpose. There are on-going health & safety issues due in the main to the risks associated with the movement of large vehicles and their interaction with people moving around the site. This of itself does not require the waste management facilities to be relocated, since a satisfactory outcome could also be achieved through rationalising activities on the Langston Road site and removing incompatible uses.

There is no land within the fenced borders of the Airfield where a depot facility could be constructed, based on current planning constraints and Airfield use. However, there is land in Council ownership bordering Merlin Way, between the gymnasium and the golf driving range, where there is sufficient space for a depot to be constructed. At this time it is known that the lessee of the golf driving range is seeking to cease that use and there may also be an opportunity to expand the amount of land available for a depot and other ancillary uses. This land would require planning consent for this change of use.

The operational benefits of a waste depot in this location are far from certain, even if it was supplemented in some way with ancillary waste management facilities such as a transfer station. Benefits may arise through the need to use fewer vehicles travelling either to landfill or to re-processors, due to the use of the site for bulking of materials. However, there will be operational costs associated with the ancillary operations and these may well balance out the savings arising from the use of fewer vehicles.

(iii) The shared use of a depot with another user may however tilt the balance of operational savings and costs to the extent that genuine CSB savings could be obtained. This sharing could be in the form of:

- (a) a highways depot with Essex County Council; or
- (b) a transfer/bulking facility with Essex County Council

It is likely that for the County to part fund and operate a transfer facility, they will wish to see the facility taking waste from other waste collection authorities, such as Harlow. There may well be political difficulties with such an arrangement. There are no obvious barriers to the shared use with the County Highways service who are keen to find an alternative site to their present one at Hastingwood, close to junction 7 on the M11 (behind the Macdonalds restaurant).

(iv) The issues around the land consultation as part of the gypsy & traveller consultation are well known and do not need to be repeated here.

(v) The impacts that any developments as set out in paragraphs (i) to (iv) above have on the Airfield depend greatly upon what the Council is seeking to achieve. There may well be existing tenants on and users of the Airfield who would be alarmed about any such development near to an operational airfield and it is certainly the case that steps would have to be taken to safeguard the airfield from some of the adverse effects of waste plants such as wind blown waste and the attraction of wildlife, particularly birds. However, with correct design and operational standards such issues can be overcome. More difficult to overcome would be the perceived effect upon the development of the Airfield through its main access being effectively surrounded by a waste plant and its ancillary activities. This might also be the case with gypsy & traveller sites. Developers of leisure based or techno-industrial facilities may consider that these uses were incompatible and would not wish to develop modern hi-tech facilities adjacent to waste plants and similar activities.

6. It can therefore be seen that decisions regarding the future retention or disposal of the Langston Road depot site are intrinsically linked with this strategic review of the Airfield.

Resource Implications:

There are no direct resource implications associated with this information report. Reports elsewhere on the agenda set out current resourcing issues.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Langston Road depot has two main third party users:

- (i) Sita, the Council's waste management service provider, who, through the contract, has a right to have a depot provided, free of charge; and
- (ii) The County Council's meals on wheels service provider, who has a lease for the use of their facilities. Details of the lease and its termination arrangements will be provided at the meeting.
- (iii) Parts of the depot are licensed for use as a waste facility with the Environment Agency. This covers the storage of waste awaiting collection by the County Council, such as tyres, batteries and gas cylinders

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The major implication relates to the delivery of the waste management service. This is a key front line service which requires the provision of depot facilities for vehicles, ancillary plant, storage and manpower. The location of the depot can have an operational and financial impact on the delivery of the service.

Consultation Undertaken:

None at this stage

Background Papers:

Cabinet decisions referred in report

Impact Assessments:

Nil at this stage