

Report to the North Weald Airfield Cabinet Committee



Report reference: *NWA-009-2009/10*
Date of meeting: *7 December 2009*

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance & Economic Development
Subject: Use of land adjacent to Merlin Way, North Weald
Responsible Officer: J Gilbert (01992 564062).
Democratic Services Officer: Rebecca Perrin (01992 564532).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To note the interest of Essex County Council in securing an interest over the land adjoining North Weald Airfield at Merlin Way, North Weald for both a waste transfer station and highways depot; and**
- (2) To consider recommending to Cabinet that the land as detailed in appendix 1 be temporarily “set aside” and excluded from the consultant’s review of the airfield and the gypsy & traveller review to enable negotiations to be undertaken with the County Council.**

Executive Summary:

The Council has been approached by Essex County Council in their role as the waste disposal authority and waste planning authority, with regards to land adjacent to the Airfield in Merlin Way for possible use as a waste transfer station. They have also approached the Council with respect to the use of the same land as a possible replacement highways depot.

The land in question may also be suitable for the relocation of the waste management services currently provided from the Langston Road, which, following consideration of the relocation of other existing users would enable the depot site to be vacated and made available for disposal.

This report sets out the proposals and seeks the Cabinet Committee’s views further to a report on potential relocation options for services currently being delivered from the Langston Road Depot, which will be considered by Cabinet on the 21st of December 2009.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To enable consideration to be given to the use of land adjoining the Airfield at Merlin Way and to put into place a strategy for the eventual vacation and disposal of the existing depot site at Langston Road, Loughton

Other Options for Action:

A decision on the use of the land could be deferred, but this does not provide the degree of certainty required by the County Council in respect of the transfer station.

Report:

1. At the last meeting of the North Weald Strategy Cabinet Committee in July 2009, it had been agreed to pursue the relocation of the depot at Langston Road in conjunction with the strategic review of the airfield (Minute ref: 27 July 2009, 7). As part of that decision Members considered:
 - (a) the operational benefits of a depot co-located with a transfer station at the airfield;
 - (b) economies of scale which might arise through joint depot arrangements with Essex County Council;
 - (c) the gypsy & traveller consultative exercise; and
 - (d) the impact such developments might have upon the future of the airfield for aviation or mixed use.

Waste transfer facility

2. Members will recall that within the Essex waste local plan, land on the concrete apron on the airfield has been identified as a preferred location for a "major waste disposal facility". However, this land is used as part of the Saturday market and furthermore is wholly the 500 metre 'restricted use' covenant which was imposed as part of the sale of the Parade Ground site for housing. In effect therefore, irrespective of the waste local plan, this land is not available for a waste purpose.
3. Since the waste local plan had been adopted there have been significant changes in the County Council's waste strategy. The County and the Districts/Boroughs have adopted the new Essex Joint Municipal Waste Strategy, which clearly sets out the authorities' aspirations for waste disposal for the next 25 years. The emphasis within the Strategy is for high recycling with the disposal technologies built around mechanical and biological treatment (MBT) and composting. The recently approved PFI bid, and its associated outline business case, does not suggest that a major waste facility be built at the airfield, but does indicate a need for a waste transfer facility in the area to serve this and Harlow District, in order to reduce the number of vehicle movements to the MBT plant which will be constructed in Basildon.
4. County officers have visited the airfield with their District colleagues to look at the land which is located outside of the airfield perimeter itself, and runs alongside Merlin way between the gymnasium and the roundabout (see plan at appendix 1). They believe the land to be eminently suitable, although they recognise existing planning constraints which would require an exception to current green belt policy. Whilst they would prefer any facility to be located near to the gymnasium, this will not be possible due to the previously mentioned 500 metre restricted use zone. However, there is space within the land in the Council's ownership, especially since the operator of golf driving range located towards the roundabout is shortly to surrender their lease, leaving that land also available.
5. Public concern in respect of waste facilities is understood. However, a transfer facility is a very basic operation, requiring just a large building, in which residual waste is deposited, stored and then bulked up for onward transfer to the MBT plant. There is no reason why a properly constructed building with appropriate controls over potential nuisances could not be satisfactorily operated in the proposed location. In terms of its impact upon other potential uses/users, the building will look no different to any other large industrial building. Attached to the report are some photographs of a similar (albeit larger) facility at Haverhill in Suffolk.
6. County officers believe that a site of around 2.5 hectares (4 acres) would be required, to handle in the region of 45,000 to 50,000 tonnes of residual waste per annum. The actual amount would depend upon the success of the recycling arrangements of this Council and

Harlow Council in keeping residual waste to a minimum. Based on:

- (i) 50,000 tonnes per annum;
- (ii) a refuse freighter having a capacity of 8 tonnes;
- (iii) a bulker having a capacity of 24 tonnes;
- (iv) the transfer station working Monday to Friday; and
- (v) a vehicle movement being a trip to or a trip from the transfer station.

This equates to around 60 vehicle movements per day.

7. There is a limited time period available to the County for the acquisition of a suitable site and the construction of a transfer facility, in order to ensure that it is available in time for the start up of the MBT plant. This effectively means that the County need to secure the 'control' of a site by August 2010 at the latest. This is a very short time frame, but given the nature of the location and existing planning controls, it is prudent to assume that pre-development issues could take an extended period to resolve.

8. There are potential revenue benefits to the Council from having access to a transfer facility. Once the new MBT is operational, freighters will be required to travel to Basildon, which is a lengthy journey, subject to delays on the motorway and A127. This can lead to significant operational difficulties and costs. If a transfer facility were available locally, freighters would only be required to travel to that facility, which has the potential to reduce down time and also reduce the numbers of freighters required to deliver the service. Each freighter and crew costs in the region of £120,000 per annum.

County Highways Depot

9. Some time has elapsed since the County's agents approached the Council with regard to the availability of land for a replacement highways depot. The original approach was to seek an alternative location to the existing highways depot at Hastingwood (to the immediate rear of McDonalds) since their current interest in the site is coming to an end. Officers have therefore sought updated information from their County colleagues as to the status of their land search and will report back at the meeting if a response has been received.

Langston Road Depot

10. Cabinet has already made the decision that it wishes to see the depot site vacated so that it can be marketed for alternative uses. However, because of the current mixed use, this is not straightforward to achieve. The current users of the site are:

- (i) waste management (Sita and EFDC client officers);
- (ii) ground maintenance;
- (iii) fleet operations and MoT bays;
- (iv) museum store; and
- (v) the WRVS undertaking the County Council's meals on wheels service

11. These multiple uses are causing concerns. The depot site is overcrowded and the risks associated with the current mix of heavy plant and people has been brought to the Council's attention by the Health & Safety Executive and the Council's own Safety Officer. Whilst steps have been taken to control activities on site, the current situation is inherently unsatisfactory and very difficult to manage. The only solution is for some of the activities at the depot to cease or to be transferred to alternative locations. A report is being prepared for the Cabinet meeting on the 21st of December 2009, setting out options in respect of current depot users.

12. The Sita contract requires that the Council makes depot facilities available, although

there is no commitment to a specific location. The contract runs until November 2012 with an option to extend until November 2014. For a future waste contract to operate efficiently, a service provider will require access to a 'local' depot, since otherwise operational costs will rise significantly. It is very unlikely that an incoming service provider will have local depot facilities, unless they are already providing similar services in an adjoining local authority area and that facility is large enough to accommodate the resources required to service our contract as well.

Possible interim strategy

13. This is a very complex issue, with the need to consider:
 - (a) the location of a range of services and the costs/benefits of existing depot disposal and new depot provision;
 - (b) the need to consider, even at this early stage, the potential outcome of the review of the grounds maintenance and nursery services and the retendering options for the waste contract; and
 - (c) the potential benefits of shared services in the future.

14. There is however reasonable certainty in the wish of the County Council to take control of some of the land for a transfer station, subject to the normal contractual niceties. There are clear synergies between this use and those of a waste and/or highways depot, and shared uses of this type may well result in economies of scale for construction and on-going operations.

15. The likely order in which these projects will be required is as follows:
 - (i) the transfer station;
 - (ii) a highways depot; and
 - (iii) a replacement waste depot

Therefore an option at this stage may be to exclude this land from the consultant's review of the operational airfield and from the gypsy & traveller exercise, thereby ring fencing it for waste/depot related activities. This would enable negotiations with the County to commence whilst providing this Council with additional time to enable it to fully work through all the options regarding its own land holding and future depot requirements.

Resource Implications:

Financial consequences cannot be firmly established at this time ahead of decisions being made. However, in due course Cabinet will have to consider the financial merits of service relocation based upon the likely income streams arising from the sale of the Langston Road Depot site and land at North Weald to the County Council against the expenditure associated with the construction of new depot facilities away from Langston Road, whether solely or jointly with other agencies. There will also be potentially positive revenue consequences arising from reduced management costs of new facilities due to, for example, improved thermal efficiencies of new buildings.

Legal & governance implications

Ongoing issues at the Langston Road Depot have possible implications for health & safety and action by the HSE against the Council. No other implications at this stage.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

There are a number of implications depending upon decisions made going forward. These will include efficiencies for the waste management service and reduced carbon footprint from reductions in vehicle movements and thermal efficiencies at new depot facilities

Consultation Undertaken:

Initial discussions with Essex County Council regarding transfer facilities and possible depot provision

Background Papers:

Information on Haverhill transfer station

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The greatest risk at this time is that of the current mixed use of the Langston Road Depot and the associated health& safety implications

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?