

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-066-2009/10  
**Date of meeting:** 21 December 2009



**Portfolio:** Leader  
Legal and Estates

**Subject:** Future Development of Langston Road Depot and other Key Sites within the District.

**Responsible Officer:** Mike Tipping (01992 564280).

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

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### **Decisions Required:**

- (1) That the Council agrees in principle to the relocation of the Grounds Maintenance section, Vehicle Workshop MoT and servicing bays and the Waste Management Team to an alternative site on the Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate;
- (2) That a detailed report on the construction and relocation costs be submitted to a future meeting before a final decision is made;
- (3) That the relocation of the Refuse and Street Cleansing Contractor from Langston Road Depot be timed to coincide with the renewal of the current contract in 2012 or 2014;
- (4) To determine the request by the WRVS for a six months extension of their existing lease at the Depot from April to September 2011, but for reasons of health and safety, any agreement to extend their lease be conditional on the WRVS that they do not have more than 22 vehicles on site at any one time and the Council being satisfied with the arrangements the WRVS propose to use to comply with this requirement;
- (5) That if an extension is granted the WRVS be advised that the Council will not be able to assist with accommodation at the Depot beyond September 2011; and
- (6) That a District Development Fund supplementary estimate in the sum of £15,000 be made for 2009/10 to procure specialist external advice on the development potential of key sites within the District that could lead to increasing revenue income to the Council and in addition an existing sum of £10,000 currently allocated for consultancy fees in connection with Council Car Parks be reallocated for use in connection with key sites work.

### **Executive Summary:**

This report sets out an outline strategy for the relocation of Council services away from Langston Road depot between now and 2012/14 and the implications for external tenants in order to solve short term operational problems and to achieve the medium to long term strategic objective of either selling the site or as an alternative redeveloping the site to achieve new streams of revenue income.

The report also seeks approval to reallocate some existing DDF funding in 2009/10 and supplementary funding to conduct initial feasibility studies and associated work in respect of a number of key sites within the District that may be suitable for development.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decisions:**

To mitigate outstanding health and safety issues in relation to overcrowding at the depot.

To make progress in achieving the Council's objective of vacating and selling the site or as an alternative redeveloping the site to achieve increased revenue income.

### **Other Options for Action:**

To do nothing. This is not a viable option for reasons of health and safety associated with the daily operations at the Depot and also complying with the Council's policy to dispose of the site.

To relocate the Council's services to another site(s) elsewhere in the District. There are no sites within the Council's ownership that would meet the operational requirements or would be suitable for the relocation of these services.

### **Report:**

#### Background

1. Langston Road Depot is situated near to the junction of Langston Road and Chigwell Lane in Loughton and is 0.998 hectares (2.47 acres) in area with vehicular and pedestrian access/egress onto Langston Road. A plan showing the site is attached at Appendix I.

2. The depot currently accommodates:

- Fleet Operations and MoT Testing Station;
- Grounds Maintenance Section;
- EFDC Waste Management Team;
- SITA – the Waste Management Contractor;
- Museum Store;
- WRVS undertaking the County Council's meals on wheels service; and
- Essex County Council mobile Library Vehicle .

3. The Cabinet at its meeting on 12 October 2009 considered the minutes of the meeting of the North Weald Airfield Strategy Cabinet Committee held on 27 July 2009 and in relation Depot Facilities agreed as follows:

*“(11) That the status of decisions on the Langston Road Depot be noted;*

*(12) That the key factors linking the agreed disposal of the Langston Road Depot with the strategic review of the Airfield be acknowledged; and*

*(13) That the relocation of the Depot be pursued in conjunction with the strategic review of the Airfield whilst accepting that there may be other potential sites in the District which would be better suited to the relocation of the Depot.”*

4. The Asset Management Coordination Group chaired by the Chief Executive has been

looking at how best to achieve the relocation of services from the depot, taking into account the operational requirements of the services in question and possible alternative sites within the Council's ownership including North Weald Airfield.

### Operational Issues

5. The multiple uses at the Depot 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.

### Relocation Proposal

6. The Council owns an area of undeveloped land on the Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate situated at the western end of the estate. The site approximately 0.518 hectare (1.28 acre) in area is shown on the plan attached at Appendix II.

7. Outline planning permission has previously been granted on the site for B1/B2 extension to the industrial estate.

8. A local firm of surveyors has been commissioned to undertake an initial feasibility of the site, to sketch layout stage, including highway access implications. The initial view is that the site could accommodate the operational needs of the Grounds Maintenance Service, the Council's Waste Management Team and the Fleet Operations Mot and servicing bays.

### Fleet Operations and MoT Test Station

9. Fleet Operations are responsible for servicing the Council's vehicle fleet. It also carries out licensing and MoT inspections on taxis and private hire vehicles as well as all MoT testing work for three local franchised car dealers and the general public. A small amount of vehicle servicing is also undertaken for other public bodies.

10. Cabinet had previously agreed that Fleet Operations should be closed down because it was not financially viable. However, in view of the continually increasing amount of MoT work which has significantly increased the income generated, Cabinet, at its meeting on 1 September 2008, agreed that in view of the improved financial situation Fleet Operations should continue to operate until the strategic review of depots had been completed.

11. It is proposed to conduct a full review of the section to ensure its continued financial viability before making any recommendation that the service be transferred to a new location.

### Grounds Maintenance

12. A high percentage of the grounds maintenance work is carried out in the south of the District, and therefore it would be more cost effective for the service to remain based in the south. The Oakwood Hill site would offer flexibility to take into account any change in requirements that may arise from the review of the Grounds Maintenance and Nursery Services.

### Waste Management Team

13. At present the Council's own Waste Management Client Team are co-located with the Refuse and Street Cleansing contractor at Langston Road. Whilst this does have

advantages it is not essential for co-location to continue. This provides flexibility when looking at alternative sites.

#### SITA – The Waste Management Contractor

14. A significant proportion of the depot is occupied by the waste management contractor, with the use of part of the office accommodation, space for parking refuse freighters and other vehicles and also for the temporary holding of some specific materials before these are transferred on for disposal.

15. The requirements of the contractor in terms of the number of vehicles based at the depot has increased on a permanent basis as a result of the recent changes to the refuse and recycling collection arrangements. Given the scale of current operations there is no prospect of relocating the contractor from Langston Road before the renewal of the current contract in 2012 or 2014.

#### WRVS – Essex County Meals on Wheels Service

16. The WRVS has a base at Langston Road from which it provides the County Meals on Wheels Service to the Epping Forest District and some neighbouring areas. Their contract with the County Council runs until September 2010 with the option for an extension of up to two years. The WRVS are waiting for confirmation as to whether or not an extension will be granted by the County Council.

17. In anticipation that an extension will be granted the WRVS has made a formal request that their existing lease be extended from its current expiry on 28 March 2011 until the end of September 2011.

18. As part of their lease the WRVS have allocated for their use 22 parking spaces within the Depot, sufficient to accommodate their fleet of delivery vehicles. The logistics of their operations means that they regularly exceed this allocation, particularly when their drivers have parked their own cars and are loading up the vans before starting their rounds, and when they return to the depot.

19. This exacerbates an already unsatisfactory situation and results in vehicles being parked where they should not in circulatory routes or in other organisations' spaces which inevitably leads to friction from time to time. Discussions have taken place with Managers of the WRVS about possible ways in which the parking issues could be resolved but without success.

20. This is symptomatic of the overcrowded nature of the Depot and it is the Officers' view that if the Council is minded to grant an extension to their lease it must be conditional upon the WRVS adequately managing their parking, with immediate effect, so as not to exceed their allocation.

21. The Council could of course take the view that the needs of its own operations should come first and, given the potential consequences if a serious health and safety incident occurred, could decide that the continued presence of the WRVS at the Depot can no longer be sustained and they should be given notice to quit.

22. It is recognised that this would be a difficult decision to make given the nature of the service they provide. The WRVS has said that if they had to leave the depot they would not be able to continue to provide a service.

## Other Key Sites

23. The Asset Management Co-ordination Group are also looking at the development potential to increase income of other key sites within the District. These include:

- Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate as described above;
- Merlin Way North Weald;
- Cartersfield Road Industrial Estate Waltham Abbey;
- Pyrles Lane Nursery Site;
- Medical Centre Site North Weald;
- Torrington Drive Loughton;
- Sir Winston Churchill Public House The Broadway;
- St. John Road Epping;
- Town Mead Depot; and
- The Broadway parking area/Burton Road depot.

24. There will be speculative costs involved in determining the development potential and the likely return on investment for each site which will require specialist external advice for which budgetary provision does not exist.

25. It is proposed to present a report to the Cabinet on 1 February 2010 setting out the anticipated costs involved in examining each of the sites to assist Members to decide how they wish to proceed and what level of budgetary provision they wish to make to enable this work to progress.

26. In the meantime Cabinet is requested to approve a reallocation of existing DDF budget in the sum of £10,000 and in addition a supplementary DDF estimate in the sum of £15,000 in 2009/10 to enable progress to be made on the immediate issues surrounding the Oakwood Hill /Langston Road sites and other sites where specialist advice is likely to be required during the current financial year.

### **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.

Potential loss of £40,000 pa rental income depending on the decision regarding the WRVS

### **Legal and 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:**

None.

**Background Papers:**

Previous Cabinet reports.

**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?*

*What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?*  
N/A.

*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?*  
N/A.