

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference: C-078-2010/11**

**Date of meeting: 18 April 2011**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio: Finance & Economic Development**

**Subject: Relocation of Depot facilities at Langston Road, Loughton to land at North Weald Airfield, North Weald**

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

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

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) To give approval to the relocation of Depot facilities at Langston Road, Loughton to land adjacent to the control tower at North Weald Airfield;**
- (2) That subject to recommendation (1) to make a planning application for a permanent depot facility and amend the 201/12 key objective 1 in the 2011/15 Corporate Plan accordingly; and**
- (3) That a supplementary capital estimate of £1.5 million be sought to meet the costs of site assessment, design, construction of the new depot facility and any alterations to existing buildings and car parking areas.**

### **Executive Summary:**

**Throughout this report reference to “waste management service(s)” means this Council’s refuse collection, recycling and street cleansing services only and for the avoidance of doubt excludes any form of waste transfer operations.**

After the sale of T11 industrial site in 2007 which adjoins the existing Council Depot, negotiations have taken place with the owners resulting in a proposal for development of a retail park utilising T11 and the adjoining Council owned depot site. Should this proceed, a substantial income for the Council will be generated. A planning application for this development has been submitted.

In the event of the planning permission being granted it will be necessary to relocate the existing users of the Depot site to alternative locations. It has already been agreed by the Council to move the Grounds Maintenance and Vehicle / MOT Workshop to an undeveloped land on Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate, Loughton, leaving the waste operations to be found a satisfactory alternative location.

This report proposes that a new depot facility for the waste service be provided on Council owned land at North Weald Airfield, that a planning application be made and capital resources sought to proceed.

## **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To enable the proposed redevelopment to proceed the transfer out of the Depot site of all existing services is required. All services except waste services have been found alternative sites but none of those are also able to accommodate the waste service. Having considered all current Council land holdings, only those identified near or within the Airfield are considered suitable.

## **Other Options for Action:**

To relocate the depot to a site outside the district on land not owned by the Council. This option would require land acquisition and its associated costs as well as incurring additional service costs arising from operating outside of the district.

Whilst it is possible to request that the Council's waste contractor Sita should provide a depot, this would result in delays and additional costs, as well as complications once the contract with Sita reaches its end.

It might be possible to share a depot with a neighbouring authority but at this time there is no suitable location available.

## **Report:**

### Background & Existing Situation

1. The Council Depot at Langston Road was constructed in the mid 1980s and comprises offices, workshops and storage areas for a range of Council services and contractors. These services are Waste Management, Ground Maintenance, Vehicle Workshop/MOT station, and the Museum store.

2. In 2007, the Council sold a vacant industrial development site (known as T11) adjacent to the depot. After the sale of T11, considerable interest was shown in acquiring the Council Depot due to its prime location. In this regard, discussions were held in relation to the possible development of a retail park by combining the land of T11 and the Council depot and in 2010, the Council entered into negotiations with the owners of the T11 site. A planning application has been submitted and this is presently under consideration.

3. It has already been agreed by the Council to relocate the Ground Maintenance Service and the Vehicle/MOT Workshops to Council owned undeveloped land on the Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate, Loughton, with the museum store being relocated to Council owned industrial premises in Waltham Abbey.

4. The Council's waste management service occupies a significant portion of the existing depot. The proposed site at Oakwood Hill, an area of 1.28 acres, will not, alongside grounds maintenance and the vehicle workshops, be able to accommodate the space requirements of the waste management service, which include offices, parking of refuse and recycling freighters and street cleansing vehicles, the storage of wheeled bins and the temporary storage of white goods and other materials such as batteries, gas bottles, tyres, etc.

5. The timescale for the relocation is set out in the Council's 2011/15 Corporate Plan as follows:

- cost estimates & agreement to fund by September 2011;
- determination of planning application by December 2011;
- design and tender of replacement depot by September 2012 ; and
- relocation complete by March 2013.

### Alternative depot site

6. An area of between 2.0 – 2.5 acres (1 hectare) is required to provide an efficient replacement depot. The call for sites list of land holdings has been studied and a number of Publicly owned sites of sufficient area have been considered. These sites have included:

<b>Location</b>	<b>Reason for rejection</b>
Council owned land in Luxborough Lane, Chigwell	Access difficulties at junction with Manor Road Proximity to residential dwellings
Council owned land at Town Mead, Waltham Abbey	Access difficulties Proximity to residential dwellings Potential for flooding
Essex County owned land in Luxborough Lane, Chigwell	Access difficulties at junction with Manor Road Proximity to residential dwellings Unlikely to become available to enable agreed timeframe to be achieved
Essex County owned land in Cartersfield Road, Waltham Abbey	Access and parking difficulties Unlikely to become available to enable agreed timeframe to be achieved
Essex County owned land in Mill Lane, Ongar	Access difficulties Unlikely to become available to enable agreed timeframe to be achieved

7. This exercise resulted in just two sites being identified with the potential to be used for the purpose of a depot. The locations in plan form are attached as an Appendix and these are:

- (a) land to the east of Merlin Way (8.7 hectares and including the former golf driving range); and
- (b) land to the west of Merlin Way, inside the boundary of the Airfield and located to the north and east of the control tower.

8. Although it may be possible to acquire alternative sites in private ownership or wait to see whether Sita could find a site suitable for such development, the financial and timing risks associated with these approaches is considered to be too great. Equally, although it would be technically possible to share a facility with a neighbouring authority, at this time no practical opportunities for sharing exist.

9. Each site has had a preliminary assessment including undertaking an initial ecological survey. The land to the east of Merlin Way has been found to contain a number of important animal and plant species as well as being potentially seriously contaminated. Initial discussions with the Council's planning officers also suggests that this site is particularly sensitive in planning terms and significant justification would be required for a planning consent in the green belt.

10. The second site within the boundary of the Airfield has fewer ecological and potential contamination issues as well as being more acceptable to planning officers in terms of demonstrating an exception to current green belt policy. It also has the advantage of having an existing access to the highway, of being close to the control tower which contains office accommodation which could be used by the Council's client team thereby reducing the scope of the new depot and the costs associated with it. Car parking for the client team and Sita personnel could also be provided in part away from the main depot site, again reducing land take and potential costs.

#### The Halcrow Report

11. The North Weald Airfield & Asset Management cabinet Committee recently received the final report on the possibilities of intensifying aviation activity at the Airfield. The outcome of that meeting will be reported to Cabinet at its meeting in June 2011. In considering the scale of any intensification, a key issue will be the availability of sufficient runway space and electronic landing aids that would enable business type of aircraft to use the Airfield. If the Council is to keep its options open it will be important to ensure that the runway usage is not compromised by inappropriate development close to the main runway. In that context the site adjacent to the control tower is further from the main runway and therefore less likely to cause any potential conflict of use in the future.

#### Facilities at the Proposed Depot

12. On the basis of developing the site adjacent to the control tower, the proposed depot would consist of the following facilities:

- Office, changing and facility accommodation (via a portacabin(s)) for Sita personnel
- paved (concrete) parking spaces for refuse, recycling and street cleansing vehicles
- storage hangars for EFDC & Sita
- facility for temporary storage of white goods, batteries, paint, empty gas bottles and tyres)
- a small vehicle workshop for minor repairs to vehicles
- fuel storage and pumps (subject to further consideration)
- vehicle wash (subject to further consideration)
- storage area for wheelie bins, recycling bags, etc.

#### Planning Considerations

13. As indicated in paragraphs 6 to 10 above, both sites have planning constraints and both sit wholly within the Green Belt. Therefore, any planning application for use as a depot will be required to justify an exception to Green Belt policy. Whilst both sites are therefore sensitive, planning officers have indicated that they consider the second site to be preferable on the basis that:

- (i) there are fewer ecological burdens to overcome;
- (ii) the site borders existing development, namely the tower, associated buildings and storage facility for grounds maintenance and fire fighting equipment; and
- (iii) the existing highway access could be used.

14. However, the application would remain a sensitive one and the Council would need to demonstrate, as set out in paragraphs 6 to 8 above, that no other suitable sites exist which could be used for this purpose.

15. Consideration is also required as to whether the application should be for a temporary or permanent consent. In exercising that consideration the following matters should be taken into account:

- (a) the probable costs of the depot (£1.5 million) will be the same whether it is temporary or permanent;
- (b) the current contract for the waste service requires the Council to make depot facilities available to the contractor; and
- (c) whilst a future contract could be let without a depot being provided, a bidding contractor would either have to find a depot site themselves or operate from another location away from the District, both adding significantly to the costs of the service as well as reducing service efficiency (see risk management below).

16. On this basis it is suggested that the depot should be permanent and that key objective (1) in the Council's newly adopted Council Plan 2011/15 should be amended to reflect that change.

**Resource Implications:**

At this stage the indicative cost of the provision of a depot facility at North Weald Airfield will be in the region of £1.5 million. However, it must be recognised that no site assessments (other than initial ecological) have been undertaken and therefore issues around contaminated land, the presence of discarded ordnance and access to foul drainage may still arise.

If the relocation proceeds there will be some temporary increase in the costs of service delivery resulting from Sita's costs of dealing with their staff having to travel from Loughton to North Weald. A number of their staff commute to Langston Road via public transport which will not be possible at the North Weald site. Sita will therefore operate a shuttle bus service for up to six months to enable their staff to make alternative travel arrangements.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

None at this stage.

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

An efficient depot is essential to the operation of the waste management service which is a key front line service to the community. The ability to have on site storage facilities for fuel is also potentially critical in terms of ensuring the Council's resilience to future fuel shortages or disruptions to supply.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

Discussion with Essex Wildlife Trust, North Weald Airfield, Highways, Environment Agency, Sita, and planning & drainage sections of EFDC.

**Background Papers:**

Ecological surveys of the two sites.

## Impact Assessments:

### Risk Management

Identified risks include:

- (a) an increase in the projected costs of the depot depending upon issues such as the outcome of the surveys; remediation measures required to address the issue of contamination; and any changes in the area required for the proposed depot;
- (b) complexity and length of planning process due to the location and nature of proposed site;
- (c) ensuring that current and future aviation activities are not adversely affected by the presence of a depot facility on the Airfield;
- (d) future waste contract/service delivery being such that smaller depot facility than is currently envisaged;
- (e) decision on whether to provide a fuel storage facility as part of the depot will have an impact upon the Council's resilience to future fuel shortages etc; and
- (f) not providing a permanent facility may significantly affect the future costs of service procurement in that if the Council cannot guarantee access to a local depot facility to a prospective service provider, they will inflate their tender costs to reflect, inter alia:
  - (i) the need for them to acquire an existing depot site elsewhere;
  - (ii) the need for them to have to acquire land and then develop a depot site elsewhere; and
  - (iii) the additional costs associated with a depot potentially being located outside of the District.

### 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?*  
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