

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-040-2018/19

Date of meeting: 11 April 2019



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Commercial and Regulatory Services

Subject: North Weald Airfield Masterplan

Responsible Officer: J Nolan (01992 564083).

Democratic Services: A Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To agree the Planning Brief for the Airfield Masterplan.
- (2) To agree to seek expressions of interest from consultants to develop a Masterplan for the airfield in accordance with the requirements of the Local Plan Submission Version.
- (3) To delegate the authority to appoint a suitable consultant to the Chief Executive.

Executive Summary:

North Weald Airfield is the Council's largest land asset and the Council has been seeking to maximise the potential of the site for a number of years. It has been identified in the in the Council's Local Plan Submission Version as a Strategic Master Planning site. This report seeks Members agreement to the adoption of a planning brief for the site and the appointment of consultants to undertake a full master planning exercise.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

In accordance with the requirements of the Local Plan Submission Version, the Council is proposing to develop a Masterplan.

Other Options for Action:

Not to carry out the Master Planning exercise now but to defer it to sometime in the future. This option has been discounted because any delay would mean a loss of potential income from any resulting development on the site.

Report:

1. North Weald Airfield is a 150ha site which is currently used for general aviation and commercial purposes, as well as playing host to a programme of outdoor events and other sporting/leisure uses. The aviation related activity is concentrated on the west side of the main runway, with the land to the east being utilised for non-aviation uses.

2. The Epping Forest District Council Local Plan Submission Version identifies a Masterplan Area comprising of the operational airfield, including associated runways, taxiways and grassed areas, and a cluster of industrial, commercial and retail uses in the south east with associated car parks and hardstanding. Included in the area is an indicative development area of 40.8 ha (NWB.E4) within which is a specifically identified employment site that is allocated for a minimum floorspace of 10 ha of B1/B2/B8 class use (business use/general industrial/storage and warehousing).
3. Reference is also made to the potential provision of a new Leisure Centre. However, as a result of further feasibility work undertaken at the request of Sport England, the Council has adopted an alternative option of replacing Epping Sports Centre at St John's Road in Epping. Therefore, as a result, the requirement for a Leisure Centre will not be considered as part of the proposed Masterplanning exercise. It is recognised that appropriate additional community provision will still be required in North Weald to meet the needs of planned housing growth which will be considered as part of the Masterplan for North Weald Bassett.
4. A draft planning brief has been prepared the purpose of which is to inform potential consultants about the site and the Council's aspirations for it (Appendix I).
5. The planning brief outlines the Council's requirements for the site. Apart from the 10ha of industrial use already identified, Members have in the past, expressed a desire to see an intensification of aviation use to the west of the main runway. This has, in part, already been achieved with the National Police Air Service and the Herts and Essex Air Ambulance joining our existing aviation tenants. The planning brief highlights the potential for aviation related uses to be increased.
6. Members have traditionally expressed a desire for the historic nature of the airfield to be retained and the planning brief makes specific reference to this.
7. The Control Tower on the airfield is Grade II listed as one of only seven of this type of post-war control towers in the country. As such it will be retained going forward. There is a requirement within the Local Plan Submission Version for community uses to the east of the main runway and it is envisaged that these could be potentially incorporated into the future use of the Control Tower without impinging on its historical integrity.
8. The Local Plan Submission Version refers to the construction of a new access from Epping Road (B181) to service the west of the site which will facilitate the proper separation of air activities from the rest of the site.
9. If aviation intensification is to take place on the airfield there may be a need for a considerable investment in the current infrastructure. Previous survey reports have identified a deterioration in the main runway and a lack of more advanced aviation related infrastructure such as landing lights, air/ground radar etc. Currently the airfield is unlicensed and consideration will have to be given as to if it should continue to be so. The design brief highlights these problems and seeks innovative solutions to them.
10. As part of the Master planning exercise officers are investigating the possibility of re-locating our offices to the southern part of the site on a location previously identified for use as a works depot. The re-location of our offices could also present the opportunity to facilitate a work space for other partner organisations such as the Parish Council.

11. The Masterplan and subsequent proposals will be considered and informed by a Quality Review Panel followed by the normal planning application processes.

Resource Implications:

The cost of this exercise will be met from the existing local plan DDF budget.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The council has a duty to utilise its assets in the best way possible, this proposal paves the way for the maximisation of the income potential for the airfield. As part of its community leadership role the Council should demonstrate that it is using its assets in such a way as to achieve a good rate of return whilst being sensitive to the needs and desires of its community as a whole. The progress of the Master Planning process will be the subject of regular reports to the Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The Strategic masterplanning process provides a comprehensive framework to assess the site in its current form (including but not limited to natural environment, ecology, landscape, transport and movement), to appreciate the potential impact of development options and to stipulate requirements within the final Masterplan that development must adhere to.

Consultation Undertaken:

No consultation has been undertaken so far however, as part of the master planning process an examination will be carried out by a quality review panel. Any submission to such a panel will require a thorough consultation to be undertaken with key stakeholders including the public.

Background Papers:

Previous reports on North Weald Airfield.
Draft Planning Brief.

Risk Management:

The main risk associated with this project is not progressing it in a timely fashion. It is proposed to mitigate this risk by developing a robust project planning framework using the councils Pentana system which will incorporate regular update reports to Members.