

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 12 JULY 2004 AT 2.00 P.M.

Agenda Item No.

16

PROPOSED RELOCATION OF ST ALBANS FIRE STATION

Joint Report: Corporate Director (People and Property), and Chief Fire Officer

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Executive Members: Iris Tarry and David Beatty

Local Members:- Chris White and Jill Gipps

1.0 Purpose of report

1.1 To consider a scheme under which a new fire station would be established at London Road and the existing fire station at Harpenden Road would be closed.

2.0 Summary

2.1 The Fire and Rescue Service is not able fully to meet the attendance times for the area served by the existing fire station. It has been concluded that it is necessary to relocate the station in order that the attendance times can be met.

2.2 A site search and a feasibility study have been carried out leading to the identification and acquisition of a suitable new site adjacent to the Francis Bacon School in London Road, St Albans. Planning permission for a new fire station has been granted.

2.3 A scheme for design and construction of a new fire station, with estimated costs, has been provided.

2.4 The existing fire station occupies a key part of a larger site at Harpenden Road, St Albans. This larger site benefits from a resolution by the Local Planning Authority to grant planning permission for the construction of approximately 48 dwellings and community facilities, subject to a section 106 planning agreement.

2.5 The proposed replacement Fire Station scheme is contained in the forward capital programme as a self-financing scheme. There are a

number of complex land and development issues yet to be resolved in order that a comprehensive plan for rationalisation of the larger Harpenden Road site can proceed.

- 2.6 It is proposed that forward funding be provided to allow the fire station be relocated and to resolve the service attendance times at the earliest opportunity. This would also provide a first phase of rationalisation of the larger Harpenden Road site.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to consider authorising the proposed new fire station scheme and the necessary capital funding arrangements.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 The County Council currently operates a Fire Station at Harpenden Road, St Albans. The Fire and Rescue Service is not able fully to meet the attendance times for the area served by the station from this location. It has been concluded that it is necessary to relocate the station in order that the times can be met. A site search and a feasibility study have been carried out.
- 4.2 At its meeting on 19 November 2001, the Executive Committee decided "That the County Council should submit an appropriate planning application, and make and submit a compulsory purchase order, if necessary, to achieve the provision of a new fire station on a site at Francis Bacon School, London Road, St Albans".
- 4.3 Detailed drive time isochrones have indicated that the required attendance times to London Colney, How Wood and adjacent areas can be achieved from the London Road site, while maintaining adequate fire cover to the St Albans area.
- 4.4 At its meeting on 9 July 2002 the Development Control Committee resolved to grant planning permission for a new Fire Station at that site. The matter was then referred to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), as a departure from the Development Plan. The ODPM did not intervene and planning permission was then granted.
- 4.5 There followed detailed negotiations for sale and purchase of the site and the establishment of an intended capital scheme for use of the sale proceeds for school premises development. The County Council provided support to the school regarding the school site capacity assessment and it was concluded that the school would retain the ability to expand to eight forms of entry after disposal of the proposed Fire Station site.
- 4.6 Work on the first Fire Service Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) has indicated that the London Road site would support the greater emphasis on life safety.
- 4.7 After the necessary local consultations the Governing Body of Francis Bacon Foundation School, as owners of the school property, applied to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for consent to sell the site. This consent was required as the land formed part of the school playing fields and so had protection under the provisions of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.
- 4.8 By letter dated 18 May 2004 the Department for Education and Skills advised that the Secretary of State had consented to the intended sale. Arrangements for purchase of the site were concluded and completed on 25 June 2004. The site is shown on plan EM10369 attached.

- 4.8 Whilst the lengthy site planning and acquisition processes were completed a detailed scheme for the proposed new fire station was developed and detailed planning permission obtained.

5.0 Proposed Scheme

- 5.1 The scheme as now developed and permitted is illustrated on the Mace isometric view drawing attached and is described in the next paragraph.

- 5.2 A single storey accommodation block comprises offices, training room, dormitories, shower/changing rooms, and kitchen. Adjoining is a linked appliance garage for six vehicles and services allowing for 24 hours operations. The external walls comprise blue brick plinths cladding in coloured sheet with a curved sheet roof. A separate training block comprises a practice tower and workshops for servicing equipment and a training room for fire service staff and community use. The station has a drill yard surface to the front of the site with parking for visitors and footpath access. The rear yard incorporates turning space for vehicles, fuel storage, car parking, fire demonstration facilities and an area for practice on damaged vehicles. A canopy extends to the rear of the appliance bay to allow covered washing of the fire tenders complete with water recycling. The scheme includes automatic operation of traffic signals in the London Road highway and other highway work to allow safe exit and entrance. A new security fence is to be erected to the boundaries with a timber fence to the west alongside the neighbouring properties.

- 5.3 The detailed scheme cost estimates indicate that total cost of construction, furniture and equipment and professional fees, is estimated at £3.4m (Mace project gateway 2.5 category A estimate).

- 5.4 The proposed development programme indicates commencement of advance highway adaptation works in August 2004, the main contract to commence a month later and completion of the scheme by September 2005.

- 5.5 A separate replacement ladder testing facility and store will need to be located elsewhere and several sites/premises within the county council's estate are being investigated.

6.0 Harpenden Road Site

- 6.1 The principle of development for housing and community facilities on the larger Harpenden Road site, containing the existing fire station site, has been established by the local planning authority resolving to grant planning permission, subject to a section 106 planning agreement.

- 6.3 That larger site with its existing land uses is shown on Vincent and Gorbing plan 4208/041 attached. An indication of the possible future

arrangement of access and land uses for the site is shown on plan 4208/040A attached.

6.4 Provisional estimates indicate that an overall scheme for the rationalisation of that site, including relocation of the fire station, would be self-financing. However significant further detailed work upon plot layout, infrastructure provision, phasing, building design, cost and value estimates is required in order that a comprehensive plan for rationalisation of the larger Harpenden Road site can be assured and proceed.

6.5 It is therefore proposed that forward funding be provided to allow the fire station to be relocated and so to resolve the service attendance times at the earliest opportunity. This would also provide a first phase of rationalisation of the larger Harpenden Road site.

7.0 Self Financing Aspects

7.1 The County Council's criteria for self-financing schemes are:

Service Departments may promote self-financing schemes funded from disposal receipts and within the capital control regime for asset replacement if:-

- The proposed scheme is estimated to be robustly self-financing
- Change cannot be achieved within a Service Guideline
- There is a real impediment to a beneficial release of resources
- The cash flow effect can be accommodated within the capital controls limits as they affect the whole of the Council, and
- Disposal receipts revert to the 'Pool' if external funding is achieved later.

7.2 This case may meet those tests on a robust basis. However it is clear that forward funding is required in the circumstances of complex rationalisation of the larger Harpenden Road site and to allow relocation of the fire station at the earliest opportunity.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 Purchase of the site was funded from the specific Fire Cover Review reserve, established from service underspends a number of years ago.

8.2 This reserve was set aside to assist with any potential shortfall associated with the relocation of Watford and St Albans fire stations, and so is available to assist in meeting any funding gap, in either of the schemes. £43,000 remains uncommitted in the fund, after acquisition of the London Road site.

- 8.3 The detailed scheme total development cost estimate is £3.4m (excluding land).
- 8.4 Cash flows arising from the proposed method of implementation are as follows:

	TOTAL £m	2004/5 £m	2005/6 £m
Construction etc	3.40	1.65	1.75

- 8.5 When determining the funding requirements for the 2004/05 to 2006/07 capital programme, indicative cash flows for the St Albans fire station project were included for planning purposes, assuming that the related capital receipt would be delivered in 2005/06.
- 8.6 Given the complexity of the exercise to release the value of the Harpenden Road site, the timing of the receipt is not certain, and so for the scheme to proceed with urgency, the implications of further forward funding of this project need to be considered.
- 8.7 For 2004/05 there are no immediate additional funding requirements of the proposed scheme, as an element of forward funding was always assumed to be necessary. However, to fund the projected cash flow in 2005/06 the council could plan to use reserves or to enter into additional borrowing within prudential limits. The level of general reserves is assessed on the basis of the potential financial risks facing the authority, and so to apply some of these resources to this project would reduce the authority's capacity to manage these risks.
- 8.8 So it is proposed that, in reviewing the capital programme and funding for future years, additional prudential borrowing should be the preferred option for planning purposes. In the event that more general capital receipts than planned arise or that other funding sources become available, it may not ultimately be necessary to enter into additional borrowing for this purpose. However for the scheme to proceed with urgency on a secure basis, the possibility of entering into additional borrowing as the fall back funding option needs to be agreed. (For every £1m borrowed for a 25 year term the annual borrowing costs would be 91,000).
- 8.9 Agreement by the Cabinet to these funding arrangements for the development of the new fire station will enable the project to proceed.