

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY 12 JULY 2004 AT 2.00 P.M.**

Agenda Item No.

17

**PROPOSED RELOCATION OF WHIPPENDELL ROAD,
WATFORD FIRE STATION**

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

Authors: Dick Bowler Head of Corporate Estate 01992 556223
 Roy Wilsher Deputy Chief Fire Officer 01992 507503

Executive Members:- Iris Tarry and David Beatty

Local Members:- Maria Green and Stephen Giles-Medhurst

1.0 Purpose of report

1.1 To consider:

- A replacement asset scheme under which a new fire station would be established at Lower High Street and the existing fire station at Whippendell Road would be closed.
- Acquisition of land at Lower High Street for a new fire station.
- Disposal of the existing fire station site at Whippendell Road.

2.0 Summary

2.1 The County Council currently operates a Fire Station at Whippendell 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 leading to the identification of a suitable new site in Lower High Street, Watford.

2.2 Planning permission in outline for a new fire station has been granted. Planning permission for residential development of the existing site has been agreed, subject to a section 106 planning agreement.

- 2.3 Negotiations for site acquisition have been undertaken and, subject to a decision by Cabinet to proceed, it is anticipated that terms for purchase can now be concluded.
- 2.4 A scheme for design and construction of a new fire station, with the possible option of flats for use by key workers on the top floor, has been provided with estimated costs.
- 2.5 The proposed replacement Fire Station scheme is contained in the forward capital programme as a self-financing scheme. Current estimates indicate that the scheme can be arranged within the programme provision.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the proposed new fire station location and scheme, the proposal to acquire the new site allowing subsequent development, and disposal of the existing site. Also that a self-financing replacement asset scheme be established.
- 3.2 To assist with management of the scheme the Corporate Director (People and Property), in consultation with the Executive Members for Resources and Community Services, could be delegated authority to agree:
 - (a) the budgets for capital expenditure,
 - (b) the timing of the investment in the new site and the accommodation (to include the possible option of key worker accommodation), and
 - (c) the land sale.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 A report was taken to the former Protection Committee on 5 November 1999 providing a summary business case for the replacement of Watford Fire Station.
- 4.2 The Committee resolved to address the failure to achieve minimum standards of fire cover in the South Oxhey area by relocating Watford Fire Station to a more strategic location.
- 4.3 Many site options were identified and tested against operational, town planning, highways, estates and financial criteria.
- 4.4 A site in Lower High Street, owned by Watford Borough Council and occupied by Stapletons as a tyre and exhaust centre, has proved the most viable against the criteria. The site is shown on the attached Vincent & Gorbings site location plan no 4363/001b.
- 4.5 Work on the first Fire Service Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) has indicated that the site would support the greater emphasis on life safety.
- 4.6 Planning applications in outline for both the new fire station and the residential redevelopment of the existing site have been made. Planning permission for the new station has been granted. Watford Borough Council has resolved to grant planning permission for residential development, subject to completion of a section 106 planning agreement.

5.0 Lower High Street Site

- 5.1 The freeholder and the leaseholder have been willing to enter negotiations to sell interests to the County Council to enable the provision of a new fire station.
- 5.2 Detailed drive time isochrones have indicated that the required attendance times to South Oxhey can be achieved from this site, while maintaining adequate fire cover to the Watford area. Work on the first Fire Service IRMP also supports relocation to this site.
- 5.3 Topographical, geo-environmental and means of access surveys have been completed on the site.
- 5.4 A feasibility layout, showing how a new fire station could be provided, accompanied the application for outline planning permission. This is shown on the attached illustrative layout plan 4363/109a.
- 5.5 An outline scheme with cost estimates has been prepared. This indicates that total land purchase, construction costs, furniture and

equipment and professional fees, are estimated at £5.5m (Mace gateway 1 estimate).

- 5.6 A possible variation of the scheme shows that there is potential, subject to a further planning application, for 3 one bedroom and 2 two bedroom flats to be provided as key worker residential accommodation on a second floor to the development.
- 5.7 There is an existing public footpath running across part of the site. In order to produce a satisfactory fire station development re-routing of the footpath to the edge of the site would be proposed.

6.0 Whippendell Road Site

- 6.1 The existing fire station site is shown on the attached site location plan no 4289/100. The principle of residential development of this site has been established.
- 6.2 An illustrative housing scheme, shown on the illustrative site layout plan no 4289/109a, formed the basis of the outline planning application. Watford Development Control Committee at their meeting on 22 December 2003 granted permission, subject to completion of a section 106 agreement regarding planning obligations.
- 6.3 Part of the site has been let for many years to Johnson Motors. It is anticipated that the site would be sold subject to, and with the benefit of, this occupation.
- 6.4 An estimate of the value of the County Council's freehold interest, based on the illustrative residential layout that accompanied the planning application, is £5,500,000 (Lambert Smith Hampton Class B estimate).

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 meets those tests on a robust basis.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The estimated cost of the scheme and of the capital receipts on disposal of the existing site are broadly equal and would support a self-financing scheme.
- 8.2 More detailed information and implications are provided in a separate report to Members which contains exempt information and has not been published.
- 8.3 Planning assumptions about the likely cash flow impact of the scheme have been made in preparing the capital programme 2004/05 to 2006/07. These assumptions will be revisited when the overall capital programme and associated funding is reviewed in the autumn.
- 8.4 Agreement by the Cabinet to the principle of a self-financing scheme, together with appropriate management arrangements for the commitment on investment and disposal of the existing Fire Station site, will enable the project to proceed.