

## **Report of the Head of Asset Management**

### **7. Asset Management Strategy: Hereford Fire Station**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To inform Members of an option to replace Hereford Fire Station and gain approval to proceed up to planning approval stage with the project, at which time final approval to complete the project will be requested from the Policy and Resources Committee.
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#### **Recommendations**

##### ***It is recommended that:***

- i) the Policy and Resources Committee notes the progress made in potentially securing a project to deliver a new fire station in Hereford at Herefordshire Council's Bath Street offices site in Hereford;*
- ii) officers be authorised to enter into further negotiations with Herefordshire Council;*
- iii) the Policy and Resources Committee authorise the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Authority and the Treasurer to spend the allocated budget on work to take the project to planning approval stage; and*
- iv) a further paper, including a detailed cost feasibility will be brought to Policy and Resources Committee for final approval before entering into a contract for the acquisition of the site.*

#### **Introduction and Background**

2. Members will be aware of the need to replace the current fire station in Hereford due to the building having reached the end of its useful life. The current building is no longer fit for purpose due to the age of the design and poor infrastructure, plant and equipment. The maintenance liability is high and an extensive condition survey completed in 2010 highlighted a maintenance requirement of £1,133,000 over the next 10 years to maintain a safe and reasonable standard of accommodation. However, the building would still not provide suitable accommodation because of the physical dimensions of the space being inadequate, poor equipment storage, lack of compliance with legislative requirements, high running costs due to inefficient heating and insulation and inappropriate welfare arrangements for a modern, diverse workforce.

3. The Chief Fire Officer and officers of the Service advised the Policy and Resources Committee in March 2011 of an indicative allocation to provide a new fire station in Hereford. This was based upon a cost estimate business case completed in June 2009, which used the best information available at that time. The Policy and Resources Committee approved the indicative allocation and authorised officers to research options for individual schemes, with the recommendation that the approval of the Policy and Resources Committee be sought prior to land acquisition and/or building refurbishment for a specific project.
4. Officers of the Service have explored a number of options to provide a new fire station in Hereford. These have been discounted for a number of reasons such as unavailability, inadequate location for mobilising, flood risk and size. Rebuilding on the existing site is an option, but is not as cost effective as finding another appropriate site due to the costs of a temporary fire station, hire of an acceptable site for such temporary relocation, and the constraints of the existing location which may limit the flexibility of the design.

### **Proposal for a new site**

5. Discussions with Herefordshire Council's officers have identified a site very near to the current fire station which includes offices owned by Herefordshire Council in Bath Street, which are soon to be vacated and are due to be disposed of by the Council. The location of this new site is identified in Appendix 1, which also indicates the proximity to our current fire station. The site is large enough to accommodate the requirements of the Fire Service and would provide immediate access onto a main arterial route into the city centre.
6. Herefordshire Council is keen to dispose of this site early in 2014. Herefordshire Council has indicated an interest in our existing fire station site and there may be potential to exchange sites, subject to planning permission. To explore this as an option, a feasibility study is being undertaken by the District Valuer to determine the values of both sites. A portion of land at Bath Street may be retained by the Council, but early indications suggest that the site could be acquired cost effectively and it is estimated that the project should be able to deliver a replacement fire station within the indicative allocated budget reported previously to the Policy and Resources Committee.
7. Other potential sites in Hereford have been investigated and a full review of these is being undertaken to assess the appropriateness of these sites in relation to risk, mobilising times and turn-in times for the retained staff. This information will be needed as a sequential testing exercise to support any planning application we may undertake for Bath Street. However, it is clear that the site in Bath Street will be an acceptable location being so near to the current site, the location of which has been supported by previous Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs).

8. Professional judgement indicates that the Bath Street site offers an excellent opportunity to provide a new location for Hereford Fire Station. None of the other potential sites would provide a satisfactory solution and certainly do not have the advantages of the Bath Street site, which meets all the requirements of size, location in relation to mobilising, location in relation to retained officers responding, flood risk, ability to offer enhanced training, community access and value. However, it should be noted that the site is in a conservation area and will require the demolition of the existing building. Therefore, it is expected that any new development would need to be of sufficient architectural merit to reflect the conservation status of the area and the building which is being demolished.
9. In order to enable an accurate cost assessment for the project to be prepared, particularly given the nature of the Bath Street site which is in a conservation area, a certain amount of design work is required to finalise the proposal so that a recommendation can be made to the Policy and Resources Committee that the site should be purchased subject to planning approval. To inform this paper, initial design work has been commissioned including site investigation at an approximate cost of £20,000. However, to progress the scheme to a stage where it can be considered to be viable and to take the project to up to a full planning approval stage, may cost up to an additional £80,000.
10. If planning approval was unsuccessful, some of this design work could be retained for the project to proceed at another location, but Members need to be aware that if this project did not proceed due to an unsuccessful planning application, at least half of these costs would be lost and would not deliver productive work which could be transferred to a new scheme. The capital programme already contains an approved allocation for site investigation works such as this, with an approved allocation for the Hereford project of £250,000 for this financial year.
11. Early indications show that the scheme should be within the allocation approved by the Policy and Resources Committee in 2011. It is therefore requested that the Policy and Resources Committee support this project and authorise officers to continue negotiations with Herefordshire Council. It is also requested that the Policy and Resources Committee authorise the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Authority and the Treasurer to spend the allocated budget on work to take the project to planning approval stage.
12. A further paper will be brought to the Policy and Resources Committee once it is determined that the project is viable, to gain final approval for the purchase of the site and for the project to be delivered to completion.

### **Conclusion/Summary**

13. The proposed site at Herefordshire Council's Bath Street offices represents the best opportunity to deliver a much needed new Fire Station in Hereford. In order to progress the scheme further and provide an accurate cost estimate, initial design work is being undertaken which may prove unproductive if the scheme does not ultimately proceed. However, a further paper including a detailed cost feasibility will be brought to the Policy and Resources Committee for final approval to purchase the site and to gain approval to proceed to completion.

## Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Commitment of budget approved previously by the Policy and Resources Committee in March 2011. Property – whole document.
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	This project supports the Asset Management Strategy.
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	
<b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	

## Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Hereford Proposed Fire Station Site

Background papers – None.

## Contact Officer

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# Hereford Proposed Fire Station Site

