

Report of Head of Legal Services

Property Update

Introduction and Summary

This report provides an update on the Authority's various capital project schemes and site disposals, as requested by Members at the last full Authority meeting.

These schemes are reported to and monitored by Group Leaders on a regular basis.

There have been some excellent success stories, such as the development of Evesham Fire Station (we have now reached agreement with Wychavon District Council regarding the outstanding costs and a final project costs are given below) and the new Wyre Forest Hub which went operational in February. Other projects such as Hereford and Redditch have not yet come to fruition, in both cases due to sites issues - it is fair to say that there are few straightforward sites that have not already been developed. However, there is now positive progress being made in relation to Redditch.

Finally, there is an update on current co-location initiatives with West Mercia Police. These are being explored on a case by case basis, as opportunities arise.

New Build Schemes

Wyre Forest Hub

1. Members had a tour of the new facility following the Fire Authority meeting in December 2019, shortly prior to practical completion. The building became fully operational in February this year. Crews from Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley have fully relocated and those stations are no longer in use.
2. Members approved a total project budget in 2017 (including land purchase costs) of £7.273m. The final account on the construction contract is yet to be finalised but we expect the costs to be within budget.

Evesham Fire Station

3. This project was undertaken as a partnership with Wychavon District Council whereby they acquired the former fire station site at Merstow Green, which has since been redeveloped as a supermarket and in return the Council were to largely fund the construction of the new fire station. Due to the risks to both

parties, it was eventually agreed that any site remediation costs over and above the original estimates would be split 50:50. Unfortunately the scale and cost of site remediation proved considerably more expensive than originally anticipated and a revised estimate was presented to Policy & Resources in September 2016 indicating that the Authority's share of the costs was likely to increase to £761,000. There was a commitment to report the final cost in due course.

4. The building was completed in November 2016 but there was a difference of opinion with the Council over the costs apportionment which delayed the final account. I am pleased to say that has now been resolved.
5. The final cost to the Fire Authority was £753,500. Whilst this is more than was envisaged when Wychavon District Council originally proposed the scheme, it has to be seen in the context that we have secured a new £4m fire station which is much better suited to the modern operational needs of the Service and have helped support the Council deliver a major regeneration project for the Town centre.

Redditch Fire Station

6. The replacement of Redditch Fire Station has been part of the Authority's approved capital programme for several years. The intention is to work in collaboration with West Mercia Police, who are also keen to relocate from their existing premises and to provide a joint facility, building upon the concept of the Bromsgrove joint Fire/Police station. Despite the intention and commitment, progress was hampered for some time by difficulties identifying a suitable site and the need for clarification over the Police's operational requirements. Both of these issues have now been resolved.
7. Land at the rear of the existing fire station on Middlehouse Lane belonging to Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council has now been identified as the preferred location for the new joint station (subject to planning permission). This is supported as part of the Redditch regeneration plan and we were successful in securing money from the Government's 'One Public Estate' scheme to fund the ground investigation survey of the site. Not unexpectedly, this has revealed a degree of contamination consistent with the use of part of the site as a former tip. A further report is currently being prepared to assess the likely costs of remediation and the overall feasibility of developing the site.
8. It is envisaged that the development will most likely include a land swap with the two Councils in exchange for the existing Fire Station site, which would then be available for redevelopment. Discussions with the local authorities are continuing and it is envisaged that a full proposal will be brought to Policy & Resources Committee for approval as soon as possible.
9. The alternative option in the event the above proposal does not come to fruition would be to redevelop the existing Fire Station site, although this would not be large enough to accommodate West Mercia Police unless we

also purchase part of the County Council's land. It would also necessitate provision of a temporary fire station whilst works were underway, thus adding to the development costs.

Hereford Fire Station

10. Members will be aware that there have been several previous schemes to replace Hereford Fire Station, none of which have come to fruition due to restrictions over conservation planning (Bath Street) or flooding concerns (Merton Meadow). As at Redditch, we have sought to work in collaboration with West Mercia Police with the aim of building a joint Fire/Police station.
11. In November 2018 Policy & Resources Committee authorised officers to pursue the development of a joint Fire/Police station on land off Holmer Road which had been secured by West Mercia Police. However, once detailed layout design work was undertaken, it became apparent the site was too small to accommodate all of the partners' requirements comfortably. The PCC's office sought to acquire additional land close by for additional parking space but the costs of providing a satisfactory access proved to be prohibitive.
12. Despite some minor adjustment to the layout, your officers were not satisfied the Holmer Road site could satisfactorily accommodate our requirements alongside those of the Police. Further investigation of the surrounding road network also gave rise to concerns regarding traffic congestion, which was likely to impede access and egress unless significant traffic control measures were introduced. This would have particularly impacted upon on-call staff when responding to the Station.
13. On balance therefore, despite initial hopes, your officers concluded that the Holmer Road site was not suitable for our needs and informed the PCC in January this year that we would instead investigate the possibilities for redevelopment of the existing St. Owen Street site. That work is still ongoing.

Broadway

14. Policy & Resources Committee approved a proposal for the redevelopment of Broadway Fire Station (subject to planning approval) in September 2018. Commencement of the scheme was delayed until late 2019 whilst resources were concentrated on development of the Wyre Forest Hub and investigation of the Redditch and Hereford projects.
15. We have since been out to tender and selected a firm of architects to undertake the detailed design work for Broadway. This work is ready to proceed. However, the local County Councillor has now put forward a suggestion for an entirely different scheme elsewhere in the village which may or may not be suitable for our needs. Consequently the original scheme has again been delayed whilst officers evaluate the alternative proposal.

Site Disposals

2 Kings Court, Worcester

16. The sale of the Authority's freehold interest in the former headquarters building to Worcester City Council was completed on 7th April 2020.

Windsor Street, Bromsgrove

17. This is a sale jointly with Worcestershire County Council of the former Bromsgrove Fire Station and adjoining library building. We exchanged contracts for the sale of the land to a developer in August 2018, conditional upon satisfactory ground investigation surveys and planning permission for retirement style assisted living accommodation. It has so far not proved possible to satisfy those conditions and we are currently seeking confirmation whether or not the developer still wishes to proceed.

Bewdley Fire Station

18. This site was marketed jointly with the County Council's adjoining land in order to maximise the potential development value of the two sites. A conditional offer subject to planning permission has been accepted. The sale is proceeding and contracts are expected to be exchanged shortly.

Kidderminster Fire Station

19. Although this site was marketed at the same time Bewdley Fire Station, no acceptable offers were received. Plans to re-market the site are currently on hold due to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Stourport Fire Station

20. This site forms part of a complex of buildings alongside those belonging to the County Council. Consideration will be given to jointly marketing the buildings as a whole, once the last of the County Council's tenants have vacated their building.

Other Fire/Police Co-location Initiatives

We continue to work closely with the PCC and West Mercia Police. In addition to the Police's involvement in the Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub, we have explored opportunities for the Police to co-locate at a number of Fire Stations within the two counties:

- **Peterchurch Fire Station** - the Police have been successfully co-locating at Peterchurch Fire Station since 2017.
- **Tenbury Fire Station** – agreement has been reached in principle on a number of internal alterations to the building that would accommodate the Police's

requirements. These would be funded by the PCC and we currently await a final decision as to whether the Police wish to proceed with the scheme.

- **Bromyard Fire Station** – the Police decided not to proceed with a proposed co-location at Bromyard Fire Station. It would have been necessary for them to build an extension, which proved to be cost prohibitive.
- **Worcester Fire Station** – there is agreement in principle for a Police team to co-locate at Worcester Fire Station alongside our Community Risk team, as at Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub.
- **Upton upon Severn Fire Station** – we are currently looking into the feasibility of accommodating the Police at Upton upon Severn Fire Station and thereby freeing up the space they currently occupy at Upton Library.