

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

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

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To report progress to the Committee regarding the provision of a new fire station in Hereford.
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#### **Recommendation**

***It is recommended that the progress towards identifying a site for a replacement fire station in Hereford be noted.***

#### **Introduction and Background**

2. Members will be aware that in March 2014, the Policy and Resources Committee gave approval for a proposed arrangement between Herefordshire Council and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to provide a new fire station on the site of the Council's Bath Street offices in Hereford. The proposal suggested a land swap of the current fire station site in exchange for a proportion of the Council's Bath Street site. However, when considering the objections raised and following extensive discussions with Officers of Herefordshire Council, it is clear that the Bath Street site is not as viable as was originally believed.
3. At the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 19 November 2014, Members requested updates regarding the progress of providing a replacement for the existing Fire Station in St. Owen Street, Hereford. This paper outlines the criteria applied to the on-going detailed search for a potential new location for a replacement fire station, explains why some options have been rejected and updates the Policy and Resources Committee about on-going examination of other options. Finally, in the time period since the original proposal, new potential sites are now available and this paper explains how these options will be examined.

#### **The Existing Site and Search Criteria**

4. The current fire station site is located within the city in a location that has good access to the main road network and reasonable access for responding on-call Retained Duty System firefighters. A survey has been undertaken to ascertain whether it would be viable to refurbish the existing building. It is estimated that refurbishment would cost in the region of £5.5 million including temporary fire station set up and relocation costs. These temporary measures are significant, cannot be incurred as capital costs and would impact the Authority's revenue

budget, where funding does not exist. However a refurbishment scheme would not address the fact that the site is restricted by its size and does not provide suitable training facilities for modern firefighters. It is more economical for Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to secure a new larger site and build a purpose built, modern facility. In addition there is insufficient space on the existing site to support a temporary fire station which would then necessitate sourcing, and rental of, a suitable site for the duration of the refurbishment works. The survey also identified that a refurbishment of the building was unlikely to extend the life of the current building for a further 30 years and therefore the most economical route in the medium and long term, would be to provide a new building at a different location. A new site would provide space for on-site training facilities and space for community groups such as the Young Fire Fighter Association.

5. Any proposed site for a new fire station would need to be within the Primary Risk area. The Primary Risk area is based on a number of factors including fires in buildings and Road Traffic Collision activity data over a four year period (April 2009 to March 2013). This analysis creates a “hotspot” map indicating the search area for a new fire. Any site outside this Primary Risk area (such as the Rotherwas estate) would not be considered an appropriate location as it wouldn't satisfy the main criteria of giving good fire cover access across the city and beyond and be a reasonable turn in location for existing on-call firefighters.
6. Using this Primary Risk area as a guide, sites have been identified through a local commercial land agent in association with Officers from Herefordshire Council and other partner organisations such as the Police.
7. Access and egress are equally important to minimise delays in response and provide the optimum service to the community and therefore consideration must be given to enable attendance and recruitment of Retained Duty System firefighters into a new fire station site within appropriate timescales. To determine a short-list of potential sites, the location, size, and access to the site and the sites availability were deemed the most important criteria for assessing the potential of any location. The full criteria can be summarised as follows:
  - Location
  - Site size
  - Site access
  - Flood zones
  - Ownership/availability
  - Neighbouring land use
8. Each attribute was given a score between 1 and 10, with the most important search site criteria having extra weighting to their scores. Flood zones are given special consideration given the historic flood risk data in Hereford as a site with potential flood risk would be unacceptable. Finally, the station footprint and required vehicle turning circles need to be mapped on potential site plans to confirm the site is suitable for consideration.

## **Current Position**

9. Following discussions with Herefordshire Council, it has become clear that there are now other parties interested in the Bath Street site that are able to utilise the facade of the existing building. In undertaking public consultation work for the Bath Street location it has been suggested locally that other sites would make acceptable locations for a new fire station. Unfortunately the alternative sites suggested do not comply with our assessment criteria. For example, the reason why the Rotherwas estate is not acceptable has already been given. The current bus station site in Commercial Road has also been suggested, but Officers from Herefordshire Council have indicated that there are no developed plans to make this location available in the near future. Council owned land as part of the new link road project in the Edgar Street area is not large enough to accommodate a fire station, and an additional site currently owned by the Police in the same area is also too small. As part of the link-road project these areas will have flood alleviation measures proposed to mitigate an existing flood risk in this area, but these would not support fire service mobilisation from a site in the event of flooding and there are known specific issues with the site that may make a development as a fire station cost-prohibitive. As has already been indicated, the Bath Street location is unlikely to proceed any further.
10. There are also sites which were considered as part of the original site search which may still provide an acceptable location. These include privately owned locations and others owned by partners. Discussions with Officers of Herefordshire Council have suggested several new sites for consideration, with detailed investigation being undertaken from January 2015. The Service is fostering a close working relationship with Herefordshire Council: for example, ACFO John Hodges has taken a tour of potential sites with Geoff Hughes, Herefordshire Council's Director for Economy, Communities and Corporate. Finally, Officers of the Service are also liaising closely with a local land agent to identify new potential commercial opportunities. It is hoped that progress will continue positively and that a preferred site will be identified by the next Policy and Resources Committee meeting.

## **Conclusion/Summary**

11. Significant work is currently being undertaken to locate an acceptable site for a new fire station in Hereford City but unlike many other developments a site for a fire station has some very specific criteria to ensure it would be fit for purpose and that the fire engines can be crewed properly and respond in an effective manner.
12. It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee note the content of this paper.

## Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Whole document relates to property. Proposals will require legal and financial input at the appropriate time.
<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).	The Asset Management Strategy supports 'Our Strategy' on the foundations of 'Buildings and Infrastructure'.
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	All capital projects are managed within the CDM 2007 regulations.
<b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	Consultation is undertaken as part of the planning approval process.
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	No – this will be considered at the appropriate time.

## Supporting Information

Background papers – Policy and Resources Committee 26 March 2014 and Policy and Resources Committee 19 November 2014.

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