

Report of Area Commander, Head of Operations

7. Proposed New Hereford Fire Station

Purpose of report

1. To report that the provision of a new joint fire and police station in Edgar Street, Hereford is no longer a viable option and to obtain authorisation to proceed with the development of a proposal for a fire station only, on the same site.
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Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- i) Officers be authorised to enter into negotiations with Herefordshire Council to provide a new fire station, in Hereford, at the existing proposed site on Edgar Street;*
- ii) Officers be authorised to spend a revised further allocated budget of up to £25k, as necessary, to take this new proposal forward;*
- iii) a further paper, including a detailed cost feasibility be brought to the Policy and Resources Committee for final approval before submitting planning applications and entering into a contract for the acquisition of the site and any disposal of existing land; and*
- iv) at an appropriate time Officers withdraw the existing outline planning application currently submitted for the joint police and fire station.*

Introduction and Background

2. For over a decade the Authority has been seeking viable options to replace the existing fire station in Hereford city. Various proposals have been developed, however, none have been successful, most notably the inclusion in the Edgar Street Grid regeneration project and more recently a potential site in Bath Street, Hereford.
3. The Policy and Resources Committee previously requested regular updates on activity being undertaken by Officers to provide a replacement fire station in Hereford.
4. At Policy and Resources Committee on 14 September 2015 it was reported that a preferred site had been identified and that the potential of this option was now being explored with police partners who were developing a business case for consideration by the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Additionally it was noted that an outline planning application had been submitted through Place Partnership Ltd, to further underpin the viability of this project.

Current Position

5. The Service has now been informed that West Mercia Police are unable to proceed with a joint scheme due to higher than anticipated capital build costs and other emerging capital financial pressures. However there remains strong support for collaboration between the police and the Service in many areas, including co-location on other sites.
6. It should be noted that costs associated with developing this project to date have been incurred by the Authority to the permitted budget of £70k and unfortunately much of this will now be abortive, as were the previous costs (£65k) incurred on the unsuccessful Bath Street proposal.
7. Despite the police withdrawing from this project the proposal for a new fire station on the Edgar Street site in Hereford is still a viable and preferred option. However, the amount of land now required would be significantly reduced (by approximately two thirds). The case for a replacement fire station for Hereford city at this location still has significant merit.
8. The preferred location along Edgar Street is currently used mainly for parking. The entire site is due to be reconfigured alongside the proposed new link road, which is currently under development and it should be noted, this may impact on any future build programme. The site is owned by Herefordshire Council and part of the site could be allocated for a new stand alone fire station.
9. Officers will always seek to collaborate with suitable partners and will endeavour to continue to explore all such opportunities within this project; however, it is now recommended that this proposal progresses as a Fire Authority owned and led capital build project.
10. In order to limit the ongoing exposure to potentially abortive costs similar to those already incurred, it is proposed that revised detailed planning works are not fully commissioned until a land purchase agreement (subject to planning approval) has been secured between the Fire Authority and Herefordshire Council. It should be noted that whilst this approach should limit exposure to further abortive costs, it will incur delays to the delivery of this project. This is due to key pieces of work that cannot be carried out simultaneously and in preparation of the next phase, but must be considered sequentially and only when the previous enabling phase has been completed.
11. Structured discussions will be needed with Herefordshire Council in order to formalise any potential future land purchase agreement (subject to planning permission), including the disposal of the existing fire station site. The project lead appointed (Area Commander – Head of Operations) will continue as the lead officer and in conjunction with the Treasurer and Head of Legal Services they are in a position to begin developing this revised proposal. In order to support this it is requested that a further limited budget of £25k is allocated.

Conclusion/Summary

12. Whilst the withdrawal of West Mercia Police from this project is disappointing and does seem to add to the long standing issues of bringing a new Hereford city fire station to conclusion, there does appear to be a viable alternative on the same site, which can be taken forward.
13. The Service still maintains a very strong relationship with West Mercia Police at all levels, and it is credit to this relationship that this matter has been dealt with swiftly and with high degree of openness and transparency on all sides.
14. It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee approve the recommendations in this paper and note the content.

Corporate Considerations

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| Resource Implications (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. The report details the budgetary costs incurred and short term implications of the new proposal. |
| Strategic Policy Links (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'. |
| Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores). | All capital projects are managed within the appropriate Health and Safety legislation and best practice and none are identified at this stage. |
| Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter) | Consultation is undertaken as part of the planning approval process and will be undertaken with staff and stakeholders at the appropriate stages. |
| Equalities (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

Policy and Resources Committee: 19 November 2014

Policy and Resources Committee: 27 January 2015

Policy and Resources Committee: 25 March 2015

Policy and Resources Committee: 14 September 2015

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