

Report to Stronger Council Select Committee

Date of meeting: 9 July 2019

Subject: Accommodation Project



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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Committee note the progress on the Accommodation Project.

Executive Summary

The accommodation programme continues to progress. The accommodation Programme Board meets monthly and the governance structure has been developed with four distinct workstreams:

- I. Construction of New Building
- II. Sale of land at the back of Civic Offices
- III. Refurbishment of Civic Offices, and
- IV. Recruitment of Partners/Tenants for Civic Offices

A project manager has now been commissioned to progress all the workstreams. This report notes the progress made under the four project areas. The corporate plan provides key milestones for the full year 2019/20.

1. Construction of New Building

North Weald Airfield (NWA) is a 150ha site which is currently used for general aviation and commercial purposes, and is the Council's biggest land asset.

The Epping Forest District Council Local Plan Submission Version identifies a Masterplan Area comprising of the operational airfield, including associated runways, taxiways and grassed areas, and a cluster of industrial, commercial and retail uses with associated car parks and hardstanding. Included in the area is an indicative development area of 40.8 ha (NWB.E4) within which is a specifically identified employment site that is allocated for a minimum floorspace of 10,000 m² of B1/B2/B8 class use (business use/general industrial/storage and warehousing).

Site NWB.E4 extends over a significant portion of what is currently NWA along with land outside of the airfield perimeter which accommodates a number of separate plots let to third party occupiers, both on standard occupational leases and long-term ground leases.

A recent report to Cabinet sought their approval of a development brief and permission to seek expressions of interest from consultants to develop the final Masterplan. The masterplan will include potential for new EFDC office accommodation.

The chosen consultant will be required to:

- prepare a Master Plan detailing the most appropriate allocation of uses;

- design an indicative layout;
- prepare all necessary supplementary supporting documentation, including analysis of envisaged economic, employment, and social implications, together with a Traffic Impact Assessment.

In addition to progressing North Weald as an option for new office space the EFDC assets team will continue to explore any other alternative options.

2. Sale of land at the back of the Civic Offices.

Valuation work has been completed by an external consultant on the development of the rear of the Civic Building reported in the April 2019 Cabinet. Further work is now being undertaken on the development options with the view to providing a revised sale of land estimate. The timetable for progress on this site is linked to the decant of the building and progress of the alternative option for EFDC accommodation. The modelling options and planning requirements will be considered in next steps.

3. Refurbishment of the Civic Offices

The current listing status of the building creates several restrictions both internally and externally to the civic offices. A meeting with Historic England and Bisset Adams the architect has taken place to establish the extent (or limitations) of the alterations that can be made to enable a commercially lettable space and/or improved working environment for EFDC staff. The designs will include; new café provision, letting of 1st floor space to external business, council chamber refurbishment to support digital working, maximisation of any open office space to enable more collaborative working (the second floor).

Indicative floor space plans for the second floor have been undertaken to investigate the maximum desk space capacity for the second floor. These designs include creating an open plan space on the second floor with meeting areas and c130 desk spaces.

Tenders have gone out for a new contract for the café with submissions expected by the end of July.

An initial presentation to demonstrate the potential for upgrading the technology in the Council Chamber including the projector, web cam, and interactive software.

4. Recruitment of Partners/Tenants for the Civic Offices

Work has commenced on selecting an independent commercial agent that will provide marketing advice for potential partners/tenants for the civic offices. This work will include discussions with any potential partners such as libraries and NHS. This piece of work will be progressed as soon as it is understood from Historic England and Bissett Adams the extent to which alterations can be made. The design of the space will be required to help inform what type of market would be interested.

Reason for decision:

The accommodation project supports the overall aspirations of the Council Corporate Plan.

Options considered and rejected:

Take no interim action within the Civic building and wait for the new build to be constructed. This is a less favourable option as an expedited new build would be 2 – 3 years of no change. The people strategy is delivering on time and the creation of the new 4-layer management spine is progressing well. There are physical barriers to working in a collaborative way, there are also barriers to working in a digital way that can be overcome without listed consent; particularly the council chamber facilities. The interim changes will go some way to opening office spaces and reconfiguring alternative working space i.e. new café – work, rest, eat, meet.

Consultation undertaken:

Consultation continues with local partners and businesses for the potential letting of spaces and the cafe. Staff are being consulted on any changes created through the improvements to the second floor.

Resource implications:

The engagement of specialist resources is being funded from the £425k agreed budget in September 2018.