



SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL Cabinet Report

Report of: Nalin Seneviratne, Director of Property and Facilities Management Services and Les Sturch, Director of Development Services

Date: 20th March 2013

Subject: Site of the Former Norton Aerodrome, Lightwood

Author of Report: Dave Wood, Property and Facilities Management and Maria Duffy, Forward & Area Planning

Summary:

To seek Cabinet approval to negotiate the freehold acquisition by the Council of 18.7 hectares of land at the Former Norton Aerodrome, Lightwood from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) with the aim of delivering comprehensive restoration and effective long-term use of the site.

To use Local Growth Funding (LGF) to finance the acquisition, demolition of the derelict buildings and holding costs pending future disposal(s) when the capital receipt will be used to repay the LGF so that it can be recycled.

Reasons for Recommendations:

This course of action is recommended because:

- a) It would enable the Council to take initiatives to remove dereliction and contamination on a conspicuous and sensitive site
- b) The previously-developed part of the site has potential to deliver some new built development under national Green Belt policy and this could contribute to the Council's strategic housing objectives
- c) It would allow the undeveloped area of the site to be maintained and enhanced to improve the recreational offer for the local community whilst ensuring the ecological issues are addressed.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- approves the freehold acquisition of the former Norton Aerodrome from the Homes and Community Agency;
 - delegates authority to the Director of Property & Facilities Management to agree the terms of acquisition with HCA and instruct the Director of Legal Services to prepare and complete all necessary documentation to conclude the purchase in accordance with the agreed terms; and
 - notes that a capital approval submission for the expenditure has been submitted as part of the agreed monthly budget monitoring process to authorise and procure the necessary capital works and that the relevant Local Growth Fund authorities have been obtained under the agreed delegations.
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Background Papers: **Site Plan**

Category of Report: **Open**

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

Financial Implications
YES Cleared by: Paul Schofield
Legal Implications
YES Cleared by: David Blackburn
Equality of Opportunity Implications
NO Cleared by:
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
NO
Human rights Implications
NO
Environmental and Sustainability implications
YES
Economic impact
YES
Community safety implications
YES
Human resources implications
NO
Property implications
YES
Area(s) affected
Birley, Gleadless Valley and Graves Park
Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Leader
Councillor Bryan Lodge
Relevant Scrutiny Committee if decision called in
Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
NO
Press release
NO

REPORT TITLE: Site of the Former Norton Aerodrome, Lightwood

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 This report is to seek Cabinet approval to the freehold acquisition of the former Norton Aerodrome from the Homes and Community Agency. The report outlines the main issues and risks associated with a decision by the Council to purchase the site from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)

2.0 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SHEFFIELD PEOPLE

2.1 The objective of the project is to secure ownership of the former Norton Aerodrome site in order to manage a comprehensive restoration and reuse of the whole site for the benefit of local people and the city. The project proposes the use of the Local Growth Fund (LGF) to finance the acquisition of the site.

2.2 The acquisition of this land would give the Council greater control over its future use and redevelopment. Under national policy for previously-developed land in the Green Belt, a limited part of the site could be redeveloped for housing, potentially contributing to the supply of family homes and affordable housing in the area. It is anticipated that any redevelopment proposals would need to include measures to maintain and enhance areas of greenspace within the site and improve the recreational offer for the local community whilst ensuring that ecologically important areas are not only protected but enhanced.

2.3 The future of the site will need to be reviewed along with other Green Belt land as part of the review of the city's Local Plan (the Sheffield Development Framework). The recommendations of this report would not influence the outcome of that review.

2.4 The amount of potential development is yet to be determined, although it could be equivalent to the main previously-developed "footprint" of the site (around 2 hectares). This includes the main former hangar building and immediately adjacent areas of hardstanding. This would also have the benefit of removing unattractive, redundant buildings from the site and making best use of previously-developed land. There is an opportunity to reconfigure the layout so that it is not constrained by the boundaries of the previous development.

Given the size of the site, it would appear to readily lend itself to a master planning exercise, involving the local community, to determine more precisely the nature and extent of development on the site and which areas ought to be left open.

3.0 OUTCOME AND SUSTAINABILITY

3.1 The proposed acquisition will contribute to the Great Places to Live framework.

3.2 The proposed acquisition supports other corporate goals and Council guiding principles:

- it aligns with Council values: long-term view, aspirational, spending public money wisely,
- it improves site viability

3.3 It offers a potential opportunity to provide some family housing and some affordable homes on brownfield land in a reasonably sustainable location. It would therefore contribute towards meeting the Council's housing land requirements in line with Central Government's priority for bringing forward more sites for housing, particularly on under-used publicly owned land. Maintaining and improving the remainder of the site for recreation use would provide health and environmental benefits for local people.

3.4 It is considered that this project offers the best opportunity to meet these objectives when assessed against the alternatives set out in section 5 of this Report.

4.0 MAIN BODY OF THE REPORT

4.1 Background

4.1.1 The site is owned by the Homes and Community Agency, formerly English Partnerships (EP). The site comprises 18.7 hectares of brownfield land. However, it lies entirely within the adopted Green Belt and this currently severely restricts the amount of built development that can be permitted on the site.

- The main areas of hardstandings and disused buildings from previous uses cover approximately 6 hectares (two large buildings and the intervening hard standings cover 2 hectares).
- Other areas of hard surfacing interspersed with green areas and land that has re-vegetated over time on other parts of the site
- However, the site is in a fairly sustainable location, on the urban fringe (250 metres of the Herdings Supertram terminus; 800 metres of Gleadless Townend Neighbourhood Centre).

- 4.1.2 EP previously proposed developing around 300 dwellings (6ha at 50 dwellings per hectare) with the remainder as open space. The HCA has also submitted representations to this effect via the Sheffield Development Framework (SDF) consultation process. However, development of this scale could only be permitted as a departure from the current development plan. The SDF Core Strategy indicates that there should be no strategic or local review of the Green Belt boundary and the only changes to the boundary should be to correct untenable anomalies.
- 4.1.3 Earlier consultations indicate the local community may support a limited amount of housing development on the site as it would remove the “eyesore” of existing derelict buildings but subject to a significant proportion of the site being retained and improved as recreational greenspace.
- 4.1.4 The Draft SDF City Policies and Sites document (June 2010) proposed the site as a ‘Major Developed Site in the Green Belt’ for Park and Ride use. However, further work by the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive has concluded that this use would not be economically viable. The National Planning Policy Framework (published in March 2012) removed the requirement for such sites to be designated in the Local Plan. Instead, it states that partial or complete development of previously developed sites in the Green Belt is not inappropriate development providing it would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.
- 4.1.5 A recent planning application by Green Estates Ltd for a green waste composting facility (initially for a 3 year temporary period) was refused planning permission in January 2012 due to it being considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt and incompatible with neighbouring properties, causing detriment to living conditions.

4.2 Planning Considerations

- 4.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts and, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. However, the Government also places a high priority on the delivery of more homes and requires a 5-year supply of *deliverable* sites to be maintained, as well as a further 5-year supply of *developable* sites.
- 4.2.2 As noted above, the SDF Core Strategy confirms that there will be no review of the Green Belt but it also states that a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites will be maintained. However, the change in economic conditions since the Core Strategy Public Examination, has made achievement of the second of those policy objectives more challenging. As at April 2012, analysis indicated that Sheffield only had

about 2.5 years supply of deliverable sites (at the rate set in the Core Strategy), though this is largely due to the lack of economic viability rather than any physical shortage of suitable or available sites. (If demand increases supply should follow suit.)

- 4.2.3 The Council's most recent assessment shows that, in theory, there is enough land to meet Sheffield's housing requirement to 2026 (the SDF end date) but not all the supply is deliverable by that date. Economic conditions are an important factor in this but much of Sheffield's land supply is concentrated on brownfield sites in weaker market areas and there are limits on the demand for housing in any one area in a single year. An early review of the Local Plan (the SDF) will be needed to enable more housing land to be allocated and to provide a wider choice of sites. It is anticipated that this process would start once the SDF City Policies and Sites document has been adopted (expected to be by summer 2014). In the meantime the potential of additional greenfield sites that are consistent with national and local policy is being actively explored.
- 4.2.4 Allowing some housing development on the Norton Aerodrome site would help improve the choice of housing sites in a part of the city where there are relatively fewer other sites. However, the Green Belt designation means that allocation of the site for housing in the SDF City Policies and Sites document is not possible. A planning application for limited development, equivalent to the existing building footprint (2ha), could, in principle, be permitted under current national policy and would potentially deliver 60-70 dwellings (assuming 30-35dph). This would make a small but useful contribution to housing land supply as well as enable ecological enhancements. As suggested above, this would be best achieved through a master planning exercise and it may be appropriate to run that, including public consultation and sustainability appraisal, alongside the Local Plan review process. The recommendations of this report are without prejudice to that comprehensive review of planning strategy for the city and would not influence the choice of options for the site.

4.3 Financial Implications

- 4.3.1 The project proposes the use of the Local Growth Fund (LGF) to finance the acquisition of the site as a key part of the Council's strategy to secure the comprehensive restoration and reuse of the site.
- 4.3.2 It is proposed to use the LGF to acquire the land, demolish the derelict buildings, remove any contamination as required and pay for holding costs pending future disposal when the capital receipt will be used to repay the LGF so that the money can be recycled.

4.4 Property Implications

- 4.4.1 The local authority has identified a need to secure the site to support its local plan objectives and housing requirements as set by the SDF Core Strategy.
- 4.4.2 The City Council and the HCA (as registered owner) have entered into initial discussions in relation to the freehold acquisition of the site which extends to approximately 18.7 hectares.
- 4.4.3 It has been agreed that an independent valuation of the site should be jointly commissioned based on an agreed valuation brief, the result of which should be binding on both parties save in the event of a manifest error (but without implying any obligation to purchase).. It is important that the valuation is mindful of the known site constraints particularly in relation to site contamination and the restrictive planning designation.
- 4.4.4 Due to its former use it is known that there are a number of contamination “hotspots” on the site and reports have been commissioned to determine the extent of the contamination. These reports have been considered by the City Council’s Senior Land Quality Officer who has given an opinion on the likely costs for decontamination (excluding the cost of demolishing the existing buildings). Such contamination potentially affects site value although this is unlikely to be significant.
- 4.4.5 The HCA have indicated that they currently spend around £20,000 per annum in vacant property management which would become the responsibility of the City Council following the acquisition. An annual sum is to be provided from the Local Growth Fund for three and a half years to support the maintenance. It is important that a management plan is developed in advance of the acquisition.
- 4.4.6 The project involves the acquisition, demolition and future management of the property.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 gives the City Council a general authority to acquire land compulsorily if the City Council think that the acquisition will facilitate the carrying out of development, re-development or improvement on or in relation to the land and it believes that the development, re-development or improvement is likely to contribute to the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area.
- 5.2 Section 227 extends the power contained in Section 226 to the acquisition of land by agreement.
- 5.3 Given that there are clear economic, social and environmental benefits to be achieved by the reclamation and development of this site Section 227

gives the City Council power to acquire the site for the purposes identified in this report.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 Do Nothing

The Council could simply do nothing and take the risk that the HCA either sell the site to a developer or submit a planning application.

If that was to happen then it is possible that development proposals might be put forward by a developer which are in conflict with Green Belt policy or which are at odds with the wishes of the local community. It also potentially makes it more difficult to negotiate planning benefits and the provision of affordable housing (particularly if the developer has 'over paid' for the site).

There is also a risk that the site would remain in a derelict state whilst the new landowner waited for economic conditions to improve. This could result in the Council having to try to acquire the site at a future date either by agreement or by Compulsory Purchase Order. This is likely to be a more expensive process and at worst could fail, resulting in blight of the area.

6.2 Minimal Intervention

The Council would seek to develop a joint scheme with the HCA (who retain ownership).

However, the HCA have indicated that they no longer wish to have a maintenance liability. Any hopes they have for significant development (300+ dwellings) could only be delivered, if at all, through a Local Plan Review (which could take 4-5 years with no guarantee of the outcome) and the HCA are unlikely to be willing to wait that long. This would lead to the same risks as doing nothing.

6.3 Fund the Project by Alternative Sources

No alternative funding sources are available.

6.4 In summary, if the property is not purchased now then the HCA may sell the site on the open market potentially leading to continued blight and anti-social behaviour on the site. It would also be likely to make it more difficult for the Council to achieve its planning objectives for the site and maximise benefits for the local community. There is also a risk that a planning application could be submitted that is contrary to the current policies in the development plan. If the site is sold to a third party, it could also be necessary for the Council to attempt to buy it at a future date if the site remains in a derelict state. This could require a Compulsory Purchase Order. The time and costs involved in that would be much

higher than if a purchase by agreement can be completed now.

6.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 This course of action is recommended because:

- a) It would enable the Council to take initiatives to remove dereliction and contamination on a conspicuous and sensitive site
- b) The previously-developed part of the site has potential to deliver some new built development under national Green Belt policy and this could contribute to the Council's strategic housing objectives

It would allow the undeveloped area of the site to be maintained and enhanced to improve the recreational offer for the local community whilst ensuring the ecological issues are addressed.

7.0 REASONS FOR EXEMPTION (if a Closed report)

N/A

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 8.1 approves the freehold acquisition of the former Norton Aerodrome from the Homes and Community Agency;
- 8.2 delegates authority to the Director of Property & Facilities Management to agree the terms of acquisition with HCA and instruct the Director of Legal Services to prepare and complete all necessary documentation to conclude the purchase in accordance with the agreed terms;
- 8.3 notes that a capital approval submission for the expenditure has been submitted as part of the agreed monthly budget monitoring process to authorise and procure the necessary capital works and that the relevant Local Growth Fund authorities have been obtained under the agreed delegations.