

## **Report to Councillor Jeremy Hunt, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property**

**October 2024**

**Property and Assets: Freehold Disposal of Former Fire Station, Hurst Road, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 2DN**

**Report by Assistant Director (Property and Assets)**

**Electoral division: Horsham Hurst**

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### **Summary**

This report advises on the outcome of the marketing of this property and seeks the approval by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property to dispose of the County Council's freehold estate of the former Horsham Fire Station, Hurst Road, Horsham RH12 2DN. Offers have been received and approval is sought to sell the property to the preferred bidder.

### **Recommendations**

That the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property approves that:

- (1) the County Council disposes of its freehold estate in Horsham Fire Station, Hurst Road, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 2DN, as set out in **Appendix A Part II** and as set out in the plan **Appendix B**, of this report; and
  - (2) authority is delegated to the Assistant Director (Property and Assets) in conjunction with the Director of Law and Assurance to conclude the terms of the sale documents and overage documents with the purchaser.
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### **Proposal**

#### **1 Background and context**

- 1.1 The broadly one-acre site is situated in central Horsham, approximately 0.3 miles east of the mainline railway station. The property is situated in a mixed-use location, adjoining law courts to the east, police station to the south and hospital to the west. The wider locality is predominantly residential property and Horsham Park.
- 1.1 The site was formerly the Horsham fire station, which was closed in July 2023, when the fire service relocated to the new build replacement WSFRS Training

Centre and new Horsham Fire Station at Platinum House, Macfarlane Way, Highwood, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 1YA approximately 2.8 miles to the southwest.

- 1.2 The site is registered at the Land Registry title number WSX339777, with the freehold estate owned by WSCC. The site currently comprises a vacant former fire station including training tower and external parking/hard standing. The buildings are tired and dated.
- 1.3 In September 2020, the Cabinet declared the property [surplus](#) to the County Council's operational requirements.
- 1.4 Following closure of the fire station, external agents were subsequently appointed. Previous advice regarding planning and development potential was also reviewed and the property was offered for sale on the open market. Marketing commenced in April 2024. Nine bids were received by the initial deadline in June 2024. A further round of bidding was undertaken, and revised best and final offers received by 24 June 2024.
- 1.5 The offers received are shown in **Part II** to this report, attached for Members only.
- 1.6 The offers have been investigated by the appointed selling agents in conjunction with the Valuation and Estates team and following agreement of heads of terms and a period of due diligence, acceptance of a bid is now recommended.

## **2. Proposal details**

- 2.1 The proposal is to sell the property to the preferred bidder as outlined in **Appendix A Part II**. The land is identified on the plan at **Appendix B**.
- 2.2 Should the offer be withdrawn, the proposal would then be to sell to the next highest bidder, or to another party. Subject to the period of time that may have elapsed from the offer being made, it is possible that the property could need to be remarketed.
- 2.3 The disposal is an unconditional sale which is subject to contract and legal due diligence only. Appropriate overage provisions will also apply from completion to ensure best value.
- 2.4 The final site plan as set out in **Appendix B** will be confirmed prior to completion of the sale documents as there are currently discussions underway with Horsham District Council regarding a small land swap to facilitate an improved cycle way to the north of the site, this remains subject to contract. Approval of the final site plan will be delegated to the Assistant Director (Property and Assets). The prospective purchasers are aware of the plans and in agreement to the proposals, subject to contract.
- 2.5 The site provides rights of access to other land holders and these will be recognised in the sale transfer conditions.
- 2.6 It is proposed that the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property agrees to this transaction being concluded by delegated authority to the Assistant Director (Property and Assets) in conjunction with the Director of Law and Assurance.

### **3. Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)**

- 3.1 The site was declared surplus as the fire service have moved to the new fire station at Platinum House in Horsham. An options appraisal of the site was considered against a range of options including for possible social, community or environmental use, particularly where this could complement the Council's ambitions relating to climate change. No other options were considered viable.
- 3.2 No alternative County Council service use has been identified for the property and the property is surplus to all operational service requirements.

### **4. Consultation, engagement and advice**

- 4.1 County Councillor Nigel Dennis (Horsham Hurst) has been consulted regarding this matter.

### **5. Finance**

- 5.1 Revenue consequences
- 5.2 The disposal will reduce expenditure on security, utilities and other holding costs, including ongoing liabilities associated with holding a vacant property.
- 5.3 Capital consequences

A capital receipt will be achieved as detailed in **Appendix A Part II**.

- 5.4 The effect of the proposal:

(a) **How the cost represents good value**

This is not a cost but a proposal to deliver a capital receipt sum, whilst making savings on vacant running costs and risks associated with owning a vacant property. The property has been openly marketed to ensure that best value consideration has been achieved.

(b) **Future savings/efficiencies being delivered**

Savings in security and other ongoing holding costs associated with the holding of vacant property will be achieved.

(c) **Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact**

The proposal supports the Asset Strategy to rationalise the property estate. There are no HR or IT implications.

### **6. Risk implications and mitigations**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating Action (in place or planned)</b>
The current purchaser does not proceed with the purchase for whatever reason and the property needs to be re-marketed potentially resulting in a	Agreed Heads of Terms set out a deadline of 8 weeks from the receipt of the full legal pack for the parties to have exchanged contracts. Should the sale to the preferred bidder not proceed, WSCC will engage with other bidders to secure a sale above

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
decrease in the offer and a reduced capital receipt	the agreed minimum value or make a decision as to when best to remarket the property.
There is a continued financial risk in holding onto under-utilised assets, which can delay capital receipts or income, or where there is no or limited-service benefit.	The decision to dispose of the property within an agreed timeframe.

## 7. Policy alignment and compliance

- 7.1 The proposal supports the [Asset Management Policy and Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26](#) which has a key objective to manage, maintain, acquire and dispose of surplus property effectively, efficiently and sustainably, together with optimising financial return. In line with this strategy the County Council now proposes to dispose of its freehold estate in this property.
- 7.2 There are no direct implications arising from the proposal on equality duty and human rights, climate change, crime and disorder, public health or social value.

Andrew Edwards

**Assistant Director (Property and Assets)**

**Contact Officer: Simon Moore**, Principal Estates Surveyor  
[simon.moore@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:simon.moore@westsussex.gov.uk)

**Appendix A (Part II – exempt)** – Summary of offers received (for Members only)

**Appendix B** - Site Plan

**Background Papers** - None