



## **ECONOMY REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday, 29 September 2021**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>SALE OF LAND AT CROSS LANE, WALLASEY</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report seeks approval for a recommendation to be made to Policy and Resources Committee for the disposal of land at Cross Lane, Wallasey.

The sale will enable West Wallasey Van Hire to meet its expansion needs and will generate a capital receipt.

The matter affects the Wallasey Ward and is not a key decision.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

It is recommended that the Economy and Regeneration Committee requests that Policy and Resources Committee approves that:

- (1) the site edged red on the attached plan set out as Appendix 1 to this report, at Cross Lane, Wallasey, be declared surplus to Council requirements.
- (2) the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to agree a sale of the site to West Wallasey Van Hire for £150,000 plus £3,000 towards the Council's legal costs and surveyor's fees(3) notices be placed in the local press in accordance with section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 regarding the intention of the Council to sell land comprising open space and any objections received be considered and determined by the Director of Regeneration and Place, in consultation with the Chair and Spokesperson of the Policy and Resources Committee; and
- (4) the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to negotiate a variation of the lease with Forestry England to facilitate an access to the site.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 To facilitate the sale of land to West Wallasey Van Hire to enable the Company to meet its expansion needs and to generate a capital receipt from the sale of the land.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Due to the restricted access the site has limited potential. The Council could retain the land, but it is currently unmaintained and underused.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The land which is shown edged red on the plan annexed as appendix 1 has previously been used as amenity space with part being used by Mosslands School as its playing fields. The plan shows the land located adjacent to Ashville football ground with the railway line running to its early border, with Forestry England's land to the south. The site has limited access which is currently provided via the School Lane footpath and underpass. It also suffers from flooding and as a consequence it has not been used as a playing field for decades with Mosslands school having relocated its sporting activities to the neighbouring Wallacre playing fields.
- 3.2 West Wallasey Van Hire (WWVH) is located at the premises shown edged blue on the plan in appendix 1. The premises is located towards the end of Cross Lane and is visible from the motorway link road. It also occupies several sites at various locations in the borough. WWVH has advised that its current main site is being operated at maximum capacity and is inadequate to meet its future growth plans. Consequently, it is considering options to expand and consolidate the business in its current location which would be facilitated by the purchase of the land that is subject of this report. If this is not possible WWVH has stated that due to the lack of alternative sites in Wirral the company may have to look outside of the borough to realise its growth ambitions. Since the company started over 46 years ago it has steadily grown and expanded its operations to become one of the largest independent van hire companies in the U.K. Its Cross Lane site currently employs 280 people, mainly drawn from the local area, in a range of sales, administration and technical roles. The company estimates that a further 250 jobs could be created over the next 5 years if it is able to realise its growth plans.
- 3.3 WWVH is aware that expansion on to the Council's land has a number of challenges but has worked with consultants to try to mitigate them. Their proposal will include the following:
- a. The need to engineer a solution to the water levels on the site;
  - b. The need to create a linked access route from their site to the Council's land via the route shown hatched black on the plan. This land is owned by the Council but leased to Forestry England. The terms of the lease with forestry England will need to be varied to permit the construction of a link road between the two sites. Any special conditions required by Forestry England will be met by WWVH;

- c. Third party pedestrian access through the site will be provided via reserved rights of way to access Forestry England's site and also the playing field identified on the plan;
- d. As part of the planning process WWVH has recognised that the land it wishes to purchase is designated as greenspace in the Council's UDP and has therefore agreed to provide, as part of its planning process for its expansion plans, a commuted sum that would be used to fund works to off-set the loss of the greenspace. Early discussion between WWVH and planning officers have identified a range of options that could be included in a future programme of works including an upgrade to the changing facilities at nearby Wallacre Park as well as providing new drainage infrastructure to upgrade the park's football and rugby pitches. Details of this will be determined as part of the planning process for the new facility.
- e. WWVH has previously secured planning consent (now lapsed) to provide access to its site from the motorway link road. This is a hugely costly proposal that will help address some of the access issues to the site. Should the Council approve the sale of this site, WWVH will resurrect its application to create this access.

3.4 The site in its current status could not be readily sold on the open market due to its lack of access and the restrictions referred to above. In negotiating a purchase price, the Council commissioned a valuation of the land which took in to account the above factors and established a land value in the sum of £150,000. WWVH has agreed to pay this sum plus a contribution towards the Council's legal costs and surveyor's fees. WWVH will sub a detailed planning application for both the expansion land and the new access road. The sale would only complete once full planning is granted. As this will incur significant expenditure by WWVH they would need the confidence that securing planning permission would result in them acquiring the site. It is therefore proposed that, if approved, a contract for sale be entered into which is conditional on the securing of full planning consent.

3.5 The site is open to public access. Accordingly, a proposal to dispose of the land will need to be advertised in the local press in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972. Agreement to disposal on the terms now proposed would be subject to the outcome of the public advertisement period. The sale will result in the loss of amenity space, but the steps required to try to offset the loss of amenity will only be fully determined within the planning process.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The sale will generate a capital receipt of £150,000 towards the capital receipt target agreed as part of the 2021/22 budget, plus a contribution towards the Council's costs.

4.2 A sale of the site would remove the maintenance liability, albeit relatively minor.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Council is obliged to obtain the best price reasonably obtainable under s 123 of the Local Government Act 1972. To establish best price the Council sought the advice of an external valuer.

5.2 The proposed sale of this open space land will be advertised by Public Notice and any objections will be considered by the Director of Regeneration and Place in consultation with the Chair and Spokespersons of Policy and Resources Committee.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

6.1 There are no IT or staffing implications arising from the disposal of this land.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 Failure to complete the deal will result in the potential loss of a capital receipt of £150,000. It could also force WWVH to look elsewhere for a location to meet its expansion plans.

7.2 The proposal by WWVH could fail to secure planning consent, in which case the sale would not proceed.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 The sale of the site will be advertised by way of Public Notice as required under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972.

8.2 The sale will only take place once WWVH secure planning consent and as such the public will be consulted on the proposed change of use of the land as part of that process.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 This report has no direct equality implications..

9.2 Access to the site is currently limited to a single, poorly maintained footpath. As part of the proposed planning application WWVH are proposing to upgrade and light this footpath and create a new link to the remediated Cross Lane landfill. This will enhance the connectivity of the area making it more accessible.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The sale of this site will result in the loss of amenity space as referred to in the report. The purchaser will be asked to make contributions to the enhancement of other sports and amenity facilities as part of the planning process.

10.2 The purchaser has been made aware of the Council's aspirations to tackle the climate emergency and has offered the following information to be taken into consideration:

*In respect of West Wallasey's environmental credentials, we have x5 onsite wind turbines that produce more green energy than we use onsite (displacing more than*

*50 tonnes of CO2 annually) making us one of the most environmentally sustainable businesses for energy in the country. We are also transitioning our customers across to electric vehicle fleets wherever possible in a drive to net zero emissions.*

*In conjunction with electric vehicles, we are also in discussion with manufacturers in relation to zero emission hydrogen technology to support businesses that work in heavy industries or remote regions where electric vehicles may not fulfil their requirements. We are independently audited for our environmental management and we are accredited to the internationally recognised ISO14001 standard.*

*The proposal is for vehicle storage on land adjoining the current West Wallasey's main site. The environmental and community impacts of this proposal have been considered from the beginning of the design process and West Wallasey seeks to incorporate the following, bringing wider benefits across the area:*

- *Permeable car parking surfacing and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to mitigate flood risk.*
  - *Tree and buffer woodland planting to screen the car park and improve the environmental quality for users of the new footpath.*
  - *Biodiversity will be enhanced on the site through the tree planting and other landscaping as well as the potential creation of new ponds as part of the SuDS proposals.*
  - *Creation of a new footpath (from existing pedestrian entry point under railway line) which will relocate the Public Rights of Way to ensure accessibility is maintained. Furthermore, an additional path will be provided to increase access to the Forestry Commission woodland, situated south of the site.*
  - *Improvement of existing nearby sports pitches as well as off-site improvement of other open spaces, as agreed with Wirral Council officers.*
- Further details of the above will be discussed as the scheme develops, but the overarching principles of the proposal consider the local environment and seek to provide mitigation or enhancement where possible.*

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 The aim of this report is to secure the best possible outcome for the future of this land.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Site plan

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Negotiated Heads of Terms

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>