

Part 1

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WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
FULL COUNCIL – 12 MARCH 2025
REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

PURCHASE OF A PROPERTY IN WELWYN HATFIELD

Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council is currently progressing plans for the regeneration of Hatfield Town Centre. The programme is advanced and has primarily utilised properties owned by the Council.
- 1.2 Ownership of key property assets in areas targeted for regeneration greatly increases both the options available to the Council and the viability and deliverability of those options.
- 1.3 Over time privately owned sites in the town centres become available on the open market. These windfall sites can provide the Council with the opportunity to increase its property holdings, enabling future regeneration.

Whilst regeneration plans are being progressed ownership of key assets can provide other opportunities, including greater control of the direction of travel of town centres and generation of revenue income.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Full Council recognises the potential benefits of acquiring windfall sites in the town centres and instructs officers to investigate these when appropriate.
- 2.2 That Full Council agrees the budget amendment proposed in the Part II report with a view to officers further investigating potential purchases.
- 2.3 That Full Council grants delegated authority to the Executive Director (Place), in consultation with the Leader, Executive Member (Planning) and Executive Member (Finance) to agree a purchase for a figure no greater than the budget sum (as set out in the Part 2 report).

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The Council is currently progressing plans for town centre regeneration in Hatfield. Plans for Hatfield are advanced with improvement works already carried out to White Lion Square, construction works at One Town Centre and Link Drive due to complete in the near future, the regeneration of Market Place due to commence imminently and other future development sites identified.
- 3.2 The Council's regeneration of Hatfield Town Centre has been via the use of council owned land and property (many of which were acquired during a previously aborted regeneration scheme in the early and mid 2000's). As such

the Council have had significant control over the direction of development and have directly benefitted from the outcomes.

- 3.3 There are also a number of sites in private ownership in the town centre. The ownership is relatively fragmented and as such it is difficult for individual owners to carry out significant improvements. There is potential for the Council to acquire sites on the open market over a period of time, this will allow for future regeneration, ensuring that there is a cycle of continuous improvement, preventing the type of issues common in new towns, where multiple assets reach the end of life at the same time, resulting in a period of stagnation, followed by urban decline.
- 3.4 Due to the fragmented nature of the ownership of property in Hatfield Town Centre these windfall sites are likely to be available at relatively low values and can be acquired over an extended period of time. It may be possible to fund at least some of these acquisitions via existing Council reserves, while others may require borrowing.
- 3.5 A potential windfall site has been identified and further details are given in the part II report.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 Local Authorities are permitted to purchase property for the purposes of any of their functions, or to benefit, improve or develop their area under S120 of the Local Government Act 1972. Councils are permitted to borrow under this Act to fund purchases. It is anticipated that most windfall acquisitions could be carried out under this Act.
- 4.2 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives Local Authorities the ability to do anything that an individual generally may do, including purchasing property. However there are a number of constraints to these powers. Councils are permitted to borrow to fund purchases under this Act but, again, there are constraints to this borrowing. It is anticipated that any windfall acquisitions which could not be carried out under S120 of the Local Government Act 1972 could likely be carried out under this Act.
- 4.3 Local Authorities are also permitted to acquire properties for investment under section 12 of the Local Government Act 2003. There are significant constraints to this power, particularly where borrowing is involved. It is not considered likely that any of the windfall acquisitions would be carried out under this Act.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There would be costs associated with the purchase, these are set out in Part II of the report.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 There are general risks associated with the acquisition of any property, specific risks associated with the windfall site in question are set out in the Part II report.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

7.1 None directly from this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 External advice will be required in relation to potential purchases. It is intended that this will be provided by companies within existing framework agreements.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 None at this stage.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

10.1 There will be some increased workload, both in the short term investigating this acquisition and to a lesser extent in the long term management of the property. Both these can be accommodated within existing resources.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

11.1 None.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

12.1 It will be necessary to communicate the reasons behind any acquisition and the benefits to the Council.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the following Council's Corporate Priorities.

13.2 Homes to be proud of – Town Centre regeneration can provide significant number of both private and affordable housing.

13.3 Enable an economy that delivers for everyone – Town Centre regeneration is vital in ensuring vibrant town centres with an appropriate mix of uses.

13.4 Action on Climate Change – Where assets are Council owned the Council has the opportunity to improve the energy performance of those assets.

13.5 Run an effective council – Acquisition of sites as and when they become available from a willing vendor is more efficient than having to acquire in bulk from potentially reluctant owners.

13.6 Together, create opportunities for our communities – Town Centre regeneration creates opportunities for our communities by providing the necessary infrastructure for events as well as providing homes, civic and leisure facilities and retail space.

14 Equality and Diversity

14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed at this stage as this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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Title	Assistant Director of Regeneration and Economic Development
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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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