

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

7 January 2020

Subject: Acquisition of Land at Horton Road Devizes

Cabinet Member: Cllr Philip Whitehead - Leader of the Council and
Cabinet Member for Economic Development

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

The Council has been approached by representatives of three companies which would like to construct new employment facilities on land at Horton Road Devizes. The site is shown on the site plan in Appendix A. The owner of the main site is reluctant to sell individual plots, preferring to dispose of the whole.

It is proposed that the Council acquires the whole site, together with the adjoining skid pan owned by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, then sells individual parcels to those or any other interested companies. Any remaining land could be developed for employment purposes by the Council as an investment.

Proposals

To recommend to Full Council:

1. That the Council acquires, subject to the grant of planning permission, the land at Horton Road Devizes, including the skid pan
2. To dispose of individual plots to companies to enable employment development to take place
3. To construct employment units on any remaining land as a commercial investment

Reason for Proposals

To enable employment development to take place thereby safeguarding and creating jobs in accordance with 'Growing the Economy' section of the Council's Business Plan

Alistair Cunningham OBE, Executive Director, Growth, Investment and Place

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Purpose of Report

1. The Council has been approached by representatives of three companies which would like to construct new employment facilities on land at Horton Road Devizes.
2. The owner of the main site is reluctant to sell individual plots, preferring to dispose of the whole. This site is shown edged red on the site plan in Appendix A.
3. It is proposed that the Council acquires the whole site, together with the adjoining skid pan owned by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (shown coloured pink on the site plan), then sells individual parcels to those or any other interested companies. Any remaining land could be developed for employment purposes by the Council as an investment.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

4. The acquisition of the land by the Council will enable employment development to take place thereby safeguarding and creating jobs in accordance with 'Growing the Economy' section of the Council's Business Plan

Background

5. The site, including part of the skid pan, extends to approximately 8.5 hectares (21 acres), is allocated in the Council's Core Strategy for employment development, with specific reference in Appendix A: Development Templates For Strategic Allocations (pages 338 – 341).
6. The owner of the site has offered the site for sale as a whole but has so far been unable to find a purchaser.
7. The Council has been approached by the representatives of three Wiltshire based companies, all of whom have ambitions to expand and modernise their facilities. Their combined requirements are still being refined, but an initial assessment identifies that the vast majority, if not all, of the net developable area of the site and the skid pan would be absorbed.

8. The land owner is reluctant to sell the site by way of individual plots, however an acquisition and subsequent disposal in parts would unlock this strategic employment development site.

Main Considerations for the Council

9. The Council's Employment Land Review dated May 2018 at section 7.3 (page 67) states:

'The findings of this report are that there are supply side issues which if not addressed will act as a constraint on economic development in Wiltshire'

10. The section identifies a number of interventions that should be considered by the Council including:

'Purchase of part or all of a site to enable development to take place'.

11. The land owner has accepted an offer from the Council, conditional upon the grant of planning permission for the site and subject to approval from Cabinet and Full Council.
12. The owner of the adjoining skid pan, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, has indicated that it would be prepared to sell the land to the Council.
13. The representatives of the three companies have agreed in principle that their clients would be prepared to enter into a binding transaction to acquire the part of the site that would meet their requirements immediately following the purchase by the Council.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

14. No engagement has taken place with the relevant leading Members of the Overview and Scrutiny function at this stage.

Safeguarding Implications

15. No safeguarding risks have been identified.

Public Health Implications

16. Any public health implications would have been taken into account when the site was allocated for employment development in the Council's Core Strategy

Procurement Implications

17. If there is part of the site that the Council intends to develop out itself as a commercial investment, then this will be conducted in accordance with all procurement rules and regulations.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

18. There are no negative equalities implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

19. The Council's Core Strategy for employment development at Appendix A: Development Templates For Strategic Allocations (pages 338 – 341) identifies and recommends action that should be taken if the site is to be developed, including: transport, green infrastructure and biodiversity, ecology, landscape, archaeology and historical interest.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

20. If the Council does not acquire the site then the three companies may decide to relocate outside of the county thereby resulting in job losses.
21. In addition, the landowner may consider submitting a planning application for residential development on all or part of the site thereby potentially leading to the loss of some or all of this strategic site for employment development.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

22. There is a risk that one or more of the three companies may decide to not acquire their part of the site. In such circumstances the Council could develop the site itself on a speculative but phased basis. It is considered that there is demand from local companies for small to medium sized employment units.
23. There is a risk that planning permission is refused. The representatives of the three companies have agreed in principle to share the costs incurred in submitting a planning application together with the costs of obtaining the appropriate expert consultants to support the application

Financial Implications

24. The financial implications are set out in the confidential report submitted to this meeting of Cabinet.

Legal Implications

25. The legal implications are set out in the confidential report submitted to this meeting of Cabinet.

Workforce Implications

26. The acquisition and the subsequent sales will be dealt with by Council officers within the existing structure.

Options Considered

27. The Council could decide not to acquire the site and skid pan in which case the three companies may decide to relocate elsewhere. In addition the site may not be developed for employment purposes.
28. Both would have negative implications for job retention and creation.

Conclusions

29. The acquisition of the site, together with the skid pan, provides an opportunity for the Council to actively intervene to enable employment development to take place at 'stalled sites' as identified by the Council's Employment Land Review dated May 2018.

Alistair Cunningham OBE, Executive Director, Growth, Investment and Place

Report Author:

Chris Hilton, Interim Head of Economic Development

20 November 2019

Appendices

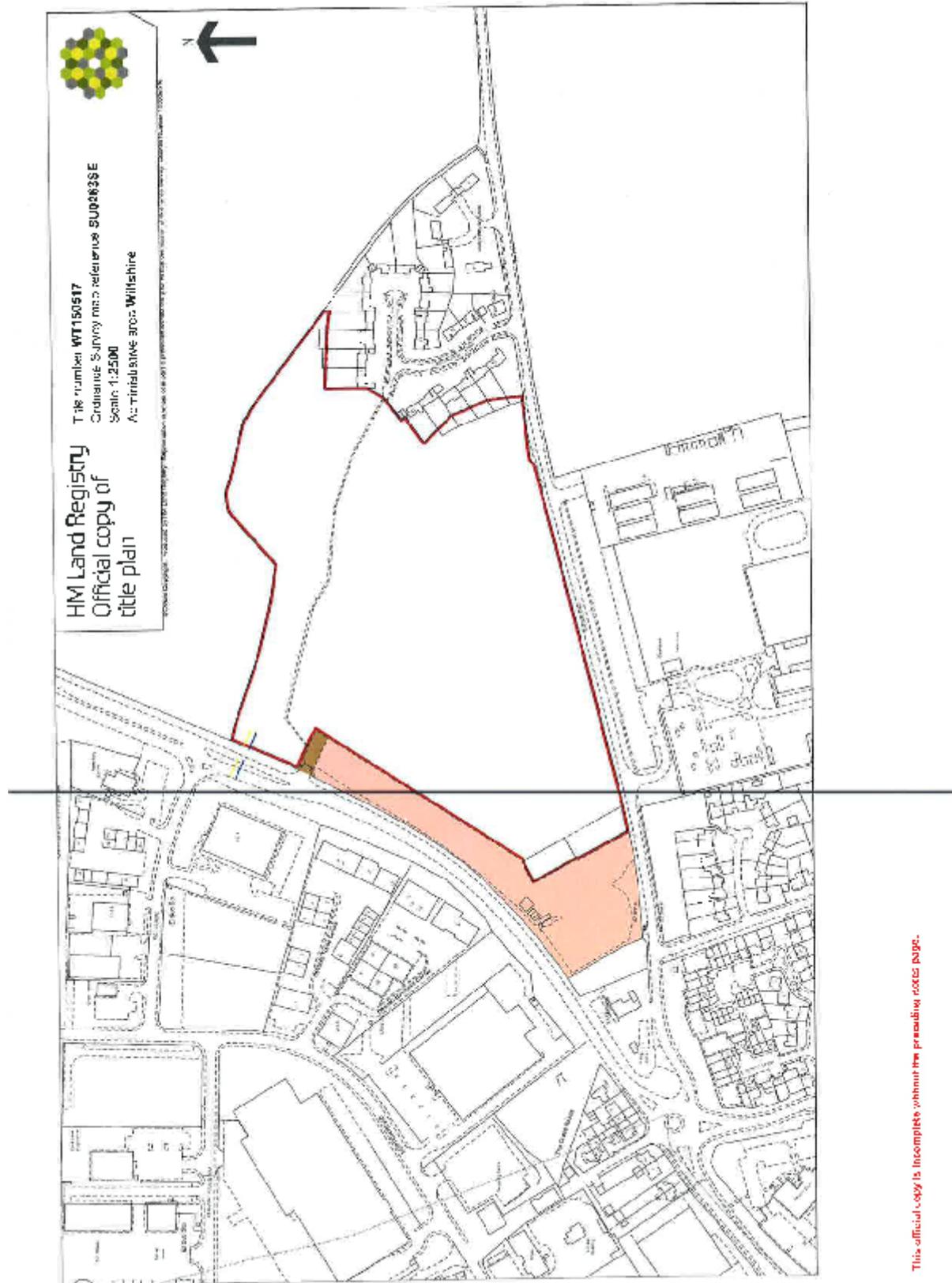
Appendix A: Site Plan

Background Papers

Employment Land Review May 2018

The Council's Core Strategy for employment development at Appendix A:
Development Templates For Strategic Allocations (pages 338 – 341)

Appendix A: Site Plan



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