

EASTERN QUARTER

Cabinet Member: Councillor Steve Broadbent

Wards Affected: Abbey, Terriers and Amersham Hill

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PROPOSED DECISION

That:

- (i) the aspiration for the regeneration of the Eastern Quarter be noted and agreement be given in principle to compulsorily purchase the Brunel engine shed and surrounding land, subject to Member approval of the specific budget bid; and
- (ii) the decision to enter into agreements necessary for the redevelopment of the shed and surrounding land be delegated to the Corporate Director (Growth and Regeneration), in consultation with the Head of Finance and Commercial, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, subject to budgets being agreed.

Reason for Decision

The regeneration of the area around High Wycombe railway station (the 'Eastern Quarter') is vital for the prosperity of the town and the wider district. The acquisition of the Brunel engine shed and surrounding land is the first step in this process.

Corporate Implications

1. A capital bid as part of the 2019/20 budget setting process has been made to cover the acquisition and redevelopment of the shed. Details are set out in exempt Appendix A.
2. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 gives the Council powers to acquire land in its area at Section 226(1)(a)&(b) if the authority thinks that the acquisition will "facilitate the carrying out of development, redevelopment or improvement on or in relation to the land", or where the land involved "is required for the a purpose which it is necessary to achieve in the interests of the proper planning of an area in which the land is situated." Final authority to confirm the Order rests with the Secretary of State.
3. This power is limited though Section 226 (1A) to circumstances in which the authority thinks the development etc is likely to contribute to the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of their area.

Executive Summary

4. The area around High Wycombe station has long been identified as being suitable for regeneration. The lack of a sense of place and the presence of the

undeveloped Brunel shed has meant that developers are unwilling to invest. The redevelopment of the shed will raise the profile of High Wycombe as a town and will encourage investment.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications

5. The acquisition and redevelopment of the Brunel shed fits with the Council's corporate priorities:

A great place to be – the Brunel shed will be brought back into use as a facility for the people of High Wycombe and for visitors. It will animate a previously unused area of the town and generate a sense of civic pride.

Strong communities – once it is in use it is envisaged that the Brunel shed, alongside commercial uses, will be able to be used by community groups for events.

Growth and prosperity – the Brunel shed will provide a location for start-up business, for example in the food & beverage markets, adding to the wider prosperity of the town.

Efficient and effective – the regeneration of the Eastern Quarter will be greatly assisted by the acquisition and redevelopment of the Brunel shed. It will generate publicity for the area and help to create the sense that Wycombe is 'open for business'.

Background and Issues

6. The Brunel engine shed is a Grade II listed building immediately to the south of High Wycombe railway station. It was in private ownership and used for commercial purposes up until approximately a decade ago when it was purchased by Chiltern Rail. Since then it has not been brought back into use.
7. The Brunel shed effectively blights what could be a new station square for High Wycombe and until it is brought back into use it is highly unlikely that further investment in the immediate area will be made.
8. There have been many attempts to persuade Chiltern Rail to invest in the building over the years but none have been successful and it is now clear that moving to compulsory purchase, as a final resort, is the only route available to the Council if the situation is to ever be resolved.

Consultation

9. A meeting has taken place with Chiltern Rail, informing them of the Council's intentions and timescale for a decision to be made.

Options

10. To not proceed with the compulsory purchase of the Brunel engine shed and to continue to attempt to persuade Chiltern Rail to redevelop the site. This is not recommended for the reasons set out in this report. Officers will continue to negotiate with Chiltern Rail, but authority to compulsorily purchase is required, as negotiations have proved unproductive so far.

Conclusions

11. Chiltern Rail have had 10 years to redevelop the building and have not done so – it is very unlikely that this situation will change, therefore the recommended course of action is the only one available.

Next Steps

12. The compulsory purchase process normally takes around 18 months. However, if Chiltern Rail do not object then it could be considerably shorter. Alternatively, Chiltern Rail could be in a position to negotiate a sale, in which case the process would be shorter still.
13. Following acquisition there will be a period of works of 6-12 months following which the shed will be available to use. Design, planning and survey work, along with related procurement activity can all take place in parallel with the compulsory purchase process.

Background Papers

Exempt Appendix A: background detail.