

RAF BATTLE OF BRITAIN BUNKER ENCLAVE

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| Cabinet Member | Councillor Ray Puddifoot MBE |
| Cabinet Portfolio | Leader of the Council |
| Officer Contact | Raj Alagh, Administration Directorate |
| Papers with report | Appendix 1: Site Plan |

HEADLINE INFORMATION

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| Summary | This report seeks Cabinet approval to formally acquire the RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave outlined in red on the site plan. |
| Putting our Residents First | This report supports the Council's key objectives of: <i>Our People; Our Heritage and Civic Pride; Our Built Environment;</i> |
| Financial Cost | The Council will receive a grant from HM Treasury for the purpose of preserving and renovating the RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave |
| Relevant Policy Overview Committees | Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee and Residents' & Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee. |
| Ward(s) affected | Uxbridge North |

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 1. Welcomes the commitment of the Council and the government to secure the future of the RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave.**
- 2. Authorises the acquisition of the RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave by the Council from the Ministry of Defence.**
- 3. Agrees to accept a grant of £1m from HM Treasury.**
- 4. Agrees to accept a gift of the leasehold land hatched black on the site plan from the Ministry of Defence and Annington Property Limited.**
- 5. Instructs the Borough Solicitor to complete the legal documentation to facilitate all property transactions which are the subject of the report.**
- 6. Authorises the Council to undertake all necessary works to refurbish and renovate the RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave.**

7. **Notes that the Council will give consideration to applying for Heritage Lottery Funding.**
8. **Delegates authority to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services, in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Residents Services, to make all necessary decisions to give effect to the above recommendations and any other decisions which are required in relation to the RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave.**

Reasons for recommendations

The RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave is of huge historical importance, not only in the Borough itself, but also nationally. It is therefore imperative that all possible steps are taken to ensure that it is renovated and preserved.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Council could decide not to acquire the RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave and renovate it but this is not considered to be a viable option, given its historical importance.

INFORMATION

Background

1. The RAF Battle of Britain Bunker ["the Bunker"] was built by Sir Robert McAlpine between February and August 1939 and it became operational on 25 August, just nine days before the outbreak of the Second World War which was officially declared on 3 September 1939. The Bunker was involved in the war within the first week and it was designated as the No.11 Group Operations Room which played a pivotal role in defeating the German airforce, the Luftwaffe. In fact, this was the room from which most of the RAF's involvement in the Battle of Britain was coordinated.
2. The Bunker continued as the No.11 Group Operations Room until 1958 and during this time it was used to track aircraft during the early days of the Cold War.
3. In 1958, Lord Dowding, who held the high rank of Air Chief Marshal during the Battle of Britain, unveiled a memorial close to the entrance of the Bunker, commemorating its role during the Battle of Britain where more than two-thirds of enemy aircraft shot down during the Battle were destroyed by the No.11 Group. At the bottom of the memorial Sir Winston Churchill's famous words are recorded, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed, by so many to so few" which he first spoke outside the Bunker on 16 August 1940.
4. The Bunker is located on the west side of Vine Lane and to the south of St Andrew's Road in Uxbridge. It is a Grade 1 listed building and forms part of St Andrews Park, the former RAF Uxbridge site, where a substantial development is taking place which includes the construction of up to 1,340 new homes, a new primary school, a large public park and related amenities.

5. The Bunker is currently owned by the Ministry of Defence ["MoD"] and although RAF Uxbridge closed in 2010, the MoD has granted permission for the Bunker enclave to continue to be referred to as RAF Uxbridge.
6. The approximate size of the Bunker is 12.65m by 35.58m plus related infrastructure. The Bunker is underground with the floor being located approximately 60ft below ground level. It is accessed by a staircase and is described in the Heritage Statement which was prepared in November 2014, and which accompanied the planning application for the new visitor's centre, as:

"Consisting of the main underground building plus two main surface structures forming the entrance and an emergency exit point. Both of these have airlocks and a stairwell. These have attached underground air filtration rooms with exhaust and air vents that rise above ground. The exit/entrances are concreted to the main block by 53ft long corridors at either end of the block and these are aligned in opposite directions".
7. The Council has actively supported the Bunker over the years and its involvement includes:
 - refurbishing and relocating the Spitfire Gate Guardian;
 - providing bespoke cover for the original Battle of Britain Plotting Table;
 - installing interpretation boards and Perspex panels inside the Uxbridge Room located in the Bunker;
 - removing double yellow line markings and providing new defined parking bays, including provision for the disabled;
 - improving road signage to the Bunker;
 - giving 100 copies of the Bunker's Battle of Britain film to World War Two veterans;
 - making venues available, free of charge, to facilitate Battle of Britain Bunker meetings.
8. The Bunker is of huge historical interest which has been highlighted by the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. It is open to members of the public and attracts approximately 7,000 visitors each year. In addition to the memorial, it includes replica Hurricane and Spitfire aircraft. Guided tours are available but as the Bunker is located in a compound, it is closed to the public at night.

AUS Building 76

9. AUS Building 76 ["the Building"] adjoins the Bunker. It was constructed as a First World War Cadet Officers' Mess and originally comprised a much larger building, half of which was demolished in 1987 to allow construction of the adjoining Uinter Building. The Building currently comprises a visitor's centre and volunteer support building, associated with the Bunker. It provides toilet and visitors facilities. The gross internal area of the Building is approximately 611sqm.

10. The Building has a main corridor, leading to numerous compartmentalised offices, a classroom, a library, store rooms and associated accommodation which is in a poor state. It is surrounded by grassed and landscaped areas and mature woodland.
11. On 29 January 2015, the Council granted full planning permission for a new Battle of Britain Education and Visitor's Centre. This will require the demolition of the Building and for it to be replaced with a state of the art visitor's centre with exhibition space, auditorium, meeting rooms, library, cafe and shop with associated parking area and landscaping.

The Valuation Report

12. The MoD has deemed that both the Bunker and the Building are surplus to its requirements. It is happy to divest itself of any further responsibility for the Bunker and the Building and agrees that the Council should take all necessary steps to renovate and preserve them. On this basis, the MoD has agreed to transfer its freehold interests in the Bunker, the Building and the surrounding land to the Council, which are collectively known as the RAF Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave. The full extent of the proposed transfer is shown as marked red on the site plan. The area shaded brown on the plan is a road which is to be subject to the transfer but both the MOD and Annington Property Limited will retain a right of way over it.
13. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation, which is part of the MoD, commissioned GVA, a leading firm of property consultants, to provide a Red Book Market Valuation of both the Bunker and the Building.
14. GVA issued its valuation report in February 2015. It assessed the market value of the freehold interest in the Building at £365,000, with the benefit of full planning permission, and it further assessed the market value of the Bunker as minus £400,000, having regard to its ongoing liabilities.

The grant from HM Treasury

15. The MoD recognises that the Council will have to incur significant expense in preserving and renovating the Bunker and the Building and therefore, not only has it agreed to transfer them, together with the surrounding land, for nil consideration but HM Treasury has also agreed to pay a grant of £1m to the Council. It is lawful for the Council to accept this payment on the basis that it legitimately forms part of the consideration of transferring the Bunker enclave to the Council. Additionally, the Council has the power to receive the sum of £1m as a gift, pursuant to Section 139 of the Local Government Act 1972. This provision empowers the Council to accept gifts of property, whether real or personal, either for the purpose of discharging any of its functions or for the benefit of the inhabitants of its area.

Annington Property Limited

16. The MoD has granted a 999 year lease to a company known as Annington Property Limited ["Annington"] in relation to the land hatched black on the site plan. Cabinet will note that this land falls within the area outlined in red on the site plan. Annington has agreed with the MoD that it is willing to transfer its leasehold interest, jointly with the MoD, to the Council as a gift, (and therefore for nil consideration), as part of the wider property

transaction. Once again, this triggers Section 139 of the Local Government Act 1972 which allows the Council to lawfully accept the gift from the MOD and Annington.

The Proposed Works to the Bunker Enclave

17. The Council, having commissioned a feasibility report, is proposing to develop a new RAF Battle of Britain Education and Visitor's Centre to complement the Bunker. This new building will replace the Building and will cost approximately £4.5m to construct.
18. The new two storey Centre will have a gross internal floor area of 1800m², providing a double space exhibition area which will allow for the display of full size World War Two aircraft together with a gallery at first floor level, library, workshop, lecture theatre, meeting room, gift shop, cafe and ancillary accommodation. Furthermore, an internal lift will be provided to ensure that the Centre is fully accessible by the disabled.
19. The Council will also be undertaking refurbishment works to modernise the Bunker. This will include introducing measures to protect it from flooding and further deterioration through age. The Council will give consideration to applying for Heritage Lottery Funding to assist it in meeting the costs of these works.
20. A two stage procurement exercise is to be undertaken by the Council for the purpose of facilitating these works. The first stage is to be a competitive process, leading to the selection of a preferred contractor with whom, during stage two, the Design Team will finalise the design up to the required stage. The preferred contractor will then become responsible for the design process going forward and its remit will also include confirmation of the contract sum.

The Legal Documentation

21. The Borough Solicitor is working closely with the MoD's solicitor in relation to the preparation and agreement of the necessary legal documentation required to transfer MoD's freehold interest in the Bunker Enclave and Annington's leasehold interest to the Council. This will take time to finalise so the Council has reached agreement with the MoD that the parties will enter into two interim licences. The first is to allow the Council to occupy the Bunker enclave on a short term basis and the second is to give the Council the right to undertake certain works which will include the demolition of the Building and a small adjacent boiler room. Annington is not required to be a party to the Licences as the Council, does not currently envisage carrying out any works in relation to the area of land hatched black on the site plan. The Licences are in the process of being finalised.

Financial Implications

22. The MoD has agreed to transfer its freehold interest in the Battle of Britain Bunker Enclave to the London Borough of Hillingdon for a nil consideration, and will therefore become a Hillingdon asset with the responsibility to redevelop and maintain the site. There is also to be a gift / transfer of leasehold land also at nil consideration with a 999 year lease from Annington Property.

The 2015/16 capital programme approved by Cabinet in February 2015 includes a budget of £4,850k for the Battle of Britain heritage project to be funded from Council resources,

with an amount of £3,350k currently forecast as re-phasing to complete the project in future years. The recent announcement of £1,000k funding from the Treasury to be accepted as a gift will be a beneficial contribution towards this project reducing the level of Council resources required. It is also noted that consideration will be made around submitting a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to contribute to the project. At this early stage the timescales of the bidding process and likelihood of success are not known.

COMMENTS OF POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEES

None at this stage.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

There will be a significant benefit as a site of such historical value will be preserved for the benefit of residents in the Borough.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

None required.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Property and Construction

The Red Book Valuation report produced by GVA on behalf of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation is mentioned in the body of the report and the valuations of both the Building and the Bunker have been reviewed by Corporate Property. The market valuation assessed by GVA of the Building at £365,000 was based on the assumption that there is no realistic prospect of a higher value driven by residential redevelopment and relies on an alternative use within the existing D1 Planning use. The residual valuation approach adopted by GVA is reasonable and the valuation falls within an acceptable valuation range.

GVA's assessment of the market value of the Bunker at minus £400,000 is assessed on a profits based valuation approach and considers that the outgoings will exceed the potential income, thereby producing a negative value. This again appears reasonable and the valuation is consistent with the information available.

Other Corporate Property and Construction comments are included within the body of the report.

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial implications set out above, noting the recommendation to accept a grant of £1,000k from HM Treasury as a contribution towards improvement works at the RAF Battle of Britain of Bunker will reduce the Council resourced requirement of this scheme in the Capital Programme. The consideration for a bid submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a contribution to the Bunker Project will, if successful, further reduce the Council's financing requirement and associated capital financing costs. Updates on the bidding process will be captured through monthly monitoring reports and reflected in financing forecasts when known.

Corporate Finance further notes that the statutory accounting implications of the freehold transfers have been confirmed with the Chief Accounting Officer.

Legal

The Borough Solicitor is the author of the report and all necessary legal implications are therefore contained in the body of the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.