

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	15 th October 2002
Subject:	Wood Farm, Wood Lane, Stanmore
Key decision:	Yes
Responsible Chief Officer:	Head of Property & Development
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	Portfolio Holders for Property & Finance and for Planning.
Status:	Part II Exempt – not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) relating to the terms proposed to the Authority in the course of negotiations for the disposal of land.
Ward:	Canons
Enclosures:	Appendix A - Location Plan Appendix B - Schedule of Improvements

1. **Summary/ Reason for urgency (if applicable)**

- 1.1 This report outlines the recent history of this land which is owned by the Council but is the subject of a long term agricultural agreement. It advises of a recent change in tenancy and that a viable agricultural unit is not sustainable on this land. It suggests alternative uses for the land and recommends the basis for an agreement with the current tenants that, subject to the granting of planning permission, would see these uses implemented.

2. **Recommendations (for decision by Cabinet)**

- 2.1 That, subject to the receipt of planning consent, and the approval of the Secretary of State, the proposal to dispose on a freehold basis of the part of the Wood Farm holding required for residential development be approved on the basis set out in the report.
- 2.2 That the disposal agreement requires the remainder of Wood Farm to be surrendered back to the Council after the improvements to this land specified in the report have been undertaken.

REASON:

To ensure that this important Green Belt site is restored to accessible and useable public land and its long term future secured.

3. Policy Context (including Relevant Previous Decisions)

3.1 Previous reports have concerned the condition of this land in the Green Belt and the proposals for reinstatement following tipping activities. There have also been previous proposals for alternative uses of the land.

4. Relevance to Corporate Priorities

4.1 This report addresses the Council's stated priority of enhancing the environment in Harrow as the proposal will bring back into public use neglected Green Belt land and enable it to be used in conjunction with neighbouring countryside park. It also addresses development of a prosperous and sustainable economy in Harrow by providing investment through disposal of Council land for residential development.

5. Background Information and options considered

5.1 Background

5.1.1 Wood Farm is a Council owned property subject to long term leases granted to Stanmore Dairies Ltd. This company was owned for many years by Mr & Mrs J Bygrave but some 18 months ago the Company was sold to CP Holdings Ltd. The extent of the holding is shown on attached plan and covers approximately 75 acres. The land is held for the purposes of open space and is within the Green Belt.

5.1.2 Over a period of years the Farm has been the subject of an agricultural improvement scheme that has involved the importation of builder's waste and material on a tip and fill basis. There has been excessive and illegal tipping that has been the subject of previous Committee reports. A compromise restoration scheme was eventually agreed and monitored through the Council's Consultant Agricultural Surveyor, Bidwells.

5.1.3 Although not fully satisfactorily completed as yet the restoration is probably close enough to be finally accepted. Negotiations on this aspect are ongoing between Bidwells and CP Holdings Ltd. Acceptance of the restoration scheme will include confirmation from the Environment Agency that there are no outstanding liabilities.

5.1.4 The holding has not been farmed in any sense for several years and it is the view of Bidwells that the land is not a sustainable agricultural unit. Given the location of the site within the Green Belt the alternative uses of the land are quite limited. The land is located next to Stanmore Country Park.

5.1.5 Over recent years a number of proposals have been put forward for use of all or part of this land holding e.g. hotel and golf course, crematorium and cemetery. More recently proposals have come forward to use land on the Wood Lane frontage for limited residential development and to enhance and improve the remainder of the land and incorporate it into Stanmore Country Park.

5.2 Current Position

5.2.1 There are substantial buildings on the northern part of the holding fronting Wood Lane amounting to around 40,000 sq.ft. which has led to the suggestion of built development to replace these buildings being permitted in return for improvements to the remainder of the land.

- 5.2.2 CP Holdings have commissioned landscape architects to design a scheme that follows this suggestion and to identify the kind of improvements that might be incorporated. Without prejudice discussions have been held with Council Officers on these matters (attached is a schedule of suggested improvements).
- 5.2.3 The Chief Planning Officer comments that discussions have taken place with C P Holdings and their Consultants and these could form the basis of a proposal that could be recommended to members for approval. There are still detailed matters to be resolved, including any requirements for affordable housing and how and where these might be provided, and it is unlikely that an application will be submitted to the Development Control Committee before its November meeting. Design is still in conceptual outline stage but it is not envisaged that built elements will cover an area of land greater than 3 or 4 acres.
- 5.2.4 The Head of Property & Development has also explored the financial basis of a deal that might be possible if planning permission were to be granted. This will clearly depend on the extent of built development that would be permitted and the costs involved in the improvement to the remaining land. A formula has therefore been discussed involving the Council in receiving a percentage of net development value.
- 5.2.5 Current percentage being sought is 50% to reflect the fact that neither party can achieve a development without the other. The leases held by CP Holdings are for agricultural use only and therefore unless the Council agrees cannot be used for other purposes.
- 5.2.6 If the Council were to secure this percentage in the formula and a built development permitted somewhere approaching 40,000 sq.ft. then it should be possible to achieve a capital receipt well in excess of £2m.
- 5.2.7 Clearly the residential units will be at the top end of the property range and CP Holdings are seeking the freehold of the land upon which they will be built for onward sale. It is unlikely that 125 or 250 year leasehold interests would be acceptable. Possibly 999yr leases might be but this effectively relinquishes any real control. Members need to consider therefore freehold disposal of this part of Green Belt to facilitate this development. Any disposal will require the consent of the Secretary of State.

6. **Consultation**

- 6.1 Further consultation with local groups and Ward Councillors will be carried out in addition to the planning process when firm proposals are received.

7. **Finance Observations**

- 7.1 The receipt would contribute to the Council's Capital Investment Plan but at this stage cannot be relied upon.

8. **Legal Observations**

8.1 No additional comments

9. **Conclusion**

9.1 Over the years this agricultural holding has proved troublesome and the landfill operation effectively suspended agricultural activity. It is highly unlikely that the land could ever again sustain a viable agricultural unit.

9.2 This is a very prominent site in the Green Belt adjacent to a Country Park. The opportunity exists for enlargement of the Park and considerable enhancement and improvement to both accessibility and environment through the granting of planning permission for limited residential development on the Wood Lane frontage.

9.3 This would also realise for the Council a significant capital receipt which in these circumstances would be regarded as best value. To ensure achievement of this the Council would need to dispose of its land on a freehold basis.

10. **Background Papers**

10.1 None

11. **Author**

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