

This Report is part exempt and Appendix B is not available for public inspection as it relates to exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. It is exempt because it refers to commercially sensitive information, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information

CABINET	
Subject Heading:	Asset Disposal Programme 2022-2028
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Graham Williamson– Cabinet Member for Development and Regeneration
SLT Lead:	Neil Stubbings – Director of Regeneration
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Policy context:	Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan
Financial summary:	The proposals within this paper seek to support the Council's broader Capital Strategy by delivering a pipeline of capital receipts in the broad sum of £10m p.a. to deliver capital investment priorities whilst reducing the need for capital borrowing.
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes
	Expenditure or saving (including anticipated income) of £500,000 or more
When should this matter be reviewed?	February 2024
Reviewing OSC:	People/Place OSSC

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

People - Things that matter for residents X

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy X

Resources - A well run Council that delivers for People and Place.

Place an X as appropriate



This report considers the adoption of a medium-term asset disposal programme, providing a sustainable pipeline to deliver capital receipts as an integral part of the Council's wider Capital Strategy.

The proposed programme will span 2023/28 albeit the focus of this paper is upon the initial phase of disposals intended for completion by March 2024. Proposals for asset disposals within the subsequent 4 years will be the subject of further reports as part of the broader Capital Strategy updates to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the reasons set out in the report and its appendices, Cabinet is recommended to:

- Declare the following assets as surplus to the Council's operational requirements:
 - Former Century Youth House, Albert Road, Romford, RM1 2PS
 - Scotts Primary School House, 2 Bonington Road, Hornchurch, RM12 6TH
 - Newtons School House, Lowen Road, Rainham, RM13 8GL
 - Heather Avenue Workshop, 45 Heather Avenue, Romford RM1 4SU
 - Former Petersfield Avenue Depot, Harold Hill RM3 9PR
- Agree to the disposal of the assets identified within Appendix A, noting that the decision to dispose of car park assets is provisional at this stage and is subject to public consultation relating to the required modification of Traffic Management Orders relating to those sites, the outcome of which will be reported back to Cabinet upon completion.
- Agree that the larger sites will be sold to Mercury Land Holdings Limited, where identified within Appendix A.
- Agree to the disposal of the remaining assets within Appendix A by way of auction.

- Agree the award of contract for pre-disposal services at the cost of up to £800,000 to Mercury Land Holdings, associated with the assets listed in Appendix A.
- Delegate authority to the Director of Asset Management in consultation with the Deputy Director of Legal and Democratic Services to conduct all appropriate steps to progress and conclude the 2022/23 asset disposals in a manner that satisfies all legal/regulatory requirements. This delegation to include the terms for any interim lease-back of operational assets and/or subsequent buy-back of assets not subsequently progressed by Mercury Land Holdings.
- Delegate authority to the Director of Asset Management in consultation with the Lead Member for Development & Regeneration to agree appropriate reserve values for those assets proceeding to auction.
- Authorise the Assistant Director of Public Realm to proceed with the process for the modification of Traffic Management Orders in respect of those car parks listed in Appendix A.
- Note the further reports will follow, linked to Council's Capital Strategy, to seek formal Cabinet approval for the disposal of specific assets within the subsequent 4 years of the asset disposal programme.

REPORT DETAIL

1. Context

The Council's Capital Strategy is a key element of the wider budget and financial planning process, seeking to identify both the priorities for forthcoming capital investment and the appropriate funding sources. These funding sources typically comprise a combination of:

- Prudential borrowing.
- Use of developer contributions generated from S106 or CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) contributions.
- Capital grant (often ring-fenced).
- Capital receipts generated through asset disposal.

The relative 'ratio' of use of the above sources will vary from year to year depending upon a variety of factors, but Havering Council has proactively used the option to generate capital receipts through the sale of surplus assets over the past 15-20 years as a means of minimising reliance on prudential borrowing. By definition, there is a finite limit to the scope to generate receipts from asset disposals as the asset base diminishes over time, but opportunities are available in the medium term as a consequence of various factors including:

- Existing asset rationalisation proposals Cabinet agreed in January 2021 to rationalise its administrative accommodation to reflect revised working practices following the Covid pandemic and the opportunity to reduce the Council's office needs, rendering some buildings surplus to operational requirements
- Medium term financial strategy the need to achieve significant reductions in the Council's revenue expenditure has necessitated a comprehensive review and reprioritisation of Council services and their means of delivery. Resulting from this work is the likely opportunity to rationalise assets linked to front-line service delivery in order to deliver service efficiencies, with a consequent release of some assets from operational use.
- Asset review the Council's Asset Management Plan promotes the ongoing review of all assets to ensure that there is a clear and justified requirement for their ongoing retention. Where the alternative use value of an asset exceeds its existing (operational) use value, it is appropriate to review whether the operational case for retaining the asset can be upheld, relative to the opportunity cost (i.e the greater value that could otherwise be realised by releasing the asset). Similarly, there may be examples where the continued retention of an asset generates increasing revenue liabilities due to age, obsolescence and/or future investment/maintenance costs to the extent that disposal represents the most cost-effective option.

The above factors combine to offer a series of opportunities to develop a pipeline of capital receipts in the short to medium term to support the Council's Capital Strategy. Current indications are that capital receipts in the order of £10m per annum (£50m over the 5 year period of the disposal programme) are likely to required.

2. Pre-considerations for asset disposal

The disposal of any asset requires a varying degree of due diligence work in advance to confirm legal title, identify any potential constraints whether of a legal nature (covenants, restrictions), environmental (e.g. potential contamination or hazardous materials) or other forms of constraint. Subject to the nature of any constraints, it may be appropriate for the Council to explore means of remedying/removing these prior to any disposal in order to maximise receipt, where it is practical and cost-effective to do so.

It is also critical, as a public body, for the Council to demonstrate that it has met its obligations under S.123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to achieve 'best consideration' from any disposal.

This generally requires the Council to demonstrate that open market value (OMV) has been achieved, either by evidencing that the asset has been openly marketed, providing an opportunity to potential purchasers to submit an offer, or in circumstances where this is not practical, that an independent valuation has been provided to demonstrate that OMV has been achieved.

The nature of certain assets also requires the Council to complete various steps, some regulatory, others discretionary, as a consequence of proposed disposal. These include:

- Seeking a formal declaration from the Department for Education for any education related assets (including school houses, land etc) to confirm that the asset is surplus to education requirements
- Undertaking a formal public consultation process prior to making a decision to close car parks and to amend Traffic Management/Parking Orders in relation those carparks. The Council would consider the availability, accessibility and capacity of alternative parking provision in the local vicinity as part of this process.
- Specified procedures relating to the potential sale of land identified as public open space.

3. Challenges for the initial phase of asset disposals

This paper introduces the aim to develop a 5 year, medium-term pipeline of capital receipts up to 2028, but with a more immediate focus on the requirement to generate circa £20m of capital receipts by the end of March 2024.

For the smaller sites it is proposed to progress sales by auction in early 2023 to provide an ongoing flow of receipts pending conclusion of the larger transactions.

For the remaining assets, it is the aim, where possible, to carry out all necessary due diligence (including consultation) and to secure planning permission prior to concluding a sale to Mercury Land Holdings, such that the disposal price reflects the benefit of planning consent.

It is however recognised that it may not be feasible in the case of all sites to:

- complete the prior due diligence work identified above.
- complete the necessary studies to support a planning application, submit the application and secure planning approval
- exchange contracts and achieve legal completion with Mercury Land Holdings.

prior to 31st March 2024.

Where such a scenario is likely to arise for assets within Appendix A, it is proposed that:

- The Council and MLH will agree the potential development capacity of each site.
- Subject to future governance processes the Council will transfer the site formally to MLH for an initial capital payment, prior to the end of March 2024.
- The transaction will also include an appropriate overage/clawback provision such that MLH pay to the Council a proportion of any subsequent uplift in value resulting from the achievement of additional extra plots/units/sq.m of development that is over and above the initial assumed amount.

- Following the issue of planning permission, MLH will determine whether to retain individual sites for developing their private rental product, or seek to dispose of the site to a third party where it does not wish to retain.
- If MLH sells on the site at a higher price before commencing development, overage should be payable to LBH – based upon New Sale Price less index linked original site acquisition price, multiplied by an agreed %, less planning related and holding costs.
- Where planning permission has not been secured by the end of March 2024, it is proposed that the asset is leased back to the Council at a peppercorn rent to hold until planning consent is in place and development can proceed. This would enable operational assets to continue in their current use pending development proceeding.

Where a site does not subsequently obtain planning consent or is abortive for other reasons, then the Council will have a buy-back option on the site in question. The buy-back price to be at the original unconditional price paid by MLH to the Council.

The initial phase of asset disposals is summarised in Appendix A, accompanied by site plans indicating the extent of each site and brief background to the asset becoming surplus, where appropriate.

Indicative values are set out in the exempt Appendix B.

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Other options considered:

Do nothing

This is not considered to be an option as the failure to generate capital receipts would require the Council to increase its level of prudential borrowing to a level that would unsustainable in the context of current revenue pressures.

Defer all asset disposals until planning permission has been secured

There are pre-existing capital commitments within the Capital Programme that are predicated upon the generation of capital receipts as an alternative funding source to borrowing.

Deferring asset disposals to the point where planning consent is secured is likely to require re-profiling of the agreed capital programme and/or increased prudential borrowing.

Disposal at auction for all disposals

Asset disposal via auction does potentially offer a quicker route to legal completion as exchange of contracts takes place at the point of auction with completion generally required within 28 days.

The larger sites within Appendix A generate affordable housing provision as a planning requirement, the detail and extent of which needs to be confirmed via the planning process, such that any time advantage posed by an auction would be removed.

Sale by auction is however appropriate for the small number of sites set out at Appendix A, by exception, where advance work has already been completed and no affordable housing provision is anticipated.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

The current capital strategy and MTFS includes the requirement to generate £20m capital receipts by the end of the 2023/24 financial year, with a projected need for a further £10m in each of the subsequent three financial years, to be used to fund elements of the capital programme, thereby reducing potential capital borrowing requirement. The financial implications of each disposal will be considered individually as they are progressed, including satisfying the best value requirement.

To maximise the potential receipt generated from the sale of assets there will be the requirement to incur pre-sale expenditure as identified above within this report. Accounting regulation allows for up to 4% of the expected sale value to be financed from capital receipts and whilst this then increases the amount of receipts needed to be generated, it will ease any additional pressure on revenue as a result of these costs. The £20m receipts target set by the Council by March 2024 would mean additional pre-sale expenditure of up to £800,000 to be financed from capital receipts and therefore increasing the receipts needed to be generated to £20.8m

Pre-Sale expenditure is limited to expenditure incurred on the asset prior to any sale. Once sold any further expenditure would be included in the MLH business plan relating to the specific project

Appendix A includes 5 existing public car parks sites, collectively generating a gross annual income stream in the sum of £390,000p.a. These car park sites also generate annual operating costs (NNDR, maintenance, utility costs) in the sum of c. £200,000 p.a., suggesting a net income across the 5 sites of £190,000 p.a.

In the event of these car parks closing to enable development, a proportion of this income is likely to be displaced to other Council car parks, particularly in Hornchurch, whilst the operational costs will be shed in full.

Any transfer between the Council and MLH (whether freehold or leasehold) will likely trigger payment of SDLT.

Legal implications and risks:

In respect of the auction site and the small site to be disposed to the current leaseholder, the Council will agree adequate reserve prices and a sale price respectively, which will be informed by independent valuation advice, to ensure that the Council can comply with its duty to obtain best consideration, pursuant s.123 Local Government Act 1972.

In respect of the sites proposed for disposal to MLH, the position is more complicated as some of the sites may remain operational. The ability for MLH to develop and/or dispose of those sites will depend upon legal due diligence. Some sites may be subject to public consultation prior to ceasing current operational use. Furthermore, there remains the possibility that planning permission could be refused.

Any disposal to MLH will allow for buy-back to account for the above factors and as such any capital receipt generated by this arrangement may be repayable.

Given the proposed overage provisions there is no suggestion of an undervalue or subsidy.

A separate report/s will be brought to Cabinet to seek a decision as to whether monies will be made available to Mercury Land Holdings to make necessary arrangements for the sale and purchase. These reports will require the Council to demonstrate compliance with the relevant laws including S.123 and State Subsidy laws.

In order make a direct award of contract the wholly owned Council Company is required to fall within the exemptions contained in regulation 12 Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended). The work undertaken for the Council must be more than 80% of the work undertaken by the Company. The level of control exerted by the Council must be akin to the way the Council controls its internal departments. Mercury Land Holdings Limited in a wholly owned company of the Council and has no private capital participation. These requirements must be met continuously and so must be kept under review if the companies undertake non-Council work.

The direct award of a services contract is considered to fall within the regulation 12 exemption and therefore lawful. Further, the Council's Contract Procedure Rules permit a direct award to a Council wholly owned company where legal requirements are met.

Council should be aware that successful disposals are dependent upon satisfactory title due diligence, consultation and other matters.

Human Resources implications and risks:

There are no anticipated HR issues resulting from this decision.

Equalities implications and risks:

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

An EqHIA (Equality and Health Impact Assessment) is usually carried out when a current or planned service/policy/activity is likely to affect staff, service users, or other residents.

Several of the sites for proposed disposal are no longer operational, as detailed in Appendix A, and have been declared surplus, meaning that there is no material impact upon groups with protected characteristics.

The proposed asset sales include a number of car parks with varying levels of disabled parking provision within. Consideration has been given to the proximity and capacity of alternative disabled parking provision (provided by both the Council and others) within Romford and Hornchurch town centres in order to mitigate the impact of withdrawing the subject car parks from their current use. For the time being these facilities remain in operational use and a full EqHIA will be conducted in advance of any change of operational status.

Health and Wellbeing implications and Risks:

There are no specific Health & Wellbeing implications identified a consequence of the proposed resolution to dispose. Several of the assets identified have already been vacant/surplus for some time, meaning there is unlikely to be any material wellbeing impact arising.

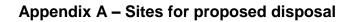
The existing car parks within scope of this report will remain operational in the short-term pending a planning decision on future use.

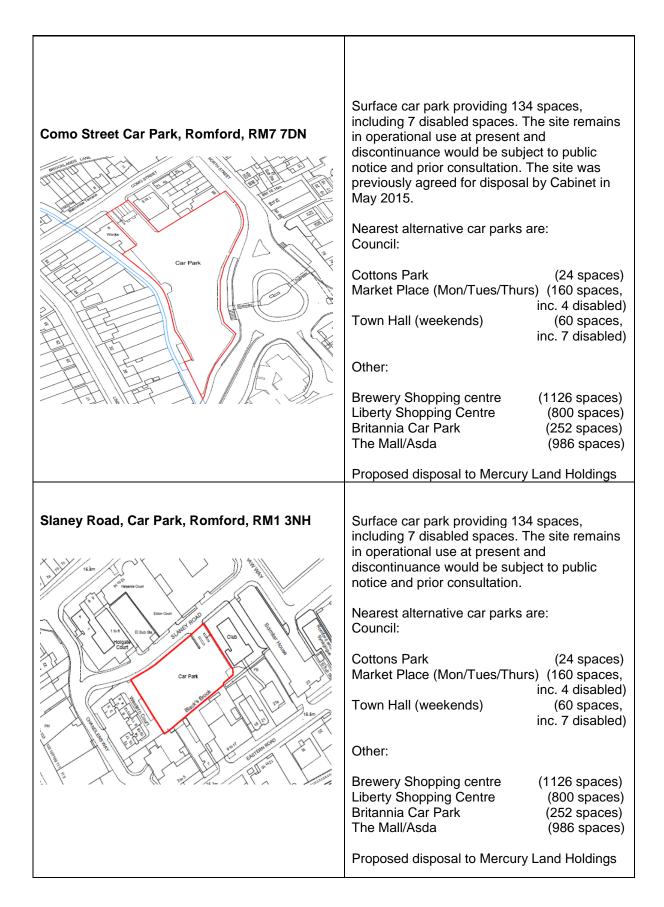
Environmental and Climate Change Implications and Risks:

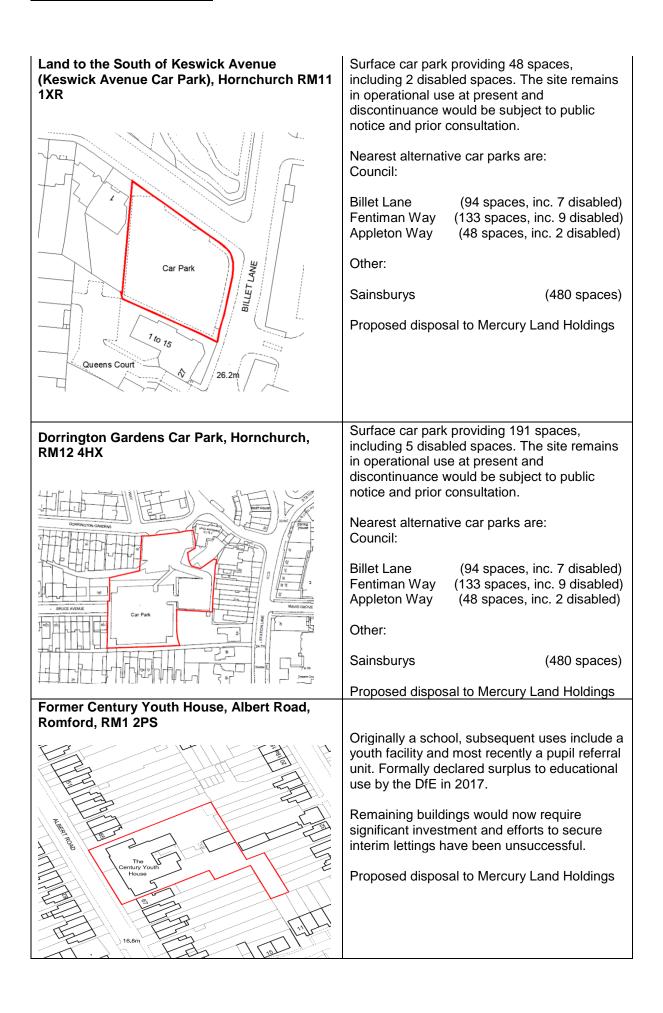
Disposal of the proposed sites will not, in itself, generate any environmental or climate change implications. Subsequent development of the sites will be subject to seeking planning permission and building control approvals, the process for which will require the applicant to demonstrate how any potential impacts are addressed.

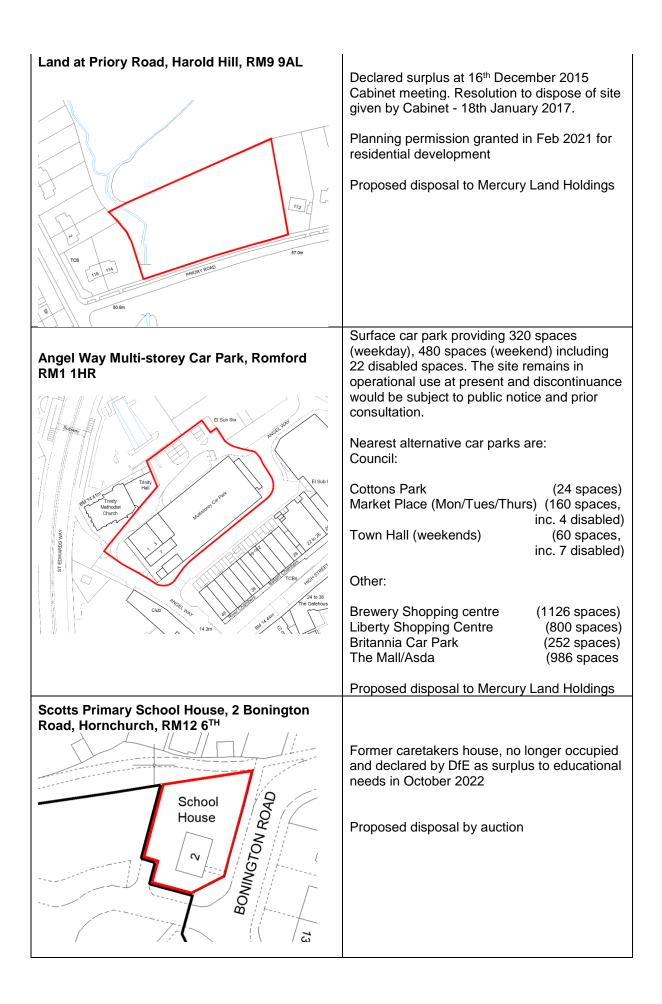
BACKGROUND PAPERS

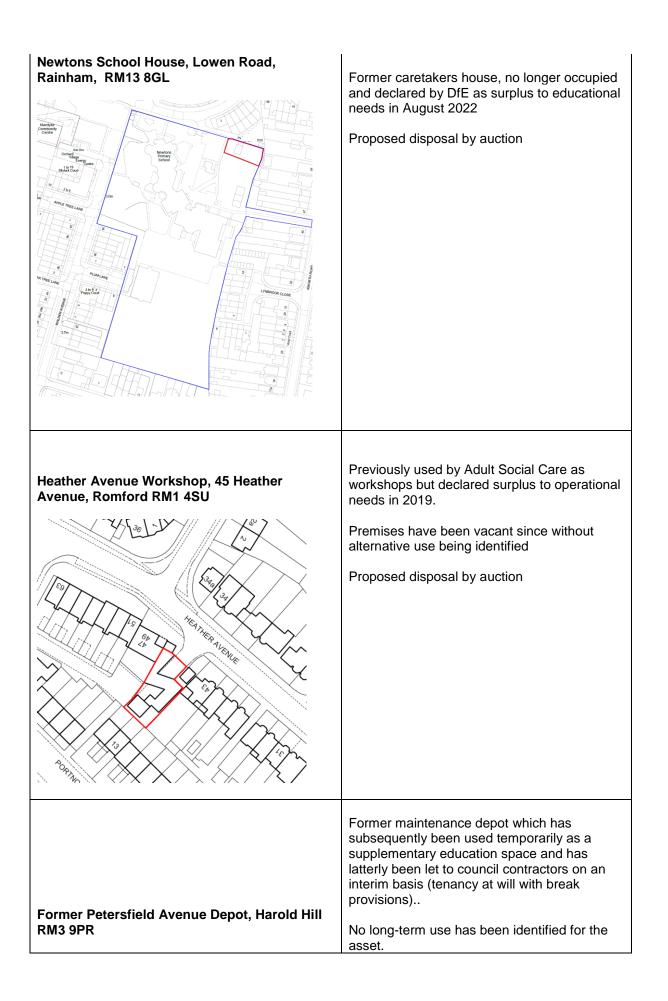
None.

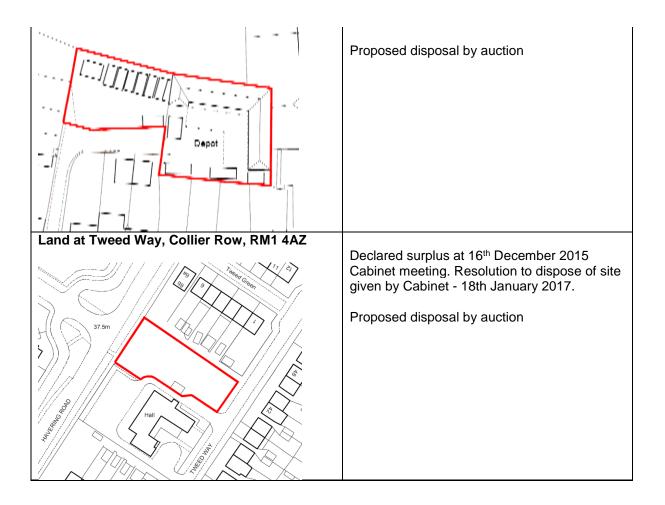




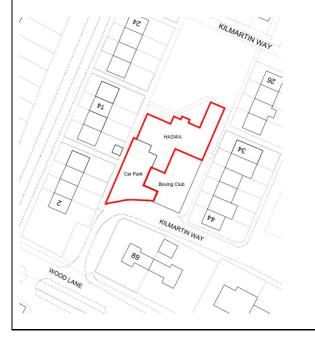








Havering Asian Social & Welfare Association, (HASWA) Kilmartin Way, Hornchurch, RM12 5NB



Proposed disposal of asset to existing tenant, subject to restrictive covenant retaining the asset for community use.