

**ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS REPORT
(Report by the Heads of Legal & Estates and
of Environment & Transport)**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on current issues relating to land and property management and new assets.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The main purpose of the Asset Management Plan (AMP) is to optimise the utilisation of District Council assets in terms of service benefits and financial return. The AMP originated in 2002. It embraced all the Council's operational and non-operational land and buildings and was intended to cover a 5 year period with annual reviews and updates. It provided information on all existing built assets, their condition and the source of responsibility for their management and maintenance. In that respect one of the key requirements identified was the need to introduce computerised records as part of the Council's geographical information system (GIS).
- 2.2 The Asset Management Sub-Group co-ordinates at Officer level preparation of the AMP and its annual reviews. In so doing the following areas of responsibility have been allocated:-

Legal & Estates for

Industrial and commercial property,
Development land, and
Surplus land and property.

Community Services for

Public open space and amenity land,
Parks and pavilions,
Leisure Centres, and
Country Parks & Nature Reserves.

Environment & Transport for

Car Parks/Parking Areas,
Council offices and depots,
Bus Stations,
Public conveniences, and
Sewage treatment works.

- 2.3 Records of land and property are currently held in two main formats:-

- Deeds and other legal documents, which are maintained by the Legal & Estates Division; and
 - Land Terrier (paper plans), which are maintained by the Environment & Transport Division.
- 2.4 The degree of detail in the Terrier, which records acquisitions and sales is less than comprehensive and insufficient in terms of contemporary expectations for land and property management. Some land Terrier information was transferred to an earlier electronic version and then to the GIS, but this has only repeated inconsistencies in paper plans and circumstances often require ownership records to be validated against the source material.
- 2.5 Plans prepared for the large scale voluntary transfer of the Council's housing stock in 2000 reliably identify the land transferred and some associated areas of land retained by HDC. However, other areas retained such as car parks are not identified on the plans. A pilot exercise in the summer of 2004 to assess the ease with which these records could be added to the new GIS resulted in about 25% of housing estate records being processed in a three month period.
- 2.6 Since November 1986 all acquisitions of land or property have been registered at the Land Registry which provides a certificate of ownership. Whilst some other acquisitions have been registered, all District Council land and property should be registered over time. With that objective in mind, discussions have taken place with the Land Registry on the preferred method of taking this forward. A pilot project of 70 registrations has been agreed commencing in August 2005 at a cost of £500. This will be followed by a rolling programme of registrations of the remaining deeds (approx.500) for completion in mid-2006.

3. CURRENT ISSUES

3.1 GIS

The Land Registry has confirmed that an electronic version in the required format can be provided at a cost of about £2,000 which can be accommodated within existing budgets.

3.2 New Assets

These generally arise from Section 106 Agreements and include the transfer of open space, landscape bunds, amenity land and, occasionally, car parks. Usually commuted sums are obtained from developers although there is a recent example of a car park in Godmanchester being constructed as part of an adjacent development and transferred to the District Council without a commuted payment. Divisional responsibility for future maintenance, including the budgetary provision where appropriate, needs to be established at an early stage during the planning process.

3.3 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS)

This is an example of another type of new asset. The District Council actively promotes these systems through the development control process. However, Anglian Water will not adopt SUDS installations as part of the public sewerage system and developers, therefore, seek to transfer responsibility to the District Council. Currently there is a lack of clarity with regard to the availability of delegated authority to determine whether these new assets should be accepted by the District Council and this issue accordingly is addressed later in the report. SUDS generally are not open spaces that could fulfil a leisure purpose, and they will have high, long term maintenance costs. Careful design checks and the payment of commuted sums would be required if the District Council is to accept on-going liability for them.

3.4 Closed Churchyards

Once a churchyard is closed for burials it can be transferred to the District Council via a process provided for in the Local Government Act 1972. Providing the appropriate procedures are followed the District Council cannot refuse to accept responsibility for maintenance which will include grass cutting, repairs to footpaths, walls, gates, fences and monuments. At present the churchyards at Colne, Farcet, Sawtry and Hemingford Grey have been transferred. Under the scheme of delegation, the Head of Operations is responsible for the maintenance of closed churchyards. In view of the potential costs of maintenance, appropriate budgetary provision will need to be made once a full assessment has been carried out. It is proposed that the Environment and Transport Division assumes responsibility for the management of closed churchyards transferred to the District Council under this process.

3.5 Miscellaneous Land and Property

The regular review of assets and also the investigation of original deeds has highlighted a number of assets with no matching service responsibility. These will be either allocated to the most appropriate service area or declared surplus to operational requirements. Any budgetary requirements for maintenance of these assets that are not currently funded will be included in an MTP bid.

3.6 Amenity land

The District Council has inherited maintenance responsibility for a number of amenity areas without a formal transfer of the land. Ideally the position needs to be regularised by transferring the land to the District Council. In these cases it is unlikely that a commuted sum for that purpose would be available. Sometimes the original owner is unknown and the Crown Estate is involved, in which case some costs are payable. It is proposed that the Director of Central Services is given delegated powers to acquire these areas after consultation with the Executive Councillors for Resources and Policy and for Leisure, subject to any costs being met from existing budgets.

3.7 Non-land and Property Assets

The use of GIS and associated databases will enable comprehensive records to be maintained of other assets e.g. street nameplates, street furniture, CCTV cameras. The availability of information in this format will greatly improve the service offered to customers when the Council's call centre is established.

4. IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Land Registry will be undertaking the registration of the Council's land and property with assistance from staff in the Legal and Estates Division, who will check deed packets and process the applications.
- 4.2 Some costs will be incurred in dealing with the registrations and the GIS transfer from the Land Registry but it should be possible to accommodate these costs from within existing budgets, if spread over the next two years.
- 4.3 It will be necessary to acquire some additional software to link property records and other Asset Management Plan information to the GIS. The initial costs are £8,000 including training with £4,200 annual costs and these will be met from existing budgets.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The absence of comprehensive information for the Asset Management Plan affects service delivery and exposes the District Council to a level of risk which the actions proposed in their report seek to address. Until such time as asset records are accurately recorded on GIS, this will impact on the ability of the Call Centre to deal effectively with public enquiries that relate to the Council's assets.
- 5.2 New assets including SUDS (referred to in paras. 3.2 and 3.3) should only be accepted where there is budgetary provision or other appropriate arrangements are in place. It is proposed that the Director of Operational Services should be authorised to approve the acceptance of these systems after consultation with the relevant Executive Councillor.
- 5.3 Responsibility for closed churchyards is to be transferred to the Environment & Transport Division and appropriate budgetary provision will need to be sought as part of the MTP process.
- 5.4 Wherever possible amenity land currently maintained, but not owned by the Council, should be transferred on terms to be approved by the Director of Central Services after consultation with the relevant Executive Councillors.
- 5.5 While the formal AMP only refers to land and property assets, the process now needs to be expanded to cover other assets such as plant and equipment, street furniture, etc. This aspect will be the subject of a further report in due course.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Cabinet are recommended to:-

- (a) delegate authority to the Director of Operational Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resources & Policy, to accept new assets, (including SUDS) where they are accompanied by satisfactory financial and management arrangements.; and
- (b) delegate to the Director of Central Services authority to accept the transfer of amenity land, currently maintained but not owned by the District Council.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Legal and Estates file Gen. 26

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