Westgate Multi-Storey Car Park.

### Summary

1. **This is a key decision as the Council will incur expenditure or savings beyond the threshold agreed by the Council (currently £350,000).**

2. To inform Members of an incident at the Westgate Multi-Story Car Park, action taken, and possible future outcomes.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the actions undertaken by Officers thus far in relation to the closure of the Westgate Multi-Storey Car Park be endorsed.

2. That the decision to obtain competitive tenders in relation to the demolition of the Westgate Multi-Storey Car Park be endorsed and that following completion of a formal procurement exercise, authority be delegated to the Strategic Director, in conjunction with the relevant portfolio holder to accept the most economically advantageous tender, appoint the contractor and proceed with the demolition works as a matter of urgency.

3. That a capital budget of £500,000 be established funded from:
   - A reduction in the capital budget for Acacia of £16,000
   - A reduction in the capital budget for other corporate properties of £162,000
   - A contribution from non earmarked reserves (including commuted car parking) of £322,000

4. That the Managing Director be given delegated authority to amend the proposed funding arrangement should a more advantageous arrangement present itself.

### Background and Discussion

1. **Westgate Multi Story Car park (WMSCP) was constructed in 1977 using the British Lift Slab (BLS) technique.** The construction method basically involves the erection of reinforced concrete columns around which a continuous reinforced concrete floor slab is formed. Once set and in place the floor slab is then mechanically jacked up around the column and wedges inserted to secure the slab to the column. A concrete cap is then cast to protect the joint between the column and the underside of floor slab.

2. In 1988 a similarly constructed car park in Coventry suffered a partial collapse which led to recommendations that similarly constructed car parks be regularly inspected. A further failure occurred to a BLS car park at Pipers Row in 1997 at which time the Council commissioned a structural survey which did not raise any particular areas of concern. Since then the car park has been inspected intermittently with routine works completed as required.
3.3 On 19 August 2009 a 1450mm x 600mm x 40mm concrete cap (as previously mentioned in paragraph 3.1) fell from the ceiling of the ground floor parking area onto a vehicle parked below. Upon inspection, it was noted that many of the 208 concrete column caps were exhibiting cracks and were separating from the ceiling soffit due to corrosion of the reinforcement, loss of bond and general deterioration of the structure. At that point Officers, in consultation with leading Members, took the immediate decision to close the car park for safety reasons.

3.4 On 20 August 2009 a civil and structural engineer was commissioned to undertake a survey in relation to the condition and structural integrity of the car park structure.

3.5 The findings contained in the structural engineer’s report raise specific and immediate concerns. As previous inspections have not noted the current defects, it is highly likely that the deterioration in the condition of the structure has occurred recently and is accelerating. This is similar to the course of events, as detailed in the HSE report, which occurred prior to the partial collapse at Pipers Row.

3.6 The structural engineer also commented that further exploratory work could be undertaken to identify the specific causes of the failure but given the speed of deterioration of the structure and that the damage caused is clearly evident, this is not recommended. The structure is now some seven years beyond its originally designated design life and this fact adds impetus to the view that further expenditure on investigating the cause of the failure cannot be justified.

3.7 The car park provides much needed parking in the town centre and income to the Council but the Council’s options are limited. Its current condition prohibits potential users entering the structure and it will continue to deteriorate with a real possibility that the structure may fail in due course. This option will also incur ongoing protection costs and the site will quickly become an eye-sore in the town centre.

3.8 Based on this information, and as noted by the consultant structural engineer, it is clear that the costs of remedial repairs likely to be exorbitant when compared to the structure’s remaining lifespan, making demolition of the structure the only viable option.

3.9 Consideration should also be given as to whether an open-air parking area should be provided on the site to mitigate the loss of parking in the town centre and income to the Council. A new pay and display parking area on the existing footprint, reusing existing parking equipment, would also make specific provision for blue badge holders, motorcycles and cycles; especially as there is insufficient provision in the town and the railway station for the latter two groups.

4. Proposals.

4.1 As WMSCP is one of the primary parking areas within the town centre it is clear that the matter should be dealt with as a matter of urgency.
4.2 Members are therefore asked to endorse the following actions:

- The appointment of a suitably qualified consultant structural engineer to advise on the most effective demolition process, to produce a demolition specification and method statement, to ensure the Council adheres to planning, party wall and H&S regulations and to supervise the demolition works on the Council’s behalf.
- Officers to appoint a suitably qualified CDM co-ordinator to ensure adherence to the Construction & Design Management regulations.
- Officers to authorise the Council’s asbestos consultant to undertake a comprehensive asbestos survey of the structure.
- Officers to commence with decommissioning and disconnection of utilities and other services connected to the structure.
- Officers to begin the procurement process, in accordance with the Council’s procurement rules, that will deliver the demolition of the existing structure, provision of a level surface, and all associated works that will allow open air parking on the site.
- That the Strategic Director be granted delegated authority, in conjunction with the relevant portfolio holder, to accept the most economically advantageous tender, appoint the contractor and proceed with the demolition works as a matter of urgency.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Plan

- To create a safer borough in which to live, work and socialise.
- To ensure that regeneration in Dartford is sustainable and of benefit to all of our communities.

6. Financial, legal, staffing and other administrative implications & risk assessments

| Financial Implications | Officers have only been able to make tentative enquiries with regard to likely costs and estimate the following:
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<tr>
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<td>Cost of Demolition &amp; Associated Works - £400,000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cost of Supervision, Surveys etc - £20,000</td>
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<td>Cost to provide new parking surface etc - £80,000</td>
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<td>Total Cost of Works - £500,000.</td>
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There is no specific budget provision for these works. The capital programme (page MD 139 of the budget report to GAC on 2 March) includes a sum of £344,000 for works to many of the Council’s operational properties. Included in this is a figure of £162,000 for works to the multi-storey car park. This can now be utilised to part fund the demolition costs.

The Council also holds non earmarked reserves, including commuted car parking contributions from developers, of £322,000 and this can also be used to part fund the demolition.

Thus £484,000 has been identified to fund the works. It is recommended that a budget is established of £500,000 and that the balance of £16,000 is funded from a small reduction in the Acacia capital budget.
This budget totals £376,000 in 2009/10 and only £300,000 has so far been committed. Other works are on hold pending a further report on the future of Acacia. Currently the car park generates a gross annual income of approximately £156,000 and expenditure of £97,000 giving net income of £59,000.

Income ceased from the date of closure, although some of this may be transferred to other car parks. Not all expenditure will cease immediately and some fixed costs are still payable. The worst case for 2009/10 is a net budget overspend of approximately £50,000 but this will reduce if the car park is demolished and the surface car park established this financial year.

Further details are included in the revenue budget and capital budget monitoring reports on this agenda.

Staff resources at the WMSCP will be transferred to deal with the management issues relating to other parking areas in the town centre that have been used to accommodate the displaced vehicles since the car park closed.

The Council has a legal duty in relation to the safety of users of the car park making the immediate closure of the car park essential.

The Council also has a number of obligations in relation to the management of the demolition project and specifically in relation to operatives working on the project, neighbouring properties and the general public during the execution of the works. These obligations will be reflected in the contract documentation.

Discussion with Officers from Planning and Transport indicate that an open air car park can be operated on the same site. Some variations to the existing off-street parking places order may be required.

The new parking area can also make specific provision for blue badge holders, motorcycles and cycles; especially as there is very little provision in the town for the last two groups and insufficient capacity at the railway station.

The terms of the contract will be agreed in consultation with the Head of Legal Services and in accordance with the Council’s approved contract documentation.

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<th>Legal Implications</th>
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<td>Staffing Implications</td>
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<td>Administrative Implications</td>
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Appointment of suitably qualified consultants will ensure that the Councils meet its obligations in relation to this specialist area of work and would therefore minimise any risk. Failure to act will result in further deterioration of the structure and potential collapse.

6. **Details of Exempt Information Category**
   Not applicable

7. **Appendices**
   None

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents consulted</th>
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<td>Peter Dosad</td>
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