

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	14 DECEMBER 2017	REPORT NO:	CFO/059/17
PRESENTING OFFICER:	DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	AM PAUL MURPHY	REPORT AUTHOR:	COLIN SCHOFIELD
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STEWART WOODS, HEAD OF ESTATES IAN CUMMINS, TREASURER		
TITLE OF REPORT:	PROPOSED FIRE STATION, SAUGHALL MASSIE, WIRRAL		

APPENDICES:

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval to proceed with the scheme to build a new fire station on land at Saughall Massie Road, Saughall Massie, Wirral.

Recommendation

2. That Members:
 - approve the building of a new fire station on land at Saughall Massie Road, Saughall Massie, Wirral;
 - approve the capital budget for the scheme in the sum of £4.8million; and
 - approve the drawdown of £600,000 from the capital investment reserve to fund the variant in capital cost from that in the approved capital programme.

Introduction and Background

3. At its meeting on 30th June 2015, the Authority considered reports CFO/059/15 Wirral Fire Cover Consultation 2 Outcomes and CFO/058/15 Operational Response Savings Options for West Wirral 2015/16 and resolved to approve:
 - a) The merger of Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road, subject to agreement from Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council to transfer ownership of the land to the Authority and the granting of planning permission.
 - b) The relocation of the West Kirby fire appliance to Upton to be crewed whole-time retained as an interim measure prior to the construction of the new station.
 - c) An amendment of the Capital Programme to incorporate the Saughall Massie fire station scheme; and

- d) Delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer to continue discussions with partners, including Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service, with a view to sharing the new building.
4. Consequently work commenced to design a new community fire station on land at Saughall Massie Road, Saughall Massie. The site is located within the designated Green Belt, adjacent to residential development.
 5. A pre-application was submitted to Wirral Borough Council on 8th October 2015 and a meeting held with Wirral planning officers to discuss this on 8th November 2015. As a result of the meeting and subsequent correspondence, the building design and site layout plans were modified to take on board comments received. Of particular importance was the clear message that any development on Green Belt land is automatically considered inappropriate development and the only way that approval was likely to be obtained is by demonstrating 'Very Special Circumstances'. This needed to focus on the operational rationale for choosing the Saughall Massie site.
 6. Significant work was undertaken to demonstrate Very Special Circumstances culminating in the production of a document entitled 'Analysis of Response Times within the West Kirby and Upton station areas' which was submitted as part of the planning application.
 7. A sequential assessment of all the sites that were considered by officers was also produced. This detailed the pros and cons of each site considered. This document was incorporated into the overall Planning Statement. This was the main document submitted justifying the choice of this site and covered planning and operational aspects.
 8. All necessary noise, traffic, transport, ecological and environmental assessments were carried out as part of the application process and the planning application (reference APP/16/00985) was submitted to Wirral Borough Council on 15th July 2016.
 9. Following the 13 week consultation period, the application was originally scheduled to go to Wirral Planning Committee on 20th October 2016 but, following delays, the report, which recommended approval of the planning application, was deferred by Wirral Planning Committee on 10th November 2016 for a site visit which took place on 13th December 2016. The report was then submitted to Planning Committee on 15th December 2016.
 10. The Planning Committee on 15th December 2016 refused the application for the following reasons: "Having regards to the location of the development proposed and the proximity to residential properties and the nature of the activities proposed, particularly with regards to the sudden and/or emergency nature of the activities, together with the character of the local highway network, the Council considers that the proposal would result in harm to the visual amenities of the Green Belt, the character of the area and the amenities of neighbouring residents and the wider locality. Therefore, the development would be contrary

to Policy GB2 of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan and the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework”.

11. Full details of the Planning Committee meeting and decision were provided to the Authority on 26th January 2017 in report CFO/007/17, together with the proposed approach to deliver the Authority approved proposal.
12. The Authority resolved to instruct officers to submit a revised planning application addressing the specific points for refusal and hold back on any appeal pending a decision on the revised application.

Revised Application

13. The revised planning application was submitted to Wirral Borough Council on 13th March 2017 although not formally validated until 28th March 2017. This application addressed the reasons for refusal by reducing the overall size of the site by 30%; by reducing the size of the building by some 10%; by moving the building several metres further away from the nearest properties; by realigning the building by some 15° to prevent headlights from appliances leaving the site shining into houses opposite; by improving the site layout including moving the generator and fuel tank to the side of the site away from the houses; and by providing improved landscaping and fencing. Following advice from the Planning Officer, the timber cladding was extended from just the front and rear elevations to the sides (previously these were aluminium) and the sedum roof covering extended to cover the whole roof (and not just the eastern side). For Members information, it has subsequently been decided not to install a fuel tank at this site.
14. Two months after submission, a query was received via the Planning Officer regarding archaeological matters on the site. It transpires that the discovery of ‘made’ timber and animal bones in the nearby Arrowe Brook in 2005 prompted Merseyside Environmental Advisory Services (a statutory consultee) to suggest that the site could possibly be the site of an Iron Age settlement. At Planning Committee a condition was attached to the approval that requires an archaeological evaluation of the site to determine if there is any evidence of such a settlement.
15. This application was considered by Planning Committee on 22nd June 2017 with the report from officers recommending approval. However the Committee again decided to defer any decision pending a site visit. This visit took place on 18th July 2017, before which Wirral Borough Council arranged for the area to be mowed which facilitated the site being pegged out to show site and building boundaries, together with other key features and access and egress points.
16. The application was finally considered by Planning Committee on 20th July 2017. Following lengthy consideration of the issues, planning permission was granted for the development.

17. As the site is within designated Green Belt, the decision had to be referred to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for ratification. On 15th August 2017, Wirral Borough Council were notified in a letter from the Department for Communities and Local Government that the Secretary of State had decided not to call in the application and that he was content for the application to be determined by the local planning authority. Consequently Wirral Borough Council issued their decision notice granting planning permission for the new fire station on 15th August 2017.
18. The judicial review period, during which this decision could be challenged, expired on 26th September 2017. No claims for judicial review were lodged during this period.

Land

19. On 8th September 2017 Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service jointly appointed Lambert Smith Hampton to provide an independent valuation of the land. The valuation was received on 10th October 2017 in the sum of £42,000.
20. The land transfer to this Authority was formally agreed by Wirral Borough Council Cabinet at its meeting on 27th November 2017. The land is to be transferred to this Authority on a 150 year lease at a peppercorn rent. A user clause will restrict the site to Emergency Services and community use only.

Current Situation

21. Subject to approval to proceed being given at today's meeting, a Pre-Contract Services Agreement will be drawn up with Wates Construction Ltd, the Authority's appointed building contractor for the Station Mergers project. As Members may recall, Wates were appointed following a tender process in 2014 conducted via the North West Construction Hub. Their appointment was approved by Policy and Resources Committee on 27th November 2014.
22. The Pre-Contract Services Agreement allows the initial site investigation, design and other preparatory works to be undertaken. It also allows the price for the building works to be reviewed. It is estimated that this Agreement would run for some five or six months prior to the building contract being signed. Current estimates suggest that the build would take some 12 months to complete.
23. Assuming approval to proceed is given today, it is therefore anticipated that the station could be operational by the middle of 2019.

Equality and Diversity Implications

24. The Equality Impact Assessment for the station mergers programme in general and the proposed new Saughall Massie fire station in particular, have previously been submitted to the Authority. There is no update to the Equality Impact Assessment as a result of this report.

Staff Implications

25. The implications for personnel, involving the net saving of 22 WTE firefighter posts from this merger, have been previously reported to the Authority and the financial savings anticipated have been now been realised through Firefighter retirements.

Legal Implications

26. The lease for the land will be drafted by Wirral MBC and signed by the Solicitor to the Authority when agreed.
27. The contract with Wates Construction will be drafted using the agreed format and signed by the Solicitor to the Authority when agreed by both parties.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

28. The current estimated build cost for the Saughall Massie fire station is some £4.700million. Members are asked to note that this estimate includes the work already carried out, e.g. the preparation and submission of two planning applications, including the associated architectural, design, survey and other work.
29. However, it is also important to note that this estimate is based upon current understanding of site conditions which could change, once intrusive site investigations have been carried out. A tender price will be sought from Wates Construction Ltd at the end of the Pre-Contract Services Agreement period once they have the detailed information to allow this to be prepared.
30. Additional costs include land purchase at £0.042m, ICT fit out charges at some £0.020m and technical support and advice from Todd and Ledson at some £0.038m. The total capital cost of the scheme is therefore some £4.800m.
31. The current capital programme includes a provision of £4.200million for the new Saughall Massie fire station. Consequently an increase of £0.600m is required. This can be funded, subject to members' approval, from the capital investment reserve, bringing the total reserve contribution to £2.164m. The balance of the funding, £2.636m, will come from
- The Authority received a capital grant in 2015 from the Department of Communities and Local Government for this scheme from the Transformation Fund of which £2.086m has been allocated to this scheme.
 - Capital receipts are anticipated from the sale of the existing fire station buildings at Upton and West Kirby. Whilst the actual value will not be known until the sales have gone through, current estimates are £0.350m for Upton and £0.200m for West Kirby, totalling £0.550m.

32. The Transformation Fund grant received also included £297,000 revenue funding. Some £60,000 of this has been used to fund expenditure on consultation, advice received and other items during the early stages of this project.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

33. No new issues arise directly from this report. The previously produced surveys and reports that supported the initial planning application and the revised application remain valid.

Contribution to Our Mission: *Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters*

34. Whilst the proposed station merger will not improve operational cover in the West Wirral area, it is the least worst option to adopt in the circumstances and is seen as reasonable given the financial challenge faced by the Authority. A new fire station will however provide an improved working environment for firefighters.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CFO/111/14 Station Mergers Project – Appointment of Contractor
CFO/058/15 Operational Response Savings Options for West Wirral – 2015/16
CFO/059/15 Wirral Fire Cover Consultation 2 Outcomes
CFO/007/17 Proposed New Community Fire Station at Saughall Massie, Wirral

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

MBC Metropolitan Borough Council
