

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY		
DATE:	18 OCTOBER 2018	REPORT NO:	CFO/055/18
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	JANET HENSHAW	REPORT AUTHOR:	COLIN SCHOFIELD
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	ACFO MOTTRAM, STEWART WOODS, HEAD OF ESTATES IAN CUMMINS, TREASURER DEB APPLETON, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY & PERFORMANCE WENDY KENYON, DIVERSITY & CONSULTATION MANAGER		
TITLE OF REPORT:	PROPOSED NEW FIRE STATION FOR ST. HELENS		
APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A: PRE-CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMME		

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Authority on progress on the proposed new community fire station for St. Helens, to advise of key dates and to seek approval to proceed with the scheme at the budget figure set out below.

Recommendation

2. That :
 - a) progress on the proposed new community fire station for St. Helens be noted;
 - b) the timetable required to achieve progress be agreed;
 - c) approval be given to proceed with the new build community fire station at a total estimated cost of £7.700m (inclusive of £2.086m grant from the Transformation and Efficiencies fund); and
 - d) approval be given to increase the current scheme budget by £2.450m funded by a contribution from the capital investment reserve

Introduction and Background

3. At its meeting on 17th December 2015, and following consideration of a report on the outcomes of the twelve week public consultation exercise, the Authority approved the merger of Eccleston and St. Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street, St. Helens, subject to the purchase of the land from Pilkington

and the granting of planning permission. The land at Canal Street is part of Pilkington's larger Watson Street Works.

4. Following this approval, a purchase price for the land was agreed with Pilkington, subject to contract, Authority approval, ground conditions and planning approval.
5. An environmental assessment was commissioned for this site and initial site investigations were carried out during 2016. However, despite the financial commitments made by the Authority, as work on this site did not proceed at the speed which Pilkington felt it should have, Pilkington withdrew the offer of the site on 22nd February 2017.

Current Situation

6. However, Pilkington subsequently offered an alternative site at the opposite end of the Watson Street Works site with access onto Milverney Way and then straight onto Linkway. The land at Milverney Way is currently privately owned but the proposed site has access rights over the land and St. Helens Council are considering adopting this road.
7. This site provides the optimum response location for the St. Helens area. Analysis has shown that our response performance from this location will be 0.7% better when compared with current provision.
8. The site is some seven acres in total with the Authority being offered the front part of the site with direct access to Milverney Way. Pilkington intend to dispose of the rear of the site separately, for light industrial units, or similar. The Solicitor to the Authority has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Pilkington which gives the Authority an exclusivity option to purchase an appropriate portion of this land in the 18 month period from 28th February 2018 (but see paragraph 14 below).
9. The Authority and Pilkington jointly appointed Curtins to carry out detailed site investigations on this site and their final report was received on 3rd August 2018. This report indicates that the site is mostly covered with 'made ground' (i.e. tarmac, concrete & other building materials) at a depth of between two and seven metres, with numerous obstructions encountered during drilling operations. No significant chemical pollution was found on site but small amounts of asbestos are present in certain areas. Consequently the site is classified as 'low risk' in terms of ground contamination and ground gases for a commercial-type development.
10. Coal Authority plans indicate the presence of 11 coal seams and seven mine shafts on the whole site. Three of the mine shafts were on the portion of the site provisionally allocated for the Authority to purchase.
11. Members may recall that similar issues within the ground were encountered on the Prescott site and it is fair to assume that any site in the St. Helens area is very likely to have similar ground conditions due to the history of land use in that area.

12. Wates Construction Ltd are the Authority's appointed contractors for the Station Mergers project. Their appointment was approved by Policy and Resources Committee on 27th November 2014.
13. Following receipt of the site investigation report, Wates were commissioned to carry out a feasibility study for the proposed building on this site and produce a site layout. As part of this, a topographical survey of the site was undertaken, along with a flood risk assessment. A key element of this work was to produce a foundation solution for the building which minimises any negative impacts from the ground conditions on site.
14. However, Pilkington have recently advised officers that they need to get the land deal finalised with the Authority by 31st March 2019 as instructed by their Board of Directors. Failing this, the offer of the land will be withdrawn. This timescale is very tight, but achievable, subject to decisions being made to achieve the key dates set out below. One of the key dates is that for obtaining planning permission as clearly the Authority will not be purchasing the land without this. A provisional programme of the work involved to get this scheme to site on or soon after 1st April 2019 is attached as Appendix A to this report
15. A crucial element of the proposed building design was a decision from NWAS on whether they wished to join the Authority at this site and, if so, to what extent. NWAS had initially expressed an interest in joining the Authority on the site and they contributed £15,000 towards the site investigations carried out by Curtins.
16. Once the results of the site investigations were received, NWAS were requested to confirm their long term commitment as a matter of urgency in order to progress the design and thereby determine the total site area required to meet the deadlines set by Pilkington. The NWAS Estates Manager attended a design workshop for the new station and an email was sent to the Head of Service at NWAS, to seek a decision on NWAS involvement, by no later than 22nd August. No response was received from NWAS by the deadline but, following a number of chase-ups, officers were informed that due to the (necessarily) very tight timescales, NWAS had taken the decision not to commit to being involved in the project.
17. Whilst this decision is obviously disappointing, as NWAS had previously seemed keen on sharing this site, it has allowed the site to be redesigned for MFRA use only, with a subsequent reduction in the land required from Pilkington. The site for the new community fire station is now some two acres with an additional half an acre required for an access road to service both the Authority site and also the Pilkington land at the rear.
18. Because of the reduction in the site area, another two of the mine shafts are now outside the Authority's site, leaving just one to deal with. It is anticipated that the Coal Authority will require this mine shaft to be capped and budgetary provision (of some £240,000) has been made for this in the costs set out below. The building footprint has been moved to ensure it is away from the mineshaft and outside the 'zone of influence' (i.e. the area of ground that might be affected should subsidence occur).

19. A fundamental element of this work carried out by Wates thus far has been the production of a cost model for building the new community fire station. As mentioned above, this has including evaluating the various options to produce a foundation solution to address the ground conditions encountered on this site.
20. This has produced a budgetary figure to design and build a three bay community fire station on this site of £6.545m. This figure includes all preliminary works but to this needs to be added a building contingency of some £450,000. Todd & Ledson have looked at the calculations behind this figure and are content they are reasonable, taking account of ground conditions and current build costs. A further provision of £80,000 is required to relocate a gas pipe that runs across the site.
21. It is intended to appoint Todd & Ledson to act as agents and provide project management services to the Authority (as they have done at Prescott and Saughall Massie) for the duration of the design and build works at an additional cost of £60,000.
22. The cost of land purchase from Pilkington is £550,000 and the cost of the site investigation work carried out by Curtins is £15,000 (net of contributions from Pilkington and NWAS).
23. Consequently the total capital cost for which approval is now being sought from the Authority is £7.700m. However please see the full financial implications at paragraphs 42 to 45 below.

Consultation on the Proposals

24. As indicated in paragraph 3 above, the proposal to merge Ecclestone and St. Helens fire stations was subject to a comprehensive 12 week consultation process in 2015. As reported to the Authority at its meeting on 17th December 2015, the vast majority of consultees agreed that the principle of the merger was reasonable given the financial challenges facing the Authority (and was preferable to the outright closure of Ecclestone fire station, which was the other option considered). The Authority, having considered the detailed report on the outcomes of the consultation report, agreed to the merger at the Canal Street site.
25. It is not considered necessary to repeat the extensive consultation process previously undertaken nor ask the Authority to reconsider their decision to merge the two stations as the financial challenges facing the Authority are even greater than in 2015. Whilst the selected site for the proposed station is not on Canal Street, it is still on the larger Watson Street Works site, so again it is not considered necessary to repeat the previous extensive consultation for the proposed new location. However, if the Authority approves the new station going ahead, an engagement exercise will be undertaken with neighbouring premises, principally retail and business enterprises, as there are very few residential properties in the vicinity of the new station.

Further Work

26. Subject to Authority approval today, further design work will be undertaken to allow a detailed planning application to be submitted for the site, in mid-November 2018. The planning application process will also involve consultation with both statutory bodies and neighbouring properties. It is hoped that this will result in the application being approved by St. Helens Planning Committee at its meeting on 12th February 2019.
27. The outcome of both the planning application and engagement exercise will be reported to the Authority at its Budget meeting on 28th February 2019 for final ratification to the proposals.
28. If planning permission is granted and the Budget Authority agree the final proposals, this will allow the land purchase to be concluded with Pilkington. As detailed earlier, Pilkington are insistent on the land purchase being concluded and the purchase price being paid in the current financial year.

Additional Considerations

29. It should be noted that during the period since approval for the merger was given, a number of alternative sites in the St. Helens area have been investigated and evaluated by officers but none have proved suitable for a new St. Helens community fire station.
30. There is still the option to build a new fire station on the current site in Parr Stocks Road. However, one of the principal reasons for seeking a new site is the need to optimise response times to the whole St. Helens area which the current site does not provide. Furthermore, whilst a rebuild on the current site would obviate the need to purchase land, the existing buildings would need to be demolished at an estimated cost of some £200,000 and the build costs for a new station would be similar to those at the Watson Street site. It is also known that the ground conditions at Parr Stocks Road are not ideal so remedial works will also be required before any rebuild could be undertaken. Consequently, this option is not recommended.
31. Work has also been undertaken to establish the cost of refurbishing or modernising both Eccleston and Parr Stocks Road fire stations. A limited refurbishment of both stations would cost around £3.6m and would offer a period of some 5 - 8 years without the need for further work. A wholesale modernisation of both stations would cost in the region of £7.8m and would offer a period of some 10 – 12 years before any further capital funds would be necessary. A new station at Watson Street would have a life of at least 25 years before any significant lifecycle works would be needed.
32. It should be noted that the Transformation Grant funding could not be used to support either the refurbishment or modernisation options.

Equality and Diversity Implications

- 33. A full EIA has already been completed for the Station Mergers programme and has been submitted to the Authority with earlier reports.
- 34. The EIA made reference to some areas within the geographical 10 minute response time which may have implications for attendance in the St. Helens area. The EIA made recommendations to mitigate this specifically around HFSCs and community engagement. Officers will ensure that actions are taken before the station merger takes place.
- 35. No further consultation is required in relation to communities from protected groups as the previous consultation is still relevant and did in fact ask about equality impacts to which no significant challenges were raised.
- 36. Community groups will be consulted as appropriate and the new station will be much more inclusive to diverse community groups.
- 37. Following discussions with the Authority's Diversity and Consultation Manager, it is not necessary to make amendments to the previous version of EIA presented to Members.

Staff Implications

- 38. The implications for personnel including the net saving of 22 WTE firefighter posts from this merger, have previously been reported to the Authority and the financial savings anticipated have been now realised through firefighter retirements.
- 39. The proposed new community fire station will provide modern facilities and a greatly improved working environment for personnel compared to those currently available at the aging Eccleston and Parr Stocks Road fire stations.

Legal Implications

- 40. A Pre-Contract Services Agreement (PCSA) has been agreed with Wates Construction Ltd. This follows the form previously utilised and agreed for both Prescott and Saughall Massie.
- 41. The agreement to purchase the land at Watson Street Works from Pilkington will need to be prepared and signed by both parties before 31st March 2019 to ensure that option to buy is not lost.
- 42. Any purchase agreement will need to include easements or other access arrangements to allow Pilkington to maintain existing services within the site. A separate legal agreement will also be needed in respect of the shared access road servicing both the Authority site and the remainder of the existing site which will be sold by Pilkington. This area of land (some 0.5 acres) will be leased to the Authority on a peppercorn rent for 125 years with access rights being granted in perpetuity.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

43. As detailed above, the total estimated cost of the scheme using the cost plan prepared by Wates Construction under the PCSA, and including work already undertaken, is £7.700m. This includes land purchase, site investigation, pre-contractual works (including design), advisors fees and construction. .
44. The current approved capital programme includes a sum of £5.25m for the St. Helens scheme.

Current Approved Capital Scheme Cost	<u>£5.250m</u>
Funded By:	
Government Transformation Grant	£2.086m
Capital Receipts – sale of St Helens & Eccleston	£0.700m
Capital Reserve	<u>£2.464m</u>
	<u>£5.250m</u>

45. However, as the total estimated cost for the scheme is now £7.700m the budget for the scheme needs to be increased by £2.450m and approval is sought from the Authority to fund this amount by a further contribution from the capital investment reserve.
46. The Transformation Fund grant received also included £297,000 revenue funding. Elements of this have been used to fund expenditure on consultation and other items during the early stages of the project. This includes the abortive work on the original Canal Street site. This revenue funding has been used to initially fund the feasibility study by Wates, and also additional services provided to the Authority from Todd & Ledson but these costs will be capitalised if the Authority approve this scheme. If the scheme is not approved, all costs incurred will have to be funded for this provision (with any further revenue contribution, if necessary).

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

47. The site investigations carried out have identified a range of risks, health and safety issues and environmental implications. The costs of mitigating or remediating these issues are included in the overall capital costs for the project.
48. When the Transformation Fund grant application was submitted, the key criteria were efficiencies and sharing buildings with other emergency services. Whilst efficiencies will be made by merging two stations into one, the fact that NWS are no longer part of the project goes against the joint working element. There is consequently a risk that the Home Office could decide that the scheme no longer meets the grant criteria. However, there is sufficient evidence of attempts, over a long period, to encourage NWS to co-locate but ultimately their decision not to move in is outside the Authority's control. Furthermore, a similar situation occurred at Saughall Massie (although for different reasons) and the Home

Office were satisfied that the scheme still met the necessary criteria so officers believe the risk is low.

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

49. The proposed station merger will improve operational cover in the St. Helens area. A new fire station will also provide an improved working environment for firefighters and improved facilities for the local community.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- CFO/111/14** Station Mergers Project – Appointment of Contractor, Policy & Resources Committee, 27th November 2014
- CFO/059/15** St. Helens Consultation Outcomes, Authority, 17th December 2015
- CFO/094/15** Proposed Station Merger of Eccleston and St. Helens Fire Stations at a new site on Canal Street, Authority, 17th December 2015.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

EIA	Equality Impact Assessment
HFSC	Home Fire Safety Check
MFRS	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service
NWAS	North West Ambulance Service
PCSA	Pre-Contract Services Agreement