MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	**AUTHORITY**		
DATE:		**REPORT NO:**	**CFO/023/17**
PRESENTING OFFICER	**DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	**PHIL GARRIGAN, DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**	**REPORT AUTHOR:**	**COLIN SCHOFIELD, PROGRAMME DIRECTOR**
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	**AREA MANAGER PAUL MURPHY HEAD OF ESTATES, STEWART WOODS**		
TITLE OF REPORT:	**STATION MERGERS PROJECT - PROGRESS REPORT**		

APPENDICES:	

Purpose of Report

1. To provide a progress report to Members on the Station Mergers project up to the end of April 2017.

Recommendation

2. That Members note this report.

Introduction and Background

3. This report provides an update on progress to provide new Community Fire Stations at Prescot (to replace Huyton and Whiston); Saughall Massie (to replace Upton and West Kirby) and St. Helens (to replace Eccleston and St. Helens.

Prescot

4. As members may recall, the new building at Prescot will serve as a Community Fire Station and a Neighbourhood Police Station.

5. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided a progress report (CFO/087/16) to Policy and Resources Committee on 15th December 2016. That report identified the significant challenges that had been faced on the site since the scheme was originally approved and which had caused delays to the programme and increased costs. These included discovery and eradication of Japanese Knotweed; grouting of shallow mining workings; requirement for further boreholes and trial pits due to inaccurately plotted co-ordinates; and the discovery of further asbestos contamination. As a result of these issues, the Policy and Resources Committee agreed to increase the budget for this scheme by £145,000.

6. Wates Construction Ltd, the Authority's appointed contractors, were issued with a (pre) Contract Instruction on 28th November 2016 which allowed them to access the site to carry out preparatory works including putting up hoardings around the site and creating a temporary access road, including some tree removal. All necessary works were completed and the site made secure prior to Christmas 2016.

7. This allowed the main contract work to commence early in January 2017 with the removal of all Japanese Knotweed from site. The Japanese Knotweed removal work was paid for by Knowsley Council as the site owner. Once this work was completed, the site compound was established at the southern end of the site, under licence from and on land owned by Knowsley Council, site clearance and other enabling works then commenced

8. Pressure grouting was carried out to all the shallow mine works under the footprints of the main building and also the training tower. All drilling, grouting, earthworks and remediation has now been completed. It should be noted that, rather than being removed to landfill as originally envisaged, a small quantity (200 m^3) of hazardous asbestos found on site has been buried under the new access road, a separation layer installed and capped off with clean material. The exact location has been plotted and logged. This was agreed by Knowsley Council officers as part of the submitted remediation strategy and is the preferred option for dealing with such material.

9. All foundations and ground beams have been laid and the concrete for the ground floor slab was poured on 26th April 2017. Retaining walls for the approach road are in place. Steel work started in the first week in May.

10. The build has been registered with the Considerate Constructors Scheme and the first assessment visit has been undertaken. Wates carried out a letter drop to all neighbouring properties in late 2016 advising of works commencement and published and distributed a community newsletter in March 2017 updating neighbours on progress.

11. Unfortunately there was a break-in to the site compound in the early hours of 15th April (Easter Saturday). Although the intruders' presence alerted the remote alarm monitoring company and CCTV captured images of two people on site, the intruders managed to steal some £2000 worth of plant and equipment.

12. As part of their contract with the Authority, Wates appointed Everton Development Trust as their social value partners. Through this partnership and working with Knowsley Council, Wates have appointed four young apprentices to work on the project in various guises including management, surveying, administration, logistics and operations. Wates are also working closely with the Princes Trust team based at Huyton Community Fire Station. This included sponsorship of a project to refresh the refectory at St. Albert's Church, Knowsley. Wates have recently parted company with Everton Development Trust and have now appointed Calico as social value partners. This move will guarantee the apprentices two years employment.

13. Work is currently on schedule to be completed in March 2018.

Saughall Massie

14. Members may recall, from report CFO/007/17, considered by the Authority at its meeting on 26th January 2017, that Wirral Borough Council's Planning Committee on 15th December 2016, refused planning permission for the building of a new community fire station in Saughall Massie. The Authority, at that meeting resolved, amongst other things, that it is the intention of officers to appeal the decision to the Secretary of State via the Planning Inspectorate and to submit a revised planning application addressing the specific reasons for refusal.

15. A revised planning application was submitted to Wirral Borough Council on 13th March 2017 but not formally validated until 28th March 2017. This has been registered as APP/17/00306. To address the reasons for refusal of the original application, the overall size of the site was reduced by some 30%; the size of the building was reduced by some 10%; the building realigned by some 15°; with the site layout altered including significantly improved landscaping.

16. It was originally hoped that the new application would be considered by Wirral Planning Committee on 1st June 2017 but due to Purdah any decision is likely to be deferred to a future meeting. There is a Planning Committee on 22nd June 2017 and it is anticipated that the application will be considered at that meeting.

17. If the revised application is refused, an appeal to the Secretary of State, via the Planning Inspectorate, will be made. The Authority has six months from the date of refusal to submit an appeal.

St. Helens

18. As Members may recall, the Authority, at its meeting on 15th December 2015, approved the merger of Eccleston and St. Helens Community Fire Stations at a new station on Canal Street, St. Helens, subject to the purchase of land from Pilkington and the granting of planning permission.

19. During the course of 2016, following extensive negotiations, which at one stage included Merseyside Police who had expressed an interest in being a party to any development on this site, a purchase price was agreed with Pilkington for two acres of land on the Canal Street site (which forms part of their larger Watson Street works).

20. Based upon experience of ground conditions and resultant delays at the Prescot site (detailed above), together with the potential risks of any brown field site in the St. Helens area, it was agreed that the best course of action was to take the Canal Street scheme forward on an incremental basis. Consequently, as phase one, a desk top study was commissioned from Wates Construction Ltd, under a pre-construction services agreement, following which a report on site conditions was produced, together with an initial cost estimate for remediation and building works. This was completed in late 2016.

21. Following consideration of the phase one report and cost estimate, Wates were commissioned to undertake phase two, which involved on-site surveys including full intrusive site investigations, together with demolition, topographical, drain, radar and ecological surveys and ground gas monitoring. These detailed surveys would take up to 22 weeks to complete, including production of the final report and cost plan. Following this, the initial cost estimate would be finalised and, if the scheme remained cost-effective, Authority approval would be sought to proceed.

22. A licence was drafted by Pilkington to allow Wates to carry out these works but before Wates were able to get on site, the Programme Director was informed by the Managing Director of Pilkington that, as they had another party interested in purchasing the Canal Street site, the Authority only had exclusivity until the end of April 2017. As the phase two works and report production were unlikely to be completed before the end of June 2017, the Programme Director wrote to Pilkington with a request for an extension to the exclusivity period. On 22nd February 2017 a reply was received withdrawing the offer of the Canal Street site.

23. An analysis of potential response times from this site shows a slight improvement on those modelled for the Canal Street site, which itself was considered to be a very good response compared to retaining the current St. Helens station site. The site has excellent access onto Linkway which as Members may know is the main arterial route through St. Helens.

24. Initial discussions with Merseyside Police and NWAS about a potential tri-Services hub on this site have proved positive, with NWAS in particular keen to develop an operational hub, including a 'make ready' facility on site, subject of course to costs.

25. Initial massing drawings showing how a three bay fire station (based on the Prescot model) and a five bay fire and ambulance station, incorporating a 'make ready' facility could fit on this site have been produced and shared with Blue Light colleagues. Merseyside Police have now advised the Authority that they are not in a position to commit to the project at this stage given their current estate plans however NWAS have agreed to give an initial response by the end of May indicating whether they will be willing to contribute to a phase one desk top study of this site by Wates which will produce a report on site conditions, together with an initial cost estimate for remediation and building works. At this stage, further discussions will be held with NWAS to consider whether they wish to proceed with the phase two intrusive site investigations.

26. Some further public consultation will be necessary, when the potential site usage is quantified, as whilst the wider consultation already carried out on the proposed station merger (report CFO/059/15 refers) remains valid, the actual site proposed is now in a different location. Any consultation will reflect this position.

Equality and Diversity Implications

27. The Equality Impact Assessment for each of the three station mergers and for the station mergers programme as a whole has previously been submitted to the Authority. There is no update to the Equality Impact Assessment as a result of this report. Further work will be required in due course to reflect the potential new site at St. Helens, if a decision is taken to proceed.

28. However, it is important to note that the potential impact on certain groups within the community that are at greater risk than others, will increase if any of the proposed station mergers do not proceed for any reason.

Staff Implications

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

Legal Implications

30. A formal contract has been entered into with Wates Construction Limited for the design and build of the new Prescot Community Fire and Neighbourhood Police Station. An Agreement to Lease and Lease has been signed with Knowsley Borough Council for the land at Prescot. A Development Agreement and Sub-lease have been signed with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside for Merseyside Police using part of the Prescot building as a Neighbourhood Police Station.

31. Formal Pre-Construction Services Agreements have been entered into with Wates Construction Limited for the initial works required at Saughall Massie and St. Helens.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

32. There are no additional financial implications as a result of this report.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

33. At Prescot, the mine cap has been located but no further works to the shaft or cap are required as a result. All voids under the proposed buildings, caused by shallow mine workings, have been pressure grouted. All Japanese Knotweed has been removed from site and root barriers installed to prevent it recurring. All asbestos-contaminated soil has been removed from site and disposed of to landfill with the exception of some 200m^3 which has been capped, buried and its location plotted on site in accordance with the approved remediation strategy.

34. Details of any risk management, health and safety and environmental implications for Saughall Massie and St. Helens will be provided in due course, when these are known

35. A full risk register is maintained for the whole station mergers project.

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

36. Whilst the proposed station mergers will not improve operational cover in all three areas, it is believed to be the least worst option to adopt under the circumstances and is considered to be reasonable (through public consultation) given the difficult financial challenges faced by the Authority.

37. The new community fire stations will however provide improved working environments for firefighters and other emergency service workers.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CFO/059/15 Authority 17th December 2015
CFO/094/15 Authority 17th December 2015
CFO/087/16 Policy & Resources Committee, 15th December 2016
CFO/007/17 Authority, 26th January 2017

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

NWAS North West Ambulance Service
WTE Whole-time Equivalent.