

CORRESPONDENCE WIRRAL 2 CONSULTATION

23 – emails/email threads and letters

Phone Call received by Professional Standards:

A Resident from Upton has recently received a 'cover consultation' document. She called to offer her congratulations on producing such an understandable and accessible document on the subject. She stated that 'even she could understand it'. She feels that there were some concerns in the community, regarding certain issues, but the document has gone a long way to allay these fears.

She said that she will try to attend the next consultation meeting to pass on her thanks in person.

Comment

As a resident of West Kirby and a mother of three young children I object to the proposals to close West Kirby fire station.

This is a ridiculous and dangerous proposal and directly increases the risk of death, from a house fire, to my family.

Question

Consultation re proposed fire station on Green Belt land at Saughall Massie.

Response, the Wirral Group of Cheshire Wildlife Trust, on behalf of Wirral Wildlife committee

1) The Fire and Rescue Service, as a public body, is bound by the "Biodiversity Duty":
Section 40, Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006:

" Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity"

2) Barn Owl are nesting north of Saughall Massie Road, and may use the proposed site for foraging, as the rough grassland is suitable habitat for the small mammals on which they feed. Barn Owl are a Local Biodiversity Action Plan species and their nest sites are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended. Please contact the Wirral Barn Owl Trust, whom I have informed about this - wirralbarnowltrust@sky.com . A barn owl survey must be done before any planning application is submitted. If development was permitted, then mitigation for loss of foraging habitat should be provided in the vicinity.

External lighting would also have to be kept to a minimum (see below re bats).

3) Bats are reported feeding along the Arrowe Brook by local residents. Bats are European protected species under the Habitats Regulations 2010. They are also UK protected species under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended. A bat activity survey done by a suitably licensed and experienced surveyor would be required before a planning application was submitted. In my view a corridor at least 15m wide should be left between the Arrowe Brook and the edge of the development, and managed to benefit invertebrates, as food for bats. To minimise disturbance, external lighting would have to be kept to a minimum and be bat and invertebrate-friendly; suitable guidelines are available from Bat Conservation Trust, www.bats.org.uk Such lighting would also minimise disturbance to owls and other nocturnal wildlife.

4) Kingfishers are reported in the area. Kingfishers are a UK protected species under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended. However, this only protects the birds themselves and the nest sites. I do not think the brook banks at this point are suitable for kingfishers to nest, but a breeding bird survey should be carried out prior to any planning application.

5) Since some green land would be lost to this development, affecting the above and a range of commoner wildlife, mitigation should be provided so that the proposed development would lead to "no net loss" of biodiversity.

This could take the form of:-

- * Wildlife-friendly planting as landscaping to screen the development, including native tree and shrubs.
- * Funding much-needed management to Jenny's Wood (the small wood nearby), which has not been managed since planting and needs attention. This should include opening up the pond to more light.
- * Clearance of invasive Himalayan balsam from the Arrowe Brook, including funds for clearing for some distance upstream to lessen the risk of re-infestation.
- * Activities with local people to foster respect for the brook and the local wildlife.

6) Since this is Green Belt land, it will be necessary to prove "very special circumstances" to allow development, including lack of any alternative sites. Protecting the Green Belt is very important in Wirral, to encourage re-development in the older urban areas as well as the usual Green Belt reasons. There will therefore have to be very good reasons to allow development on this site, and it must not be a precedent for other developments.

Answer

Thank you for taking the time to share your findings with the Fire and Rescue Service. Although the current consultation is concerned with the operational response options available to the Authority to deal with the cuts to its funding and not planning matters, should (following the consideration of the consultation outcomes) the Authority decide to pursue the proposal to build on the site, a planning process will be entered into where matters such as this will be considered.

Question

We write to you concerning the suggestion of building a new Fire Station on “Green Belt” land on Saughall Massie Road.

A consultation document we recently received there were two options stated.

- 1 Merge the two present sites (Close both) by building a new one on Saughall Massie Road
- 2 Close West Kirby site and maintain a service from Upton, which we are told would be inadequate.

We write out of our concern that only these two options were suggested and not the possibility of searching for a Brown land site. We know that there is a brown land site available locally though there is much local opposition to this.

Also we are concerned regarding that site because:-

- 1 It is designated as “Green Belt”. I believe that once building starts on this green belt there will be a domino effect and soon there will be no green land at the northern end of the Wirral.
- 2 Safety Hazard. There are two roads from Saughall Massie village to the north of the potential site and the western one is at the top of a rise with restricted views for traffic from Saughall Massie turning right to West Kirby. The speed limit on this section is 50mph.
- 3 The government is constantly trying to save money by spending money, in this case by building and reducing staffing levels. We have friends running small businesses and for them making people redundant is a costly nightmare with redundancy payments. Consequently the costs of this plan include building, redundancy and potential long term unemployment benefits, and the human cost of families with no bread winner. This is of course hidden as it would come out of different departments budgets.

Answer

In response to your query, the Authority is required to make significant changes to the way in which it delivers its services to achieve £6.3m of savings in 2015/16. This is due to cuts in Government Grant to the Authority. The Authority will take £2.9m from support/back office costs, which leaves £3.4 to come from operational response. This requires the closure of a number of stations and in some cases we are proposing to build a new station in a central location between two closed stations to help maintain reasonable attendance times to emergency incidents.

The closure of West Kirby and Upton fire stations and the building of a new station in Saughall Massie would save in the region of £850,000 every year. The cost of building a new station would be met by a combination of Government capital (one off) grant, sale of the current sites and Authority reserves (again this would be a one off use). This would leave the Authority effectively mortgage free, but with an ongoing saving of approximately £850,000 year on year from this proposal. I hope this explains how the proposal would provide

savings rather than increase costs, whilst still providing the best possible response to both Upton and West Kirby station areas.

Closing West Kirby and responding only from Upton would create the same level of saving, but provide a poorer emergency response service to West Kirby's station area, particularly Hoylake and Meols. The Authority is keen to avoid this and to ensure that all areas receive the best response possible in an emergency.

With regards to your comments about the site, I can appreciate your concerns and they will be reported to the Authority. However, matters such as this would be fully considered during the planning process should the Authority decide to proceed with this proposal following consideration of the outcomes of consultation.

I hope this helps with regards to your queries, if you have any other questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Question

[To an MP] You called at my house recently and posted one of your leaflets and I'm very sorry that I wasn't at home due to work commitments and missed the opportunity to meet and talk with you at that time.

I've copied my recent emailed message to Councillor regarding the Fire Station Cover Consultation and his response below and can inform you that to date I've still not received the information I've requested even though I'd requested it in good time and in advance of the second public meeting regarding this proposal in Woodchurch on the 28th of April.

I've been a loyal Labour supporter and trade union member for 38 years but I'm afraid you won't get my vote this time or for the foreseeable future as the local Labour Council is backing the proposed building of the new fire station on Saughall Massie Road while the Conservative Councillors are supporting the vast majority of locals who are against the proposal.

You are no doubt aware that many people, and many would say the majority, vote more for the political party that looks after the interests and supports the feelings of local residents rather than on national issues and the importance of preventing this proposal getting the go-ahead is unprecedented as far as I'm aware in the 22 years I've lived in this area.

The questions I've asked but not received answers to are listed below.

1/ Closeness of proximity to private houses the closest being in Woodpecker Close.

How would you feel if this new fire station got the go-ahead to be built 25 metres from your front gate!!

In the absence of a response I've estimated (using the accurate house width of properties on Woodpecker Close as a proportional scale) that the minimum distance the perimeter wall will be from the nearest residential dwellings front door in Woodpecker Close is between 27 and 30 metres which is 6.3 times the length of an average family car and between 22.5 and 25 metres from this properties front gate which is just over five times the length of an average family car.

The typical perimeter wall height for a facility of this type is approximately 5 metres and the drill tower can be expected to be around 18 metres (over 54 foot) in height.

I requested accurate measurements if my dimensional calculations were disputed but otherwise, asked it to be noted how unacceptably close to current residential properties this new proposed fire station will be if it goes ahead.

2/ Proposed site is on green belt which it will be degraded and it will remove a valuable asset to the local community.

3/ The proposed site is west facing to the front of houses in Woodpecker Close which will block sunlight to varying degrees during the day depending on time of year.

4/ Increased noise and air pollution during emergency responses and training.

5/ Reduction in emergency response time during morning and afternoon periods when Saughall Massie Road is heavily congested with commuter traffic.

If response times are to be truly and realistically considered then this site is unsuitable because response times will be greatly increased during the morning and early evening "rush hours" due to heavy road congestion along this arterial commuter route.

6/ Although the cost of build is coming directly from the treasury (the taxpayer) the cost of this will be far more than if built on a brown field site as the proposed site is sloping and will need considerable infill to level it and create foundations which will cost more time and money. A projection of extra cost will be provided once scales have been provided.

Please don't point out to me that it's the Conservatives who're driving this reduction in fire station numbers and funding in general because Labour would have done the same given the current situation and I feel they helped create this mess by overspending when they were in power.

Please understand I'm not against a new fire station per se I'm just against it being built on Saughall Massie Road for the reasons I've listed.

If we do get to talk I'd be delighted to express my experiences of working in both the public sector and in the private sector.

I have considerable experience of interfacing with the NHS and have many friends who currently work within it.

In my experience situations are not always what they seem to be when viewed through the media.

If this goes ahead with Labour backing you'll understandably lose a great number of supporters.

Response from Councillor

Subject: RE: VITAL POINTS & INFO. REQ REGDS WIRRAL WEST FIRE STATION PROPOSAL

Thank you for your email and for sharing your earlier email of 19 April 2015 with me, which you sent directly to the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service consultation email address. It is for the Fire Service to respond to the questions you ask about the sketch design, operational matters including response times and station location criteria.

The council was approached some time ago by the Fire Service and asked to identify land owned by the council in the Greasby area, initially in the existing residential area and subsequently a wider search to include land around Greasby, particularly in the Pump Lane area. The council has duties in respect of public safety and I hope you will agree that as the Fire Service consultation relates to the safety of 26000 residents that it would have been wrong for the council not to engage with the Fire Service.

From the sites identified by the council, the initial proposal was for the central Greasby site. As the scheme developed and following the consultation, this scheme became more problematic as the size of the proposal grew, the proposed replacement of the community centre did not find favour, nor the replacement of the library. There were also potential grant claw back issues in relation to works carried out to extend the library building.

The proposal put forward by the Fire Service is currently out for consultation. When that is complete, the Chief Fire Officer will report to the Fire Authority and a decision taken on whether to take the proposal further. This process is entirely outside the council. Should the Fire Authority decide to proceed, the council will have to consider any approach to acquire sufficient land for the proposal. Should that be agreed, then the Fire Authority would need to apply for planning permission, which given the Greenbelt status of land would require national as well as local consideration.

The scheme outline proposal produced by the Fire Authority was, as I understand, to provide some ideas for discussion. To have said nothing would have led to criticism. The drawings were presented to facilitate responses along the lines you are doing.

I will ask that the matters you raise are re-stated to the Fire Service and appreciate you sharing your thoughts and feelings with me.

In conclusion, I must stress that the decision about any site for a new fire station is the responsibility of the Merseyside Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer and their principal

concern is response times to save lives. Sadly, this issue has only come on to the agenda as a result of government cuts to the Fire Authority's budget. I recognise the strength of your views about the green belt, however, there is a formal legal process which this must go through.

Original Question

Please provide the following information regarding the proposal for the new fire station to be located on Saughall Massie Road.

1/ Your Cover Consultation Document shows illustrations of the two proposed fire stations options, one and two storey, without scale measurements. Please provide footprint and height dimensions for both proposals including height of perimeter wall and training tower.

2/ Provide minimum distance from the nearest residential dwelling.

3/ Provide typical sound level in decibels of all emergency alarms, including combined engine noise, generated during a call out measured from the front of a facility of this type.

Bases upon current information my objections are primarily based upon the following;

1/ Proposed site is on green belt which it will be degraded and it will remove a valuable asset to the local community.

2/ Closeness of proximity to private houses the closest being in Woodpecker Close.

3/ The proposed site is west facing to the front of houses in Woodpecker Close which will block sunlight to varying degrees during the day depending on time of year.

4/ Increased noise and air pollution during emergency responses and training.

5/ Reduction in emergency response time during morning and afternoon periods when Saughall Massie Road is heavily congested with commuter traffic.

6/ Although the cost of build is coming directly from the treasury (the taxpayer) the cost of this will be far more than if built on a brown field site as the proposed site is sloping and will need considerable infill to level it and create foundations which will cost more time and money. A projection of extra cost will be provided once scales have been provided.

This proposed facility was originally going to be located in Greasby so why do you think you can now relocate it in Saughall Massie.

Are the considerations of resident in Greasby any different to and more important than those in Saughall Massie?

I understand you have to build it somewhere but brown field sites both private and council owned are available on the old Champion Spark Plugs site and the Premier Foods/Cadbury Factory site. Any extra cost of acquisition could be partly or wholly offset by the reduction in build cost.

Question – Sent again

Please read the emailed message below very carefully.

I can guarantee you 100% that if this proposal goes ahead I will never vote Labour both nationally or locally again.

Dear Sir/Madam,

In order to raise credible and accurate questions regarding the proposed building of a new fire station on Saughall Massie Road, in a democratic society I'm entitled to receive accurate information as requested from you over a week ago in my emailed message copied and provided again below.

Your West Wirral Fire Cover Consultation document shows diagrammatic representations of both one and two storey proposals without a distance scale to allow gauging of dimensions which I would have thought is an essential requirement to enable the assessment of its impact on Saughall Massie residence.

In the absence of your response I've estimated (using the accurate house width of properties on Woodpecker Close as a proportional scale) that the minimum distance the perimeter wall will be from the nearest residential dwellings front door in Woodpecker Close is between 27 and 30 metres which is 6.3 times the length of an average family car and between 22.5 and 25 metres from this properties front gate which is just over five times the length of an average family car.

The typical perimeter wall height for a facility of this type is approximately 5 metres and the drill tower can be expected to be around 18 metres (over 54 foot) in height.

Please provide accurate measurements if you dispute my dimensional calculations but otherwise, note how unacceptably close to current residential properties this new proposed fire station will be if it goes ahead.

Also please provide a credible reason as to why, in a democratic and fair society, the residents of Saughall Massie's overwhelming feelings of resistance to this proposed fire station are being overridden by the local Labour Council when equal or lesser feelings of resistance by those in Greasby were considered in full and their request to reject the proposed building of this facility (on a brown field site) was granted.

My objections as previously provided are outlined below.

1/ Proposed site is on green belt which it will be degraded and it will remove a valuable asset to the local community.

2/ Closeness of proximity to private houses the closest being in Woodpecker Close.

3/ The proposed site is west facing to the front of houses in Woodpecker Close which will block sunlight to varying degrees during the day depending on time of year.

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This proposed facility was originally going to be located in Greasby so why do you think you can now relocate it in Saughall Massie and why can't the residence of Saughall Massie have another public meeting in Saughall Massie on the basis that approximately 220 people plus (not 180 as reported) were locked out of the meeting on the 20th of April which proved the level of emotive feeling concerning this proposal.

Why are the considerations of resident in Greasby any different to and considered more important than those in Saughall Massie?

Please have the decency to reply to me with the requested information in addition to a credible answer to the above question and don't just send me another questionnaire, thanks.

Please note that I need this information before the next public meetings on the 28th of April and the 5th of May which I will be attending very early due to being locked out of the previous one at St Mary's Church Centre on the 20th of April.

Thanks for your reply and my comments regarding the answers you've given are as follows;

The drawings produced so far have been created to provide an indication of what a fire station could look like etc

What you've demonstrated is the reverse logic that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority have demonstrated so far as this consultation should not have even started without first considering the obvious and serious impact of the proposed fire station's location on local residents and particularly those living in Woodpecker Close.

Due to the closeness of the houses on Woodpecker Close it should have been a non-starter from the onset so all the time and effort spent so far is a complete waste of time unless this consultation is a "smoke screen" and the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority intend to go to planning and final

implementation stages regardless of local opposition. With the strength of opposition already expressed why hasn't the idea to build it at this location been cancelled already?

What the new station would look like is irrelevant as its not going to add to the scenery and it's the size of it, wall and tower height etc, that are relevant and these haven't been detailed so far (I suspect on purpose) and allowed local people to understand accurately what the full impact will be.

The area is no more heavily congested with traffic than any other area of Merseyside and fire appliances and other emergency vehicles already travel by that route etc

I totally disagree with this answer. I live next to Saughall Massie Road and during the morning and evening "rush hours"

it's very heavily congested to a far greater extent than other local roads at these times. I travel 25 thousand miles a year with my job and use the local roads extensively at all times of the year so I have a great deal of experience regarding local traffic congestion hotspots and this is one of the worst at these times.

Your expert drivers cant drive through or over other vehicles and would be hindered dramatically during these periods.

My instinct is that this is a "done deal" so to speak and the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority are just going through the legal process otherwise this plan would have been rejected already.

If it goes ahead to the planning stage there will be even more resistance and if the Labour Council back its implementation they will pay a very heavy price politically.

Think how you'd feel if a new fire station of this scale was being built 25 yards away from your front door!

Apologies for the delay in response to your original email. I have added answers and comments to your email using a blue font. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Questions – sent again – Responses in Blue

Dear Sir/Madam,

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- > In the absence of your response I've estimated (using the accurate house width of properties on Woodpecker Close as a proportional scale) that the minimum distance the perimeter wall will be from the nearest residential dwellings front door in Woodpecker Close is between 27 and
- > 30 metres which is 6.3 times the length of an average family car and between 22.5 and 25 metres from this properties front gate which is just over five times the length of an average family car.
- >
- > The typical perimeter wall height for a facility of this type is approximately 5 metres and the drill tower can be expected to be around
- > 18 metres (over 54 foot) in height.
- >
- > Please provide accurate measurements if you dispute my dimensional calculations but otherwise, note how unacceptably close to current residential properties this new proposed fire station will be if it goes ahead.

The drawings produced so far have been created to provide an indication of what a fire station could look like on the site and are not intended to be a representation of any actual plan or design. There are intended to assist the consultation but are not part of any planning process. The consultation currently underway is considering the operational response options for the West Wirral area; i.e the principle of closing two stations and building a new station at an optimum location between the two sites as an alternative to the outright closure of West Kirby. If, following the outcomes of consultation, the Authority decided to pursue the building of a new station it would then enter into the planning process, when matters such as those to which you refer would be fully considered.

- >
- > Also please provide a credible reason as to why, in a democratic and fair society, the residents of Saughall Massie's overwhelming feelings of resistance to this proposed fire station are being overridden by the local Labour Council when equal or lesser feelings of resistance by those in Greasby were considered in full and their request to reject the proposed building of this facility (on a brown field site) was granted.

I am not sure why you think that the views of residents are being overridden. The consultation process is still on-going, with a final public meeting at Hoylake tonight and several other consultation events having also taken place. Our on line questionnaire is still available until 18th May, when the consultation closes. Following the closure of the consultation process a full report on all the outcomes will be presented to the Fire and Rescue Authority for them to make a final decision on the proposals, as is always the case. The Chief Fire Officer is on record as acknowledging that the people from Saughall Massie (at the public meeting) were opposed to the proposal and this will be reported back to the Authority.

The decision about Greasby to which you refer was made by the Council and not the Fire and Rescue Authority, which is a separate local authority, so we are unable to comment on the thinking behind that decision.

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- > My objections as previously provided are outlined below.
- >
- > 1/ Proposed site is on green belt which it will be degraded and it will remove a valuable asset to the local community.
- >
- > 2/ Closeness of proximity to private houses the closest being in Woodpecker Close.
- >
- > 3/ The proposed site is west facing to the front of houses in Woodpecker Close which will block sunlight to varying degrees during the day depending on time of year.
- >
- > 4/ Increased noise and air pollution during emergency responses and training.
- >

All the above matters would be considered during any planning process and are not the subject of the current consultation, which is concerned with the operational response implications.

- > 5/ Reduction in emergency response time during morning and afternoon periods when Saughall Massie Road is heavily congested with commuter traffic.

The area is no more heavily congested with traffic than any other area of Merseyside and fire appliances and other emergency vehicles already travel by that route. Drivers are highly trained for driving safely in all conditions. Importantly, the Saughall Massie location would result in better attendance times than the outright closure of West Kirby. Hence why it is the Authority's preferred option.

- >
- > 6/ Although the cost of build is coming directly from the treasury (the taxpayer) the cost of this will be far more than if built on a brown field site as the proposed site is sloping and will need considerable infill to level it and create foundations which will cost more time and money. A projection of extra cost will be provided once scales have been provided.

Unfortunately, the Greasby library site is no longer available to the us, so any speculation on this matter is no longer relevant.

- >
- > This proposed facility was originally going to be located in Greasby so why do you think you can now relocate it in Saughall Massie and why can't the residence of Saughall Massie have another public meeting in Saughall Massie on the basis that approximately 220 people plus (not 180 as reported) were locked out of the meeting on the 20th of April which proved the level of emotive feeling concerning this proposal.

The Chief Fire Officer is of the view that as the vast majority of people at the Saughall Massie meeting were opposed to the proposal, it is considered that the attendees at any subsequent meeting would also be opposed. This will be reported back to the Authority. As we already know that people are opposed (and why) it is not considered that a second meeting would have added any value to the consultation process. The meeting held in Upton a week later was only attended by 20 people, several of whom were from Saughall Massie.

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> Why are the considerations of resident in Greasby any different to and considered more important than those in Saughall Massie?

They are not. The Council chose to withdraw the land that had been identified and as such the Fire and Rescue Authority's original proposals could not proceed.

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> Please have the decency to reply to me with the requested information in addition to a credible answer to the above question and don't just send me another questionnaire, thanks.

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> Please note that I need this information before the next public meetings on the 28th of April and the 5th of May which I will be attending very early due to being locked out of the previous one at St Mary's Church Centre on the 20th of April.

>

Apologies for the delay in response to your original email and I hope that this response answers your questions. I will be at the Hoylake meeting tonight and would be happy to discuss this with you further if you require.

Questions – further from same source

Thanks for your reply and my comments regarding the answers you've given are as follows;

The drawings produced so far have been created to provide an indication of what a fire station could look like etc

What you've demonstrated is the reverse logic that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority have demonstrated so far as this consultation should not have even started without first considering the obvious and serious impact of the proposed fire station's location on local residents and particularly those living in Woodpecker Close.

Due to the closeness of the houses on Woodpecker Close it should have been a non-starter from the onset so all the time and effort spent so far is a complete waste of time unless this consultation is a "smoke screen" and the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority intend to go to planning and final implementation stages regardless of local opposition. With the strength of opposition already expressed why hasn't the idea to build it at this location been cancelled already?

What the new station would look like is irrelevant as its not going to add to the scenery and it's the size of it, wall and tower height etc, that are relevant and these haven't been detailed so far (I suspect on purpose) and allowed local people to understand accurately what the full impact will be.

The area is no more heavily congested with traffic than any other area of Merseyside and fire appliances and other emergency vehicles already travel by that route etc

I totally disagree with this answer. I live next to Saughall Massie Road and during the morning and evening "rush hours" it's very heavily congested to a far greater extent than other local roads at these times. I travel 25 thousand miles a year with my job and use the local roads extensively at all times of the year so I have a great deal of experience regarding local traffic congestion hotspots and this is one of the worst at these times. Your expert drivers cant drive through or over other vehicles and would be hindered dramatically during these periods.

My instinct is that this is a "done deal" so to speak and the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority are just going through the legal process otherwise this plan would have been rejected already.

If it goes ahead to the planning stage there will be even more resistance and if the Labour Council back its implementation they will pay a very heavy price politically.

Think how you'd feel if a new fire station of this scale was being built 25 yards away from your front door!

Further information was provided to this correspondent as a Freedom of Information request.

Answer

Thank you for your comments. I hope the following will assist:

As I'm sure you are aware, the primary concern of the Fire and Rescue Authority is the provision of emergency response cover and locating a fire station as close as possible to the mid-point between the existing Upton and West Kirby station areas delivers the least impact on emergency response. That has to be our starting point when faced with cuts.

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> Regarding response times; the average response times we have quoted in our consultation publications are based on actual run times (for attendance at emergency incidents), along the roads you refer to when the location of the incident necessitates traveling via those routes.

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> I can assure you that the outcome is not a "done deal" and the Authority will give full consideration to the consultation outcomes when considering their final position. If they then decided to pursue the Saughall Massie option, the planning process would deal with the concerns you raise

In response to a request to consider a new location in Moreton:

Thank you for your suggestion. My department has now considered the training centre location in Moreton. We have looked at the distance (by road) from the mid point between Upton and West Kirby fire stations (the Three Lane Ends roundabout), the travel time to West Kirby fire station from the location and we have illustrated on a map the time it would take to respond to incidents in both station areas in 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 minute intervals. We have also done the same for the Saughall Massie road site.

- The Moreton site is 1.924 miles from the mid point and the Saughall Massie Road site is 0.601 miles from the mid point.
- From Saughall Massie Road it would take 5 minutes 58 seconds to get to West Kirby fire station and it would take 8 minutes 27 seconds from the Moreton Training Centre.
- As you can see from the maps it would take longer to reach large parts of the West Kirby station area from the Moreton location, with much of the more populated area of West Kirby seeing a 9 or 10 minute response.

For all these reasons, the suggested site would not meet the Authority's requirements, as any new station would need to be as close to the mid point as possible to ensure we equalise response times into both the current station areas; but thank you again for taking the time to make the suggestion.

M.F. & R.A West Wirral Fire Cover Consultation

My response - From a member of the public

I hope to be at the meeting in Saughall Massie if I am able but in case I can't make I wanted to put some of my concerns and questions in writing so that my views could be aired.

Firstly I want to know why the Greasby Road option was dropped. It seems to me from comments in the document that it was never a realistic proposition.

After an initial assessment of the sites available, planning constraints and in particular the impact on response times the only viable option at that time that was identified was the Library and Children's Centre site on Frankby Road, Greasby. The site was considered a

viable option because it was within an area where development was permitted (not green belt) and because it gave the opportunity for developing a joint service hub with Wirral, containing a new build Library, Children's Centre and Fire Station. The option was a realistic proposition for the Fire and Rescue Authority, but Wirral Council withdrew the land following objections from local people and their representatives.

I'm not sure how we are supposed to consider viable alternatives to your proposals when we aren't being made aware of all the alternatives or the costs of change.

Details of the alternatives already considered are included at the end of the consultation document along with the reasons why they have not been put forward as options. The alternatives either would not save the required amount of money or would deliver a reduced level of operational response than the options out to consultation; or in some cases both of these reasons.

You say significant future savings will probably be required irrespective of which political party is in power. Where is your evidence based analysis of this and why doesn't your report contain any comment from the main political parties? Have you even elicited the views of our local MP's?

The Authority's budgetary forecasts are based on the government's budget, widely available independent assessments of the public finances by organisations such as the Institute of Fiscal Studies and the Office of Budget Responsibility and guidance from the Local Government Association. All the main political parties remain committed to eliminating the deficit in public finances and whilst they each wish to protect different sectors of public investment, no party has committed to protecting local government (including Fire and Rescue Authorities). This will probably mean that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority will face further large spending cuts since it is heavily reliant on grant funding.

Of course this cannot be confirmed until after the general election and a spending review. If in the unlikely event there is unexpected growth in future budgets the Authority is likely to seek to increase the number of immediately available wholtime appliances to improve the service across Merseyside.

All the local MPs in the station areas concerned have been consulted in relation to these proposals and the previous consultation. Extensive lobbying at Parliamentary level has also previously taken place in an attempt to minimise the effects of the cuts to grant funding. The decision on which options to pursue to achieve the required savings is one the Fire and Rescue Authority must make having considered the views on the public and other interested parties (hence the current consultation).

Have other Wirral station mergers been considered and if so why were they discounted in favour of of Upton/West Kirby? What would be the operational impact of say Bromborough and Heswall merging?

All other options for merging stations in Wirral have been considered (as they have been elsewhere in Merseyside). The proposal to merge Upton and West Kirby, is considered the option that will have the least operational impact, based upon an analysis of response times across Merseyside.

As an alternative have you considered achieving the cost savings by sharing facilities with other authorities which border Merseyside and which presumably are under the same pressures as you to reduce costs?

The Authority already shares several of its premises with the Police and Ambulance Services including the Joint Control Centre in Bootle and has agreements with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service whereby Heswall provides the first response into Neston and Cheshire provides the first response into Cronton in Knowsley. Other “mutual aid” arrangements ensure that all the surrounding Fire and Rescue Services (Cheshire, Lancashire and Greater Manchester) support Merseyside when required and vice versa.

Fire stations in Cheshire are remote from the Wirral and providing services from there to Merseyside would result in a much longer delay in operational response, which would be unacceptable in terms of public safety.

The reduction in the number of incidents is impressive and is a credit to the force. Without their education and hands on approach many people wouldn't be aware of their responsibilities as citizens. What you don't say however is what the figures are for the other stations in Wirral-without these I find it difficult to consider alternatives.

Thank you for your comments. I have attached details of the performance of each of the Wirral stations, but the most important factor in determining where to locate fire stations is the extent to which we can avoid large increases in response times and particularly whether we can achieve our 10 minute response standard. In an emergency fire or rescue situation a couple more minutes can make a significant difference. Closing West Kirby and responding from Upton would mean some people in the current West Kirby station area waiting more than 10 minutes for an emergency response.

From a non-operational perspective what facilities could be shared that aren't currently. Isn't it also possible to look at a combination of the options you have discounted such as LLAR stations and crewing during the day. I don't know is viable because you haven't provided the data necessary.

The Fire and Rescue Authority has already taken all the possible non-operational savings available to it (totalling £2.9m) and increased council tax by 2% per annum, but to set a balanced and therefore legal budget it still has to find £3.4m savings from operational response. The numbers of support staff employed by the Authority are at the lowest level achievable now. We believe it is a myth that services could be shared whilst delivering significant savings from the position we are at now.

The information at the end of the consultation document provides examples of how many stations would need to be converted to LLAR for example, to achieve the required savings. An explanation is also offered as to what the operational impact of that amount of LLAR stations would be (e.g. reduced resilience). The other significant point to note is that the Authority could not secure sufficient numbers of volunteers from existing staff to crew the number of LLAR stations required to deliver the necessary savings. Nor are the existing stations suitable for the development required to provide firefighter accommodation (which is a necessary part of the LLAR model). This is explained within the consultation document.

The MF&RA are to be congratulated on the response times achieved and nobody wants this to change materially but inevitably closures and mergers will impact. I'm not sure however that you haven't over egged the pudding somewhat on response times which is tantamount to scaremongering. Why is it predicted for instance that the response time will increase by over 3 minutes on average or by approx. 64% by closing West Kirby when that station is only responsible for 27% of the incidences of the joint command? You also say that parts of Hoylake can't be reached in 10 minutes from Upton but you don't say what the areas are, what the current response time is and when the last reported incidence was. It would be stretching the facts somewhat if it is one or two houses and the last reported incident was over 30 years ago! Please give us some valid statistical data to support your contentions.

Although the document contains incident details as an indication of how the demand on the service has reduced over the years due to preventative work carried out by the Service, the model on which all Fire and Rescue Services operate is one of risk; i.e that although there are some people and places that are more likely than others to experience an incident. Experience shows us that incidents can and do happen anywhere and to anyone and it is vital to respond as quickly as possible when they do. For example, a house fire may be less likely to occur in Hoylake than in central Birkenhead, but the consequences can be just as devastating when it does.

Closing West Kirby will still mean that the response times will continue to be faster than the national average and won't have a major impact on the Saughall Massie community which has been affected considerably by road changes in recent years and the loss of bus services. I would like some additional evidence to support your response times from Saughall Massie as my experience is that the proposed station will be situated at one of the busiest junctions in Wirral and will create chaos at peak times.

The Fire and Rescue Authority has to consider the overall impact of the cuts on all the residents of West Wirral and although we fully understand that some people will have concerns about the proposal it is important that the Authority tries its best to deliver the fairest outcomes for all those residents. We believe that far from being a burden, a fire station could bring useful community facilities to the area, as well as reassurance for Saughall Massie residents that the fire and rescue service is on their door step should they need them.

Fire crews are engaged for much of the operational day in undertaking Home Fire Safety checks, supporting fire safety in businesses and are out and about in the community. They mobilise to operational incidents from where they are at the time. That combined with the (thankfully) relatively low numbers of calls means that direct responses from the station are unlikely to be more than 3 per day.

The Fire and Rescue Authority would work with highways staff at Wirral council to ensure that egress on to Saughall Massie Road is safe. MFRA has an excellent record in road safety. The site at Saughall Massie Road is far more favourable for response than many other stations on Merseyside.

Although maintaining operational effectiveness must be your prime consideration you can't ignore the impact a new fire station will have on the Saughall Massie community no matter what you say about it blending in. Green belt land is there for a reason a building a fire station on it isn't it!

Overall although I still require some answers and more information I can't see based on what you have said building a new station is the best option.

If Saughall Massie is the only site close to the mid-point and available why was Greasby Rd. ever a consideration. What other alternatives to Saughall Massie have been considered and why were they rejected?

The Frankby road, Greasby site was the best option at the time as the land was not greenbelt and was in council ownership (so was available to the Authority). The Saughall Massie road site is in fact operationally better for the fire and rescue service, but wasn't available whilst the brownfield site at Frankby Road was. Once Frankby road was withdrawn by the council, the only remaining available land was in the greenbelt. Several options have been considered, all in the greenbelt and either not currently available, or not as suitable operationally (i.e. emergency response times are not as good).

What really concerns me is the lack of information on the cost of closing 2 stations and building a new one. Then there is the throw away comments at the end of the report about consultation with NWAS. It occurs to me and no doubt other people that a joint venture is the only way you can secure the savings you see as inevitable through joint training facilities shared IT, admin, HR etc. Without NHS funding to support this venture the cost of a stand alone fire station would be prohibitive. Can I have some information on this please.

In the longer term the capital and revenue cost of one fire station is cheaper than two. Compared to every other Fire and Rescue Authority Merseyside has more buildings per area and head of population. With the budgetary cuts that has to be addressed.

There is a short term capital investment required to build the new fire station of about £3m. This is offset by a grant (£1.5M) that has been received from the government to support the

station mergers and the sale value of the two old fire station sites with the remainder of any cost to the Fire Authority being met by reserves. This capital investment allows staffing savings of nearly £1m every year to be realised so clearly the business case is strong for a merger with or without partners. In addition one station would not have the associated overheads and running costs as two on an ongoing basis.

If the Ambulance Service were to be included in a new station at Saughall Massie Road it is expected they would pay their own costs in full. The business case for the merger is not reliant on NHS funding - although their contribution would help make the case even more powerful.

Question:

Hi, I noticed that you're looking at options to build a new fire station between West Kirby and Upton and that consultation has been started on using council land in Saughall Massie. I wondered whether using the former RAF West Kirby site, also on Saughall Massie Road had been considered since this is more accurately brown-field than green-field, would be a fitting tribute to a site which served the nation during and after WW2 and is not adjacent to any other property, therefore limiting the objections of residents. Kind Regards

Answer

Thank you very much for your suggestion. The Service has previously considered this site, which I am informed is in the Green Belt. However, I will ensure that your email is passed onto the officers dealing with this matter and it will be considered alongside the other comments we receive during the consultation process.

Reply

Thanks for your response. I'd be grateful if the potential for considering the site be fully investigated, especially with potential as a multi-agency base and possibly by including facilities for youth organisations such as cadet forces, which would fit well with the history of the site. Similarly, if the site is potentially useful then I'd be keen to ensure you consider adopting landscaping, layout and construction styles which are in keeping with the heritage of the site. Finally, I'd suggest that the potential for road-safety improvements along that stretch of the road could also be incorporated into consideration of using that site, I guess this may open up opportunities for joint funding with other agencies.

It seems to me that the use of this site has many benefits as well as a good story behind it.

Question

I have received the 2015 residents' survey and booklet giving the options for fire cover in our area. However the questionnaire does not answer a number of important questions. From reading the correspondence the fire service prefers a new station on Saughall Massie Road. Would you confirm which route the Fire Engine would take to West Kirby. The shortest route would be down Saughall Massie Road which for most of the time is narrow country lanes. A large heavy vehicle travelling at speed down these narrow lanes would be a hazard for traffic travelling in both directions. There is no space to pull over to let the appliance through or any safe stretches of road for over taking. The speed limit on the country lanes is 50 mph, but due to the bends many cars travel at 30 / 40 mph and slower at night, hindering the passage of an appliance on an emergency call. Taking the alternative route would go through Frankby village again a narrow road with few places to overtake. Also when a appliance on an emergency call bursts out of Saughall Massie Road on a blind bend, straight ahead is West Kirby Children Centre, with the road being very congested with parents delivering and collecting children.

Would you confirm if a risk assessment has been carried out for an appliance travelling this route at speed.

Answer

A fire appliance could indeed use the routes you describe when travelling towards West Kirby, but it is important to note that they already do so from the fire station in Upton, depending on the location of the incident and the number of appliances required to deal with it. For example, a minimum of two appliances are sent to a house fire. As it stands one would be sent from West Kirby and the other would be sent from Upton). All of our drivers are highly trained to arrive safely at an incident and would not drive at speeds higher than were appropriate for the road conditions. The roads in West Wirral present no greater challenges to our drivers than do the roads in other parts of Merseyside, all of which requires them to drive safely in the proximity of schools, homes and all other types of building to reach an emergency incident in the quickest time possible.

I hope that this satisfies your enquiry and thank you for taking the time to respond to our survey. You can be assured that all views will be taken into account by the Authority.

Question:

Please find attached our response to the West Wirral Fire Cover Consultation particularly with regard to the proposal to site the new fire station next to green belt land at Saughall Massie. As you will appreciate there is a lot of strong local feeling in the village against the new station at Saughall Massie Road (Option A).

Attachment

Firstly let us thank Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) for coming to a meeting in Saughall Massie on Monday 9 February to explain to the residents the operational need for change. We accept that £20 million revenue savings have to be made in the Merseyside fire service by 2020 - as they have in all other public service finances if the budget deficit is to be reduced. However we cannot see how that will logically lead to the decision to build a new community fire station on green belt land on the edge of the Saughall Massie Conservation area.

At the meeting in February MFRA clearly explained that operational priority is about minimising response times to the best their ability. The conclusion from that would be that the ideal site would be at Three Lane Ends, noting that was in private ownership and not owned by the council. If response times are as important as implied then we can only conclude that more effort should be put into purchasing that land and siting the fire station as equidistant from West Kirby and Upton as possible, despite the extra effort involved. However if optimising response times are not worth that additional time and expense then we can only conclude that closing West Kirby and running the operation out of Upton would be the next best solution, both in terms of finances and planning issues.

Whilst we recognise the need to separate the operational reasons for change away from the planning issues, we cannot ignore how difficult and time-consuming these issues will be if for some reason MFRA were to continue to pursue the Saughall Massie option in the face of strong and vocal local opposition. Although much time and effort was wasted in eliminating the option of siting the station at Greasby, due to public pressure, we cannot see how that would be any less in Saughall Massie.

Answer

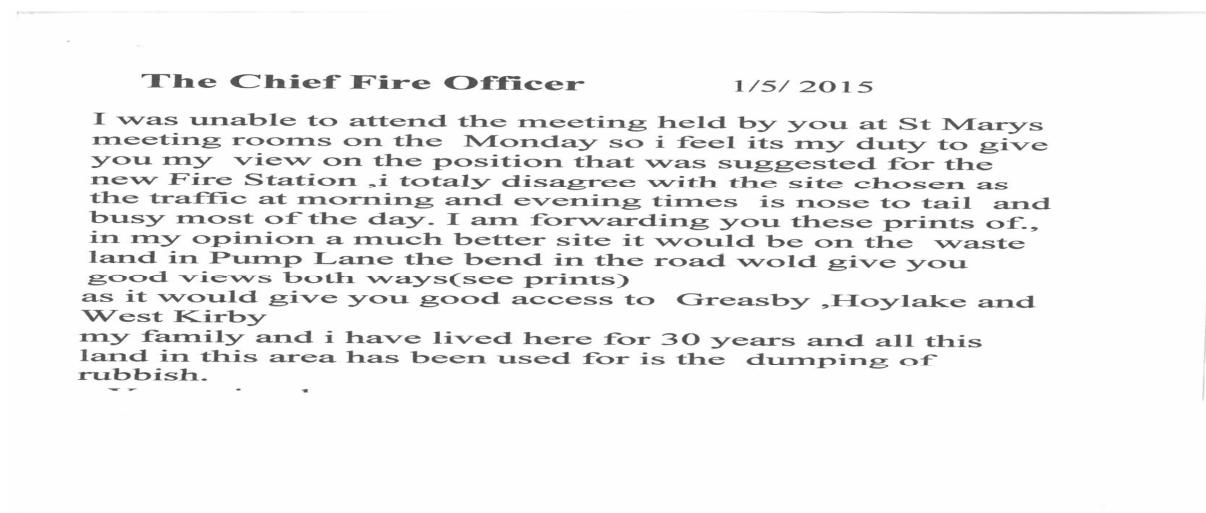
Thank you for your letter dated 31st March regarding the proposed merger of the fire stations at West Kirby and Upton on Saughall Massie Road.

Prior to responding to the substantive issue you raise within your letter I need to correct a point of accuracy. The Fire and Rescue Authority has had to make savings of £20m between 2011/12 and 2014/15. The Authority must make further savings of £6.3m in 2015/16 hence the merger proposals on Wirral and in Knowsley and St Helens and the outright closure of Allerton fire station in Liverpool as of today.

The Authority has approached the owner of the land in the vicinity of Three Lanes End over purchasing a plot of sufficient size on which to locate a fire station but have received no response. As the Authority has no powers to compulsory purchase land then the only available option at this time is the land in Council ownership on Saughall Massie Road.

As I explained at the meeting on 9th February the Saughall Massie Road site is sufficiently close to the mid-point (around 600m away) to deliver reasonable response times to both station areas. The outright closure of West Kirby would significantly increase response times to the West Kirby station area. Locating a new station on Saughall Massie Road is therefore the best option available to the Authority to limit the overall impact on response times.

Question



Answer

Thank you for your letter regarding the proposal to build a new fire station on Saughall Massie Road.

The Fire and Rescue Authority has already considered the land on Pump Lane that you identify which is in the ownership of Wirral Council.

Unfortunately the size and the shape of the land is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the Authority for a new fire station.

I am however very grateful to you for taking the time to write with your suggestion which is much appreciated.

I object to the proposed fire station in Saughall Massie because:-

- lives could be lost as Saughall Massie Road is already congested. Between 8am and 9.30am Mon-Fri - Severe congestion
- no open space for dogs & horses to run free
- our properties will de-value
- damage to wildlife habitats.

Thank you for your letter dated 25th April regarding the proposal to build a new fire station on Saughall Massie Road.

For ease of response I will address the points you raise within your letter in chronological order.

The traffic conditions in the immediate vicinity of the proposed fire station site are no more challenging than anywhere else across Merseyside. The fire appliance from Upton already responds as part of the pre-determined attendance to life risk incidents occurring within the West Kirby station area on many occasion using Saughall Massie Road. No issues have ever been raised by any of our drivers over response conditions in this area.

I acknowledge the points you raise over open spaces for dogs and horses and any damage to wildlife however as I explained at the consultation meeting these are issues to be considered by the Wirral Council Planning Committee in the event that the Fire and Rescue Authority submitted a planning application.

In response to your final point I am not aware of any evidence from anywhere across the Country where the building of a fire station has had any negative impact on house prices.

I recognise that this response is unlikely to change your position but you can be assured however that your views will be faithfully represented to the Fire and Rescue Authority when I report on the consultation outcomes.

Good afternoon, further to my previous emails I can confirm that the Fire Authority, at their meeting today, approved the 12 week consultation over the proposal to build a fire station on the Saughall Massie site.

I look forward to hearing from you as to whether you wish to meet with the Chief Fire Officer on the suggested date of 9th February.

Thank you very much.

Response

Hi. All ok our end. We would like to meet at 7 pm 09/02/15 at The Saughall Hotel in Saughall Massie Village. You will be presenting to the members of the Saughall Massie Village Conservation Area Society. A projector is available for you to show us the footprint of the proposed development and any other detail.

We look forward to meeting you on Monday evening - though its fair to say that there is a groundswell of opposition building within both the Conservation Area and the wider area.

I appreciate that you have chosen our village area for its mid proximity to the area you need to provide cover for but does that correlate with the known call outs that involved life threatening incidents?

I presume many call outs are routine fire checks, installing fire alarms, checking water supplies etc etc. Probably the number of actual fires and road crash attendances is more modest? Can you inform us of exactly how many serious life endangering calls were made in 2013 and 2014 in each of the seperate post codes covered by Upton and West Kirby fire

stations and also adjacent post codes in other fire areas or on the motorway that were attended to by our fire stations.. Please confine the stats to life threatening call outs were time is of the essence.

Also how many such serious incidents and the post codes, have had to be attended by either Heswall or Wallasey or Birkenhead appliances into our area. Additionally how many serious call outs have occurred in the West Kirby area on the days that West Kirby Fire Station has been closed and from what fire station.

Its not essential we have this information for Monday but we would like it asap to best inform our members.

We write to you concerning the suggestion of building a new Fire Station on “Green Belt” land on Saughall Massie Road.

A consultation document we recently received there were two options stated.

- 1 Merge the two present sites (Close both) by building a new one on Saughall Massie Road
- 2 Close West Kirby site and maintain a service from Upton, which we are told would be inadequate.

We write out of our concern that only these two options were suggested and not the possibility of searching for a Brown land site. We know that there is a brown land site available locally though there is much local opposition to this.

Also we are concerned regarding that site because:-

- 1 It is designated as “Green Belt”. I believe that once building starts on this green belt there will be a domino effect and soon there will be no green land at the northern end of the Wirral.
- 2 Safety Hazard. There are two roads from Saughall Massie village to the north of the potential site and the western one is at the top of a rise with restricted views for traffic from Saughall Massie turning right to West Kirby. The speed limit on this section is 50mph.
- 3 The government is constantly trying to save money by spending money, in this case by building and reducing staffing levels. We have friends running small businesses and for them making people redundant is a costly nightmare with redundancy payments. Consequently the costs of this plan include building, redundancy and potential long term unemployment benefits, and the human cost of families with no bread winner. This is of course hidden as it would come out of different departments budgets.

Reply

Thank you for your letter regarding the proposal to build a new fire station on Saughall Massie Road.

For ease of response I will address the points you raise within your letter in chronological order.

The only suitable non green belt site available to the Fire and Rescue Authority was the Greasby Library. As you may be aware this site was withdrawn by Wirral Council. The only other suitable sites from an operational response perspective are all in the green belt (in the vicinity of the Three Lanes End roundabout).

In response to point 1 within your letter I acknowledge the points you raise however as I have explained at the consultation meetings held to date these are issues to be considered by the Wirral Council Planning Committee in the event that the Fire and Rescue Authority submitted a planning application.

In response to point 2 the traffic conditions in the immediate vicinity of the proposed fire station site are no more hazardous than anywhere else across Merseyside. The fire appliance from Upton already responds as part of the pre-determined attendance to life risk incidents occurring within the West Kirby station area on many occasion using Saughall Massie Road. No issues have ever been raised by any of our drivers over response conditions in this area.

In response to point 3 the Fire and rescue Authority has determined that the reductions in Firefighter posts will be achieved through retirement rather than compulsory redundancy therefore there are no redundancy costs associated with the proposal.

I recognise that this response is unlikely to change your position but you can be assured however that your views will be faithfully represented to the Fire and Rescue Authority when I report on the consultation outcomes.

Question

Re Fire Station Saughall Massie Rd.

I would like to register my disapproval
at the above, Building on Greenbelt
land is out of order.

Your bombastic, patronising, bullying
behaviour towards residents in the
area did not help your cause.

U.

Answer

Thank you for your letter regarding the proposal to build a new fire station on Saughall Massie Road.

I note your disapproval of the proposal and I am sorry that you consider my behavior to be bombastic, patronizing and bullying. I can assure you it is not my intention to display any of those behaviours and having viewed a recording of the Saughall Massie public meeting I don't honestly believe that I have.

I will however ensure that your views are faithfully represented to the Fire and Rescue Authority when I report on the consultation outcomes.

I am a resident of Saughall Massie and I understand that the consultation period for the above project is soon closing.

I trust that the public outcry from all affected communities is to be fully considered in the decision making; I and many residents are of the opinion that the decision has already been made.

I have been passed your email to Councillor by our Chief Fire Officer, who has asked me to reply to you. It would not have been appropriate for Councillor to respond to you directly or for her to have attended any of the public meetings as she, along with the rest of the Fire and Rescue Authority is required to impartially consider the outcomes of the public consultation process.

I have provided a response to each of your comments, as hopefully this will be more straightforward.

Question with responses in Blue- (other colours from original document)

I was one of the two hundred or so people locked out of the Saughall Massie public meeting, so I have not had the benefit of the facts first hand nor the opportunity to question or clarify certain issues. However I did remain and viewed what I could of the visual presentation from outside the meeting.

A number of Officers including the Deputy Chief remained outside the venue for the duration of the meeting to answer any questions the people who were unable to attend had. The Chief Fire Officer would be happy to meet with you in person or talk to you on the telephone if this response does not answer all of your questions.

Many statistics were thrown at the audience but at no time was the current staffing/performance data of the relevant two fire stations (West Kirby and Upton) displayed for comparison. Time is valuable and not to be wasted; seconds count and can make the difference in saving lives. Right away precedence was given to projected savings, funding, finances, grants and restructuring *alleged* benefits. At no time was there mention of the impact on the neighbourhoods, the environment and the social wellbeing of affected individuals. No assurances were given in response to the concerns of the 120+ audience.

A considerable amount of time was given over at each public meeting to the concerns of local residents about the matters you raise. However, as the Chief Fire Officer pointed out, this consultation is solely about the operational response considerations for West Wirral in the context of a reducing budget as a direct result of cuts to government grant. The Authority will have to either build a new station at Saughall Massie or close West Kirby and respond from Upton to make the necessary savings. The cuts also affect other areas of Merseyside and the Authority has already closed Allerton fire station and approved the closure of Huyton and Whiston fire stations and the building of a new station at Prescott. A merger of two stations in St Helens is also being considered.

The Chief Fire Officer made it clear that should the Authority agree the proposal to build a new station (following consideration of the consultation outcomes), the matters you raise would be subject to the usual planning process.

The Chief Fire Officer talked in some detail about staffing, attendance times and the numbers of incidents occurring in both station areas at each of the public meetings, as these matters are all key to operational response and as such form the basis of the Authority's proposal. The proposal to build a new fire station at Saughall Massie has been advanced because it offers the "least worst" option. That is, it allows the Authority to equalise attendance times into the West Kirby and Upton station areas. If West Kirby closes and Upton remains open this will compromise attendance into West Kirby and in particular lengthen attendance times into Hoylake and Meols.

The proposed site

This is a wonderful semi-rural area, and I have taken exception to the proposed site being described as "A SCRAPPY PIECE OF LAND". I recall several years ago when representation was made to the council for the building of a playground and the applicants were advised, quite firmly by the planning department that the land was "GREEN BELT" and also unsuitable because of its susceptibility to flooding. I can quite concur with the latter

statement, as after a heavy bout of rain the land becomes very muddy and I have slipped and slithered my way whilst walking my dogs. To both improve drainage and attract wild life, 'Jenny's Wood' was planted to the upper reaches of the land, however it has never fully resolved the problem of flooding. What will it be like if further buildings are constructed on the site?

It has been said that this land was donated by a private land owner for the benefit of the people of the area, and it now serves a large community covering residents of Saughall Massie, Moreton, Upton and Greasby/Frankby. It is well used for dog walking, general walking, and horse riding (safely off road), all activities which benefit the health and well being of all concerned. In this day and age it is an invaluable opportunity for all age groups to interact, socialise and to communicate in a friendly environment. It must be said there are no other facilities within walking distance that can rival a leisure pursuit which allows daily contact, and relieves any feelings of isolation in this day and age.

The Chief Fire Office has never referred to the site as a “scrappy piece of land” and fully understands that many people in the area do not want a station built there. These views will be reported back the Fire and Rescue Authority to enable them to make their decision following the close of consultation. However, these are all planning matters that would be considered by the Council if the Authority decided to pursue this option.

Factors that need considering.

Road congestion/ excess speeds – Since the by-pass was opened 10 years ago, we have seen a dramatic increase in traffic especially during the school runs and rush hours. Commercial traffic to/from Hoylake and West Kirby is non-stop throughout other times of the day. The lack of traffic lights or roundabouts mean that residents take their life in their hands when accessing Saughall Massie road (SMR); turning left is bad enough but turning right is a nightmare; because vehicles constantly exceed the speed limits little time is available to ingress/egress from residential roads. Also, there have been occasions when driving within the limits both on the bypass and SMR, that I have been overtaken by speeding vehicles. Even the pedestrian lights are ignored, particularly by drivers racing towards the Upton by-pass.

It is considered that the driving conditions in Saughall Massie at busy times are very similar to many other areas of Merseyside and it should be noted that fire appliances already use these routes to respond to incidents on the West Kirby station area. All fire

appliance drivers are fully trained in emergency response driving, as you would expect, and they always “drive to arrive”. That is, they do not take risks with their own or anyone else’s safety when driving. Our analysis suggests that the response times from Saughall Massie to the West Kirby station area would be over two minutes (on average) faster than if responding from Upton. This difference can significantly affect the outcome of a fire, road traffic collision or other emergency.

Location 1 - Neighbourhood

The proposed site is located on a bend in the road and adjacent to domestic properties occupied by elderly or vulnerable persons. The site boundary will be very close to the properties and the occupants will have the permanent joy of overlooking a car park, a training tower, brickwork and security fencing. They will also have to endure the respective sounds and petrol fumes of cars arriving/leaving 24 hours a day and the necessary activities of the fire personnel when training or maintaining their vehicles. This is certainly not conducive to their health and well being when their current neighbourhood has been quiet, sociable and safe. Who knows what negative effects will arise from (or be attracted by) the proposal of community use – suggested use outlined as being for youths, alcoholics and other communal needs.

Much of what you describe relates to planning matters and would be dealt with as I have explained previously. However, it is worth considering the potential advantages to elderly residents who would have first aid-trained emergency personnel on hand if a fire station was built. In addition, elderly people are at the greatest risk of dying in a fire in the home, so a fire station in close proximity, could save lives amongst this group of residents.

Although community facilities are an option in any new fire station, their exact use has not been determined and the intention would always be to provide a benefit to the local community through the use of such rooms, not a disadvantage.

Location 2 - Access

As said the site is on a bend of a road that can become rather chaotic certain times of the day, and may become exacerbated if they should ever improve the roads from Three Lanes End to Hoylake and West Kirby. A concern is that the public and the employees of the fire/ambulance services using private cars will enter and exit on a dangerous bend with no

sight of oncoming traffic from the right; the fire engines will have the benefit of controlled lights.

As explained above, these would be planning matters for the Council to determine if the proposal was agreed.

Location 3 – Roads to other areas

It has been 10 years since the Saughall Massie/Moreton Bypass was opened and it has had the detrimental effect of increased levels of traffic passing through to the coastal areas of West Kirby, Meols, Hoylake, Caldy and Heswall. In all that time, nothing has been done to improve the access roads from Three Lanes End. During the Open golf event at Hoylake, I often saw the double decker buses carefully making their way to and from the venue, and the speed limit was justifiably reduced to accommodate them. How on earth are the fire engines going to negotiate those same narrow lanes at speed during daylight, never mind in the dark on unlit roads – and meet the expected response times. Furthermore, the surrounding area of the Three Lanes End roundabout is working farmland and I have had to wait whilst cattle cross over to other pasture, and had to slow down for tractors. Also, during the winter the roads to both black Horse Hill and Meols were untreated, resulting in treacherous conditions and hazards arising from abandoned vehicles.

As mentioned above Fire and Rescue Service drivers already negotiate these types of road conditions throughout Merseyside as well as in these specific locations

Other concerns

1. Allegedly, the project/site is being extended for 2 ambulance bays, community accommodation and potentially an armed response unit. These may be only rumours but sometimes there is no smoke without fire. I say this because at a focus meeting when people were paid £30 to attend, a speaker let slip the community room would be made available to communal groups e.g. substance abuse (mentioning alcoholics).

I was present at that meeting and the reference to Alcoholics Anonymous was made in relation to a support group that meets at an existing fire station, by way of an example of how the Fire and Rescue Service can help vulnerable groups of people when that help is requested. There are many types of meetings taking place in fire stations, community

rooms, church halls and other buildings all over the country that benefit and support local communities.

Should the fire station be built, there would not be a Police armed response unit and although the Ambulance Service might wish to use any facilities, this has not been determined. This would be the subject of the planning process.

2. What else are we not being told? The authority (and council) are not being transparent, nor open and honest in providing all the necessary information to allow us the residents to make informed decisions and give our views on such proposals.

Please let me know what additional information you require and I will do my best to provide it.

3. What other locations have been considered? Brown sites are everywhere – what about the former Champions site? It is reasonable that any money raised from the sale of the two current fire stations be used to finance alternative solutions.

The Authority has considered several other potential sites. The best location between the two existing stations is the three Lanes End roundabout on Pump Lane. All land in the vicinity is greenbelt and in private ownership with the exception of a site that was too small for the Authority's purposes and the Saughall Massie Road site. Both of these are in Wirral Council ownership and therefor potentially available. Other land owners have not shown any interest in selling their land to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

The only suitable brownfield site was the Greasby library site, which as you may know, was withdrawn by the council following public opposition.

All other sites are too far away from the Pump Lane mid point to offer any benefits with regards to response to West Kirby, including the Champion Business Park.

To conclude: Every consideration should be given to the negative impact that this project is going to have on the **PEOPLE** of all the affected areas. I can only speak on behalf of my neighbourhood but I do care about the feelings of my neighbours in

Upton, Woodchurch, Noctorum, Greasby, West Kirby, Hoylake and Meols. I trust that you do as well.

The Authority's purpose in this consultation is to ensure that the safety of all West Wirral residents is given equal priority. Unfortunately, closing West Kirby and responding only from Upton would not ensure this. However, you can be assured that your views will be faithfully represented to the Authority when it meets to consider the outcomes of the public consultation.

Response

I am contacting you after Monday night's farcical attempt at a public consultation undertaken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority at St Mary's Centre. As two of an estimated 150 local residents left outside the venue with no voice and no opportunity to hear the proposals or express an opinion. I understand that you have refused to commit to a further consultation meeting for those residents who took the time and trouble to attend on Monday, but due to the poor planning and management of the event, were unable to gain access to the venue. I am disgusted at the arrogance of the Fire Authority in their handling of this matter and you should not be allowed to rely on the flawed consultation exercise, to demonstrate that you have sought the views of local residents. I urge you as the Chief Fire Officer, to make suitable arrangements for as many meetings as it may take to fully enable the residents to have their views considered.

The meeting venue was chosen on the insistence of a local councillor due to its proximity to the land in question. There are no other venues in the immediate vicinity that have the capacity to host a larger attendance.

Two further public meetings will be held. The first is on Tuesday evening (28th April) at Holy Cross Church, Church Lane. Like the meeting held last week this venue is on the Upton fire station area. A third public meeting will be held a week on Tuesday (5th May) at the Hoylake Community Centre, 31 Hoyle Lane. This venue is on the West Kirby station area.

As you are aware the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) has already held a 12 week consultation over the operational principle of station mergers. The FRA need not have held another 12 week consultation over the same operational principle but did so in the interests of openness and transparency. In an operational response context the exact location of the

proposed station is academic. The location specific issues are a matter for the Local Authority Planning Committee not the FRA.

I would hope that you agree that Monday night's fiasco did not satisfy the criteria as a meaningful consultation exercise. Having said that, you must be aware that the overwhelming views of the residents, both inside and on the pavement outside, was that this development does not take place at all within our precious 'Green Belt'.

See my response above. I am fully aware and fully expected the residents of Saughall Massie to be opposed to building a new station. It was the same in Greasby and has been the experience of a number of FRA's around the Country that have for the same operational reasons as Merseyside pursued this option to deliver financial savings whilst maintaining the greatest speed and weight of operational response achievable in the circumstances. Our experience from Greasby is that the outcomes of the second meeting were no different than the first. Indeed many of the same people who attended the first meeting attended again. On that basis I cannot see any benefit in another meeting at the same venue, not least because we are holding additional meetings in any event, one of which is also on the Upton station area. Our survey is open for anyone to respond irrespective of whether they attended a public meeting or not.

You may be able to assist me in further understanding some of the issues in this matter. I understand that, even though the land is designated 'Green Belt', the Labour Council have offered this land as a possible site for the new fire station. How is this possible? Does the Labour Council not have a responsibility to protect the 'Green Belt' within it's ownership, as indeed it would expect other land owners within the 'Green Belt' to be equally responsible. Who at the Council has identified this land as a suitable site and what steps have they taken to arrive at this decision. When, where and by whom was this decision taken and where can I view the report? As a local resident, I do not recall being asked by the Labour Council for my views on the future or disposal of this 'Green Belt' land.

Wirral Council is required to consider the safety of its residents and has responded to a request from the FRA for assistance in this regard. For anything further you would need to direct your questions to Wirral Council.

I am advised, that when this issue arose regarding a 'brownfield' site in Greasby, the Council Leader intervened personally to withdraw the site from consideration, in the light of

opposition from the local residents. I have now urged him to show the residents of Saughall Massie a similar courtesy, in what is a far worse scenario.

An additional issue arising as a result of this matter and causing us grave concern, are the comments of Conservative Councillor..... stated at the meeting on 29 January 2015, that although the site is within the 'Green Belt' it is not a green pasture it is just 'a piece of scrappy land'. This is a disgusting attitude, how can we rely on the support of our local Councillors if they harbour views such as this. This piece of land is used and enjoyed daily by many residents who exercise themselves and their dogs whilst getting close to nature. If it can be described as scrappy in any way, then this is entirely due to the Council's neglect. The other opinions expressed at this meeting clearly give the impression that the siting of this new fire station is almost a done deal and that the 'consultation' exercise is just a box to be ticked to protect the MFRA from a judicial review, rather than a genuine attempt to obtain and abide by the views of residents. Subsequent events (ie Monday!!!) would appear to support this conclusion.

Please see my response above regarding this second consultation process.

In exactly the same way as for the first public consultation process the outcomes of this process will be reported to the FRA for them to consider. This will be followed by a report advising the FRA of their options as to how to deliver the required savings for 2015/16 to its budget through operational responses changes on West Wirral. The decision will be made then and only then.

The MFRA meeting also indicated that you are aware that you will need to demonstrate 'special circumstances', in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework if you are to be permitted to develop within the 'Green Belt'. It is your opinion that you will rely upon the public safety argument to justify your case. I would argue that, how can that be the case? The only reason a public safety issue arises is by virtue of MFRA decision to close fire stations elsewhere. You cannot manufacture the circumstances by your own actions, trying to promote criteria to satisfy NPPF requirements. NPPF also requires that where special circumstances are shown to exist, any development subsequently permitted must be as unobtrusive as possible. What could be more obtrusive than a a Fire/Ambulance station, training/community centre and multi storey tower on Green Belt adjacent to a conservation area. Also, it is necessary to prove that the proposed development cannot be accommodated outside the 'Green Belt', and in this case that is not true as operating the service from Upton testifies. Then there are also the traffic issues to be considered. How inappropriate and downright dangerous would it be to have emergency vehicles exiting at speed onto Saughall Massie Road, the bypass at both ends and the country lanes. In my

opinion, the response times would not be significantly worse from Upton, with a better and safer road system already in place.

I am not manufacturing any argument. The FRA has had to make savings of £26m between 2011/12 and 2015/16. In simple terms the Authority budget in 2015/16 supports 24 immediate response appliances. It is incumbent upon me as the Chief Fire Officer to do all I can to ensure that the stations within which these appliances are located give, as fixed points of reference, the quickest run times possible to all areas of the County. The Saughall Massie Road site reduces the average run times to the West Kirby station area (which stretches from Thurstaston to Meols) by over 2 minutes when compared to the response times from Upton. I can very graphically demonstrate to you and a Planning Committee if necessary why response times matter.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for Fire Authority vehicles to attend incidents outside of their base station area, as we have just seen at the Tesco roundabout traffic accident, where fire service vehicles from both Wallasey and Birkenhead were in attendance. Clearly, this practice would already impact on, and increase, any response times to incidents back in their home patch.

You are absolutely correct that for any like risk incident the FRA mobilises more than one appliance. This is required to achieve a safe system of work for the Firefighters and an effective response for the persons involved. I am unsure however of the point you are raising?

As a result of significant financial challenges faced by the FRA over the last decade each of the existing 6 stations on Wirral only houses one appliance. Of the existing 25 stations across Merseyside only 2 house 2 appliances (Southport for self-evident geographic reasons and Kirkdale because it is the Operational Resource Centre and the support pump is used to supplement staffing on special appliances such as the Hazardous Materials Unit). When we have incidents that require the attendance of more than one appliance this invariably results in a situation where station areas are left uncovered. In these circumstances the Fire Control mobilising officer orders cover moves to ensure that the 'key' stations are covered. There are 10 key stations across Merseyside of which Saughall Massie would be one (it is Upton currently). From these 10 locations the majority of the County can be covered within a 10 minute run time. The location of these stations is of strategic importance to the FRA, hence the merger proposal for West Wirral.

To be very clear, I am not in any way advocating 10 minutes to respond to an incident. By having our stations in the best locations on average we respond in just over half this time.

This whole situation is due to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority's decision to close fire stations and therefore it is up to you to manage the subsequent consequences. It is completely unacceptable for you to think that you can just interfere with Wirral residents enjoyment of this open space and utilise an area of the 'Green Belt' to solve your problems.

The situation is as a direct result of the cuts to the Authority budget over the last decade. Put simply the number of wholetime Firefighters the FRA can afford to employ directly relates to the number of appliances that can be staffed and therefore the number of stations that can remain open. I am managing the consequences and trying to do so in such a way as to maintain the speed and weight of attack to incidents in order to make effective lifesaving interventions.

I urge you to discontinue with the plans to build a new fire station at Saughall Massie and if it is your intention to close the West Kirby station, then this should be managed by merging and operating the service from the existing Upton station.

Please see my responses above. To close West Kirby and not relocate to Saughall Massie Road who increase response times on the West Kirby station area by over 2 minutes. I am assuming you have read the West Wirral merger proposal consultation document but if not I have attached a copy to this reply.

I hope that you will withdraw from your proposals for this totally inappropriate development, but if not, we will rely on Wirral Council planning committee to do the right thing. Failing that we will be seeking grounds for a judicial review of the entire process based upon the handling of the Greasby matter in comparison to the treatment of Saughall Massie. The issues regarding the 'Green Belt' will be the subject of a referral to the Secretary of State.

You are free to seek a judicial review over the FRA consultation process at any point. As you would expect we have taken legal advice throughout, have adopted best practice

consultation guidance and have drawn heavily on the experiences of the not inconsequential number of FRA's around the Country who have had to do the very same as we are over every aspect of the process.

If I haven't answered any of your questions to your satisfaction please let me know. I would be more than happy to discuss any aspects of my response with you in person or over the telephone as I recognise the limitations of corresponding via e-mail.

Proposal for a fire station, Saughall Massie, Wirral

I am writing to express my concerns over the proposal to build a fire station on the greenbelt land at Saughall Massie. I live directly opposite the suggested site and am disappointed to learn of this proposal which I personally use at least twice a day to both exercise my dog and meet up with other local residents. There is also a great deal of wildlife and the beautiful Jenny's Wood. There are water voles, bats, owls to name a few and I am sure that many of these beautiful creatures will be affected by this build if it goes ahead.

I wish to register that I am totally opposed to the build and wish my feelings to be noted.

Yours faithfully,

Document below handed out by member of the public at Saughall Massie meeting

RE: Proposed Saughall Massey Fire Station.

As a former Paramedic working on The Wirral peninsula I have significant experience and knowledge of the roads and idiosyncrasies' of the traffic at various times of day. I know most of the quickest, safest and shortest routes to any point in Wirral and I can give a reasonably accurate assessment of 'emergency travel time' to an incident.

It has always been the case that access to and from West Kirby and to some degree, Hoylake, can be problematic. Quite simply there are only two ways in to the area, and both routes are on narrow and busy roads. One being the very narrow and busy Market Street Hoylake. The other route being down a very steep and narrow road from Black Horse Hill into West Kirby town centre. On either of these routes there is very little room for a fire engine to safely overtake other vehicles.

Some years ago I was in a supermarket in Banks Road West Kirby, during the lunchtime when a serious fire broke out at the rear of the store. The first fire engines arrived from West Kirby station within a couple minutes. That prompt response and efforts of the firemen saved the store and the flats above from becoming consumed by the flames.

In my estimation it would take a fire engine traveling from the proposed site at Saughall Massey at least an **extra six minutes** to reach a similar incident. That's a long time if you are trapped in a fire.

Add to that scenario, the time of day and the effect on traffic, also any bad weather such as fog, snow or heavy rain. From Saughall Massey road and up through the narrow country lanes (up towards Black Horse Hill) the road often floods when it rains. This is just yards from **a well-known accident blackspot.**

Also, there is a dairy farm at the junction of Heron Road and West Kirby road. Twice a day the traffic has to be stopped so that a large herd of cattle can cross the road from the farm into the fields opposite.

A fire engine answering a call at that time could not barge its way through the herd so would be delayed for several minutes.

From Saughall Massey the emergency response time to the West Kirby area would be even longer as well as increasing risk to the health and safety of the crew in the fire engine.