

Questions and answers from the Stakeholders' breakfast meeting at Hoylake
27/5/2015

Three people attended the breakfast consultation event.

Q: When the Chief was going through the presentation and was talking about average response times, he was asked whether that was responding to road traffic collisions (RTCs)?

A: The average response times, and the increase in response times from Upton fire station to the West Kirby area, if West Kirby were to close, included all life risk incidents including RTCs.

Q: When the video of the fire development on the presentation had finished playing, a person asked whether there was a reason why the video was not played to members of the public at the meeting at the St Mary's Centre near Saughall Massie on April 20.

A: The Chief answered that people at the meeting stated that they understood the importance of response times and he had asked whether people at the meeting wanted to see the video or if they agreed that response times were important. The Chief also explained, as the video was playing, that the time of the video (around 2 and a half minutes) was about the time that response times would increase by to the West Kirby area from Upton if no other station was built and West Kirby was closed.

Q: A person talked briefly about the new station in Birkenhead and how it fitted into the community. He then asked the Chief what he saw the "life span" of the new fire station buildings to be? He asked, is it "20 years"?

A: The Chief explained that stations like the one in Birkenhead were part of a Private Finance Initiative scheme and after 25 years it was handed over to the Fire and Rescue Authority. The Chief explained he did not really see the demographics of Wirral changing dramatically and he doubted that the population of Wirral would shift massively from the

locations where they were currently and so the location of stations now, including proposed locations in the merger, would cover the population in the future.

Q: A person talked briefly about the ageing population and how he had heard a group mention that a retirement village should be set-up in Wirral which had provisions for the community like a GP centre and shops and would assist with independent living.

A: The Chief talked about working closer with partners to address the risk posed by ageing populations and how there was still a risk, including fire risks, from people living longer independently. The Chief also said there would be some 'community' support if there were retirement villages as those living in it would provide some support for each other.

Q: A person spoke about the library site at the former site proposed in Greasby in the last consultation and mentioned the issue of the Green Belt with the proposed site on Saughall Massie Road but that that would be a matter for planning. She said she was surprised by the feeling, particularly in the consultation that looked at the Greasby proposed site, of people not wanting a fire station in their "back" yard/near their homes.

A: The Chief explained that there was a population on Greasby of 9,000 and it had been a vocal minority who made their views heard during that consultation as tended to be the way with issues such as this.

Q: A person asked a Wirral Officer, who was present at the meeting, whether the new proposed site near Saughall Massie Road had been welcomed?

A: A Wirral Officer explained that the proposal had come at a key time for politics and how the aim was to positively engage with the community and this positive engagement had taken place but the Wirral Officer admitted they had underestimated the response and depth of feeling on the proposed site including Greasby.

Q: A person asked in terms of the West Kirby site – that in terms of the merger that it would not be sold until the new station was built?

A: The Chief answered that the site would not be disposed of until firstly the Fire and Rescue Authority had approved its closure and then not until a new station was built. But the Chief also explained that due to staff numbers decreasing that the appliance at the station would not be available for some of the time leading up to the new station due to the time it takes for a new building project and the level of retirement rates.

Saughall Massie public consultation meeting, April 20, 2015

venue had capacity for 120 but as many people outside.

Q: A Councillor asked for “an assurance” a second meeting would be held in Saughall Massie due to the number of people outside the St Mary’s Centre, as one was organised in Greasby when people were locked out at the first one there.

A: The Chief explained the venue was the most appropriate, including its accessibility for people who lived in the area. He said the request for a second meeting in the location would be considered. The Chief also explained there were two other public meetings due to be held.

Q: The Councillor said the people of Greasby were given a second meeting, and he wanted the “same commitment” for Saughall Massie residents. He also asked whether the plans would be withdrawn if people in the area did not want it.

Q: There should have been speakers put outside (the venue) for the people outside to listen.

Q: What about the views of the people outside the venue who could not get in.

A: The Chief explained the decision about the proposal was for the Fire Authority. The Chief said the views of the people would be represented to the Fire Authority.

A: MFRS deputy chief executive, explained it was a consultation and that there were a number of forums for people to give their views.

Q: They wanted an assurance the views would be taken back to the Fire Authority.

Q: What about using the "Overchurch Community Centre" nearby as it was larger and could contain more people for a public meeting.

Q: The Councillor asked whether a report would be going to the Fire Authority or whether the "crazy plans" would be withdrawn now?

A: The Chief said the views from the public would be faithfully represented to the Fire Authority. The Chief also explained that a number of options would be outlined.

A: The Chief explained the presentation was focused on operational matters only in relation to the proposals. The Chief said there were "substantial public safety implications" from the options which would be outlined.

He added it was also important people understood what the fire and rescue authority was here to do and what it was not here to do. He said it (The Fire Authority) was not Wirral Council and the fire and rescue authority does not deal with planning. He said the fire and rescue authority did not make any decision over planning and had no regard to issues concerning that and the Fire Authority had no powers in relation to that (planning).

Q: We don't believe what was being said.

A: The Chief said the Authority makes decisions solely in relation to operational response - public safety.

Q: There were more questions asking if Wirral Council offered the fire authority the green belt land and a question asking why there was a proposal to build the fire station.

Q: Why are you proposing the construction of new buildings on Green Belt land and in a "preservation area".

A: The Chief said there would be time for questions at the end and if he was given the opportunity to present he could answer some of the questions people had.

A: The Chief said again that the meeting was concerning operational matters for the Fire and Rescue Authority and asked to be allowed to present. The Chief said that he would be able to address some of the questions people had in his presentation.

Q: The Chief was asked whether the other station mergers in St Helens and Knowsley were taking place on green belt land.

A: The Chief said he would come to that and address that question.

When the Chief was talking about in his presentation about the fire stations currently in existence in certain areas were not in the "right place".

Q: Was "Greasby was the right place" or was "not the right place" for a fire station.

A: The Chief said he would come to that during his presentation.

When the Chief was talking about the merger option in West Wirral and said that there are two fire stations Upton and West Kirby.

Q: West Kirby is closed isn't it?"

A: The Chief said West Kirby was not closed. He said it was "on the run" (with a crewed fire engine at the station) about 70% of occasions.

When the Chief was talking about the previous site that was available in Greasby (but which was withdrawn) and then explaining that Wirral Council offered for consideration the site on Saughall Massie Road, a member of the public asked:

Q: Who offered it? Was it the council?

A: The Chief explained Wirral Council had a duty around community safety.

A: The Chief explained that the only land available as a proposed site was on Saughall Massie Road and the alternative to the merger was the closure of West Kirby as it was not a key station.

Q: They had children and the person said they did care and "everyone" cared but the Chief needed to understand where people were coming from and why they were at the meeting.

A: The Chief said he understood that but there was some views expressed in the Greasby consultation that some members of the public did not care about response times.

Q: It was stated that this was a "terrible thing" for someone to say that response times did not matter.

Q: Would keeping Upton open keep the fire and rescue service within response times anyway.

A: The Chief explained that, as the presentation slides showed, the number of incidents had been reduced through work by the fire and rescue service, but that he was concerned about life risk incidents and what would happen in the future.

Q: He was asked if the video (showing how quickly a fire develops in a room) in the presentation could be "skipped".

A: The Chief said that if people already felt that they understood and agreed that response times were important he did not need to show the video.

When the Chief was talking about if West Kirby were to close and that the West Kirby response from Upton would take over 8 minutes 43 seconds, a member of the public asked –

Q: It would be quicker from Heswall though, wouldn't it? It's a straight run through.

A: The Chief said it would not be quicker from Heswall to get to Hoylake. He said he would show where the West Kirby station area covers. Heswall would only be quicker to Station Road but Upton would be quicker to respond into the West Kirby area.

Q: What's the national average response times?

A: The Chief explained it was 7 minutes 24 seconds to a dwelling fires but the Merseyside average response times, which are quicker than the national average, included all "life risk" incidents.

Q: People in the room asked about the designs on stands at the front of the room.

A: The Chief said the designs were for "indicative purposes only" it shows in relative scale how the station could be placed and what it could look like.

The consultation was only to do with response times and it appeared people in the room and himself were saying the same thing.

Q: A number of people said no.

Q: The Chief then asked the room, on the response times are we not saying the same thing?

Q: A number of members of the public said "no".

A: The Chief clarified and said the consultation "was only concerned with operational response".

Q: We're not only concerned with that (operational response).

A: The Chief said he understood that. He then said anything else is a planning issue.

There were a number of people saying "no it isn't" at this point.

A: The Chief said that any planning issue would be subject to a separate consultation, at this point, a member of the public asked:

Q: Is there anybody here from the Council planning?

A Wirral Council Officer explained why he was at the meeting and explained to the public at the meeting before the question section that due to Purdah he would be restricted on what he could talk about at the meeting.

Q: Why have you picked this place (for a fire station) because we've got two by-passes. We've also got traffic.

Q: There are a number reasons why building a fire station on the site was not a good idea. They said the location would affect response times if a fire station were put there. At 9am in the morning most local people knew you could not get through Pump Lane so a fire engine could not too. Also the lanes in the area were too narrow for a fire engine to pass any other vehicles. The proposed site was a bad place to put a station as at 3pm a fire engine would face a lot of traffic from the school at the end of Saughall Massie Road. There may be other sites and he knew sites were being developed down by Carr Farm and there was "brickworks" and "brownfields".

A: The Chief explained fire crews currently used roads in the Saughall Massie area to respond to incidents and they were no more challenging than other roads in Merseyside. The Chief also said if West Kirby closed the fire engine would need to come from Upton using the same roads.

Q: Incidents were continuing to reduce and whether because of this could Upton not manage.

A: The Chief explained that it was about getting quickly to life risk incidents and the fire and rescue service needed to be in a position to respond to the people of West Kirby from a fixed position.

Q: It was stated that the largest part of red on one of the maps displayed was actually all fields and golf course and the majority of the area responded from the Upton side was still within acceptable response times.

A: The Chief explained it depended where the incident was.

Q: The member of the public said they understood that but it (the red area) was mainly over the fields and golf course.

A: The Chief said that the figures were based on actual incidents. He said there was still a good portion of populace that's covered by 8 to 9 minute response when the response time could be 6 minutes or 7 minutes.

Q: A Saughall Massie resident for a number of years said they had seen the issues the fire engines had getting through some roads in Wirral. They had lived near a fire station in Wirral before coming to Saughall Massie. If the Chief felt that was the best place for the station the Chief would need to prove it to everybody.

A: The Chief explained that if, for example, you had two shops but could only have one, then you would put one in the middle to maximise its reach and make the best of the situation.

Q: Another FRS had approached the financial situation by using BRVs (Brigade Response Vehicles) and how they had increased the number of BRVs. The member of the public said they wanted the Chief to consider the option of BRVs.

A: The Chief explained that the other FRS had an opportunity to raise council tax by £5 and they had more council taxpayers in their area which meant they had money to keep their stations and have BRVs which had a crew of three. But a crew of three would be only of use

tackling small fires and would not be much use responding to a house fire and life risk incident in Merseyside. The Chief explained Merseyside was not in such a financial position to do this.

Q: Just raise council tax.

A: The Chief explained that in order to raise more money from council tax that a referendum would need to be held.

Q: Will the Chief would consider the BRV option and the solution needed to be a "compromise".

A: The Chief explained the BRV would give him nothing and that he would have to make two stations BRV stations and he would be paying for assets he could not use.

Q: there is a petition to save the fire station in West Kirby as the council had plans to build a supermarket and multi-storey car park.

A: The Chief explained there had been no decision regarding the disposal of the West Kirby site.

A: The Council Officer at the meeting said there were no plans for the West Kirby site.

Q: There is nothing coming out of West Kirby (fire appliance-wise), so they had been led to believe.

A: The Chief explained the availability of the West Kirby appliance was about 70%.

Q: Why not expand Upton then?

A: The Chief explained that that would increase response times to the West Kirby area.

Q: Has there had been a risk assessment for traffic management for the area of the proposed site.

A: The Chief said any of the issues on roads and traffic management would be picked up as part of processes. He said there were no more challenging conditions in the area than anywhere else in Merseyside.

Q: A member of the public said that all they were thinking was if a fire engine wanted people to move aside, where can they go as there would not be space on roads in the local area.

A: The Chief said that situation could happen now. And if West Kirby closed then it could happen when the fire appliance was coming from Upton.

Q: The proposed site is a heritage site and there were cottages that have been there for 500 years” The person said people want to move but had been told there would be 10% knocked off the value of their home if a fire station was built near them. The person also said people could not afford to move and some had used their savings to buy a place in the area. The person said that they wanted to know how this proposal for a new station would affect the member of the public as they lived locally.

A: The Chief explained that these were issues a planning committee would need to consider.

Q: A person asked who legitimately thought about those issues in Greasby when it got thrown out of Greasby, was that planning?

A: The Chief explained it did not reach the planning stage as the land was withdrawn in Greasby. He said the fire and rescue authority did not own the land.

Q: Is it even going to be Wirral Planning department because I heard that these things sometimes go to Bristol for planning?

A: The Wirral Council officer explained about the council’s legal duties and the fire authority coming to the council as well as identifying possible sites for a fire station. He said there were a number of reasons the Greasby site was withdrawn.

Q: What were the reasons?

A: The Wirral Council officer explained there were a number of reasons. He said as the idea developed feedback had come in. He also explained the council looked at three sites which were not green belt but a triangular grassed area was not suitable for fire appliances to get in and out of the station and so the central Greasby site was left. But it appeared that would not work. He said the Fire Authority would need to make the decision about the current proposed land.

Q: A person said that it appeared that the proposed land may have been of interest due to the money the council could get from the fire service to help the council.

A: The Deputy Chief Executive explained the decisions about fire stations were taken in regards to operational matters not due to financial motivation on things such as the price of certain land.

Q: A person talked about the environmental issues and stated the proposed site was "a very important piece of land". The member of the public also said that they did not think it was being taken into account how narrow lanes are in the area (so fire appliances would not be able to get through if there were other vehicles).

A: The Chief explained if West Kirby closed Upton would need to use the roads in the area anyway to respond to emergencies and that situation would increase response times to West Kirby.

Q: A person said their concern was not about roads but about sheltered accommodation.

A: The Chief said that protecting the vulnerable was what the best operational location for a station was about.

Q: I'm concerned about the safety of the people on the Wirral, but I'm concerned about the people in sheltered accommodation. The person explained they had a grandfather and was concerned sirens would be going "day and night" causing them disruption.

A: The Chief explained that if a person was to look at the number of incidents there was less than three calls a day. He said the idea that fire appliances would be “flying all over” the place was not accurate.

Q: A person said the location of the new station may mean it was further away it was from Arrowe Park Hospital. The member of the public said there were a lot of vulnerable people there.

A: The Chief explained that Arrowe Park hospital was responsible for managing fire safety and a fire risk assessment at their site and there was fire management at Arrowe Park and fire detection systems, but the bigger risk was people who lived in private dwellings.

Q: I used to play on the fields (location of the proposed site). The person said since the bridge had been built the land was “very unstable” and the field flooded every winter and there was a “massive” pond that had not been there 10 years ago. The person said if a station were to be built there the fire and rescue authority/service should “check the land out”.

Q: If you had all the money in the world would you want to keep Upton and West Kirby open? Yes? The person also said the economy would get better and said “we can have both” (West Kirby and Upton fire stations). The person asked “Why this knee jerk reaction?” and also asked if merger of two stations into one was a fiscal thing.

A: The Chief explained he would not recommend the closure of any fire station. But he said the fact was the budget now does not sustain 28 fire appliances and the number of firefighters needed and it would not in the future either.

Q: Say if it were to go ahead. Any new station, how long would it take (to build)? Will it take years? It’s going to be a new Government (by then).

A: The Chief explained that there was a planning process and a build would be at least a year. He also explained the challenge he had was here and now and needed to be addressed now. He explained the firefighters were retiring and could not be replaced.

Q: Most of us would love to give you more money. It's a green belt issue.

Q: What had not been talked about was the impact and benefits of health to those who live near green belt spaces and land. The person said they felt that people in the area feel that these things were "special circumstances" that should be taken into account. The person said there were not just physical benefits of the green belt land in the proposed area for a fire station but also "psychological and spiritual" benefits. The person said studies showed people living near green open spaces suffer less incidents of depression and recover sooner after hospital treatment and coming home. The member of the public referred a University of Exeter medical school study that showed people moving from living near green space areas who move to built up areas suffered a decline in mental health. The person also referred to a BBC report in 2009 which had reported that levels of physical disease were lower for populations living near green spaces (compared to more built up areas).

Q: This is what we need to take up at planning not with the fire (people).

A: The Chief said it appeared to him that there were issues people in the room recognised such as the value of fast response times. But he said to the room it appeared there was universal opposition to a station being built on the land at Saughall Massie – there were responses of "yes" from members of the public at this point along with some clapping. The Chief said the views of the people would be faithfully represented.

Q: We expect you to have a concern for (our) health and welfare.

A: The Chief said that the fire and rescue service does but it also is concerned about the health and welfare of the people of West Kirby.

Q: A person asked whether there be a public meeting for planning?

A: The Council Officer present said planning meetings were held in public.

Q: A Councillor asked the Chief – will you hold another meeting?

A: The Chief explained that he would raise it with the Fire Authority but the second Greasby meeting heard similar views to the first public meeting. He said he was not convinced if a second meeting was held in Saughall Massie that the views would be different to those expressed in this meeting of April 20.

Q: Councillor, (regarding request for second public Saughall Massie residents meeting) said we are only asking for parity. We are not asking for special treatment.

A: The Chief said that he would consider a second meeting but there some issues that needed to be considered including whether the venue could be secured. The Chief said if he felt the second public meeting would not result in any different outcome.

Q: A person said did he know that in Greasby (that the outcome/feeling at the second meeting would be the same as at the first)?

A: The Chief said he did not know that would be the case at that second meeting but now that those meetings had taken place and this one on April 20 he thought a second Saughall Massie meeting would have the same outcome/feelings aired.

Q: Councillor said people (including those who were outside the venue and could not get in) may have some "superb ideas". The councillor asked again whether the Chief would consider holding a second meeting at the St Mary's Centre/in Saughall Massie/for Saughall Massie residents.

A: The Chief said he would consider whether or not to hold another public meeting.

The Public Meeting held at Woodchurch on the 28th April with 21 members of the public attending.

Q: A person in the audience said they were from Saughall Massie and said the Chief had been talking about retained firefighters and asked what was wrong with them (retained firefighters)?" and that there was the TA which fought in wars and were volunteers.

A: The Chief explained that he would not choose to employ retained firefighters as full-time firefighters had more training time to develop and maintain their skills.

Q: A person said other options were not being recommended by the Chief because: "It does not suit you. You don't listen to people".

A: The Chief explained that he would take and answer questions at the end of the presentation.

Q: A person said that the site is Green Belt land?"

A: The Chief explained the land was all Green Belt in the area including the proposed site on Saughall Massie Road.

Q: A person asked the Chief to go through the process again? You were saying about closing West Kirby and Upton. Could you go through that again?

A: The Chief set out and explained the background including the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) for Merseyside and national standards of fire cover. The Chief said the Fire Authority had no powers of enforcement for anyone in single private dwellings. The Chief said although any response standard could be set in Merseyside the firefighters would get there as quickly as they could to an incident. He also explained that firefighters needed a fixed point to be located (a fire station) as they spent around 70% of their time at the station.

Q: A person said again at this point, what I was asking about was you were talking about shutting West Kirby and Upton.

A: The Chief explained that the members of the public in the audience needed to understand the background and explained about the 10-minute response standard in Merseyside. He also described how incidents could reduce the numbers of fire appliances which were available at a particular time and that to ensure a 10 minute response standard there needed to be a fire appliance at 10 key stations.

Q: At this point, a person asked if Birkenhead was a key station.

A: The Chief explained that Birkenhead was not a key station because it was too near the River Mersey (in regards to a 10 minute response area drawn around the station). The Chief said the average response time in Merseyside was currently 5 minutes 24 seconds. The Chief explained about the proportion of incidents that occurred in Wirral (10% of those for all of Merseyside) and also said that Upton and West Kirby could "in theory" both be shut.

Q: A person said fires "can happen anywhere".

A: The Chief explained that the number of incidents was academic as it was about life risk and the possibility of someone being in a position where they could die in a fire.

Q: A person said that there were "set standards" (for response) but the Chief had said that the standards "don't make sense".

A: The Chief said the 10-minute response standard made sense for the mobilising officer in Fire Control.

Q: A person said the response standards are operational standards to "manage risk" and "they are not performance" (standards)?

A: The Chief explained the average response time in Merseyside was currently 5 minutes 24 seconds. He also said 10 minutes would be longer

than a person would want to wait if there was a fire. The Chief said the point was that there had to be a response standard that could be used as a target.

Q: A person said the Chief had said response standards “did not make sense”.

A: The Chief explained that setting a response standard in some ways did not make sense as the fire appliances got to the incident as quickly as they could.

Q: A member of the public said if 10 key stations were needed why not “just keep” the fire station open?

A: The Chief said that the aim was to keep a station open that could cover the 10 minute response standard and provide fire cover for the area.

Q: A member of the audience asked if the Chief lived in Saughall Massie.

A: The Chief explained that he did live in Wirral and was familiar with the area which would be affected by the proposal and then he invited a Station Manager, who was also present at the meeting in uniform, to explain how long he had lived in the area and been a firefighter in the area. The Station Manager explained how he lived in an area not far from the proposed site.

Q: A member of the audience spoke about their concern that lanes in the Saughall Massie area, near to the proposed site, would be too narrow for a fire appliance to use if there was traffic on the lanes already.

A: The Chief said he wanted to reassure the public that the traffic conditions in West Wirral were no worse than any other areas of Merseyside.

Q: A person said the Chief was not correct and they were concerned about “wagons” using lanes in the area.

Q: Another person talked about a site which used to operate in the area and there were “wagons all the time” using roads in the area and he said he did “not know what the worry” was.

Q: A person responded saying “because we live there”. The person said that they “don’t want extra traffic and noise” and the worry regarding fire appliances going through the narrow lanes.

Q: A person said “for the sake of progress, could I ask you to say how long this presentation going to be?”

A: The Chief answered that it would take around another 10 minutes.

Q: Another person public said that the Chief said he would take 20 minutes at the start of the presentation to complete the presentation.

Q: The Chief explained that he had been asked questions and then asked if he had answered the question posed by a member of the audience before continuing.

Q: A member of the public asked whether West Kirby fire station was closed “most of the time”

A: The Chief explained that the number of firefighters retiring could not be replaced at the rate they were retiring. He said due to the decreasing numbers of firefighters, that some stations such as West Kirby, were not available at some points.

Q: A member of the public said that 24 posts were not being saved by the proposed merger.

A: The Chief explained that 24 posts were being saved.

Q: A member of the public said it “does not make sense” and that 24 posts were not being saved by the proposed changes.

A: The Chief explained that due to the reduction in the number of firefighters at locations including West Kirby and Whiston “pumps were going off the run”. He explained reserves were being used to avoid compulsory redundancies. The Chief said what he could do was make the 88 firefighters compulsory redundant “tomorrow” which would make the cash saving. He said reserves were being used to avoid compulsory redundancies but in the meanwhile there were not enough firefighters to maintain 28 fire appliances. He said the number of fire appliances would, over time, it would move to 24.

Q: A person said it didn’t really make sense.

A: The Chief said he wanted to make sure people understood the issues he was explaining.

A: The Chief explained that the importance of an increase in response times of 2 and a-half minutes would be demonstrated by a film he was about to show in the presentation. The Chief also said what he was trying to do was explain some points to the audience.

Q: A person said the Chief had told them he would only take “20 minutes” but he had taken “over an hour”

A: The Chief said if he was allowed to continue the presentation with no further questions for now, he could take questions later.

Q: A person said to please let the Chief finish his presentation so people can ask questions

Q: A member of the public asked how much there was in reserves.

A: The Chief answered that there was around £23 million in reserves but once the reserve money was spent it was gone and there would be no more reserves left.

A: The Chief explained the average response times were based on real incident call-out details and he knew the roads or lanes were not an issue as the figures were from actual response times across these area.

When the Chief was about to show the video showing fire development in a room as part of the presentation, a member of the public said that the presentation was taking even longer now due to the video and that the video was blackmail. Another person urged the person to “give” the Chief Fire Officer “a chance” to explain the situation.

Q: A person whether the video was showing a real fire or whether it was computer graphics.

A: The Chief said it was a real fire provided by a research establishment.

A: The Chief explained the call to the fire and rescue service could be later than when the smoke alarm first sounded. He also explained that the video was being provided as there had been lots of comments during the consultation surrounding the proposed site in Greasby that response times did not matter.

Q: A member of the audience said they could understand some people’s comments because people in Greasby “did not want a fire station there”.

Q: A person asked what would happen if the fire shown in the video occurred in Arrowe Park Hospital? They said with the proposed changes, it would take firefighters “longer to get there”.

A: The Chief explained the site had fire doors, alarms would activate and fire doors would lock shut containing the fire in a compartment.

Q: A person said “It would still take you 2 minutes longer to get there.”(the hospital)

A: The Chief said “potentially yes” it would take that amount of time. He explained that he had no ways of influencing through any fire safety enforcement what people do in their own homes, “which is where people die” in house fires in their own homes.

Q: A member of the public asked what area was needed for the new fire station?

A: The Chief said he could show the person on the next slide in the presentation. The Chief explained designs on view in the room were for indicative purposes to give people an idea of what it could look like. The Chief said there was a seven acres site but not all would be needed for a fire station.

Q: A member of the audience asked the Chief why he did not just explain to people what was proposed to be “put” on the site.

A: The Chief explained that in the proposal as it stands – the police did not require a presence. He also explained there was a possibility the North West Ambulance Service may also use the site but he could not say for definite that would be the case.

Q: A person asked whether PCSOs would still be at the site?

A: The Chief said the latest from the Police is that they would not require that (PCSOs).

Q: A person then asked - “Will there be a young people’s club in that building?”

A: The Chief explained that all fire stations had community rooms open for use by the community and that on some stations Fire Cadets scheme were held if there was demand in the area.

Q: Another person asked if the community rooms were like a specific community centre

A: The Chief said the community room was a room.

Q: A person asked if the room was used by firefighters for such things as training?

A: The Chief said training did take place in the community rooms too.

Q: A person asked if things like "birthday parties" could be held in the community room.

A: The Chief said he was not aware that a birthday party had been held in community rooms. He said people with cardiac-related issues referred by their GPs, used the station gyms on Wirral.

Q: A person asked the rest of the public at the meeting if people could put their hands up if they did not want a fire station where they live - around five people put their hands up

A: A person from the audience said: You don't want a fire station, but you want a fire engine to come to your house when it is on fire?"

Q: Another person said it was about "loss of green belt".

Q: A person asked the rest of the public at the meeting: "Is there anyone here who is concerned about the standard of fire cover" and attendance if their house was to go on fire?"

A: A number of people said "yes" and "of course".

A: The person who asked the question then said "then can we hear some more from you people" and less from others at the meeting.

Q: A member of the public talked about the 50% reduction in the number of incidents and said that "there was every reason to suspect" that a similar reduction would take place in the coming years.

A: The Chief explained the reduction was unlikely to continue and the trend was "reversing".

Q: Why is that?

A: The Chief explained the trend was reversing because of the “capacity to intervene” by the fire and rescue service had been “significantly reduced” and the population was getting older.

A: The Chief said that there had been 10 fire deaths in the last year. The Chief explained that the number of incidents referred to were “life risk” incidents and there were still over 1,000 dwelling fires a year in Merseyside.

Q: A person said the Chief kept “referring to Merseyside” but should be talking about Wirral not the Merseyside area.

A: The Chief explained that Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service was a pan-Merseyside organisation, and had to respond to incidents across Merseyside. The Chief said even if incidents were reduced again by 50%, there was still a likelihood of a life-risk incident occurring and a severe incident/life-risk incident (where someone could die in a house fire).

Q: A person said that if the demand on the service continued to decrease, would the Service not be “too overmanned in the future?”

A: The Chief said no this would not be the case for the Service (that it would be too over staffed).

Q: A person said people were entitled to their opinion but it should be “based on fact”.

A: The Chief added that there needed to be fixed locations to make a response to an incident. The Chief explained that there would only need to be two key stations in Wirral if the fire and rescue service/firefighters wanted to take 10 minutes to get to an incident on 90% of occasions, but he said that is not what the aim was it was to get there as soon as possible. He explained the two key stations were Bromborough and Upton.

Q: A member of the public asked the Chief if he wanted a station in the Wirral with the best response time, where would he put it?

A: The Chief said the best location, in terms of West Wirral now, was a location around "Three Lanes End" near Saughall Massie Road.

Q: The person who asked the question responded – "I tell you where I would put it. I would put it on junction 3 of the M53."

A: The Chief explained about that there was a PFI station in Birkenhead Community Fire Station, but he could not do anything about the location of that new station.

Comment – a member of the public said Birkenhead Community Fire Station was "PFI".

A: The Chief also explained there were PFI stations, at this point a member of the public said this **Comment:** "That's your issue".

A: The Chief explained the background of the PFI scheme, which was created around 12 years ago and the Fire and Rescue Authority had approved moving forward with PFI around 10 years ago after it was decided some of the older stations needed replacing. The Chief explained the decisions to go ahead with PFI were taken by the Fire and Rescue Authority and five or six years ago the Fire Authority was basing decisions on the number of fire appliances and stations they had then. The Chief said the decisions on PFI had been taken place before the "significant austerity".

Q: They put it in the wrong place?

A: The Chief explained that the Fire and Rescue Authority based their decisions on what they had at the time – including 42 fire appliances, but this had reduced to 24. He said the Fire and Rescue Authority could not have been foreseen then what was going to happen with the reductions in grant. The Chief said he had lobbied against the reductions in funding and he had spoken at a Commons Select Committee about the funding reductions and the impact the reductions were having. The Chief said that he would not shut West Kirby if he "had a choice".

Q: A member of the public said "You said PFI 'proved to be a mistake' - do you think Saughall Massie will prove to be a mistake?"

A: The Chief said that he was not saying PFI "proved to be a mistake" but if he had been the Chief Fire Officer at the time he would have done things differently. The Chief explained about the location of the proposed site for a new station and mentioned Three Lanes End he ended his explanation by stating -

A: The Chief said he did think Saughall Massie was the right place for building a station.

Q: A person said the land in the area of the proposed site had been green belt 40 years ago but then houses were built on it; "why not a fire station?".

Q: A person asked how much of the land would the fire station be taking up and what was going to be done with the rest of the land alongside Saughall Massie Road?

Q: Another member of the public asked whether all of the land was going to be used (alongside Saughall Massie Road)?

A: The Chief said not all the land which was green belt would be used by the new proposed fire station but he explained that in regards to the rest of the land that question should be directed to those who owned the land, which was Wirral Council.

Q: A person said that they were asking the council what they were considering to do with the land.

A: A Council Officer who was attending the public meeting confirmed it was the council's land and it would be up to the council what they did with the land in the area.

Q: A person also asked about what would happen to the land where the West Kirby station was and they were “concerned” about this.

A: The Council Officer who was attending the public meeting explained that the fire and rescue service had approached the council about the proposed site on Saughall Massie Road but there were “no plans” regarding the remaining land in the area of the proposed station site that the council owned.

Q: A person said they had been in West Kirby “years ago” and land at the time was being looked at to build a hotel.

A: The Council Officer who was attending explained that people looked at land the council owned all the time but there were no current plans for the site in West Kirby.

Q: A member of the public said if it was to go ahead to build a fire station on the proposed site on Saughall Massie Road, whether it had been “realised” how building a fire station would “impact” on people “over 70” particularly in regards to building work.

A: The Council Officer said this was a question for the Fire Authority but the council would not be making a decision on the land until after the consultation and the go ahead of any station would be subject to a submission to the council’s planning department.

Q: A person said the proposed plans for a new fire station would “affect people” in Woodchurch and asked if people from Woodchurch had been invited to the meeting.

A: Two people in the audience said they were from Woodchurch and had been invited to take part in the consultation.

Q: A member of the public asked if a second meeting was going to be held in Saughall Massie.

A: The Chief Fire Officer explained that this consultation process was more than what was required and explained about the difficulty of suitable venues in the area in the vicinity of Saughall Massie Road and that there was criticism of what had been done during this consultation. The Chief Fire Officer said he did not think the views from a second public meeting at a similar location would lead to different views being expressed to those expressed at the first meeting in the area on April 20.

Q: A Councillor at the meeting said the first public meeting on April 20 at St Mary's centre on Saughall Massie Road was a "public meeting" but 150 people had been locked out of the venue.

A: The Chief explained that the venue was put forward by a councillor as the one that should be used to allow good access for local people.

Q: A person said people in Greasby had been allowed a second meeting. Another person said there were a lot of elderly people who live near the St Mary's Centre on Saughall Massie Road who could not go to a venue that was further away than that for a public meeting on the proposals on this consultation.

A: The Chief explained that what had been done in this consultation was "above and beyond" what was needed for such a consultation.

Q: A member of the public asked how long response times would be if West Kirby was not closed.

A: The Chief said it would be 2 minutes longer to respond.

Q: The person asked whether the extra 2 minutes would mean it would be "12 minutes" in total for a response time?

A: The Chief said it was not 12 minutes and explained it was a mean average response time. The Chief explained that response times were worked out from a fixed location for a potential new site and the speed of the appliance was speed limit in the area plus 20%.

Comment – A member of the public said the Chief had said at the public meeting on April 20 that firefighters could get from Saughall Massie Road to Upton would takes “30 seconds”.

A: The Chief said he had not said that if the station was built on the proposed site in Saughall Massie, Upton response times would change. An MFRS Officer, who was at the meeting, stated the Chief had been talking about the difference in the average response time in the Upton area, of 4 minutes 34 seconds, increasing, if Upton were to close and response to the Upton area was from the proposed site on Saughall Massie Road. Response to life risk incidents in the Upton station area would increase to 5 minutes 3 seconds (an increase of 30 seconds).

A: The Chief clarified it was in regards to the overall average response time into the Upton area would increase by about 30 seconds for life-risk incidents from the proposed site in Saughall Massie Road.

Q: A person said the Chief had spoken during his presentation about the only “non-green belt site” that was “viable” at Greasby. The person said that piece of land was rescinded and asked what was the reason for that?

A: The Council Officer who was attending the public meeting explained there were a number of reasons why the non-green belt site had been withdrawn and that three sites had been identified originally. He explained that as the fire and rescue authority consultation on the Greasby site progressed there was “outright opposition” and they had been asked by the fire and rescue authority to “broaden” the search for sites. He explained that there was one “little piece of land” near Pump Lane but it was the wrong shape for a fire station and too small.

Q: A person said objections were made (in Greasby) because it was not a “small fire station” but a “large facility” with youth and ambulance facilities and people were objecting to the size of what was proposed. The member of the public said: “I don’t want it (a station) built on the green belt” but if “push came to shove” and if “we had a small facility at one top end of the field” it “might be more acceptable”.

A: The Chief said if he could show some examples of what a fire station could look like, which were included in the presentation, it may help this person's comment. (The Chief then showed a photo of Birkenhead Fire Station and a fire station in Patterdale in Cumbria to the audience).

Q: A member of the public asked if the proposed fire station would have a "40-foot" training tower.

A: The Chief explained that there needed to be training facilities for firefighters but the training facilities could be achieved in other ways. He explained a training house could be used at the site rather than a training tower for confined space and safe working at height but he said that huge amounts of space were not needed for this but there had not been as much space at Greasby which is where people may have heard about a potential training tower.

Q: A person said that it would still be three-storeys.

A: The Chief explained there was due to be a large training facility in Prescot.

Q: A person said they thought the fire and rescue service was cutting back on spending and building things.

A: The Chief explained that training facilities were needed but it did not need to be a 40-foot tower.

Q: A person said that they wanted to be "clear" and that the Chief was saying a 40-foot training tower would not be built.

A: The Chief answered that there was no plan to put a training tower in.

Q: A person said what the Chief was talking about (using a house for training) would be "more intrusive" and that there was a tower at Upton fire station but a two-storey building (for training) would be "more intrusive".

A: The Chief said these sorts of discussions were to do with planning issues.

Q: A member of the public said they thought people had been "very rude" and that they thought the Chief had done a "brilliant job".

Q: A person talked about the two different design of stations (PFI at Birkenhead and one at Patterdale in the Lake District which were shown during the presentation) and asked whether there was much difference in cost for something which was more in keeping with the area?

A: The Chief said there would not be much difference in cost for the two different designs. He explained a station would cost around £3 million in terms of design but he was not "aware of any reason" why it would cost more to design a station more "sympathetically".

Q: A person asked if anyone had done a "back of an envelope calculation" on what the cost might be.

A: The Chief explained that the cost of a station for such a proposed site would be around £3.5 million with one fire appliance and one retained fire appliance at the station. The Chief explained there was a grant from DCLG.

Q: A person asked if Wallasey Fire Station was "going to close". The member of the public said if Wallasey was to close would it affect response times from Upton?

A: The Chief said if further closures were needed then these would be in Liverpool next but at some point, if funding continued to decrease, the attention on looking at stations would return to Wirral. Before that point was reached the Chief said he would have recommended that the fire and rescue authority hold a referendum on increasing council tax to raise more funds.

Q: A person said the Chief had been talking about what station could look like and that most of the barns in the area near the proposed site were "40-foot high" and suggested the training facilities were created to look like a barn to fit in with the surroundings.

A: The Chief explained that suggestions could be made as part of the consultation as to the situation.

Q: A person spoke about smaller fast response units and how they were used across the country. The person said they were not only used for "speed" but also because they are "cost saving". The person said "You said last week you would have to employ three extra firefighters "but other fire authorities are not doing that, there are other ways of doing it."

A: The Chief explained about the small response units being used in other parts of the country and how the vehicles would need to be crewed. The Chief said if you take Fire and Rescue Service, who used Brigade Response Vehicles for small fires, as an example, Merseyside had got rid of small fires units, which were effectively the same, after using them a number of years ago. He said the small units had been "wonderful" when there were 42 appliances but now, with less fire appliances available, fire appliances that could be sent to any incident were better than a smaller unit that could not be sent to life-risk incidents.

Q: The person who asked the above question, then said "I'm not saying completely turn it (West Kirby) into" just a small fire unit.

A: The Chief explained that it would need more people to crew the small response vehicles. The Chief said West Kirby could be turned into a small fires unit but this would add to response times for incidents that were life-risk as a fire appliance would need to come from another station further away.

He said he would have to pay for 16 people to man the small response vehicle he did not have a budget for.

Q: A person said they had seen small fires units going to a house fire.

A: The Chief said that more than 3 people were needed to set up a safe system of work to respond safely to a life risk incident – and this was achieved by using the current fire appliances with the crew numbers on those. The Chief said although some may want a Brigade Response Vehicle (BRV) it had little use at life-risk calls including house fires.

Q: A member of the public asked doesn't the fire and rescue service know whether they are going to a house fire, or something else.

A: The Chief explained how a call was taken and how fire appliances were sent to house fire. The Chief said it was about prioritising resources to life-risk incidents.

Q: A person asked why a small fires unit could not just be used for smaller fires, mentioning it had a pump on it and could deal with fires.

A: The Chief explained that in order to put a small fires unit or BRV on (to respond to calls involving small fires), it would be at the expense of a "rescue pump".

Q: A person said that it could be done because most of the fires were small fires.

A: The Chief explained about needing to have a fire appliance to respond to rescue people. He also spoke about firefighters carrying out community safety work, including Home Fire Safety Checks, but also being ready to respond to an incident. The Chief said the fire and rescue service had a "finite resource" and people must see that.

Q: A person said the issue with all this is the funding. The person said the Chief was making the best decisions he could with the experience he had and the Chief had a lot of experience. The person said they thought the answer, as money was not coming back to the fire and rescue authority, was to "take £4 out of each insurance policy on homes and cars" and put

that straight into the fire and rescue service. The person said that through that approach tens of millions of pounds could be raised.

A: The Chief explained funding for the fire and rescue authority came from business rates that are paid in centrally are then re-distributed as grants funding.

Q: A person asked exactly where the station was going to be built and asked whether it could not be built "further down the field, towards the bridge" at the proposed site.

A: The Wirral Council Officer at the meeting explained that what a building looked like, its height and so on would form part of a planning application and discussions.

Q: A person said: "We don't want a fire station there."

Q: A person said "what about the conservation area that's connected to it"?

A: The Wirral Council Officer said elements and concerns such as conservation would form part of the planning process.

Q: A person said they did not know if it was true but they had been told there were bats on the field.

A: The Chief explained about the consultation process was around the principle of the fire station and said all of these other issues being raised were planning issues.

Q: A person said "There's supposed to be an American pilot who went down near the bridge" and they had been told it was an "historic safe site".

A: The Wirral Council Officer explained that the body of an American pilot who had been on a test flight had been recovered along with parts of a plane and were on display and there was a plaque marking the site.

Q: A person said the Chief had said that by 2020 the funding issues may have changed and asked does that not mean that the Saughall Massie site was a "temporary solution to a temporary issue?"

A: The Chief said that he did not think the financial position is going to change. He also said he did not see "any prospect" of moving back to where financially the fire and rescue service had been.

Q: A Councillor said West Kirby was thought to be "closed most of the time". The councillor said that closing the station had been "risk assessed

A: The Chief said that was "not true".

Q: The Councillor replied "what I am saying is you have risk assessed it."

A: The Chief explained that on any given shifts there were appliances not available. He also explained that "cash savings" were made when people leave. The Chief explained that reserves were being used to avoid compulsory redundancy as firefighters were not leaving at the rate required for the savings.

Q: A person asked how long that would take to reach the required number of firefighters?

A: The Chief said it would take probably take until "some point" next year but reserves were being used to avoid compulsory redundancies. The Chief also explained as people leave that was one less person to be on a fire engine and also there were a number of staff on other duties who may be recovering from illness or injury and were not "fit enough" to be on a fire engine. He explained as a result of this West Kirby may not be available on some shifts, along with Whiston, Aintree and Kensington.

Q: A member of the audience then asked whether Upton is not available at any time?

A: The Chief explained that it was always available because it was a key station and there were 10 key stations. The Chief explained West Kirby would be made not available before Upton because ten key stations, including Upton, were needed for response. The Chief said the longer this situation went on the more fire appliances at stations would not be available.

Q: A person said the proposals “proved” Upton is “far more busy” and “more essential” than West Kirby.

A: The Chief said it was not to do with how busy a station was as, for example, Formby was a key station, but it was the quietest in terms of the number of incidents in Merseyside. But he said it was a “key station” because of its location. The Chief said it was about having a fixed location to cover an area and get there within 10 minutes.

Q: A person said in regards to the Chief’s explanation, that West Kirby was still closed “50% of the time”.

A: The Chief said the station was “not closed” but its fire appliance may not be available.

Q: A person asked what were the figures the fire appliance at West Kirby was available for?

A: The Chief said the fire appliance at West Kirby was available around 75% of the time but that the fire appliance would be available less and less.

Q: A person said that was a “relentless reduction”.

A: The Chief explained that as people retired there would be less people. The Chief said there was not the budget to have the staff needed to keep West Kirby and Upton open.

Q: A person said: “Surely there must be a point” where “West Kirby will shut”?

A: The Chief said yes. The Chief also explained what he was trying to do was deliver the “best possible outcome”.

Q: A person said there were more “incidents this side” (Wirral).

A: The Chief explained about the numbers of life-risk incidents and that there had been fatalities in house fires in Wirral, but the main difference in figures was around secondary fires.

Q: A person asked how many fire engines there were at Upton?

A: The Chief said there was one.

Q: The person asked how many crew members were there?

A: The Chief said it was a crew of five.

Q: A person asked if the stations were merged how many firefighters would there be?

A: The Chief said there would be half as many needed.

Q: A person asked how many fire engines there would be at the merged station

A: The Chief said there would be two fire engines.

Q: A person asked if there was any other way funds could be raised by the fire and rescue service.

A: The Chief explained that a referendum could be held to try and win support to raise the council tax precept more. He explained that a referendum would cost around £1 million and a 10%/15% or even 20% council tax increase would be needed to make any difference. The Chief also explained that he did not believe there would be the support on a referendum to raise council tax by this amount and others, such as the

police, may also want to take this option if the fire and rescue authority went for that approach.

Q: A person asked whether we could get any lottery funding.

A: The Chief explained that if that was an approach to be taken then the fire and rescue service would be in direct competition with others who raise money through fundraising like the RNLi and Claire House.

Q: A person said that they just wanted to “thank” the Chief Fire Officer for his time and that the questioning and meeting had been “pretty tough”. The person said they felt as though they had had more consultation at this meeting than at the one on April 20. (Around eight people in the audience then clapped.)

Question and answers from the public consultation meeting in West Kirby 05/05/2015

Approx 15-20 people attended

Q: It seemed very easy for them (The Council) to get the parking for the Golf Open. They managed to make the approach to make a deal there.

A: The Chief said it was his belief that it was probably the landowner doing that.

Q: There is obviously a route to the landowner.

A: The Chief said that agents working with the Fire and Rescue Authority made repeated approaches. That is a matter for the individuals concerned.

Q: Is it more than one landowner you have approached then about other land?

A: The Chief said he couldn't comment because there are commercial issues around that. There have been approaches to landowners but we have had no response.

Q: Most people have got a price and it's a balance between the merger you have planned and how that would affect the people living there.

A: The Chief said if people are not willing to engage with us, we haven't got compulsory purchase powers and we can't compulsory purchase the land.

Q: On the video you showed is that fire retardant furniture?

A: The Chief Yes, it is, to British Standard. He added that even if the proposal was approved by the Authority it would still go to planning, then because it is greenbelt, it would go to the Secretary of State.

Q: (Councillor on a planning committee): But if you get refused at planning you could still appeal it couldn't you?

A: Yes.

Q: We only get the opportunity locally today to really speak from the heart about how we feel. Whether you say "we're not interested, it will go to planning and then you can have your say", people want to have their say before it goes to planning.

A: The Chief said he does care what people think. But his primary concern is about the safety of people. He will then feed back people's views to the Fire and Rescue Authority as with Greasby.

Q: People were locked out at the meeting (Saughall Massie).

A: The Chief said we were asked by elected representatives in the area to use that location. We were aware that wasn't suitable.

Q: You're paid to do this.

A: The Chief said he thought people over estimate the impact of a fire station. It's not anything like as disruptive as people think. I would be made up if my parents in law could go to the fire station. I would know there would be people close by who are there to assist in case of an incident.

Q: Can you tell us how high the external walls are going to be?

A: The Chief said it doesn't have to have walls. Bootle and Netherton station is open. There's a car park. It's all about design. Would it be one storey or two storey? It depends on what the view was of the local people.

Q: It's very close to people's properties. The design issues are a long way down the line.

Q: You mentioned it was the elected members who initiated using the building in Saughall Massie for the meeting. The reason was people who are affected are people nearby and they are mostly elderly and infirm and can't travel.

A: The Chief said he didn't need to have a second meeting to know that people in the vicinity are against it.

Q: Yes but rather than you say it, you will be able to count heads at the meeting.

Q: The Saughall Massie Conservation Trust have done some research and other fire services have covered areas that are hard to reach by using quick response vehicles. Why can't you revamp Upton and a single quick response vehicle be used to ensure people in West Kirby are getting a proper response time? You said the fire authority has been running inefficiently for a number of years.

A: I never said it was inefficient.

Q: It's one of the most expensive in the country.

A: That is a legacy issue.

Q: If you build in Saughall Massie you get a grant. From a business point of view you need this. Your option B is a quick response vehicle.

A: The Chief asked what was proposed for Upton?

Q: Is it not possible to invest the money in a quick response vehicle in this part of the area?

A: The Chief said a rapid response vehicle is used to deal with anti-social behaviour fires and we've managed a lot of those out. To crew a rapid

response vehicle 12 hours a day it would need 12 people, which I haven't got. I can't deploy a small fires unit to anything other than small fires.

Q: You said the vast majority of fires are small fires and getting cats out of a tree.

A: The Chief said that we have got 24 rescue pumps for RTCs, water rescue, house fires, all the things retained firefighters around the country aren't trained to do. Toxteth crews in Liverpool City Centre were on the scene within two or three minutes when the Duck boat sank. They rescued three people who would have drowned if we didn't have water rescue training. You wouldn't get that with the retained because it would take another five minutes to get there. A small fires unit gives me nothing. Where they are used around the country is in place of support pumps. They are used in places where you have two fire appliances.

Firefighters do carry out HFSCs in the afternoon but they can deploy to any incident. This is about protecting the resources we have. Small Fire Units are a gimmick. They use them in place of support pumps. We haven't got any support pumps left.

Q: The crews in West Kirby, they will go?

A: Yes they will go through natural wastage.

Q: A member of the public made a comment about how long it takes to travel from Upton to West Kirby.

A: A Station Manager said blue lights don't get you through traffic at 60MPH. There are other people and other road users. We have to be ready to stop at red lights.

Q: During the rush hour it you have to use Saughall Massie Road, it's packed with traffic.

A: Station Manager said if the fire appliance is at Upton, it's going to be worse. The response time from Upton will be a lot longer.

Q: So there's no legal response times? You've made them up yourselves? If anyone had a problem, 15 seconds is a bit too slow. Most of West Kirby can be covered in 10 minutes from Upton.

A: The Chief said that accepting 10 minutes response times would be at odds with the rest of Merseyside.

Q: Of course you're biased, you want it at Saughall Massie.

A: The Chief said he was trying to achieve the fastest response times as I can across Merseyside. If I set a precedent here then than I would have to do that for the rest of Merseyside.

Q: You're always going to have a strong argument.

A: The Chief said that was because I have got a strong argument.

Q: It's what price you are willing to pay. The people who live nearby might die because of the stress caused by this. I could play on that. It could see two or three people die early.

Q: How long has West Kirby been closed? (Meaning not manning the station all of the time)

A: About a year.

Q: So you've made a risk assessment about the safety of people in West Kirby.

A: The Chief said it was far from ideal. He doesn't like having any pumps off the run but we can only staff with the people we've got.

Q: You said you've got engines out doing community work and fire alarms. Why do you have to operate them from a fire station? Ambulances park in places, they don't have to have a station. If the firefighters are out on patrol why can't they be permanently out?

A: The Chief said he could use strategic standby. Unlike the ambulance service we require an operating base, for things such as training. When they do 42 hours at work, firefighters undertake 20 hours of training to maintain technical competence, which is a very broad skill set now. A lot of time is spent on training and standard testing of equipment. We have a highly professional fire and rescue service on Merseyside which is the envy of the rest of the country. He wants to keep it that way. We could lower standards to the lowest denominator but he doesn't want that. Whatever we do, we're going to upset somebody.

He understood people don't want a fire station where they live. But ultimately he wanted the option that is best of operational response, not necessarily on that site. It could be Three Lanes End but we don't have a compulsory purchase order.

Q: So because you have things like training and equipment you need somewhere rather than being able to operate out and about?

A: The Chief said 30% of the time they are out and about but 70% they are in a fixed location. They've got to maintain core competencies to achieve safe systems of working because it is a dangerous occupation.

Q: If the questionnaires come back mostly against the proposal does that mean democracy prevails and it will be ditched?

A: The Chief said the Fire Authority would consider whether a viable alternative had been identified. My professional advice will be based on response times. You are as likely to have a life risk incident in West Kirby as you are in Upton.

Q: I live in West Kirby and I'd rather have a fire engine come from nearby than from Upton. People are saying it might only be an extra minute, you tell that to the person whose house is on fire. Those minutes make a difference. Would you want it there quick? This is a common sense approach. They've got to save money and they can't have two fire stations and does it make common sense to put it there (Saughall Massie), I think it does.

A: The Chief said he is a professional advisor, but the Authority makes the decision, but if they do decide to go for the merger then there would be the planning process, where it is considered again by elected members. They will look at the response from the public, myself and the FRA. If that prevails you have an appeals process.

Q: I'm an elected councillor for Hoylake and Meols. I'm horrified about the thought of West Kirby and leaving us with a ten minute response. I'm desperate that you do not close West Kirby. As a member of the council I'm disappointed with our senior officers because firstly there was a crazy idea of giving the land at Greasby and then this crazy idea of putting it

next to people at Saughall Massie. If the council can find land for a golf resort I'm sure they can find a site somewhere along that stretch. Don't go for this site because it is going to upset those people but do keep chipping away at Wirral Council.

A: The Chief said in defence of Wirral Council, they have tried to help us as much as they can. The Greasby site is a community hub and children's centre. It would be wonderful if Wirral owned land in Three Lanes End but the fact is they don't.

Q: How hard have you tried to get in touch with the people who own the land?

A: The Chief said you don't want to harass people. If they don't want to sell, they won't.

Q: Why would you send the letter to Wirral Council about the site now?

A: The Chief said that if the land is withdrawn, then the station build would not happen and then the process would be academic.

A: A Wirral Council Officer said they were in purdah so he was limited in what he could say. Wirral has legal duties around public safety and you would expect us to cooperate with our partners. We have three sites around Greasby, one was too small, one was leased to the Woodland Trust for 100 years and the other was Greasby. The proposal was the fire service would provide us with brand new facilities. The community centre however is leased to a trust and the library service didn't see any major use of having a new building. A grant was used to build the children's centre and there was a chance that would be withdrawn.

The fire service came back to us and said could we extend our search area. The preferred position was close to Pump Lane. The council only owns one site there but the site is not big enough. The next piece of land is here (Saughall Massie).

He said he fully understood the points made. The Chief does have to go back to the Fire Authority and he will advise them. They don't always take that advice. The second bit of democracy is if the outcome of the

FRA is that they want to use this site is it will go to Cabinet about the possibility of releasing this site. The third is the planning process.

Q: I've got a big question around impartiality around this.

A: The Wirral Council Officer said the planning committee shows no favouritism with schemes.

A: A Councillor who is on a planning committee said they were not influenced by the Council.

Q: It would be interesting to know the criteria. If 95% say they don't want it will the Chief still say he wants it?

A: The Chief said the people of Saughall Massie are against the proposal but the people of West Kirby and Upton may not be.

A: The Councillor who is on a planning committee said the planning process doesn't look at an alternative site. We don't debate whether two alternative sites are up for grabs.

Q: We're talking about Greenbelt policy. Someone would have to come in and say there is no alternative.

A: The Councillor who is on a planning committee said the Chief would have to come and say there is exceptional circumstances to use greenbelt.

A: The Wirral Council Officer said that should the planning committee give approval his understanding is it has to then be signed off nationally because it's greenbelt.

A: The Chief said he would know he had done his utmost to protect the people of Wirral.

Q: You had a topographical study done. Do you have a copy that we can see?

A: the project manager said he did and made them available.

A: The Wirral Council officer said that they had allowed them to go on to the land, not to prejudice anything but to know as much about the site as they can if decisions are going to be made.

Q: Are you going to carry out any habitat surveys?

A: The Wirral Council officer said that would be done during planning.

Final comment The Chief said the minimum number of firefighters for an appliance is four people to achieve a safe system of work. When they are called to a fire they will look at what is in there, are there any people etc. That all happens on route as soon as the appliance gets there we can make an intervention. When you only have 24 appliances you've got to put them in the right locations. I would love to have 42 fire engines but unfortunately I don't.

We understand people in Saughall Massie don't want a station and that will be considered by the Fire and Rescue Authority, who will also consider fire response and the views of people in West Kirby and Upton.

It would then go to planning. If it doesn't go ahead then I will have done all I can to maintain the response times. If it is approved all I can do is say I advised this based on my professional opinion around response times.