

Hereford Fire Station Update & Project Overview

Purpose of report

1. To provide an update and project overview for Members on the replacement of Hereford Fire Station which forms part of the Fire Authority capital build programme.

Background

2. The Authority's Asset Management Plan 2009-2013, adopted in 2009 identified that:
 - the design of Hereford Fire Station, opened in 1951, was no longer fit for purpose;
 - the building's services were approaching the end of their useful life; and
 - some elements of the building were deteriorating.
3. Following completion of further property condition surveys, an Asset Management Strategy report was brought to Policy & Resources Committee in March 2011 which highlighted four stations as priorities for replacement. These were:
 - Bromsgrove (completed 2014);
 - Malvern (completed 2014);
 - Redditch (project completed January 2025); and
 - Hereford.
4. As a result of the 2011 report, members agreed a series of capital allocations for each of the above schemes, with individual proposals being subject to further reports and approval once initial investigations had been completed.
5. Hereford Fire Station was the only scheme approved in 2011 which had not so far been delivered or was in the process of being delivered. The main reason for this had been the difficulty in finding a suitable site. However, this had not been for the want of trying and several alternative proposals have been investigated over the years:
 - An early proposal to include a new fire station as part of the Edgar Grid redevelopment did not come to fruition;
 - Proposals for a new station on land at Bath Street were withdrawn in 2014 considering objections from the Planning Conservation Officer regarding the demolition of the former Industrial School on the site;
 - In 2016 members approved a proposal to investigate the feasibility of a joint Fire & Rescue, Police and Herefordshire Council hub on Council owned land at Merton Meadow. A feasibility report funded by money from the government's One Public Estate initiative subsequently identified the site as being unsuitable due to the risk of flooding;
 - Following the decision not to proceed with the Merton Meadow site, an alternative site was acquired by the Police & Crime Commissioner at Holmer Road, Hereford and members gave approval in November 2018

for officers to investigate a Joint Fire & Rescue and Police Station on this site. However, once detailed layout design work was undertaken, it became apparent the site was too small to accommodate the partners' requirements, particularly as regards the number of Police vehicles on the site. The PCC's office sought to acquire additional land nearby for additional parking but the costs of providing a satisfactory access proved to be prohibitive; and

- In June 2020 officers reported that in view of the restricted nature of the Holmer Road site and concerns about possible congestion on the adjoining road network which would have impeded access and egress without significant traffic control measures being introduced, the site was no longer considered suitable and attention would instead focus on the potential for redevelopment of the existing fire station site at St. Owen Street.
6. A complete list of papers concerning the Hereford Project from 2015 to date is provided in [Appendix A](#). The earlier investigations, reports and design processes for the numerous previously proposed sites came at a significant cost and it was felt by the Fire Authority that a viable solution that could reach completion was necessary.

Approved Proposals

7. As previously reported to the Fire Authority on 17th June 2021, architects were appointed to undertake a high-level feasibility options appraisal of the existing Hereford Fire Station site at St Owen Street, Hereford. This was as part of the strategic direction of the then newly appointed Chief Fire Officer Jonathon Pryce and Councillor Roger Phillips (Chair of the Fire Authority), to deliver a new fire station for Hereford city following an inability to achieve this for over two decades. As all other potentially viable opportunities had been explored during the previous decade it was agreed by Members to pursue a rebuild on the existing site.
8. The St Owen Street site is in a prime location, but it was the condition of the existing building and facilities that was of primary concern. However, extensive analysis demonstrated that the low level of calls in Hereford city and the risk profile, did not pose any significant advantage to a relocation from the existing site, nor did it preclude it.
9. A preferred option was identified, proposing a new four bay fire station on the same site, with associated accommodation, with improved access and egress from the site and enhancing car parking. The proposals also provide space for partners, office space for Herefordshire based prevention and protection teams, and dedicated rooms for level one incident command training and assessments. The final Design & Access Statement, submitted as part of the planning application is provided in [Appendix B](#).

10. It was reported to the Fire Authority in October 2022 that final surveys and assessments had been completed during August, and a formal planning application was being prepared. Staff at the site had been extensively consulted and as the planning application progressed staff continued to be engaged with, as well as ensuring that all other appropriate local stakeholders were briefed on the proposals. The ACFO attended Hereford City Council (24/01/23) to present proposals and consult with elected local Members for the proposed new fire station design on the same site, and the CFO attended to take questions concerning the project. Other local Members were also engaged with on a more informal basis, including Fire Authority Members.
11. A full planning application was submitted to Hereford Council on 4 October 2022 and validated on 21 November 2022. Full detail can be found under the planning portal reference P223339/F [link here](#). Planning permission was granted on 13 April 2023 with a number of conditions. A copy of the Planner Officer's Delegated Decision Report, dated 13 April 2023 is provided at [Appendix C](#), along with the Planning Decision Notice at [Appendix D](#).
12. Due to the decision taken by the Fire Authority to redevelop the existing fire station site, arrangements for a temporary fire station during redevelopment had to be explored. Officers instructed Berrys, a local commercial chartered surveyors practice, to provide an independent site search outlining the availability of commercial property in Hereford that could accommodate the temporary station whilst the new station was being built.
13. The search identified that, at the time of carrying out the exercise (July 2023), there were only a few commercial sites currently available in central Hereford. Five sites were identified and an assessment against the user requirements was carried out. A copy of Berrys' Site Search can be found within HWFRS Site Search Report dated September 2023 (see [Appendix E](#)), provided as part of the planning application submission for the St Owen Street site.
14. The evidence within the site search completed by Berrys, along with operational knowledge informed the report. When taking the Service's requirements into account, focusing on the on-call turn out times, the size of the unit and yard area, and the ease of fitting out the building to provide the accommodation required, it was recommended that Option 2 (Unit 5, Mortimer Road) was the most suitable site. It is worth noting that there was strong interest in the site, so negotiations with the landowner needed to commence in a timely manner.
15. To provide appropriate accommodation and facilities for fire crews at the temporary building, initial designs were completed, and a planning application submitted for a change of use and the erection of a temporary radio antenna at Mortimer Road was submitted to Hereford Council on 10 June 2024, with the application being validated on 2 July 2024. Full detail can be found under the planning portal reference P241471/F [link here](#).

16. Planning permission was granted on 16 October 2024 with several conditions, and building works were completed in June 2025 allowing crews to occupy the temporary facility in early July. A copy of the Planner Officer's Delegated Decision Report, dated 16 October 2024 is provided at [Appendix F](#), along with the Planning Decision Notice at [Appendix G](#).

Budgets

17. Previous reports to the Committee have referenced the UK construction tender price index, and the associated inflationary pressures being seen across the building sector.
18. In a confidential report to the committee in September 2021 it was noted that the original budget allocation for the scheme was made in 2011. There had been no adjustment for inflation since then but there had been some expenditure on the various abortive schemes. The current UK construction tender price index at that time was 192 and reflected an annual rise in construction costs of approximately 3.81% per annum since 2011 (139-192), further detail was provided in a confidential appendix to that report.
19. The estimated cost of the proposals in 2021 left a shortfall compared to the existing allocation. The Treasurer advised at that time that the estimated shortfall could be financed through borrowing, and repayment accommodated within anticipated capital financing budgets.
20. An additional review was completed from 2021 to 2024 utilising the Construction Output Price Indices, published by the Office of National Statistics in August 2024, which indicated an additional increase of 24.22% for all new construction work.
21. Furthermore, an assessment of construction costs for the fire station schemes at Redditch and Broadway was completed. Officers were satisfied that the Hereford project costs closely aligned to these in terms of value for money. They were also in line with the current market and published construction indices for the 13-year period (2011 to 2024). Whilst the overall cost of this project was significant and the largest undertaken to date by the Fire Authority, it was noted that this is partially because of decades of previously failed attempts to rebuild Hereford Fire Station.
22. It was also noted in September 2024 that further delays or attempts to redesign, re-engineer or relocate Hereford Fire Station would take considerable time and most likely counteract any potential savings that could be realised, against the annual increases in build and design costs that showed no indication of slowing down, despite overall national inflation rates reducing that year. Indeed, recent projections suggest construction inflationary pressure will continue to increase by 10.8% in 2025/26.

23. Members were also made aware from budget monitoring reports that there had been a repeating underspend in capital financing costs as a result of delays to major capital build schemes. In anticipation of the imperative to replace Hereford Fire Station and escalating construction industry costs, the Treasurer had maintained the capital financing budget. The Treasurer confirmed in September 2024 that, subject to the confidential details presented to Members concerning the revised project costs, these could be contained within the existing budgets for the whole of the MTFP period.

Contractor Selection/Tender Process

24. A main contractor was appointed via the Pagabo procurement framework and has worked with the design team to develop the detailed designs and specifications.
25. Final contracts were agreed and signed between the Fire Authority and Speller Metcalfe Midlands Limited (SMML) on 18 February 2025.

Construction progress to date

26. Following completion of the temporary facility at Mortimer Road, crews have moved out of St Owen Street and are settled into the temporary fire station.
27. Enabling works, asbestos removal and demolition commenced at St Owen Street officially on 16 June 2025, with a programme set at approximately 86 weeks, and a practical completion date for the new Hereford Fire Station as January 2027.

Summary

28. The Fire Authority's Asset Management Plan 2009-2013 identified the need to replace Hereford Fire Station. Hereford Fire Station was the only scheme approved in 2011 which had not so far been delivered, following the difficulty in finding a suitable site, with several alternative proposals having been investigated over the years.
29. In 2021 architects were appointed by Place Partnership Limited to undertake a high-level feasibility options appraisal to redevelop the existing St Owen Street site. A full planning application was submitted to Hereford Council in October 2022 and approved in April 2023.
30. The Fire Authority have been advised throughout concerning the project budget allocation, with previous reports to the Committee referencing the UK construction tender price index, and the associated inflationary pressures being seen across the building sector.

31. A contractor tender process followed and work to find an alternative temporary fire station site for the period of construction commenced with local chartered surveyors. An industrial building at Mortimer Road, Hereford was selected as a preferred option, and a change of use planning application submitted in June 2024 was approved in October 2024.
32. Fire crews moved into the temporary fire station facility in June 2025, and demolition work commenced at St Owen Street in mid-June.

Appendices

Appendix A: Timeline of Committee Papers / Updates referencing Hereford Project

Appendix B: Hereford Fire Station - Design & Access Statement, 30 Sept 2022

Appendix C: Hereford Fire Station - Delegated Decision Report, 13 April 2023

Appendix D: Hereford Fire Station - Planning Decision Notice, 13 April 2023

Appendix E: HWFRS Site Search Report - Temporary Hereford Fire Station, Sept 2023

Appendix F: Temporary Fire Station - Delegated Decision Report, 16 Oct 2024

Appendix G: Temporary Hereford Fire Station - Planning Decision Notice, 16 Oct 2024