

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

12. Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Preferred Sites Consultation

Purpose of report

1. This report reviews the outcome of investigations into potential locations for the Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station and recommends that public consultation be undertaken on the preferred site.
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Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- i) at this stage, Silverwoods Park is the preferred site for the proposed Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station, but Stourpoint 5 is also considered to be a satisfactory location;***
- ii) further detailed negotiations and site investigations continue in respect of both sites;***
- iii) a further phase of public consultation be undertaken to determine public support for the proposed Hub Station if it is on one or other of the two sites identified above; and***
- iv) following the consultation, the Authority receive a report from ORS setting out the public feedback in respect of the preferred sites, prior to the Authority making a final decision at their meeting on 11 October 2016 on whether or not to proceed with the Hub Station project.***

Introduction and Background

2. In May 2015, the Authority received an award grant of £2.38 million from the Government's Transformation Fund to develop a proposal to create a new purpose-built, multi-agency Emergency Services Hub to serve the Wyre Forest area and replace the three current fire stations at Bewdley, Stourport-on-Severn and Kidderminster. In addition to the Fire and Rescue Service, the Hub would also accommodate West Mercia Police Community Support Officers and provide facilities for the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA), St John Ambulance and the British Red Cross.

3. The bid was predicated on the basis that maintaining the status quo is not sustainable or financially viable over the longer-term for the following reasons:
 - there have been substantial reductions in risk levels and incident numbers in the Wyre Forest area and generally across Herefordshire and Worcestershire, which means having three fire stations in such close proximity in comparison to other areas of the Service is no longer an effective and efficient way to provide fire cover,
 - the potential to relocate and combine resources into a Hub Station should improve the availability of on-call crews and their appliances by creating a single larger 'pool' of on-call firefighters,
 - facilities at the existing three fire stations are limited and confined by the available space,
 - the current fire stations will need expensive maintenance and refurbishment work, which will be a drain on our reducing financial resources,
 - the Government funding of £2.38million towards the overall Hub proposal cost of £5.8 million is not available for any other purposes or proposals.
4. On 17 June 2015, the Authority authorised formal public consultation on the principle of the proposal. The consultation was facilitated by an independent social research specialist, Opinion Research Services (ORS), who undertook an extensive 12-week programme of public meetings and stakeholder forums as well as producing a public consultation document and questionnaire. The outcome of the consultation was reported to the Authority on 17 February 2016. The Authority requested that a detailed investigation of the potential sites be carried out and reported back for determination of a preferred location, prior to a further period of public consultation before making a final decision on whether or not to proceed with the Hub Station project.
5. The detailed investigation work has now been completed and is reported in the following sections.

Review of site search and analysis

6. In the spring of 2015 Place Partnership Limited were commissioned to undertake a site search and investigation to identify available sites suitable for developing the new Hub Station to include space for replacing the Strategic Training Facility currently at Kidderminster fire station. To provide an independent assessment of the potential impact on operational matters following a move to a single Hub Station instead of the existing three fire stations, Operational Research in Health Limited (ORH) were engaged to undertake data analysis and validation at each potential site.
7. A total of nine sites were initially identified and, following further investigation, six of these proved to be either unsuitable or no longer available. The remaining three sites were considered to be potentially suitable Hub locations based upon our own requirements and those of our blue light partner agencies. The three sites were:

- Blakebrook School, Bewdley Road, Kidderminster,
 - Stourpoint 5, Stourport Road, Kidderminster (former site of Romwire),
 - Silverwoods Park, Stourport Road, Kidderminster (former site of British Sugar).
8. Many factors were examined and evaluated as part of the site investigations. The main criteria included:
- land availability issues such as landowner terms, costs and timescales,
 - size and space available to accommodate the Hub Station and Strategic Training Facility,
 - planning requirements such as access to transport and utilities infrastructure, development restrictions and conditions, future development plans, e.g. potential new housing developments,
 - impact on neighbouring areas such as proximity to residential or commercial/industrial development, and the potential environmental impact of the Hub Station development.
9. Likewise, the analysis of the potential emergency response impact of the location of the Hub also considered a number of criteria, including:
- likely attendance times from the new site compared to current performance, including modelled attendance performance to potential life-risk incidents (fires in buildings and road traffic collisions),
 - availability of a local pool of potential candidates for on-call firefighter recruitment within five minutes of the new Hub location,
 - ability to attend simultaneous incidents, including the likelihood of simultaneous incidents occurring, from the new Hub location,
 - proximity of key risk sites such as heritage buildings, industrial sites and environmentally sensitive areas.
10. In considering the suitability of the three available sites against the criteria outlined above in paragraphs 8 and 9, the site at Blakebrook School, Bewdley Road, Kidderminster was found to include the 1936 library building of the Grade II Listed former King Charles School. Initial enquiries of Wyre Forest District Council indicated that demolition of the building would be resisted on the grounds that it is a building of historic interest within the curtilage of a Listed Building and its removal would have a major adverse impact. As a result, this site is no longer considered a viable option as its Listed status would limit the development of the proposed Hub and potentially increase the projected costs considerably. Therefore, the remaining two sites are recommended for further public consultation.
11. A summary of the sites investigated by Place Partnership Limited is set out in the following table, with a short commentary on the suitability or not of each site. Further details of the two sites considered to be potentially suitable are set out in Appendix 1. Appendix 1 is exempt as it relates to the financial and business affairs of the Fire Authority.

Summary Table of Site Search and Investigation

Address of Site	Comments
Blakebrook School Site, Bewdley Road, Kidderminster	The use of the site is restricted by the presence of historic buildings. Not suitable
Zortech Avenue, Stourport Road, Kidderminster	This site would require an existing building to be purchased and then demolished, increasing costs. Not suitable
Finepoint, Minster Road, Kidderminster	This site would potentially have restricted access on to the Stourport Road, delaying responding appliances and RDS personnel. Not suitable
The Briten Building, Hoo Farm Industrial Estate, Kidderminster	Outside of revised search area. Not suitable
Stourpoint 5, Stourport Road, Kidderminster	Available and meets partner agencies and Service requirements. Suitable
Former Sealine Premises, Whitehouse Road, Kidderminster	Under offer to purchaser. Now Unavailable
Haynes Point, Stourport Road, Kidderminster	Under offer to purchaser. Now Unavailable
Wyre Forest District Council depot, Green Street, Kidderminster	This site is under consideration for development by WFDC. Now Unavailable
Silverwoods Park, Stourport Road, Kidderminster	Available and meets partner agencies and Service requirements. Suitable

Assessment of potential sites

12. Moving from three separate fire stations to a single Hub Station will potentially have an impact upon overall response performance within the Wyre Forest area and across the wider Service. To help assess the potential impact, ORH carried out an analysis of incident data to model the potential response times from either of the two new Hub locations.
13. The ORH analysis looked at performance using five measures:
 - average first appliance response performance to all incidents,
 - average second appliance response performance to all incidents,
 - proportion of first responses to fires in buildings within 10 minutes,
 - proportion of second responses within five minutes of the first response to fires in buildings,
 - proportion of first responses to road traffic collisions (RTCs) within 10 minutes.
14. The analysis found that relocating the stations at either Stouport 5 or Silverwoods Park would have an impact on current performance. Average response times from both potential Hub sites were longer than at present as were the numbers of incidents attended. Of the two sites, Silverwoods Park gave a better performance against the majority of the measures.
15. The modelling showed that the average first appliance response times to all incidents, including false alarms, could rise by up to 150 seconds depending on where the Hub Station is located. Of the two potential sites, locating at Silverwoods Park would have the least impact on average response times. The following table shows the differences at both potential locations.

Table 1: Modelled first appliance response times to all incidents

Modelled options	All incidents in Wyre Forest area		All incidents across whole Service area	
	Average response time (min:sec)	diff.	Average response time (min:sec)	diff.
Current (modelled base)	10:33	-	10:44	-
Silverwoods Park	12:10	+97 secs	10:59	+15 secs
Stourpoint 5	13:03	+150 secs	11:07	+23 secs

(based on ORH analysis of response data 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2015)

16. In terms of the potential impact on responses to fires in buildings and road traffic collisions, based on the two-year modelled dataset, the figures show there would be a reduction in the numbers of incidents reached within 10 minutes at both possible Hub sites (38.1 fires in buildings and 28.7 road traffic collisions reached by the first fire engine from Silverwoods Park and 29.7 fires in buildings and 23.6 road traffic collisions from Stourpoint 5 compared to 51

and 35 incidents respectively from the current arrangement). The differences are shown in the following two tables.

Table 2: Modelled response to fires in buildings in Wyre Forest area

Modelled options	Fires in buildings in Wyre Forest area			
	1 st fire engine		2 nd fire engine	
<i>1st fire engine: average annual no. of incidents attended 2013-15 = 89.0</i>	Average no. of incidents attended within 10 minutes	diff.	Average no. of incidents attended within 5 minutes of 1 st fire engine	diff.
<i>2nd fire engine: average annual no. of incidents attended 2013-15 = 57.5</i>				
Current (modelled base)	51.0	-	41.5	-
Silverwoods Park	38.1	-12.9	16.8	-24.7
Stourpoint 5	29.7	-21.3	18.7	-22.8

(based on ORH analysis of response data 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2015)

Table 3: Modelled response to road traffic collisions in Wyre Forest area

Modelled options	Road traffic collisions in Wyre Forest area			
	1 st fire engine		2 nd fire engine	
<i>1st fire engine: average annual no. of incidents attended 2013-15 = 82.5</i>	Average no. of incidents attended within 10 minutes	diff.	Average no. of incidents attended within 5 minutes of 1 st fire engine	diff.
<i>2nd fire engine: average annual no. of incidents attended 2013-15 = 37.5</i>				
Current (modelled base)	35.0	-	30.0	-
Silverwoods Park	28.7	-6.4	25.6	-4.4
Stourpoint 5	23.6	-11.4	21.9	-8.1

(based on ORH analysis of response data 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2015)

17. A more detailed summary of the modelled impact on the towns of Bewdley, Stourport and Kidderminster is set out in Appendix 2.

Mitigating potential impacts

18. While it is technically and operationally feasible to develop a single Hub Station at either of the two potential sites, in order to help allay any concerns about response times, there are several mitigation measures which can be put in place.

19. Firstly, in those areas where attendance times may potentially be longer than at present, the level of community and business safety activity could be increased, focusing in particular on the more vulnerable members of the community; this may involve additional programmes of home fire safety checks and business fire safety audits. This targeted prevention approach would also be facilitated by closer joint working brought about by the development of the Hub allowing work with partner agencies to increase the level of road safety and other safety education.
20. Secondly, on those infrequent occasions when simultaneous incidents occur, and when the wholetime crews may already be deployed at an incident for a prolonged period of time, Fire Control already have the discretion to call in other crews to provide immediate response standby cover as required. In the ORH modelling, for over 90% of the time all Wyre Forest appliances were available to be assigned to incidents, and for the year April 2014 to March 2015 there were just two occasions (0.1% of the time) when all four Wyre Forest appliances were assigned to ongoing incidents.
21. Finally, it should also be remembered that with the Hub Station the whole of the Wyre Forest area would be receiving an immediate, full-time, 24/7 response service as opposed to the current provision of on-call services in the Bewdley and Stourport areas, which can be affected by the availability of the on-call staff at different times of the day or night.

Financial Considerations

22. The estimated £5.8m cost of the project (as submitted in the Transformation funding bid) is met partly by the Transformation Grant and partly by the estimated proceeds of selling the three existing sites, with the balance being met by other resources. It may be possible to utilise the balance of the Budget Reduction Reserve, but if necessary the funding will come from capital borrowing. The additional financing costs will largely be covered by savings in running one modern building instead of three older ones and the potential reductions in on-call crew turnouts as the new location makes more effective use of the whole-time crewed appliance.
23. To put these costs into context, if a new Hub Station is not built in the Wyre Forest area the existing three buildings will need refurbishment works in the next few years, but this may only extend the life of the buildings by 10-15 years, when replacement will be required anyway. These costs are unlikely to generate savings and would add between £0.150m and £0.200m of capital financing costs to the revenue budget.
24. Any updated project costs will be presented to the FRA meeting in October.

Implications of not proceeding with the Hub Station project

25. It is important to note at this point that there would be a number of implications should the Hub Station project not proceed. The main ones are set out below:

- the £2.38 million Transformation Fund award would potentially need to be returned to central government,
- there is a reputational risk to the Fire Authority which could have a detrimental impact on future funding applications to the Home Office or Treasury,
- the three existing fire stations would still require costly modernisation and refurbishment to meet current standards,
- the Service still faces a challenging budget situation, which requires ongoing reviews of operational resource deployment,
- partner organisations would need to review their accommodation requirements separately, which could affect our relationship with them,
- the project is a significant example of how HWFRS is demonstrating its commitment towards complying with the new Policing & Crime Bill currently progressing through Parliament, which proposes a statutory duty on emergency services to collaborate,
- £110,000 will have been spent on the formal consultation programme, data modelling, site search fees and architect designs to prepare the Hub proposal, which would not be able to be off-set against the transformation funding awarded,
- opportunities for redevelopment at the three existing fire station sites contributing towards town centre regeneration would be lost.

Next Phase of Consultation

26. The next phase of the consultation process, subject to Fire Authority approval, will be to consult with the Wyre Forest residents, local businesses and fire station personnel to gain a local public perspective on the suitability of either site, rather than establishing which is the preferred site as this decision is reserved by the Fire Authority.

Conclusion/Summary

27. This paper has presented Authority members with the detailed analysis of two viable sites for the new Wyre Forest Hub Station (with a preference and rationale identified by officers for one of those sites), as requested by the Authority in February 2016. Having reviewed the analysis, the next decision required by the Authority is to authorise further public consultation on these sites. If agreed, a report on the consultation outcomes will then be presented to the Authority on 11th October 2016, with a view to assisting the Authority in making a final decision to progress the project to fruition.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	<p>The project will contribute towards the savings required in the period up to 2019-20 as well as forming part of the 2020 Vision Programme aimed at achieving a sustainable future for the Service.</p> <p>Costs incurred to date are £110,000. If the project does not proceed, or if the bid funding is withdrawn for any reason, then under the funding terms and conditions the costs would be abortive and would need to be absorbed from other areas of the Fire Authority budget.</p>
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	<p>The project is directly linked to delivering 'Our Strategy' (Resourcing the Future and Buildings and Infrastructure).</p>
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	<p>A Risk Management log is included within the project documentation.</p>
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	<p>Listening and Engagement forums have been held with key stakeholders and an extensive formal public consultation programme was carried out between 1 September 2015 and 27 November 2015.</p>
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is available as a background paper.</p> <p>There is no evidence that the development of a Hub Station would differentially and adversely affect those with protected characteristics or any other vulnerable groups at higher risk of fire and other emergencies.</p>

Supporting Information

Appendix 1- Confidential Summary Table of Suitability of Potential Sites

Appendix 2- Summary Impact Assessment of the Hub proposal on Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport

Background papers

Fire Authority report 10 December 2014: Item 7, Transformation Bids

Fire Authority report 17 June 2015: Item 14, Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub

Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station Transformation Fund Application, 4 June 2014

Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station Consultation document

Wyre Forest Transformation Funding and Other Issues – Preliminary Listening and Engagement Forums with members of the public and operational staff, Opinion Research Services, © June 2015

Fire Authority report 17 February 2016: Item 9, Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Consultation Responses

Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station, Report of Consultation with Operational Staff, Stakeholders and Members of the Public, Opinion Research Services, © January 2016

Equality Impact Assessment for the Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station

Contact Officer

Nathan Travis, Chief Fire Officer
(0845 12 24454)
Email: ntravis@hwfire.org.uk