

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 18 SEPTEMBER 2019
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: ANDREW LEADBETTER

SUBJECT: CREWE FIRE STATION SITE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1 This report:

Provides information about the outcomes from the feasibility work that has been carried out to assess whether it is possible to build a joint fire and police facility on the Crewe Fire Station site; and

Proposes next steps.

RECOMMENDED: That Members:

- [1] Note the contents of the report;
- [2] End the project to create a joint fire and police facility on the Crewe Fire Station site;
- [3] Instruct officers to develop a fire-only proposal for the Crewe Fire Station site.

BACKGROUND

2 This matter was last considered at the Fire Authority meeting in September 2018. Members decided to:

- Note the contents of the report;
- Commit to proceed with a joint fire and police facility on the Crewe Fire Station site;
- Authorise officers to enter into suitable arrangements including written agreements with the Police and Crime Commissioner to enable the project to be progressed;
- Include the sum of £5m in the capital programme to cover the potential Fire Authority contribution to the cost of creating the joint fire and police facility; and
- Note the anticipated cost of progressing the project to create initial designs, carry out suitable surveys/checks and prepare a cost plan and commit the sum of £200k as the Fire contribution.

INFORMATION

Feasibility

- 3 Over the last twelve months a significant amount of feasibility work has been carried out. During this period some external issues have come to light and some have changed.
- 4 The project team included a number of officers and external support covering project management, architectural concept design, structural engineering, civil engineering concept design, building services, cost consultancy, environmental standard assessment, and principal design.
- 5 The project team presented the Feasibility Report to officers in July and the following paragraphs summarise the key matters that the Report covered, adopting many of the headings from the Report.

FEASIBILITY REPORT

Site Analysis

- 6 General Section. Outlines the purpose of the feasibility work, namely to inform the parties about the factors and constraints that would influence the design. It noted that a key driver was likely to be a planning document produced by Cheshire East Council which was linked to HS2 and the redevelopment of Crewe Railway Station and the surrounding area.
- 7 Legal Title Section. There are covenants which either reduce the size of the area of the site that can be developed, or create issues that will need to be dealt with and attract associated cost, e.g. a drainage wayleave and gas pipe easement. There is also a height restriction covenant.
- 8 Traffic and Traffic Management Section. The site is adjacent to a major road intersection, with two points of vehicular access and traffic control infrastructure for the emergency access point. See later comments about informal feedback from Cheshire East Council.
- 9 Climate (Solar) Section. Notes that the site benefits from a predominantly southerly aspect. This probably necessitates the creation of solar shading to the building. A thermal study would confirm the extent of this.
- 10 Ecology Section. The preliminary habitat survey did not uncover any major concerns, having considered: the habitats that were present; any ecological constraints; the existence of legally protected species; and the presence of invasive plants.
- 11 Services Section. This was a desktop study with the benefit of utility searches. This considered telecoms, electric cables, gas supply, surface and foul water drainage and water supply. The study confirmed that there is a significant amount of services infrastructure directly adjacent to the site. This has an impact on the area of the site that can be developed.

Site Layout

- 12 Three site areas were considered for the development:
- A The existing fire station site
 - B The existing fire station site plus a small area of land directly adjacent to the site (owned by Cheshire East Council)
 - C The swapping of the existing site for an area of land adjacent to the site owned by Cheshire East Council
- 13 Option B would have created a more usable space, but it was not possible to secure agreement from Cheshire East Council. Option C was not feasible as a significant proportion of the land owned by Cheshire East Council was found to be subject to a different category of flood risk (it is lower than the existing fire station site) which was not suitable for an emergency services facility. This left us with Option A, working with the existing fire station site only.
- 14 Some key determining factors were noted at the outset of this Section of the Report.

Residential properties adjacent to the site

The proposal would see a considerable intensification of the use of the site and there would be an impact on residential amenities especially during the night.

Emergency turn-out

This would need to remain as it is at present.

Car parking

The significant numbers of operational vehicles and car parking for staff

Architectural Design

- 15 The Report noted that the site was in a prominent position and would probably attract a requirement for a strong architectural presence. The term 'landmark building' was used. There was also the issue of solar gain to tackle. This led the team to conclude that there would need to be some kind of treatment to one or more of the elevations of the building that could be expected to add to the complexity and cost of construction.

Structural Design

- 16 The Report considered the ground conditions, requirements for the foundations and the manner in which the basement would be formed. The site layout and building design that was settled upon involved the creation of a substantial basement. The basement would need to be built close to a couple of boundaries and its footprint would be markedly bigger than the building that would sit on top of it. This created some structural engineering

challenges. The building design also included an atrium. This was considered to be necessary because of the shape of the building and the need to create sufficient natural light and ventilation.

Highways

- 17 The Report covered the informal discussion that had taken place with Cheshire East Council. It was clear that the officers involved could see some difficulties creating another emergency service vehicle access across the dual carriageway on Crewe Road. Officers were also concerned about increasing vehicle movements to and from the site via the residential street. Whilst it was accepted that some staff parking would need to be off-site officers expected to see a formal agreement about this: it would not be acceptable to rely upon on-street parking given the numbers of staff and limited scope for parking on the adjoining road network.

External Issues

- 18 Police colleagues have been unable to secure off-street parking for staff. An arrangement with an adjacent land owner can no longer be pursued to a binding commitment as it is understood that the ownership has changed. The prospect of agreeing anything that might be considered medium term to permanent appears now to be non-existent. There are no other viable options within a reasonable distance of the site.
- 19 The Crewe Station Hub Area Action Plan has been developed by Cheshire East Council and is being consulted upon with a view to it being adopted in 2020. The impact of this is not clear at this point, but the existing fire station site is within the area of the Action Plan.
- 20 The proposal would require Cheshire East Council to provide a temporary letting of part of its adjacent land for the temporary fire station and site compound. Although positive discussions have taken place no commitment has been secured.

CONCLUSION ABOUT FEASIBILITY

- 21 The Feasibility Report does not contain a conclusion, as it is intended to allow the parties to consider whether the feasibility work has provided a satisfactory outcome and way forward. The following paragraphs are a summary of the conclusions reached by officers about the Report, apart from the financial aspects which are dealt with in the Financial Implications section of this report.
- 22 The layout/design produced by the project team can accommodate all requirements. The solution is impressive and appears to deal with the key challenges associated with such an ambitious use of such a constrained site.
- 23 The layout/design and site constraints have led to a substantially higher cost for the project than was originally anticipated. The areas which account for some of the higher costs are: a substantial basement built close to

boundaries of the site which exceeds the footprint of the building; an atrium which is required to bring light and ventilation into the centre of the building, the requirement to consider the 'landmark building' status that is anticipated and to tackle the solar gain; and the need for a temporary fire station 'off-site' during the construction period.

- 24 The fact that police colleagues no longer have a workable solution for off-street staff parking in the vicinity of the site means that the proposal is unviable.
- 25 The supplementary planning guidance that has been prepared by Cheshire East Council could have a bearing on any development on the site and at present the implications of this are not known.

Next Steps

- 26 The project to create a joint fire and police facility on the Crewe Fire Station site should be brought to an end, with members of the project team being thanked for the work that they have carried out.
- 27 Given the condition of Crewe Fire Station officers should now prepare a fire-only proposal.

Financial Implications

- 28 The costs of the joint fire and police facility are substantially higher at £18m, than some earlier attempts at estimating the cost (which had ranged from £11m to £14m). There are a number of reasons for this, the most significant being the fact that so much needed to be fitted onto the existing site. This led to expensive solutions and the following figures give an indication of some of the larger costs (estimated): basement, £2.6m; atrium, £1m; and 'landmark building', at least £350k. The temporary fire station would cost in the region of £1m and that figure does not include any payment that might be required by Cheshire East Council for use of some of its land on a temporary basis.
- 29 Whilst work has not been carried out to determine the respective share of the costs of the joint facility, it is highly likely that the cost to the Fire Authority would substantially exceed the £5m funding that was set aside. This figure was arrived at because a single build was expected to save the two organisations a combined sum of about £2m (£1m benefit to each).
- 30 The feasibility work has produced something that is simply too expensive and cannot represent value for money.
- 31 The feasibility work has cost around £50k, with the Fire Authority and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire sharing the cost equally. A small amount of the work will be of relevance to future plans for the site.

- 32 Whilst it is too early to offer a figure, the current capital allocation of £5m will undoubtedly need to be increased if the project team decide that a completely new fire-only facility should be built. The project team will be asked to consider whether any of the current buildings should be retained.

Legal Implications

- 33 The work to-date has been carried out in a collaborative manner and there are no legal agreements between fire and police that need to be considered at this point. Existing contracts for the project team may be relied upon to deliver a fire-only project.

Equality and Diversity Implications

- 34 Equality and diversity issues will be considered as any new proposal is developed.

Environmental Implications

- 35 The Crewe Fire Station building is reaching the end of its serviceable life. It was designed and constructed at a time when its environmental impact was not considered, or at least not in the depth that it is in modern construction. Any new proposal would undoubtedly improve the position. Previous new-build fire stations have aimed for a Good environmental rating (BREEAM). However, it seems increasingly likely that local authorities will expect a minimum Very Good rating. This could increase costs.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE