

**Status of Report:** *Public*

**Meeting:** Combined Fire Authority

**Date:** 16 June 2021

**Subject:** Training Facility – Service Leadership and Development Centre:  
Project Update.

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**For:** Information only

### **Purpose**

1. This report provides the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) with an update on the progress of land acquisition and design of the Fire Behaviour Unit, clarifying the impact that the desired training delivery model has on the existing estate.

### **Recommendation**

2. It is recommended that the CFA notes that:
  - a. The process of acquiring land suitable for fire behaviour training continues with the need to pursue and consider alternative sites;
  - b. Research and learning from interaction with other fire and rescue services has better informed and influenced the production of initial design plans for the fire behaviour unit;
  - c. The use of new technology has changed the way in which learning and development is delivered so allowing better use of the existing estate;
  - d. A further progress update will be presented to the CFA at its meeting on 22 September 2021.

### **Executive Summary**

3. At its meeting on 16 December 2020, the CFA recognised the risk around the procurement of a dirty training site at Caterpillar in Desford and the need to seek alternative, market rate sites. A progress update on the review of the use of the operational estate for training purposes was presented to the CFA at its meeting on 10 February 2021.
4. This report provides an update on project progress, highlights risks and measures being taken to mitigate them. It also details activity relating to land searches and details changes to the ways in which learning is delivered which has been influenced by the technological and innovative solutions adopted as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

## Background

5. At its meeting in September 2019, the CFA authorised an approach to progress the concept, design, development and technical detailing for a consolidated Leadership and Development Centre that was capable of accommodating staff and the delivery of all learning and development functions. These functions include practical outdoor activities that span the wide range of operational disciplines including: live fire behaviour; road traffic collision; breathing apparatus; rescues and emergency response driving, as well as providing classroom based activities and Command developments and assessments.
6. At its meeting in September 2020, the CFA recognised the need to scale back from a single consolidated site to deliver all elements of training for the Service to a cost-effective split-site hybrid solution that incorporates less risk. The sites proposed were at Desford (owned by Caterpillar) for outdoor “dirty” activities with the site at Loughborough Fire Station used for those that are classroom based.
7. At its meeting in December 2020, the CFA acknowledged risk around the acquisition of land at Desford and that market forces and the COVID-19 situation had changed how training was being delivered. Innovative remote delivery of learning was expanded through the use of technology. The CFA further acknowledged that maximising the use of the existing estate would reap financial benefit.
8. Senior officers challenged the Learning and Development team to consider the key requirements for delivering dirty training and the possibility of delivering remote training (as demonstrated during Covid-19 restrictions) and how the use of the existing estate could be maximised. This review identifies that there is a need to have a site that can facilitate multiple fire behaviour related scenarios with other practical and theoretical applications to be delivered at existing sites.
9. As a contingency measure in the event that land at Desford is not secured, a property agent has been commissioned to identify potential sites within Leicestershire considerate of: arterial route access, local planning uses and a size suitable for a Fire Behaviour Unit and supporting infrastructure only, which is around 1.5 – 2.5 acres. Search areas have been refined to source suitable sites within a 3-mile radius of existing whole-time stations in order to maximise the use of existing facilities in support of fire behaviour training by reducing the infrastructure requirements of the Fire Behaviour Site. The repurposing of the current Fire Training Unit at Loughborough Fire Station is also being explored as a contingency option.

## Progress

10. Positive communication in pursuit of purchasing/leasing land from Caterpillar at Desford continues recognising that this has not featured as a business priority for them during challenging commercial times associated with COVID-19. Opportunities to work in collaboration through exercises and support are being

pursued demonstrating our appetite to work in conjunction with them.

11. A pre-planning application has been submitted to Charnwood Borough Council to assess the viability of replacing the current containerised Fire Training Unit at Loughborough Fire Station with a brick and block Fire Behaviour Unit. This offers the most cost-effective solution to replacing the functionality of the current failing unit in the event that no suitable sites are located elsewhere to build a fire behaviour unit. The application is for the same footprint but with an additional storey and capable of both LPG and carbonaceous burns.
12. In considering alternative sites to Desford, the project team have considered:
  - a. **Likely planning approval.** Proximity to residential areas will likely attract planning conditions that would restrict the use of the facility similar to that incurred at the current Fire Training Unit site at Loughborough Fire Station.
  - b. **Cost of development.** This is a combination of purchase price, the cost of providing utilities, potential remediation measures for the site and running / replacement costs. For this reason, sites are shortlisted with the preference for those that have been previously occupied, i.e. brownfield sites.
  - c. **Proximity to major arterial routes.** In order to minimise the impact on crews, efficiency of travel to any site is a consideration.
13. The project team in conjunction with LFRS have reviewed four potential sites - two brownfield and two greenfield. Both greenfield sites were dismissed as being too far from utilities making them cost prohibitive. Both brownfield sites were deemed unsuitable due to the proximity of housing and the likely planning constraints that this would attract.
14. Following extensive research and engagement with other fire and rescue services which operate various styles of fire behaviour units the design of a structure suitable for delivery of all types of fire behaviour training has been developed along with the floor plans and elevations. These generic floor plans will be used in pre-planning applications on sites deemed suitable from desktop study as a mitigation of the planning risk.
15. An updated high-level cost plan for a brick and block build has been produced for the preferred solution at Loughborough following case studies of similar builds. A containerised solution may be less expensive to erect and a cost versus benefit analysis including whole life costs needs to be completed before any final decisions are sought on construction type.

## 16. Cost Summary:

Element	Estimated Cost	Notes
Land Purchase	£1.25m	Assume brownfield site @ £0.5m / acre
Construction	£1.5m	Building fabric, services, fit out, externals
Client-Side Costs	£0.5m	Fees, Risk, Contingency, Planning etc

**Opportunities**

17. The ability to build a FBU on a self-contained site whilst delivering other practical and theoretical learning on existing sites presents the following opportunities:

- a. There will be an ability to facilitate other dirty training opportunities at no extra cost. The external and internal features of the FBU provide functionality for other aspects of training without the need for fires to be set. Dependant on site and infrastructure dimensions, there may be sufficient room to facilitate a broad range of operational exercises or to deliver other outside based training.
- b. The disestablishment of the current Fire Training Unit and support elements at Loughborough will create space within the curtilage of the fire station and reduce the need to significantly develop the current Learning and Development Centre.
- c. Innovation and technology implemented during restrictions associated with COVID-19 has changed conventional delivery models by enabling remote learning, reducing the need to travel for classroom-based activities. Future enhancements and accessibility to online, blended and virtual content further changes the approach to learning and development, influencing a desire to maximise the use of the existing estate, including Birstall Headquarters and whole-time stations, reducing the requirement for additional training facilities.
- d. Improving the learning environment and increasing the flexibility and functionality of the existing estate, there is an ambition to have training provisions on each whole-time station segregated from station welfare facilities, making them available to use by non-station based staff.
- e. The budget savings realised to complete minor refurbishments across existing assets as opposed to new build costs would be of significance given the likely future financial climate.
- f. Through better use of the existing estate and savings realised as detailed above, there is the opportunity to upgrade and improve many more sites across the estate.

### Next Steps

18. The project team continue to work with senior LFRS personnel to ensure that the requirement captures the change in approach given the fundamental shift in the property market and the need to focus on LFRS owned assets in the first instance.
19. The project team will continue to attempt to secure a favourable land deal at Desford but will continue to assess other sites as part of contingency arrangements.
20. The project team intend to update the CFA at its meeting on 22 September 2021 regarding progress, focussing on identification of a suitable site and a rationalisation of the use of existing assets.

### **Report Implications/Impact**

21. Legal (including crime and disorder)
  - a. All stages of the design and build will comply with CFA Procedure Rules, Contract Procurement Rules and Financial procedure Rules
  - b. Redevelopment or refurbishment work is likely to require planning permission and approvals from building control.
  - c. Legal support will be provided by the County Council's Legal Team in the usual way.
22. Financial (including value for money, benefits and efficiencies)
  - d. An earmarked reserve of circa £6m is available to support this project. Utilising the refurbishment of existing infrastructure will significantly reduce the need for additional funding requirements – representing reduced scope as a control within current financial uncertainty.
  - e. At this stage it is not feasible to achieve cost certainty.
  - f. Caterpillar at Desford represents an opportunity to secure provision or use of land at a much-reduced rate.
  - g. The sum of £90,000 has been set aside for this project to develop the business case.
  - h. The table below identifies a potential overspend of £1,080. This may be reduced following a measure of actual works carried out.

- i. The option to 'buy-in' fire behaviour, Breathing Apparatus training has been discounted by cost benefit analysis undertaken in 2019 and included in previous CFA reports.

<b>Table 2 – Current Project Budget Overview</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Spend to Date</b>
Project Management	LCC Project Manager	£19,500	£19,500 4 days remaining)
Surveying	Topographical surveys of Loughborough and Desford	£2,020	£1,620 (FY 19/20)
RIBA 0+ Report	Consultancy support	£20,950	£20,950 (FY 19/20)
2 no. RIBA 2 Reports	Consultancy and architectural support	£48,250	£15,700
Planning	Pre-planning advice	£360	£0
		<b>£91,080</b>	<b>£67,770</b>

\*\*FY = Financial Year

23. Risk (including corporate and operational, health and safety and any impact on the continuity of service delivery)
- a. LFRS current resource expertise in this area is limited, therefore the entire programme of works is being led by the Estates and Building Services (EBS) department of Leicester City Council.
  - b. To mitigate risks around project delivery, the building design and construction process will be undertaken within the shared framework of Royal Institute of Building Architects (RIBA) Plan of Work 2013.
  - c. The approach outlined in the report addresses the risk around a potential land deal at Desford by considering reducing the requirements down to a Fire Behaviour Unit and associated infrastructure only with other training, both dirty and clean, being delivered on existing estate assets. Key issues are:
    - i. Limiting the scale and nature of development at the Loughborough site will reduce the risk that planning conditions may be too onerous. The submission of a formal pre-planning application has been made as a contingency measure allowing the project team to identify whether Loughborough can be considered as a site for dirty training.

- ii. Reduction in estimated project cost by utilising existing assets as far as reasonably practicable due to refurbishment costs being significantly lower than new build costs.
- iii. The proposal will significantly reduce the risk of requiring temporary accommodation whilst work is undertaken and allow continuation of operational effectiveness.
- iv. The proposal will significantly reduce the risk of breaching the CFA's VAT Partial Exemption. If this were to occur, then all CFA supplies rated as exempt VAT will not be recoverable from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and would incur significant cost to the CFA. The impact of VAT will be fully assessed and calculated as part of the overall financial evaluation.
- v. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors' Building Cost Information Service is forecasting that tender prices will rise between 4.5% and 5.5% every year at least. The risk of a rise thereafter is potentially aggravated by Brexit and the post Covid-19 impact has yet to be quantified.
- d. Reaching an agreement with Caterpillar is dependent on the continuation of their willingness to collaborate and agree reduced rates. Searching for additional potential sites mitigates this risk.

24. Staff, Service Users and Stakeholders (including the Equality Impact Assessment)

- a. Refurbishment and redevelopment work can have a significant impact on operational personnel and their ability to provide continuity of service. If temporary accommodation is required, it should be of a standard that is fit for purpose and provides the firefighters with the facilities required to remain effective.
- b. In accord with the LFRS People Strategy there has been early engagement with staff and representative bodies regarding user requirements and subsequent design specifications within the program of works.
- c. All changes will be subject to a People Impact Assessment and transport plans within Project methodology. i.e. identify impact on travel for staff/environment.
- d. Having multiple training venues may increase travel for instructional staff.
- e. Re-development of the Loughborough site would include a refurbishment of the Fire Station and would provide an opportunity to improve the use of the site by Staff, Service Users and Stakeholders.
- f. The provision of training facilities on whole time Fire Stations will incorporate a degree of refurbishments to the welfare facilities of those stations.

## 25. Environmental

- i. Following completion of the build, environmental issues are potentially improved based on the use of modern building techniques and materials (subject to the identified risks on the complexity of building services).
- ii. Design and build of the Fire Behaviour Unit will include engagement with the Environment Agency to ensure emissions are within prescribed limits.
- iii. All re-development and refurbishments will consider sustainability and the use of technologies and methods of construction that reduce the impact on the environment.
- iv. The profile of staff movements will be assessed with a view to achieving these in the most environmentally friendly way including electric vehicles and different ways of working.

## 26. Impact upon “Our Plan” Objectives

- i. An improved estate should contribute towards LRFS aims to ‘respond effectively to incidents’ and having ‘an engaged and productive workforce’. Improvements should also present ‘value for money’ as running costs and ongoing maintenance costs should reduce.
- ii. The provision of blended learning and realistic scenarios further supports our purpose in delivering Safer People Safer Places in the workplace; ensuring that there are the right people in the right place doing the right thing in the right way.

## **Background Papers**

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service Leadership and Development Facility – Strategic Business Case – September 2019 included as an Annex to  
<https://leics-fire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/service-training-facility-strategic-business-case-final.pdf>

Report to the CFA 16 December 2020 – Training Facility – Service Leadership and Development Centre: Project Update  
[Universal Report Template 2019 \(leics-fire.gov.uk\)](#)

Report to the CFA 10 February 2021 – Training Facility – Service Leadership and Development Centre: Project Update  
[ld-build-final.pdf \(leics-fire.gov.uk\)](#)



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