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Your ref: APP/16/00985

Our ref: CFO/SW

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Dear David,

PLANNING APPLICATION APP/16/00985

I am writing to you regarding the Fire and Rescue Authority planning application to build a fire station on Saughall Massie Road.

I believe I am duty bound to set out my professional position as the Chief Fire Officer in respect of this matter and specifically what I believe the consequences will be should the application be refused.

It is not my intention to revisit in detail the background to the application other than to make the point (which I have made many times in public prior to, during and since the public consultation) that this option results in the least impact on response times of any of the options available to the Authority accepting that there are no options open to the Authority that do not adversely affect response times. I will return to the importance of this point later in this correspondence.

As a result of the ongoing cuts to its budget the Authority can no longer afford to crew the two existing stations at Upton and West Kirby. Of the two stations Upton provides a more extensive coverage due to the proximity of West Kirby to the coastline. It is for this reason that Upton is designated as a key station and would therefore be the station that remains open, should the planning application for new station at Saughall Massie Road not be approved.

However, the outright closure of West Kirby and responding from Upton would significantly increase the average response times to the West Kirby station area (which extends from Caldly to Meols and includes Hoylake and Newton).

Moving the station from Upton to Saughall Massie Road would reduce response times to the West Kirby station area by an average of 2 minutes bringing response times to that area much closer to the Merseyside average.

Saughall Massie Road is located on the current Upton station area. The average response to the Upton station area from Saughall Massie Road would increase by less than one minute compared to the response from Upton, however this would still be over one minute

faster than the Merseyside average. In simple terms this is the equivalent of moving from extremely fast response times to very fast response times.

All of the available research identifies that there is a relationship between survivability and response times. This can be measured in seconds rather than minutes, so a delay of 120 seconds could easily make the difference between someone surviving in a fire, road traffic collision or other emergency, or not.

Survivability decreases significantly beyond 10 minutes. There are parts of the West Kirby station area (including within Hoylake and Meols) that cannot be reached from Upton fire station in 10 minutes. The average response time to the West Kirby station area from Upton is in excess of 8 minutes, which is 3 minutes longer than the Merseyside average and much closer to 10 minutes than almost everywhere else on Merseyside.

I have made the point on numerous occasions that whilst the Authority adopted a 10 minute response standard in 2013 as a direct result of the cuts to its budget, in no way is the aspiration to take 10 minutes to attend an incident. To the contrary, on Wirral and across Merseyside the Authority has pursued all available means to maintain average response times as close to 5 minutes as possible.

It is my professional opinion that if this planning application is refused and the Authority is forced to close West Kirby fire station outright an incident will occur on the West Kirby station area where responding from Upton fire station will result in a delay that will have a direct impact on the outcome in terms of survivability. The Planning Committee need to understand this when reaching their decision therefore I would be grateful if you could bring this to their attention.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Stephens
Chief Fire Officer