

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Question. Why was it necessary to move from the existing fire station at North Quay?**

Answer: Following the replacement of the old Poole fire station in 2008, Weymouth fire station at North Quay, constructed in 1939, became our oldest fire station. The site was extremely restricted, there was a significant backlog of building maintenance (estimated at £700,000 in 2010 for five years) and its harbourside location meant that an extension of the site was impossible.

In 2006, the Fire Authority agreed to consider a new fire station which would also include proposals for facilities that could be shared with the local community. An initial feasibility study considered the possibility of improving the existing station, but the inherent limitations of the existing site determined that a brand new station was the best solution.

The location of the new fire station and availability of a suitable, affordable site was key to the project. Several potential sites in different areas of the Borough were considered before an opportunity to purchase the former Westhaven School site in Radipole Lane was identified. The school, which was owned by Dorset County Council, was made available to the Fire Authority at a preferential price under the County Council's 'powers of well-being' in recognition of the important community role of the new station and their alignment to our vision of *working in partnership to make Dorset safer.*

### **Question: Why did the move occur in 2011?**

Answer: The Fire Authority commenced formal discussions on the replacement of Weymouth fire station in 2006. In 2007, we became aware of a potential site at the former Westhaven Junior School and began discussions with Dorset County Council. At the same time, we also discussed with Weymouth and Portland Borough Council our vision for community facilities at Westham and the dependency on the sale of North Quay to this overall project. The new fire station and community safety centre was completed in July 2011, on time and well within budget.

The timing of the new station was important in respect of our preparations for the Olympics where we will have a number of additional vehicles and personnel that could not be accommodated at the old station. We were also keen to ensure that our access and egress was not congested. The facilities at the new station allow us to increase fire cover in Weymouth and Portland during the summer of 2012 with a number of extra fire engines and specialist appliances from other parts of the UK.

In undertaking the move, the Fire Authority were also mindful of the advice it received in respect of the market value of North Quay, indicating in 2008/09 that, whilst interest was strong, longer term there were signs that the market was declining.

The site at North Quay also had a considerable maintenance backlog. In 2010, we accepted that, if we remained at this site, then over the next five years we would need to spend over £700,000. In addition, the site remained cramped and could not provide new education facilities.

Finally and crucially, the timing of the move allowed us to ensure that in respect of new statutory duties we provided education facilities at Weymouth that would help address the shocking 13 fire

related deaths that we experienced in 2008/09 and is a key part of our plans to make Dorset one of the safest places to live in England.

**Question: Why was the site at Westhaven chosen?**

Answer: Prior to the consideration of Westhaven, the Fire Authority considered a number of potential sites. Quite apart from the actual space required, any consideration of new sites for fire stations must also look at the neighbouring road network and therefore the response times that can be made. The site of the new station has in fact increased our predicted coverage within a 6-7 minute drive. At Weymouth, we have one fire engine that is permanently crewed by firefighters at the station and another fire engine where firefighters respond to an alerter. The location of the new station is also within a radius that has allowed all staff to move to the new station without any redundancies. Finally, the Fire Authority were keen that where possible the new site should be within the heart of a community.

**Question: How was the new station paid for?**

Answer: DFRS has primarily two means of expenditure. There is a 'revenue' budget that is for day to day expenditure such as pay and utilities, and a 'capital' budget that is for expenditure on assets such as fire engines and buildings. The revenue budget for DFRS for 2011/12 is approximately £29.3m and is made up of approximately £17.8m council tax and the remainder from Government grant. In terms of council tax, residents in Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole pay the lowest amount of any of our neighbours for the provision of their Fire and Rescue Service, For example, the Band D council tax precept in Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole for their Fire and Rescue Service is £60.39, compared to £71.77 in Devon and Somerset, £61.38 in Hampshire and £62.38 in Wiltshire. For just over £1 per week, DFRS provides a fantastic response, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to over 10,000 emergency incidents a year. We also now undertake over 10,000 home safety checks a year and work with approximately 15,000 people in terms of providing education and helping them live more safely.

The capital budget required varies from year to year depending on the number of fire engines, vehicles, buildings, computers, etc, that we need to replace. Traditionally, capital expenditure is financed by borrowing, similar to an ordinary mortgage.

Prior to the consideration of Weymouth, DFRS had been successful in leading a joint bid with Dorset Police to receive Government funding for new buildings, including fire stations at Dorchester and Poole, and a new Service Headquarters in Dorchester. Quite apart from the value of the new buildings, this funding also freed up a number of sites that were sold and provided capital receipts (that can only be used for further capital expenditure) for Dorset Fire and Rescue Service. We therefore had a fantastic position in 2006/07 where our capital budget allowed us to build a new fire station at Weymouth that would fully meet the requirements of a modern day Fire Service and also provide education facilities and thereafter community facilities.

The overall estimate for the new fire station included capital receipts for the former site at North Quay and initially selling the land that was unused at the rear of the new station. As a result of reducing costs of the new station, together with optimising the potential value of North Quay, it has become apparent that it may be possible to retain the land at the rear of the new station and look

for funding from our partners to help us provide a road safety centre. This remains our aim, but is very much dependent on maximising the value of the sale of North Quay.

**Question: What happens if planning is not approved for North Quay and perhaps it is not sold?**

Our first desire would be to look for new interest in North Quay. As we would be retaining the site we would also have to consider the long term security of the site and dependent on market forecasts whether it would be more beneficial to hold on to the site until the valuation rises as a result of the commercial property/land levels. We would still be dependent on part of the receipt to balance the costs of building the new fire station and of course without significant support from our partners we would not be able to progress a road safety centre without this sale. Our capital programme has flexibility to allow a delay in the receipt from North Quay, but remains dependent on its sale.

**Question: Why are you thinking of providing a Road Safety centre?**

Dorset Fire and Rescue Service together with its partners are committed to reducing the loss of lives that we suffer on our roads. Whilst people hear a lot about the enforcement and engineering aspects of road safety, a key strand that is often overlooked is the provision of education. Staff within Dorset Fire and Rescue Service together with our partners do a fantastic job in educating where possible all types, ages and abilities of road users on the safe behaviours and consequences of poor decision on our roads. The Road Safety Centre would provide a small facility that could be used to familiarise prospective, new and perhaps returning road users on safe behaviours, choices and consequences when using roads. We would also envisage the facilities being used for training by our specialist technical rescue team that is located at Weymouth and is one of only 2 teams throughout the whole of Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole.

**Question: What facilities are at the new station?**

Answer: The new fire station has six bays, four of which can fully accommodate the aerial ladder platform that is located at Weymouth. These bays are also big enough to accommodate new style combined fire engines and aerial ladder platforms that are now available to fire and rescue services. The new fire station also has improved facilities in respect of the technical rescue equipment and teams that now operate from Weymouth. In addition, there is a larger drill tower and training area for the operational personnel to use. In addition to the right facilities for a modern Fire and Rescue Service, the community site also includes facilities for fire safety education and other rooms that are available to the community to use. The other facilities include an interactive FireWise education zone where we aim to work with over 10,000 people a year to improve their fire awareness and general life-style.

**Question: Have the community been involved in the new station?**

Answer: Throughout the design of the new Weymouth fire station and community safety centre, we worked closely with Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and also established a Weymouth Strategic Stakeholder Group. This included representatives from local community groups, local councillors and the Conifers School. Over 20 meetings of this group took place between February 2008 and May 2011. In addition to the influence that this group exerted on the

design and delivery of new facilities, the Fire Authority also undertook formal consultation on the new fire station between November and December 2009 for which there was overwhelming support.

**Question: Can the community use the facilities?**

Answer: Absolutely! Our volunteers would be delighted to welcome you to the new centre and show you around. Within the building, there is also a cafe area run by O'Crumbs that also provides placements for adults with learning disabilities. Groups can use rooms which, depending on use, can be free. (Tel. 01305 753050). We would also welcome groups to tour the FireWise zone and appointments can be arranged by telephone 01305 753054.

Our ambition is relentless in changing the behaviours and life styles of communities to make them safe from fires and hopefully safer when they use the roads of Dorset. And of course we will continue to be one of the most cost effective fire and rescue services in England.