



**NORTHUMBERLAND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE  
NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CONSULTATION FOR RE-LOCATION OF  
HEXHAM COMMUNITY FIRE STATION TO HEXHAM GENERAL HOSPITAL SITE  
FINAL REPORT**

**4<sup>th</sup> July 2014 to 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

**Northumberland**  
COUNTY COUNCIL

**15.10.2014**

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## Foreword

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has an excellent track record for the work it has implemented to improve community safety through prevention programmes and community engagement activities, whilst also still delivering a high performing response emergency service.

During these difficult financial times we have to continue to adapt and innovate in order to ensure that we make the best use of the limited financial resources, whilst still ensuring that we safeguard the quality and standards of such vitally important public services. As the Deputy Leader of the Council part of my 'portfolio' of services I am responsible for includes Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service. I am therefore absolutely delighted to support this development, which is such an innovative way to provide a state of the art service to the community in Hexham and the surrounding area. Working closely with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHNFT), this proposal involves relocating Hexham Community Fire Station to an existing building on the Hexham General Hospital site and helps to reduce costs and secure efficiencies. It also offers the opportunity to provide modern up to date facilities to the benefit of the local community and staff, and will ensure we are well placed to continue improving the services we provide to the local community through better and smarter ways of working.

I feel very passionately about the need to make sure that communities have the opportunity to shape and influence what happens in their local area. The consultation on the proposed development of a new Community Fire Station in Hexham has provided such an opportunity and demonstrates our commitment to work with local communities so that they have their say over important matters that affect them now and in the future. I will ensure that the feedback received from this consultation exercise is carefully considered and taken on board when deciding what the next steps should be.



A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Cllr Dave Ledger - Deputy Leader of Northumberland County Council



Alex Bennett – Chief Fire Officer

## **Executive summary**

The executive summary explains the consultation process and presents key findings of the public consultation on the proposed relocation of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service's (NFRS) Fire Station in Hexham. The consultation was in connection with the proposed relocation of Hexham Community Fire Station to the Hexham General Hospital (HGH) site as part of NFRS improvement of services in connection with efficiencies through public services working together. The research was undertaken by NFRS under guidance of the Policy and Research Team of NCC.

Combinations of quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used. Quantitative research was in the form of the collection of data in a survey made available on the NCC website and is concerned with establishing the proportions of responses to questions about the proposal. Qualitative research was based on comments from the survey and attendance at a public session with local residents and also key community groups by senior officers where the proposal was presented and debated, and was used to explore the 'why', and/or the reasons behind the proposal. In short, it adds more depth, but is not used statistically.

Initially the method to engage with members of the public was via a press release in the local newspaper the Hexham Courant which was supported by information on the County Council and Courant websites with details of the proposal explained in the 'Consultation Strategy' with an on-line questionnaire, in addition to this there was an event held at HGH for local residents with individual letters and surveys communicated directly with residents living around the roads to the rear of HGH. The consultation commenced 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014 and concluded 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014 with exposure through press and website articles.

Secondly, the Service corresponded with key stakeholders and groups in the Hexham area offering senior officers to attend and explain the proposal which included attendance at the West Area Committee and a site meeting at HGH with Hexham Town Council. Further correspondence seeking views was sent to partner organisations as well as visits by senior officers to key premises in Hexham.

Overall it seems that a clear majority of residents who responded to the website survey supported the proposal and priorities of NFRS with regard to service improvements and relocation to HGH site. However it must be noted that a low number of residents responded to the survey with 23 in total, 19 from local residents. It is considered that the low response indicates the public chose not to respond to the consultation and were not concerned about the proposed relocation of the Community Fire Station to HGH. In addition to this the Service's attendance at key local groups such as the West Area Committee and the Town Council demonstrated support and encouragement to the proposal with regard to its benefits to Hexham and the local area provided specific issues on traffic and noise were addressed.

It should be noted there was indication from some respondents with regard to concerns of locating the new Community Fire Station away from its existing site to the hospital site in terms of potentially increasing response times along with the new Community Fire Station being away from the A69. The other main issues expressed were;

- Difficulties in responding onto Maidens Walk at key times of the day;
- Noise and light pollution whilst responding onto Maidens Walk.

### **Consultation Aims & Objectives**

NFRS, as part of NCC, under the scope of Service Modernisation intended to raise awareness and understanding of the relocation of Hexham Community Fire Station to support NFRS & NCC Strategic Aims, and its role in contributing to the prevention of injuries and deaths, and driving down risk in the communities of Hexham and Northumberland. Therefore the consultation was designed in accordance with advice from NCC Policy and Research Team and Cabinet Office guidance and intended:-

- To ensure service personnel understand how the changes will impact upon them;
- That consultation is good quality, provides value for money, and presents in a professional and efficient manner;
- That NCC provided opportunities for members of the community and personnel to contribute to the development of the project with regard to NFRS based on evidence and information provided;
- That NFRS & NCC will demonstrate that they have taken into account the views and concerns of all its stakeholders and allowed their knowledge and experience to influence the decision-making process;
- To meet with the Code of Practice Consultation (2012);
- To ensure that the consultation on NFRS Strategic Improvements to NFRS are kept separate to the Planning Applications;
- To ensure that the proposals serve the needs of Northumberland in maximising Community Well-Being by supporting Partnership working whilst meeting Efficiencies;
- To address the consensus view of staff, stakeholders and the community and incorporate these in the proposed plans.

## Methodology

Combinations of quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. Quantitative research was in the form of the collection of data in the on-line survey made available on NCC's website and is concerned with establishing the proportions of responses to set questions on the area being researched. Qualitative research was based on attendance at key community groups where there were presentations by senior officers and debate on the proposal, and was used to explore the 'why', or the reasons behind responses to a quantitative survey. In short, it added more depth, but was not used statistically.

**Stage 1:** Pre consultation was carried out with respective key groups and stakeholders to pre inform them.

**Stage 2:** Formal consultation commenced 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014, concluding 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014, with a Press Release in the Hexham Courant to raise awareness throughout the local area of the key proposal. Information was placed on NCC website for the reasons behind the proposal with a questionnaire and survey for those who wished to respond. Letters and questionnaires were issued directly to local residents with invitation to a drop in session at HGH to review proposals with senior officers. The website was kept live during the consultation period with e-mail or questionnaire accessibility to those who wished to respond.

**Stage 3:** Correspondence was issued in accordance with the 'Consultation Strategy' available on the web-site with this including key public bodies such as West Area Committee, Town & Parish Councils and other public groups as well as professional organisations and other key groups.

**Stage 4:** Presentations were provided to those groups who requested further information with senior officers attending and presenting the proposals to the respective group. This opportunity was taken up by Hexham Town Council through a site meeting and attendance at the West Area Committee; in addition to this an area officer attended key local businesses.

**Stage 5:** Review and production of Final Report available on NCC/NFRS website.

## Findings

This section provides the key findings from the website survey and presentation to community groups undertaken in the research period. It should be highlighted that the number of respondents to the questionnaire/website survey was limited to 23 people with a high percentage either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposal. However it is recognised that key to some of the responses was for the Authority to review and consider;

1. Difficulties in traffic and responding to incidents via Maidens Walk;
2. Light pollution by vehicles responding;
3. Noise whilst vehicles respond to incidents.

The findings have been divided into three sections:

- **Section A** highlights the overall results of the website survey consultation.
- **Section B** explores the comments identified in the survey responses, and from the presentation to community groups and their responses with excerpts to the strategic proposal used to provide deeper insight into the respondents' thoughts on the re-location.
- **Section C** highlights and explores the key issues raised in both parts of the consultation that may directly relate to and explain the Authority's position.

## Section A: Overall results from the resident's questionnaire and web-site survey

The consultation survey provided the following quantitative data:

Question	Quantitative Result
1. Are you supportive of replacing the existing fire station with a purpose built facility at HGH?	78.2% either strongly agreed or agreed.
2. Are you supportive of the proposal to incorporate additional services such as Community Safety?	78.2% either strongly agreed or agreed.
3. Are you supportive of the proposal to relocate the CFS at Tyne Mills and use the site for a NCC Local Services Depot?	69.5% either strongly agreed or agreed.
4. Do you agree with the principle or realising efficiencies through co-location of council services?	69.5% either strongly agreed or agreed.
5. Are you supportive of the proposal to work with NHHFT and to provide a modern CFS in most efficient way?	73.9% either strongly agreed or agreed.
6. Are you supportive of emergency service working closer to improve public services?	82.6% either strongly agreed or agreed.
7. Are you aware of the role of the Service performs at Hexham?	78.3% indicated yes to this question.
8. Do you agree that fire safety and prevention is a key role of the fire service?	95.7% indicated yes to this question.
9. Do you agree that the fire service should be involved in youth engagement and safety work?	100% indicated yes.
10. What additional services/functions would you like to see the Service providing.	Only 4 responded to this question.
11. Do you have any other comments, supportive or concerns?	50% provided comments.
12. Would you make use of the community space for meetings or events?	34.8% indicated no.
13. Do you have any other comments, supportive or concerns?	39.1% made further comment?
14. What do you think of the proposed re-location to HGH and plans for new CFS?	65.2% made further comment?

The above table indicates that the majority of respondents were supportive of the proposed Community Fire Station re-location to Hexham General Hospital Site as part of NFRS efficiency and service improvements. The results also indicate that all respondents were aware of the Fire Service role and that fire safety and prevention is a key role. However there are issues that require further exploration in terms of the new Community Fire Station and matters raised through qualitative data.



## **Section B: Key issues highlighted by the consultation**

This section of the report explores issues and comments raised by respondents from the website survey and public group consultation events to provide qualitative information.

### **Presentations & Correspondence**

#### **West Area Committee**

The committee supported the proposal "*.....Welcomed the investment of a new, fit for purpose facility in Hexham.....however wanted to confirm traffic and congestion issues.....*"

#### **Hexham Town Council**

The Town Council reported "*Hexham Town Council has no objections to the siting of the proposed Fire Station at Hexham General Hospital*"

**Website Survey** [quotes and comments identifying main issues from surveys]

***Supportive***

*"Hexham needs to keep our local Fire Station"*

*"Service needs to be updated and kept up to date in modern techniques"*

*"Modernising services would be welcome"*

*"Hexham needs a new Fire Station. This new placement seems ideal"*

*"Having all services together would work together"*

*"Community safety is very important"*

*"Combined services the best idea"*

*"Council services should all work together anyway"*

*"The combined service of Hexham and the Fire Service would be more efficient"*

*"Yes I agree"*

*"As long as there is agreement on shared vision, roles, delivery outcomes"*

*"They should always work closely together"*

*"Yes it is vital, efficient and admirable service"*

*"It has to be the main priority"*

*"Brilliant!!! More central within Hexham"*

*"I agree with the proposal to move to the Hospital site"*

***Critical***

*"Absolutely not fix the old station up it's in the perfect spot why should sick patients be bothered with the noise how can it be safe having a diesel dump next to a nursery old folks home and residential area"*

*"Yes we need a modern Fire Station but not beside the Hospital"*

*"Either rebuild on the present site or on land already purchased at West End of Hexham, either site is closer to A69 to respond to RTA's or other areas"*

*"I don't feel taking away some of the Hospital is most efficient"*

*"A study needs to be completed on traffic congestion on the Loosing Hill / Corbridge Road, Priestpopple junction.....difficult times 08:30 – 09:00, 15:30 – 17:30 mon to fri.....school and work traffic cause chaos.....little room to allow emergency vehicles through.....loss of staff parking and staff to park in those"*

*"Concerned about the noise and traffic congestion"*

*"Disruption from syrens and lights, using Maidens Walk exit for emergency call outs the road is tight and often congested at peak times....."*

*"Also need to consider the residents of Hexham East estate behind the site and those at Acomb Court"*

*"Time restrictions on vehicle lights and noise"*

## Section C: Issues identified in the consultation and NFRS considerations

This section sets out the key issues raised during the consultation period 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014 to 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014. These include information and data collected through the website survey and also responses collected from the presentations to key groups representing Hexham.

A significant point to note is the low response and engagement on the issue by members of the community from the website survey and the limited response to letters sent to key stakeholders however several residents attended the drop in session at HGH. This indicates that the proposal would not appear to be an issue that raises concern in the general community. However there was approximately a 20% response to individual letters issued to local residents who completed the survey and returned it, this also represented 19 out of 23 surveys submitted.

In analysing the low number return of the website survey it should be noted negative response or those that disagreed with the proposal were a minority of the respondents. It should also be noted that those respondents who either oppose the proposal or raised issues identified concerns as summarised below as to reasons why not to make the improvements.

In analysing the percentile response to the questionnaire 69.5% of the 23 surveys supported the move to the Hexham hospital site with 78.24% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with questions 1 to 8. This would provide the basis to consider the survey as to support the proposal however there are issues to consider and address as detailed below.

In addition to support this the engagement with the main community groups of Hexham Town Council and West Area Committee representing people of Hexham supported the proposal;

The Town Council clearly support the proposal with the statement;

*"....."Hexham Town Council has no objections to the siting of the proposed Fire Station at Hexham General Hospital" ....."*

The West Area Committee supported the proposal;

*".....Welcomed the investment of a new, fit for purpose facility in Hexham.....however wanted to confirm traffic and congestion issues....."*

However whilst supporting the proposal both the West Area Committee and Town Council identified key issues to consider, this was also supported by a minority of the community who completed and submitted the survey.

Therefore in considering points raised during the consultation period there are critical comments to the proposal with the following significant points to be considered and addressed in taking the scheme forward, summarised as;

1. Difficulties in traffic and responding to incidents via Maidens Walk;
2. Traffic congestion around mini round about and Corbridge Road;
3. Distance from the A69;
4. Light pollution by vehicles responding;
5. Noise whilst vehicles respond to incidents.

The Authority and NFRS have considered the aforementioned points in developing the proposal as part of NCC and consider the following to be a reasonable response to the concerns highlighted;

### **1. Difficulties in traffic and responding to incidents via Maidens Walk;**

In considering the issue highlighted it is recognised that the proposal is designed around the community fire station and fire engines making egress onto Maidens Walk. The key issue of responding to incidents via this route, at certain times of the day, i.e. around 09:00 and 16:00 would or could result in significant delay in emergency response. There was also the issue pointed out in terms of increasing the congestion.

Whilst it is considered that the service could still provide the necessary service to Hexham and meet its delivery standards it is proposed that;

- a) That there is a comprehensive traffic survey carried out in accordance with Planning submission requirements; and
- b) The overall site strategy and development is assessed for viability to redesign and reverse the egress and route for blue light emergency vehicles the opposite way and discharge onto Corbridge Road.

### **2. Traffic congestion around mini round about and Corbridge Road;**

In considering the traffic congestion issue this has been raised by Town Council and West Area Committee as well as some residents. Key to this is the congestion times of traffic movement and number of movements by the fire service. As detailed

under point 1 above there are key times of the day when this may affect operation of the site, operational response and local traffic congestion.

In considering this issue it should be noted that the service responds on average to between 5 and 7 calls a week, in the period of a year the majority of these are outside of the congested traffic period. In addition to this other main traffic movements to site are outside of the congested time periods identified by respondents.

Therefore in considering the congestion issue and to understand traffic issues and solution to the proposal it is intended that;

- a) That there is a comprehensive traffic survey carried out in accordance with Planning submission requirements; and
- b) The service to carry out further time analysis for responding crews and appropriate risk assessments;
- c) The overall site strategy and development is assessed for viability to redesign and reverse the egress and route for blue light emergency vehicles the opposite way and discharge onto Corbridge Road.

### **3. Distance from the A69;**

In relation to the distance from the A69 and emergency response from Hexham Community Fire Station it is recognised that the Community Fire Station is further from the A69, however the risk area covered by the Hexham appliances is located for the whole Hexham station area and not only the A69. The service covers other risks in the area as well as the A69 with response times either slightly increasing or decreasing to some areas. In terms of risk it has been assessed that this does not reduce the identified service standards with more opportunity to carry out prevention and protection initiatives with the new facilities.

Therefore in considering the issue and risk profile it is intended that;

- a) The service to carry out further time analysis for responding crews and appropriate risk assessments.

### **4. Light pollution by vehicles responding; comments;**

### **5. Noise whilst vehicles respond to incidents;**

From a few comments it has been identified that there was concern over noise issues of appliance responding onto Maidens Walk with regard to emergency fire appliances and the sirens and also potential light pollution. It is recognised that on occasions this could occur but this would not be a common occurrence. It should be noted that the station only responds to

one call through the night per week and appliances responding only utilise sirens when there is traffic which would be unlikely through the night.

Therefore in considering the congestion issue and to understand traffic issues and solution to the proposal it is intended that;

- a) That there is a comprehensive traffic survey carried out in accordance with Planning submission requirements; and
- b) The overall site strategy and development is assessed for viability to redesign and reverse the egress and route for blue light emergency vehicles the opposite way and discharge onto Corbridge Road.

## **Conclusion**

On the whole the consultation process has identified there is more support and benefits for the proposed re-location of Hexham Community Fire Station to a new facility on the Hexham Hospital Site. The joined up work and the provision of fit for purpose facilities for NFRS with NCC creating a modern Community Fire Station receives more positive support than negative comment from respondents from the consultation process.

It must be noted that there was limited response from residents of Hexham to the consultation which indicates the public chose not to respond to the consultation and that the changes did not concern them. However local residents to the rear of HGH did engage attending a drop in session at Hexham hospital with Senior Officers and submitted 19 of the 23 surveys.

Key to the consultation process is the support from the main Community Groups in Hexham and the West Area Committee who all support the proposal but both made comment about traffic congestion and noise issues. There were also positive points from the website survey returns with a greater percentage of respondents in support on several of the issues raised with 69.5% supporting the move to the hospital site.

However it should be noted that there was also a small minority whom identified concerns which the Service have taken on board and consider it has a reasonable position in making its decision to proceed with the proposal. These concerns have been considered and addressed in the previous section during the decision making process.

In essence the Service considers the re-location to meet NFRS service delivery needs and also to work in conjunction with services has greater benefits than causes for concern. Therefore the following actions have been implemented when considering delivery of the proposal and planning submission;

1. A traffic survey carried out in accordance with Planning submission requirements; and
2. Further time analysis for responding crews and appropriate risk assessments;
3. The overall site strategy and development is assessed for viability to redesign and reverse the egress and route for blue light emergency vehicles the opposite way and discharge onto Corbridge Road.

In accordance with the these actions NCC has taken the views of the public on board and consider the value of points highlighted by residents in the community and of the Town Council and West Area Committee. In the first instance there being support for providing fit for purpose premises and maintaining a Community Fire Station in Hexham. However it is also cognisant of the potential impact on local residents and Hexham in terms of responding to incidents via Maidens Walk which could cause light and noise pollution. This feedback has been crucial to the service and NCC in analysing its proposal and making changes to how it will progress the scheme.

Therefore to meet highlighted issues the scheme has been amended to reduce impact on local residents. This is being achieved by altering the proposed access and egress to and from the site. In essence vehicles will access the site via Maidens Walk and respond to incidents via the internal road to Dene Avenue, the same way ambulances do at present. This will negate appliances responding onto Maidens Walk with blue lights and potentially using sirens.

The decision to change has been subject to assessment by senior fire officers of the service who considers it suitable to provide essential emergency cover and prevention work. There has also been a traffic survey to analyse the traffic issues which supports this proposal with the service also carrying out comparative 'run times' for crews responding to incidents which highlights the changes are appropriate to managing and responding to emergency incidents in Hexham and surrounding area.

**The consultation exercise has taken appropriate steps to engage and assess public, staff and community group opinions in making its decision. Having now completed the consultation exercise and evaluated the results it is considered that the proposed scheme of re-location is in the best interests of the communities it serves and the needs of NFRS and the Authority provided the changes incorporate the amended scheme.**

**It is therefore recommended that, in light of the positive outcome of the consultation exercise and taking on board highlighted issues from the public, Area West committee and Hexham Town Council, the Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director of Place seek the necessary approvals to progress the development of the Community Fire Station at Hexham General Hospital through the Planning process.**