

St Athan Community Welfare Interest Group Project Team Response March, 2009

Overview

This document provides a record of the questions asked and comments made during the 'question and answer' breakout sessions at the Community Welfare Interest Group held at RAF St Athan Golf Club on Wednesday 4 March, 2009.

The project team's responses follow each question and/or comment.

Security and Access

What's happening to the East Gate?

There are no plans to use exit gate as a main entrance, however it is likely to be retained in some form for use by vehicles accessing Castleton Field Training area.

Where will the post office be located/what's happening to the existing post office?

The sorting office will be relocated from the site to a more suitable location. It was originally located on the base due to the fact that so much of the areas post was intended for base personnel. This is obviously no longer the case and will continue to be even following MoD St Athan's redevelopment. However, a counter service is likely to be retained for trainees.

I'm concerned about noise at Castleton Farm and the impact this could have on adjoining owners.

Metrix and the MoD are already working closely with the Vale to ensure that the activities that will take place on the Field Training Area comply with current regulations regarding acceptable noise levels.

The number of people using the FTA at anyone time will not exceed 100. Tracked vehicles, such as tanks, will not be used. This in itself will help ensure the level of noise does not reach unacceptable levels.

Metrix and the MoD are keen to ensure a long term positive relationship with their neighbours within the community and are working hard to ensure that any potential for disruption, such as through noise, is kept to a minimum.

Will construction traffic use Eglwys Brewis Road?

The objective is to complete the Northern Access Road as early on in the construction process as possible but there will be a period of approximately 12 months when construction traffic will need to use the existing Eglwys Brewis Road.

However, this will be a period of less intensive construction so vehicle movements will be fewer. As the construction programme builds and vehicle movements increase, the new Northern Access Road will have been completed.

What will happen to the footpath across the Field Training Area?

The footpath would remain and the public would continue to have access to this right of way.

Health and safety is obviously paramount. However, the MoD has several sites where training takes place on a much larger scale than anything that would take place at St Athan, has an excellent public safety record and in these instances the public have access to many parts of the site.

During training exercises, security would be very high to ensure the public did not stray into prohibited areas. Other health and safety measures include strict protocols on the retrieval of all ordnance once training exercises have been completed.

What activities will take place on the Field Training Area? Are we going to have Salisbury Plain on our doorstep?

The Field Training Area will be used for low level/intensity military training. Accordingly, activities will not be anywhere near on the same scale as those that take place on Salisbury Plain.

There will be strict regulations governing the types and scale of activity that will take place on the FTA. For example, the maximum number of people who will use the FTA at anyone time cannot exceed 100 and tracked vehicles, such as tanks, will not be used.

How often will the Field Training Area be in use and at what times of day?

The Field Training Area will predominantly be used during the working week. It will only be used on 12 weekends during the year.

Activities will predominantly be daytime based but there will be nighttime activities. As live operations can often take place at night, practicing in these conditions is an essential part of military training.

However, nighttime training will be carefully controlled and will predominantly include types of exercises where noise and light are kept to a minimum and therefore nearby residents will not be disturbed.

Will live ammunition be used in training exercises?

In training exercises, such as those that would take place on the Field Training Area, only blank ammunition would be used.

There will be a small arms range on the Picketston part of the site where live ammunition is used. Practicing with live ammunition is an essential part of maintaining basic military skills. The firing range will be within a highly secure area and the MoD follows strict protocols both in the use and storage of live ammunition to ensure health and safety remains paramount.

How Will the Field Training Area be accessed?

The FTA will be accessed using the existing track directly from Cowbridge Road.

What will students do in the evening? Local facilities will be overwhelmed when they are not in lessons.

The MoD has a duty of care to its students and the surrounding community which extends beyond the traditional working day when formal training takes place. A range of facilities, including sports and leisure facilities, a pub, shop and communal areas where students can relax and socialise, are all provided on site. These facilities will provide entertainment for students and help keep them occupied in the evenings.

I'm concerned about students causing problems in the evening - what's being done to prevent this?

St Athan has a long history with the MoD and training has taken place at this site since 1938. Over these years, an extremely strong and positive relationship has been established with the community. In recent years, there have been all but a handful of incidents involving MoD students. All of these have been minor and were dealt with promptly by the MoD.

The students who will attend the DTC will all be largely undertaking stage two training. This is the next stage beyond basic military training and allows students to focus in more specialised areas. The students attending the DTC will be experienced professionals committed to developing skills and furthering their career in the military.

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It should also be remembered that this is an MoD establishment. Not only is discipline an integral part of a students training, but the MoD is able to exercise considerably more control over its students comings and goings than, say, would be possible at a public technical college.

With the redevelopment of St Athan, the MoD is confident that its long standing and positive relationship with the community will continue. Indeed, with the opportunities created by the development, it is anticipated that this relationship will grow even stronger.

Will the Technical College be used to train overseas military personnel?

The MoD takes care to ensure that government foreign policy is reflected in the selection of the foreign students it trains. The Armed Forces has a long tradition of delivering military training to foreign students and it is likely that this arrangement will continue at the DTC.

Employment

Why are employment figures coming down?

Given the size and complexity of this project, predicting exactly how many new jobs would be created and how many would be filled by existing employees has always been difficult. For example, with regards to trainers at the DTC, we will not know exactly how many will transfer across from other sites until further on in the process – ultimately, this decision is down to the individual. In addition, some stories in the press have used figures from unofficial sources which has caused further confusion.

Presently, we estimate that the construction phase (from 2010-2014) will generate 1,200 employment opportunities at its peak, 80 per cent of which are anticipated to be filled by a local/regional workforce. The Defence Technical College will directly employ approximately 2,400 people in both military and civilian roles, the majority of which will be advertised on the open market. The Aerospace Business Park could potentially provide over 2,000 further jobs in the area. These figures do not take into account wider opportunities that will be generated across the supply chain.

The community will not benefit from the jobs that are available.

We want to encourage the employment of local people wherever possible and will do this in a number of ways. For example, we intend to work closely with Jobcentre Plus to ensure that local job hunters are made aware of the opportunities on offer.

In addition, we will set up a 'job shop' on site to provide information about the jobs available during the construction phase of the project. We also plan to use a mobile 'job shop' to tour the Vale and promote the employment opportunities to the wider community.

What will be done to train local people so they have the skills needed to compete for the jobs?

All parties involved in both the ABP and DTC are already working closely with WAG's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) to manage relationships with the leading academic institutions in South Wales including UWIC, Cardiff University, Barry College and the University of Glamorgan.

I'm concerned about employment opportunities for younger persons and disabled people.

For the majority of job opportunities available, e.g. training and support roles, disability will not be a barrier. The key requirement of these roles will be that any applicants have the necessary skills. 'Social Clauses' will be built into the necessary legal frameworks to ensure that all people are included in job requirements and recruitment.

The construction jobs will be given to migrant workers.

Similar construction projects in Cardiff (for example St David's 2) have not experienced this and we expect around 80 per cent of the necessary construction labour to be recruited from across South Wales and within daily commuting distances.

Why are WAG using green field sites for the ABP and how many green field acres have been acquired?

The footprint of the site was identified in the Development Brief in 2006 and the boundary for the scheme has not changed. Market experts have advised that a successful Aerospace Park development requires specific facilities to be sustainable and to maximise on employment opportunities. The site has been split to offer airside (i.e. compass swing and engine test pen) and non-airside operations and to limit traffic crossing the runway.

The area of land at Batslays Farm that is currently outside MoD St Athan but which will form part of ABP South is 12 hectares (30 acres).

Housing

What is this new pocket of housing to the west? It was not on the original plan shown to the public in the July 2008 exhibition?

The third area of Service Families Accommodation to the west will consist of 169 properties. The site was selected after careful consideration and in line with a number of key criteria that have been applied to all the sites identified for SFA, these include:

- A desire to protect existing housing developments around the site
- Selection of sites that minimise any increased pressure upon the transport network by ensuring they are close to the DTC and therefore minimise journey times and encourage alternative forms of transport such as walking and cycling
- It lies within the development boundary in the approved St Athan Development Brief.

I'm worried that views from Llanmaes will be obscured by the new SFA housing.

We will reconsider the look of the site's boundary and will consider the possibility of using natural hedgerows to provide a green edge.

Will the new development exacerbate flooding in the area?

Whilst we cannot solve all the problems of flooding in the local area, we can confirm we will not make the situation any worse and we'll continue to work with the Environment Agency Wales to assess the issues, both current and associated with the entire development and not just the housing.

For example, the runoff from areas of the development will be managed on-site using the principles of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). SuDS are features such as ponds and lagoons that are sized to hold runoff from a development's roads, car parks and roofs during a rainfall event and then release it slowly at a much lower rate after a rainfall event.

Why haven't you bought back the old SFA housing was sold off?

This was not a viable option. However, we will be utilising existing, vacant SFA units and these will provide 70 of required new SFA units.

Why can't you use empty new build flats in Cardiff, Rhose and Barry instead of building new housing?

This was considered but we have been guided by the need to be as sustainable as possible and minimise travel distances to and from the site. Cardiff lies outside the acceptable daily travel distance to the site. Barry is on its outer limits of acceptable daily travel distances, and more local provision will help to minimise impacts on the transport network.

Will local housing associations be involved in the provision of new housing?

The housing required for the Defence Technical College is for MoD personnel only and therefore will not be provided for in the open market. This is not to say that the housing will not be sold at a later date throughout the life of the college. The MoD will competitively procure the SFA housing which will be constructed to MoD standards and density. Housing Associations may submit expressions of interest to deliver the housing in the same way as general house builders; however they will not be invited to construct standard "affordable" housing.

Will there be access to the primary school from the golf course SFA site?

We will consider how we can help to ensure that safe routes to the school are provided from the new SFA site.

The new Northern Access Road will carve up the local landscape and will cause light pollution. Why can't you just widen Eglwys Brewis Road or use the entrance at West Gate?

The main access to the Defence Technical College will be via a new access road and junction built from the B4265. This will ensure that traffic to and from the site is provided with direct and separate access onto the main road and will inhibit traffic movements through St Athan village.

The existing Eglwys Brewis Road, where it comes off of the B4265 and runs west adjacent to West Camp, would not be able to cope with the increase in traffic that is predicted. This stretch of road is also particularly poor and unsafe for cyclists and pedestrians.

Detailed studies have concluded that the existing stretch of road cannot be sufficiently improved to make it suitable and safe for the predicted number of vehicles primarily due to the sensitive nature of the river valley adjacent. Accordingly, a new Northern Access Road will be created. This will move traffic away from the existing Eglwys Brewis road and will have the added benefit of making the existing road safer for cyclists and pedestrians.

We have looked at the possibility of using the West Camp entrance in partnership with the MoD but there are issues regarding security and site sterilisation that would make this impossible.

The current road alignment of the northern access road doesn't allow for caravan access to the caravan park - units are 12ft wide.

Thank you for raising this. We will take it into consideration.

Can some of the local rat runs be marked as access only?

At present, this is not something we are considering. However, we recognise that rat runs do cause problems in the local area.

In the redevelopment of St Athan, the transport strategy is based on an approach designed to avoid putting any further pressure on existing rat runs whilst making the agreed specified route as attractive as possible to motorists.

This will be achieved through a combination of road design and layout, and will include, for example, improvement works to St Athan Junction, the B4265 road at Gileston Old Mill and the Weycock Cross roundabout and will help ensure the classified road network is able to cope with increases in traffic at peak times.