

Site of London's new fire control centre announced

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Local Government Minister John Healey announced today (17 October) that London's new highly resilient fire control centre will be located in Merton Industrial Estate, Morden, in the London Borough of Merton.

Communities and Local Government has worked in close collaboration with London's fire authority on the project.

The new Brigade emergency call handling centre will be part of a resilient national network of nine fire and rescue service emergency call handling centres in England. These will start to go live in 2009 and be fully operational by 2011. This is part of a major Government investment in equipping the fire and rescue service for the demands of the 21st century, which range from natural, industrial and man-made disasters to climate change.

Nine control centres will replace the existing 46 local fire service control rooms across the country. The announcement of the location of the London site puts the final piece of the network into place. Given the capital's particular requirements and also the need for world class systems to be in place for the 2012 Olympics it is particularly important that Firecontrol is delivered in partnership between Government and the London Fire Brigade.

Announcing that the London Control Centre will be based in Morden, in the London Borough of Merton, Local Government Minister and Co-Chair of the London Resilience Forum John Healey said:

"The Government's top priority is protecting the public and increasing the nation's resilience. That's why we are investing in the new national network of regional control centres.

"These will provide the fire and rescue service with a modern, effective control and mobilisation system that will better protect the public. The network will deliver a service that is resilient and capable of responding to anything from a small house fire to a large scale national emergency.

"There is a compelling need to improve the existing control rooms in England to deal with the increasing range of large scale incidents - from terrorist attacks to floods - that the fire and rescue service faces. Emergency call handling systems need to be up to the challenge. In 2005 we announced the locations of 8 of the new Regional Control Centres. I am pleased to announce the location of London's Regional Control Centre which completes the picture and provides the country with the world class service it deserves. "

London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority Chair Valerie Shawcross said:

"London already has a first-class emergency fire call handling centre run by highly dedicated and professional staff, but we recognise the benefits that the introduction of new technology and improved resilience can bring. This new control centre will give us a secure place in a national system so London can have strong fall back arrangements and support other UK fire and rescue services if necessary."

Morden was chosen taking into account factors such as accessibility (for both people and services), demographics, vulnerability to threats such as flooding and suitability for development.

The Regional Control Centres are due to become operational in batches of three between 2009 and 2011. Mike Forster, Development Director at Easter said:

"Easter Group and Morley Fund Management are delighted that the Department for Communities and Local Government have chosen to locate the London Fire and Rescue Control Centre in Morden. The decision to locate this important new facility here reflects the quality of the location and environment, providing excellent communications and transport facilities for FireControl.

"Easter look forward to working closely with the FiReControl project team on this the second collaboration between Easter Group, Morley Fund Management and FiReControl. Easter and Morley Fund Management are currently constructing the South East Regional Centre at Kite's Croft, Fareham with practical completion due in May 2008."

The FiReControl project will bring the following benefits which are not currently available throughout the country:

- The London RCC will be networked to the other 8 centres - and they will be able to automatically back up each other in times of increased call pressure or failure. The control rooms will be a fully modern facility, supported by modern technology and databases;
- Wherever you are calling from will be known - the location of a member of the public calling by telephone for help will be identified automatically saving time;
- Satellite positioning equipment will tell the control centre computers which fire appliance(s) including New Dimension assets are closest to the incident in terms of travel time and with the correct equipment on board;
- The control centre technology will enable staff to mobilise the nearest available appliance(s) quickly, using data-transmission, not voice messages;
- Firefighters mobilised to the incident will have data terminals in their vehicles. These will be constantly updated, giving them a wide range of information in a standard format, including:
 - details of known risks and hazards in the building and/or the locality;
 - floor plans and access details, where appropriate;
 - the location of the nearest hydrants and water supplies;
 - relevant standard operating procedures for the type of incident concerned - e.g. how to deal with particular types of chemical or on how to dismantle particular types of car.
- A map showing the quickest route to the incident, taking into account the latest information on traffic conditions, road closures, etc (using specialist SATNAV technology).

The locations of the other 8 sites are:

- Cambridge Research Park, Cambridge
- Belmont Business Park, Durham
- Lingley Mere Business Park, Great Sanki, Warrington, Cheshire
- Willow Farm Business Park, Castle Donnington, Leicestershire
- Paragon Business Village, Wakefield, West Yorkshire
- Wolverhampton Business Park, Wolverhampton
- Blackbrook Business Park, Taunton, Somerset
- Kite's Croft Business Park, Fareham, Hampshire

The FiReControl project is primarily about increasing public safety and improving the nation's resilience. By investing in accommodation, technology and business change every Fire and Rescue Service across the country will have access to control centre facilities with the same advanced levels of technology and integral back up. This will improve the fire and rescue service's ability to manage response to emergency calls, during both major incidents and also more routine responses.

The FiReControl project was initiated following an independent review of fire and rescue control rooms by Mott MacDonald. The Government published this report in December 2003 and consulted widely on its recommendations. The project forms part of the National Framework for the Fire and Rescue Service which sets the objectives the Government expects the service to achieve. Copies of the framework and the Mott MacDonald report are available on the Communities Local Government website.

The new Fire and Rescue Control Centres will be the result of over a year of intensive research and planning. Every part of the buildings has been designed to meet fire control needs and to provide staff with a high quality, secure and attractive place to work. The buildings will fit in with their local surroundings and meet or exceed environmental standards. The new control centres will be at the forefront of architectural design, exceeding many current health and safety, disability access and fire safety requirements. Control staff from across the country, at all levels, have contributed to the design process by making it clear what is important to them. As a result, the centres will be places which support control staff in delivering an excellent service to the public.

An artist's impression and photos of how the sites will look are available from the FiReControl website www.firecontrol.communities.gov.uk. Further information on the FiReControl project is available on the CLG website