

Agenda Item No. 15(b)

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY Annual General Meeting – 12 July 2006

Support for RAF Cosford

1. **Purpose of the report**
To build on the agreement made on 5th April for the WMLGA and WMRA to have a more active role in supporting RAF Cosford as the location for a new defence training 'supersite' and report action to date.
2. **Recommendation**
That Assembly support for the bid to develop RAF Cosford as a defence training supersite, including actions to date and further activity as indicated in this report be endorsed.
3. **Report Details**
 - 3.1 At the WMRA and WMLGA meetings on 5th April there was agreement to provide more active support for the bid to develop RAF Cosford as a MOD training 'supersite', which is in direct competition to a bid for the St Athan site in South Wales. The MOD decision on the bids has been put back until the Autumn so there is continuing opportunity to promote the West Midlands proposal.
 - 3.2 This was agreed although there were some concerns expressed about the possible prejudicial implications of the Assembly supporting a major project where there was a possibility or likelihood of the Assembly as Regional Planning Body having at some stage to deal with a related planning issue.
 - 3.3 There is universal agreement that the Assembly's Planning Role should not prevent it from fulfilling its role as a regional voice and therefore expressing opinions on regionally significant developments. The issue is how best to represent and operate the separation of functions. This general issue is dealt with in the previous report on the agenda.
 - 3.4 Pending finalisation of this position, the simplest form of action is for those members with formal roles in the planning conformity process refraining from engagement in any Assembly discussions or debate, if necessary by leaving the meeting.
 - 3.5 In relation to the Cosford campaign, the WMRA Board, whilst mindful of the above issues, has determined to be much more proactive. They were particularly concerned to seek to 'draw a line' with regard to the West Midlands Region losing out on major projects or initiatives. Initial activity on behalf of WMRA/WMLGA has focused on contact with AWM to establish how we can support/enhance their work.
 - 3.6 Subsequently therefore the Chairman has written to all MPs in the region to inform them of the Assembly's support and seek their

active involvement in supporting the Cosford bid. A copy of that letter is appended. We have received a number of responses either indicating support and/or confirming action already taken by individual MPs.

- 3.7 One response did however question the benefits of the Cosford development outside of Shropshire. This highlights the need to explain more specifically why the Cosford development is regionally significant and will, either directly or indirectly benefit all parts of the region. A short briefing note will be produced for common use in this respect.
- 3.8 In addition a press release has been issued declaring the Assembly's support for Cosford and the Chair has written to the relevant Defence Minister to emphasise the regional importance of the Cosford bid. Following the recent government reshuffle this Minister is now Tom Watson, a West Bromwich MP. Whilst he will clearly need to reflect impartiality in assessing the two bids the potential, or at least perceived, geographical bias towards the St Athen bid has been removed. (the previous Minister was an MP for a constituency near St Athen)
- 3.9 AWM are extremely pleased the Assembly has actively joined the Lets Fly Cosford' campaign and the Assembly logo is now included on the Cosford web site as a supporting organisation. Promotional information will be distributed at the Regional stand at the national LGA Conference in Bournemouth at the beginning of July. We will liaise further with AWM to agree what further activity the Assembly can undertake to support the latter stages of the campaign
- 3.10 This might include senior people around the region, particularly in local authorities, formally endorsing the value of the Cosford proposal outside of the local or sub-regional context. Also that a number of senior colleagues be sought to act as champions for RAF Cosford including dealings with media and MPs etc. Assembly members and constituent bodies should promote Cosford at every appropriate opportunity eg with meetings with MPs, MoD Ministers or Civil Servants. It is important that, collectively, the region reflects a level of passion for this matter.
- 3.11 Information packs containing copies of all promotional material relating to the Lets Fly Cosford Campaign have been obtained from AWM. Copies will be available at the AGM.
- 3.12 Representatives from AWM's 'Let's Fly Cosford' working group are available to carry out individual briefings with any Leaders/Chief Executives/members who would like to have a more in depth discussion about any elements of the campaign.

Stephen Hind
Senior Director and Company Secretary