

# 'Major milestone' for the defence college

## Preparations to start before main project

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EARLY work on the Defence Technical College at St Athan will begin shortly, after the Ministry of Defence awarded the £29m contract to the Metrix Consortium.

Metrix, which is in charge of the development of the £13bn project in the Vale of Glamorgan, has announced it will carry out preliminary work on the site, preparing it for the construction of the college.

The move comes despite a recent Government statement indicating that a final decision on whether to give the full go-ahead for the academy is unlikely to be taken before the general election.

Preliminary work will involve moving an RAF training school, carry out preparatory work, as well as ensuring protected wildlife on the site is taken away before full building work begins.

The multi-billion-pound scheme, which would centralise all UK armed forces training at St Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan, represents the biggest ever single Government investment in Wales.

But although a consortium was chosen to deliver the Defence Training Review (DTR) Private Finance Initiative scheme nearly three years ago, there have been delays and questions over whether the plans represent value for money.

The early works programme is due for completion in March 2011.

Jim Morrison, chief executive of Metrix, said: "This is a very graphic statement by the MoD, it's costing £29m and it is causing disruption to people on site. The fact this is being driven forward speaks volumes.

"This is a major milestone for the DTR project. Agreement of the early works funding is a significant step forward in the delivery of DTR Package 1."

Wayne David, Under-Secretary of State for Wales, said: "This Government has always shown 100% support for the St Athan project, which will be the single biggest UK Government investment Wales has ever received and will bring thousands of jobs to the Vale of Glamorgan."

Vale of Glamorgan MP John Smith said: "This is great news for the Welsh economy and shows yet again this Government's commitment to the future of St Athan.

"I want people here in the Vale of Glamorgan to know that this Government has no intention of turning its back on this part of Wales. That's why the Government has underwritten more than £110m of essential works linked with the St Athan project. This is a major milestone which takes us closer to the delivery of the project at St Athan."

## A big scheme – not without problems

■ THE £13bn project to build a Defence Technical College in St Athan was first announced in 2007.

The scheme, which was awarded to Wales after intense political lobbying and an Echo campaign, is the nation's biggest single investment ever and will create some 6,000

jobs. But the development, which was approved by councillors last September, has not been without its problems.

Just days after the multi-billion-pound college was officially approved by councillors in 2009, residents formed a campaign group to ensure their

views would be heard, and hundreds of residents signed a petition against major roadworks planned for the site.

Then, earlier this month, the Government suggested a decision on the project's final go-ahead would not be made until after the general election.



Jim Morrison, chief executive of Metrix; left, what the defence academy could look like. PICTURE: Richard Swales/DA

