

**REVIEW OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION IN FENLAND**

*To:* **Children and Young People's Committee**

*Meeting Date:* **17 January 2017**

*From:* **The Executive Director of Children, Families and Adults Services**

*Electoral division(s):* **All County Council electoral divisions within the district of Fenland**

*Forward Plan ref:* **2017/014**                      *Key decision:*      **Yes**

*Purpose:* **The purpose of this paper is to:**

- **present the outcome of the phase 2 consultation on a review of secondary school provision in the Fenland District;**
- **inform the Committee about the additional site evaluation work undertaken to identify a preferred site for a new secondary school in Wisbech; and**
- **give an opportunity to review the original proposals made by the Committee on 9 February 2016**

*Recommendation:* **The Committee is asked to endorse the conclusions of the phase 2 consultation:**

- a) **to provide a new secondary school in Wisbech in response to the identified need for additional places for children aged 11-16 year either on land east of the Town, North and South of Sandy Lane or land to the north west of the Town at Dowgate Road allotments subject to completion of a more detailed feasibility study;**
- b) **to make provision in the capital programme of £23m in 2019/20 for a new secondary school in Wisbech to open in September 2020;**
- c) **to approve officers working with the Brooke Weston Trust as the sponsor of the Thomas Clarkson Academy (TCA) to manage the potential demand for the additional places needed in Wisbech prior to the opening of the new secondary school in the Town;**

- (d) to make provision in the capital programme for the one form of entry (FE) (150 place) expansion of both Cromwell Community College, Chatteris and Sir Harry Smith Community, Whittlesey in response to the anticipated rising demand for places within their respective catchment areas.
- (e) to make the provision of a new secondary school in March dependent on the major housing allocation sites identified in the Local Plan coming forward.

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 There are four secondary schools in Fenland; The Neale Wade Academy (March), Thomas Clarkson Academy (TCA) (Wisbech), Sir Harry Smith Community College (Whittlesey) and Cromwell Community College (Chatteris). The rural nature of the Fenland District means that there is a distance of between 6-13 miles separating each school (measured in a straight line). There is presently some spare secondary school capacity across the district. Most of this is concentrated in one school; the TCA in Wisbech. However, there is evidence of increased demand for places at the school as more applications for year 7 places were received than were available based upon its Published Admission Number (PAN) of 240 of 8 forms of entry (FE) in 2016.
- 1.2 Phase 1 of the current review of secondary education in Fenland began in 2013/14 prompted by;
  - Recent demographic change (the population of the District has grown by 13.9% to 95,300 since 2001)
  - Rising numbers of pupils being accommodated in the Council's primary schools who will age through into the secondary sector
  - The proposed levels of housing development (11,000 homes across the District in the period up to 2031) included in the Fenland Local Plan which was adopted in 2014.
- 1.3 In anticipation of the need to provide additional secondary school capacity in the District the phase 1 review included an extensive search in both Wisbech and March for sites suitable for a secondary school.
- 1.4 A wide ranging consultation was undertaken with key stakeholders and a background information paper "Demographic Pressures on Primary School Places in Fenland" was prepared to support our discussions with local councillors, schools and their governing trusts, neighbouring local authorities (Lincolnshire and Norfolk) Fenland District Council and individual town and parish councils.
- 1.5 On 9 February 2016, the Children and Young People (CYP) Committee considered the impact of demographic change, the results of the site search work and the views expressed during the (phase 1) consultation.
- 1.6 The Committee made the following recommendations which formed the basis for a second consultation to be undertaken in the Autumn term 2016:
  - (a) A new secondary school should be established in Wisbech
  - (b) The General Purposes Committee should be requested to authorise the acquisition of the site currently in the ownership of the College of West Anglia (adjacent to Meadowgate School), subject to the conclusion of satisfactory terms for acquisition and due diligence (see attached plan appendix 1). Although in recognising the results of the early site search work the Committee did express significant reservations over its suitability on the following grounds:

- The inadequacy of the current transport and access arrangements in the vicinity and the potential cost of the highway infrastructure required to mitigate the impacts of a secondary school in this location
  - Its proximity to (TCA)
  - Residents of the Town and the surrounding villages alike were likely to find a secondary school located in either the north or the west of Wisbech more accessible and more attractive as a choice of school
- (c) Work to continue towards identifying a preferred site in March should further additional secondary school capacity be required towards the end of the Local Plan period in 2031.
- (d) The financial provision made in the Children, Families and Adults capital programme (£23m in 2019/20) for a new secondary school in Wisbech should be reviewed on an annual basis given the uncertainties about demographic change and timing outlined in the report.
- 1.7 Although not formal recommendations, the need for the modest expansion of the two secondary schools serving Chatteris and Whittlesey in response to the lower levels of housing growth proposed in these two towns formed part of the phase 1 conclusions.
- 1.8 The Committee wanted to be re-assured before making a final decision regarding the CWA site that no better alternative sites were available within Wisbech. The phase 2 review consultation detailed below sought to address this particular comment in addition to seeking views on the Committee's recommendations.

## **2. MAIN ISSUES**

### **2.1 The Phase 2 Consultation**

- 2.1.1 This was undertaken between 6<sup>th</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016. The consultation paper (attached as appendix 2) was distributed to key stakeholders including, but not limited to, local councillors, neighbouring local education authorities, Fenland District Council and parish councils, parents and carers of children attending the secondary schools and their partner primary schools, those schools and, where appropriate, their respective academy trusts. It was also placed on the Council's website and gained periodic coverage in the local media and via a twitter feed.
- 2.1.2 Smart Survey, an online survey software and questionnaire tool was used to collate the responses.

2.1.3. The questions posed reflected the proposals made by this Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> February and sought to gauge the level of support, or otherwise, for them. In particular, given the reservations of the Committee about the CWA site for a secondary school in Wisbech, the consultation not only sought to establish the level of support or opposition towards it but also asked respondents whether they believed there were any better alternatives available locally.

#### 2.1.4 **Consultation Outcomes**

2.1.5 A total of 107 responses were received, of which 24 were only partially completed. All key stakeholder groups were represented. The largest response group were individual members of the local community (43) followed by parents and carers of school aged children (17).

2.1.6. The key outcomes are set out below:

- 71.6% of respondents supported the proposal to establish a new secondary school in Wisbech
- 79.7% of respondents opposed establishing a new secondary school on the CWA site.
- Delaying the provision of a new secondary school in March pending the delivery of substantial new housing development was endorsed by 55.8% of respondents.
- The proposal to make a modest expansion to existing secondary school provision in Chatteris and Whittlesey when required received the support of 75.7% of respondents.

2.1. Significant written comments were also received from Fenland District Council and the Brooke Weston Trust. These comments are summarised in the “Fenland Secondary Review – Phase 2 Consultation Outcomes” attached as appendix 3.

## 2.2 **The Opening Date for a New School**

2.2.1 There are already more Year 7 aged children living in the catchment area of the TCA than there are places available based upon the school’s current PAN of 240 or 8FE. By 2024, based upon the ageing through of existing pupil age group cohorts, there is an in-catchment forecast shortfall of 247 Year 7 places which equates to approximately 8FE.(refer to graph in appendix 4)

2.2.2 This basic need case was accepted by this Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2016. The need for a new school has been re-affirmed by the support received from the respondents to the phase 2 consultation.

2.2.3 Although the long term need for a new secondary school in Wisbech is not at issue, as the graph in appendix 4 demonstrates there is a need to consider carefully when it should open to ensure that there is a year 7 cohort of sufficient size to secure its viability and that of the TCA.

2.2.4 The following factors need to be taken into account in determining when that secondary school should open:

- There are already a sufficient number of pupils living in the catchment area to ensure both TCA’s and the new school’s viability. The total number of year 7 pupils within the catchment are forecast to rise from 406

in 2015 to 487 in 2024. The largest cohort is 498 in 2023.

- It is unlikely that the current trends and pattern of preference will continue as the alternative schools that pupils from Wisbech currently attend, particularly Marshlands in Norfolk and Neale Wade Academy in March are experiencing place planning pressures of their own. This could add another 60 (2FE) pupils to the trend forecast (green line in the graph in appendix 4) by 2020.
- Whilst house building rates in Wisbech have fallen below those indicated in the Fenland Local Plan, the District Council's housing land supply forecast anticipates the building of a further 575 houses over the next 4 years to 2020/21. Using the mid-point of the Council's standard multiplier this would generate a further 115 secondary age pupils translating into 23 pupils per year group. Again, this will push the green line in the graph higher (appendix 4).

2.2.5 The provision of the permanent accommodation required for a new secondary school, coupled with the need to identify and acquire a site (see section 2.3 below) cannot be achieved earlier than September 2020

2.2.6 The Brooke Weston Trust, as sponsors of the TCA, indicated in its consultation response that it would be prepared to expand and admit pupils above its current PAN of 240 in response to the increasing demand for places in the Town once the current changes being made to improve standards at the TCA become firmly embedded. Its operational capacity based on that PAN is 1200 pupils aged 11-15, however, it was constructed with the physical capacity to accommodate 1500 pupils (10FE) of this age. The difference results in part from the extension of the school's age range to include sixth form provision. Therefore, some investment would be required in dedicated sixth form accommodation if additional 11-15 places were to be offered at TCA. This would need to be agreed with the sponsoring trust but the level of investment should not be significant as post 16 numbers are forecast to be small (between 70 and 80) over this period.

2.2.7 This would provide a possible interim solution for managing the demand for places that will exist prior to the opening of any new secondary school.

### 2.3 **Preferred Sites for a New Secondary School**

2.3.1 The following alternative sites were suggested as possible locations for a secondary school during the phase 2 consultation:

- Allotment land on Dowgate which is in the west of the town and is currently in the ownership of the Town Council
- Farmland on Broad End Rd West about 500m from the A47
- Land to the south of Tesco, Cromwell Road, Wisbech

2.3.2 In addition, discussions with Fenland District Council confirmed that it recognises the need for this essential public infrastructure and will be more flexible in its consideration of potential sites for a school and the subsequent planning applications required. This approach also recognises the aspiration to achieve higher levels of development and regeneration in Wisbech, through initiatives such as the Garden Towns Programme, and not restrict the consideration of sites solely to the planning framework set out in the current

## Local Plan.

- 2.3.3 The three new sites together with the 8 sites previously evaluated in the phase 1 review have, therefore, been re-evaluated within this revised planning context. Additional highways advice has also been sought given the concerns expressed previously by this Committee about the CWA site. A list of the potential sites considered is attached as appendix 5.
- 2.3.4 The identification of a suitable site of approximately 20 acres is a challenging proposition given limited 'on-market' availability and remaining current uncertainty over the deliverability and viability of anticipated growth in the town with its required infrastructure improvements. These factors coupled with significant areas of the town and its hinterland being at a heightened risk of flooding and the need to provide for balanced secondary catchment areas, mean that practical target areas for a suitable location are limited and all sites that have been identified have hurdles to be overcome or compromises to be made.
- 2.3.5 Primary areas for growth are identified to the East and West of the town and some consented and planned growth also exists to the southern periphery within Norfolk. All growth areas are challenged by enhanced infrastructure requirements which impact upon their viability and deliverability. In the East these requirements may be more limited than the West where access and trunk road improvements represent the primary infrastructure costs
- 2.3.6 In the West the major growth and its viability is predicated on creating a new link road and River Nene crossing and the development of a rail infrastructure link and route to March in the longer term. In addition:
- areas to the West of the Nene are largely at high risk of flood, which presents the potential for increasing build costs and;
  - require a comprehensive approach to be taken to spatial planning although FDC does recognise that some incremental development may prove necessary to deliver much needed housing.
- 2.3.7 Whilst much remains uncertain in both growth areas it does appear, in the shorter term, that viability and deliverability is perhaps more likely to be achieved in the East unless significant sources of external finance can be identified in the West.
- 2.3.8 However, set against this, perhaps the most desirable location in the long term to balance secondary provision would be a location towards the West as this would better cater for:
- the existing catchment (including the surrounding villages)
  - the proportion of pupils who continue to choose to attend schools outside of the Wisbech Area, particularly those in Lincolnshire
  - the most sizeable housing growth if this were able to be delivered.
- 2.3.9 Given this context, the recommended acquisition strategy is to seek to agree terms for options to purchase, conditional on planning permission, for a minimum of two sites focused on (or adjacent to) areas where growth is planned and anticipated. This will enable further feasibility work to be undertaken and provide alternatives over the course of 2017 while awaiting greater clarity on the practicalities of delivering growth, the Garden Town Programme, the funding required and the timing and sources of it.

The two preferred sites recommended for acquisition options are:-

- Site 10 - The Dowgate Allotments and neighbouring farmland (either in private ownership or the ownership of the Church Commissioners)
- Site 2 - Land to the South of Sandy Lane, Walsoken

2.3.10 The full development potential of preferred sites for a secondary school will only be known once more detailed feasibility on these are undertaken. However, some of the initial constraints and issues associated with them have been established through the site search work. These are set out in more detail in the matrix attached as appendix 5.

2.3.12 Further work on identifying a suitable site in March will be concluded next year.

## 2.4 **Conclusion**

2.4.1 The phase 2 consultation demonstrates that the proposal for a new secondary school in Wisbech has widespread support and that there remains a strong needs based case. On the basis of the information available officers' judgement is that an opening date of September 2020 would be both appropriate and deliverable.

2.4.2 It has also been possible to respond to concern from a range of stakeholders about the CWA site which had been identified as the Council's preferred site, albeit with reservations. On the basis of the further site evaluation work the sites at Dowgate and Sandy Lane are being recommended as the Council's current preferences and should attract greater local support.

2.4.2 Prior to the opening of the new school in Wisbech the Council will need to agree an investment plan with the Brooke Weston Trust to deliver the additional places needed for 11-15 year olds in the intervening period at TCA.

2.4.3. There was strong support for the proposals for the limited expansion of both Cromwell Community College and Sir Harry Smith Community College.

## 3. **ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

### 3.1 **Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

3.1.1 Providing access to local and high quality mainstream education will enhance the skills of the local workforce. In particular, the Council and its partners have a strong focus on the regeneration of Wisbech.

### 3.2 **Helping people live healthy and independent lives**

3.2.1 If pupils have access to local schools and associated services, they are more likely to attend them by either cycling or walking rather than through local authority provided transport or car. They will also be able to more readily access out of school activities such as sport and homework clubs and develop friendship groups within their own community. This will contribute to the development of both healthier and more independent lifestyles.

### **3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

- 3.3.1 Providing a local school will ensure that services can be accessed by families in the greatest need within its designated area.

## **4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Resource Implications**

- 4.1.1 The capital programme currently includes the sum of £23m in 2019/20 for the provision of a 4FE to 5FE (600 to 750 place) secondary school in Wisbech. This figure does not provide for site acquisition or any interim measures that may be required prior to the target date for opening the new school in September 2020. When the costs of these elements of the project become established it will be necessary to re-consider the funding allocation as part of the annual review of the programme.
- 4.1.2 A further £3.7m has been allocated in the capital programme in 2019/20 for the expansion of Cromwell Community College, Chatteris by 150 places (1FE). There is currently no provision in the programme for the expansion of Sir Harry Smith Community College, Whittlesey. A business case will need to be prepared with a view to including this scheme when the capital programme is next reviewed.
- 4.1.3 New academy schools receive a combination of funding directly from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the County Council. The main funding will be based on the local formula applied to all schools, but will also need to include diseconomies funding to reflect the costs incurred whilst the new school fills to capacity. The Council will also fund pre-opening costs which for a secondary school are currently set at £150,000 and is available two to three terms prior to opening.
- 4.1.4 Direct revenue funding from the Council is allocated from the Growth Fund which is an amount agreed annually by the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum. The fund is retained from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to provide additional funding to schools anticipating growth, including academies.
- 4.1.5 Please note, the revenue funding arrangements above are reviewed on an annual basis and with the anticipated introduction of a national funding formula for schools from 2018/19 will need to be amended to reflect any national policy changes.

### **4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications**

- 4.2.1 When the time is right, the Council would use its agreed commissioning process to identify its preferred sponsor for the new secondary school in Wisbech. This process meets the statutory requirements of the Education Act 2011 on seeking academy sponsors for a new school. Under the legislation, the Regional Schools' Commissioner makes a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Education on who should be granted a funding agreement to sponsor the school and may, or may not, accept the Council's stated preference.
- 4.2.2. If a potential sponsor were to submit an application to establish the new school under the national free school programme, before the Council has

launched its own commissioning process, then the Council would not proceed any further until a decision has been made on the Free School application.

4.2.3 The Council would seek to acquire the freehold of the final site identified through the negotiation of terms with the current owner. Final approval of the terms for acquisition would be required from the General Purposes Committee. The Council would then grant a standard 125 year Academy lease of the whole site to the successful sponsor based on the model lease prepared by the DfE. This protects the Council's interest by ensuring that:

- The land and buildings are returned to the Council when the lease ends
- Use is restricted to education purposes only
- The Academy Trust is only able to transfer the lease to another educational establishment provided it has the Council's consent
- The Academy Trust is only able to sublet part of the site with approval from the Council

### **4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications**

4.3.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are able to attend their local mainstream school where possible, with only those children with the most complex and challenging needs requiring places at specialist provision.

4.3.2 The accommodation provided will fully comply with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and current Council standards.

### **4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications**

4.4.1 The Council has undertaken two separate stages of consultation during this district wide review of secondary school provision. The consultation process, its participants and the outcomes are covered in section 2.1 of this report and in appendix 2

### **4.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

4.5.1 Local members have been consulted and invited to contribute to the most recent consultation paper. Councillor Samantha Hoy suggested additional sites that the Council should consider for the location of the secondary school which were included in our evaluation work.

4.5.2 Officers attended a public meeting organised by Wisbech Town Council on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2016 to present the review proposals and take questions and comments.

### **4.6 Public Health Implications**

4.6.1 The school will be accessible to pupils as either pedestrians or cyclists. If children had to attend secondary schools some distance away (more than 3 miles) they would be provided with free transport by the Council in accordance with its statutory duty.

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
CYP Committee report 9 <sup>th</sup> February 2016	Web link provided in paragraph 1.5 of the report
Review Consultation Paper – September 2016	Octagon Building 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor
Summary of Consultation Responses – November 2016	Shire Hall site, Cambridge CB3 0AP
Individual consultation responses – October 2016	.
CYP Draft Capital Programme – September 2016	.