

**SIZE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLANNED TO SERVE THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF AGRICULTURAL BOTANY (NIAB) DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH WEST
CAMBRIDGE**

To: Cabinet

Date: 7 July 2009

From: Service Director: Strategy and Commissioning, Children and Young People's Services (CYPS)

Electoral division(s): West Chesterton

Forward Plan ref: N/a **Key decision:** No

Purpose: To:

- i) Seek Cabinet's re-affirmation of the established policy on primary school size adopted following Cabinet approval in September 2007, which forms the basis of the specification for new schools under the competition regulations; and
- ii) seek Cabinet's approval to proceed with negotiations with the developers of the NIAB site on the basis of provision of a primary school capable of providing for up to 630 pupils aged 4-11.

Recommendation: Cabinet is asked to:

- i) Re-affirm its endorsement of the established policy on primary school size adopted in September 2007; and
- ii) Approve the proposal that negotiations with the developers of the NIAB site proceed on the basis of provision of a primary school capable of providing for up to 630 pupils aged 4-11.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Education Act 2005 placed a requirement on local authorities to invite other potential promoters to enter into a competition to provide any new secondary schools they planned to establish, or where they planned to provide replacements for existing secondary schools.
- 1.2 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 extends the competition requirement to primary and special schools. This requirement also applies to new primary schools to be established as a result of reorganisations such as infant and junior school amalgamations.
- 1.3 Whilst guidance produced by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) provides a helpful checklist, the need for the Council to have an agreed policy framework, which would inform its decisions in respect of the establishment of new schools, was identified in 2007. On 11 September 2007, Cabinet gave its approval to the resulting policy framework.
- 1.4 On 5 May 2009, Cabinet considered a report 'Draft Consultation Response on Amended Outline Planning Application of Land Between Huntingdon Road and Histon Road, Cambridge', the site known as NIAB. Cabinet was advised that the developers' planning application included provision for a 420 place two form entry (FE) primary school on a site of 2.3ha, but that re-assessment of demographic forecasts to take account of new information on the proposed housing mix had led officers to conclude that a greater number of primary school places needed to be provided to serve the development. Cabinet approved a recommendation that an objection to the planning application should be lodged on the grounds that the developers had made insufficient provision for the delivery of primary education on the NIAB site. Cabinet also approved a supplementary recommendation that the manner in which this objection could be resolved, to the County Council's satisfaction, would be determined following Cabinet's consideration of a report from the Director of Strategy and Commissioning on the size of primary school to serve the development.

2.0 Established Policy on Primary School Size

- 2.1 The Authority has a diverse range of successful schools, from small rural primary schools such as Hauxton Primary School, which currently has fewer than 40 pupils, to Alderman Jacobs in Whittlesey, with around 550 pupils. However, for good organisational reasons, the Authority's practice is to establish new primary schools as either 210 place schools (1FE), or 420 place schools (2FE), where possible. This facilitates single year group teaching and implementation of infant class size legislation, which limits Key Stage 1 class sizes to 30 pupils to a teacher. In recognition of this, Cabinet approved a recommendation on 11 September 2007 that new primary schools should be established, wherever possible, as either 210 or 420 place schools.

3.0 The North West Fringe, NIAB Development

- 3.1 Initial forecasts for the NIAB development were for 450 primary school children, consistent with 2.1 FE or a single 2FE (420 place) primary school. Negotiations with the developers have taken place on this basis. In October 2008 a proposed market housing mix was shared with officers, specifying around 65% three and

four bedroom houses. This, together with guidance on the anticipated proportion and mix of social housing from Cambridgeshire Partnerships and Cambridge City Council, indicated that the primary school forecast required revision.

- 3.2 Assessment of the proposed mix suggested a long-term requirement for 510 primary places from this development, equating to 2.4FE. In the shorter term, however, individual intakes may reach 90 pupils (equating to 3FE) in some years, depending on how quickly the development is completed. This indicates that the 420 place (2FE) primary school, on which negotiations have been based, is unlikely to provide sufficient places to meet demand.
- 3.3 Due to increases in birth rates in the City, there is no potential for existing schools to accommodate children from the NIAB development.
- 3.4 The options available to the Authority are:
- i) To undertake negotiations with the developer for a second site on the basis of the provision of two primary schools.
 - ii) To undertake negotiations with the developer for a larger site capable of providing a school to meet the peak of 90 pupils entering Reception. This would require a total capacity of 630 pupils (3FE).
- 3.5 Option 1 would be the Authority's preference if approval were to be given to extending the area of development into South Cambridgeshire (the area known as NIAB extra). The Inspector's report on allocation of this land for housing will not be available until July. In the meantime, Cabinet has approved the submission of an objection to the developers' planning application on the grounds that insufficient provision has been made for primary education on the NIAB site.
- 3.6 The NIAB site, without NIAB extra, is a compact development and it could prove difficult to secure two sites, a sufficient distance apart, to provide a balance of provision across the development. There would be the associated challenge of drawing up catchment areas with a reasonably equal balance in terms of social mix.

4.0 **Significant Implications**

4.1 **Resources and Performance**

- 4.1.1 The County Council, the City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, have been asked to review their S106 requirements in the light of the economic downturn and impact of this on the overall affordability of each of the development sites. Building two schools would require a greater level of capital investment, and associated S106 requirements, and reduce the amount of land available for development.
- 4.1.2 There is also the question of the respective sizes of the two schools if this option were to be pursued. The natural response to the need to provide for a 90 intake would be to create one 420 place (2FE i.e. 60 places in each year group) and one 210 place (1FE i.e. 30 places in each year group) school. Over time, as numbers settled to their longer-term forecast of around 510 pupils, this could result both operating with surplus capacity. The alternative would be to provide schools capable of accommodating around 300 children each to provide for the

peak in numbers, resulting in each school having to organise into mixed age classes.

- 4.1.3 For a 3FE school, the Authority would require a 3ha site, whereas for two schools providing 2FE and 1FE, it would require a 2.3ha and a 1.5ha respectively.
- 4.1.4 The impact of increased pressure on the primary funding quantum as a result of the opening of additional new schools, in particular where this could lead to the creation of schools of fewer than 210 places in the longer-term, needs to be given due weight. Essentially, the funding quantum would have to meet the fixed costs of two primary schools rather than one.
- 4.1.5 As indicated in Section 2.1, the Authority has a diverse range of successful schools, providing evidence of the fact that size is not a pre-determinant of a school's success.

4.2. **Statutory Duties / Requirements and Partnerships**

There would be a requirement to run a competition for each new school, resulting in a minimum three-year lead-in time to establish each school; one year for the competition process, one year for design and one year for construction.

4.3 **Climate Change**

The Authority is committed to providing schools as central as possible to their communities on sites which are well served by foot and cycle paths in order to minimise the number of children who are transported to school on a daily basis. In a compact development such as NIAB, the expectation is that children should be able to walk and cycle to school.

- 4.3.1 Directing children to alternative schools would be directly counter to the Authority's active support for the creation of sustainable communities.
- 4.3.2 On 4 November 2008, Cabinet endorsed recommendations for the development of a policy framework and associated performance indicators in response to the Government's target for all new schools to be zero carbon by 2016. The design for all new schools will need to achieve a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating as a minimum.

4.4 **Access and Inclusion**

At its meeting on 11 September 2007, Cabinet reaffirmed the Council's policy of inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) in their local mainstream school where appropriate, and of a maximum journey time of 45 minutes each way for children and young people with SEN.

- 4.4.1 The creation of two schools could be deemed to be offering choice to parents and to potentially increasing diversity through competition. However, this needs to be balanced against the opportunity, through a single school, of promoting community cohesion. In contrast, the creation of two schools has the potential, in such a compact development, of dividing the community.

4.5 Engagement and Consultation

The views of the Director of Learning and the Head of Standards and Effectiveness 3-11 have been sought on the options available for primary school provision to serve the NIAB development. Both gave their support to the option of establishing a larger primary school in this case. It was also agreed that any future cases would need to be considered on their own merits.

- 4.5.1 In March 2009, the Children and Young People's Policy Development Group (PDG) were advised of the need for the Authority to plan on the basis of providing for up to 630 pupils (3FE) to meet the peak of demand resulting from the development, and the identified options for meeting this need. The PDG's advice was to proceed on the basis of the establishment of one, larger primary school.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 All schools should be designed and organised in a way, which reflects the principles set out in the Council's 'Vision for Education: Schools for the Future'. A particular emphasis should be on school design which:
- Supports the delivery of "human scale education"
 - Enables children and young people to be known and valued as individuals
 - Enables the particular needs of learners to be met as effectively as possible
- 5.2 School design should be responsive, therefore, where it is deemed appropriate, to the establishment of larger primary schools.
- 5.3 The Council's policy of providing 210 or 420 place primary schools, wherever possible, provides sufficient flexibility to enable officers to consider each case on its merits, without having to seek Cabinet's approval each time a variation is deemed to be appropriate.
- 5.4 Having assessed the options for meeting the predicted need for primary school places resulting from the NIAB development, officers consider that negotiations should proceed with the developers on the basis of the provision of a single school capable of providing for 630 pupils.

Source Documents	Location
Education and Inspections Act 2006 and associated regulations and guidance	Infrastructure Service B Wing Castle Court Shire Hall
Reports to and minutes of Cabinet 11 September 2007 and 4 November 2008	