

**BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE – THE COUNTY SCHOOL FENLAND  
CAMPUS SITE SELECTION**

*To:* Cabinet

*Date:* 27<sup>th</sup> September 2011

*From:* Executive Director: Children & Young People's Services

*Electoral division(s):* Chatteris, March East, March North, March West, Roman Bank and Peckover, Waldersey, Whittlesey North, Whittlesey South, Wisbech North, Wisbech South

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

*Purpose:* To update Cabinet with progress to secure a site for the Fenland Campus of The County School.

To seek Cabinet's endorsement to develop part of the surplus Somers Road site in Wisbech as the Fenland Campus of The County School.

*Recommendation:* Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Endorse use of part of the surplus Somers Road site in Wisbech for the development of the Fenland campus of The County School;
- b) Note the potential prudential borrowing costs associated with the capital receipt foregone if the whole Somers Road site is used for the purposes set out in recommendation (a).

<b><i>Officer contact:</i></b>		<b><i>Member contact:</i></b>	
Name:	Alan Kippax	Name:	Councillor David Harty
Post:	Building Schools for the Future Programme Director	Portfolio:	Cabinet Member for Learning
Email:	<a href="mailto:Alan.Kippax@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">Alan.Kippax@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a>	Email:	<a href="mailto:David.Harty@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">David.Harty@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a>
Tel:	01223 699266	Tel:	01223 699173

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme in Cambridgeshire includes £2.5m of Government funding to modernise the former Fenland Junction Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The PRU's current premises in March are time-expired and not fit for purpose. The BSF Outline Business Case (OBC) proposed relocating the unit to a new, purpose-built facility in Wisbech or March. Redevelopment of the existing building is not a realistic option.
- 1.2 The Fenland Junction PRU has since closed and re-opened on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011 as part of The County School, which provides support for Key Stage 4 students with 35 places in Fenland, 45 places in Cambridge and 40 places in Huntingdon.
- 1.3 The national BSF programme was stopped in July 2010. However, written confirmation was received from Partnerships for Schools (PfS) in February 2011 that 100% of the original funding (£2.5m) has been agreed for this project subject to 'Stage 0' and Final Business Case approval in due course.
- 1.4 Partnerships for Schools is due to be disbanded in March 2012 and its functions absorbed within the Department for Education. In order to reduce the risk of losing the funding for this unit, it would be prudent to try to secure Stage 0 approval before Partnerships for Schools is disbanded. A confirmed site with appropriate consents is a pre-requisite for Stage 0 approval. It is therefore increasingly urgent that a site is secured and a planning application prepared before the end of 2011.

## **2. MAIN ISSUES**

- 2.1 The Fenland campus of The County School draws the majority of its students from March and Wisbech. The new facility could potentially be located in either of these market towns and there are pros and cons to each. Some students travel by public transport but, by the nature of the unit and the fact that it serves a wide geographical area, most travel to and from the unit by car/taxi.
- 2.2 Identifying a suitable site for the unit which meets its needs as a school, is consistent with neighbouring land uses and is readily available has not proved easy.
- 2.3 In view of the potential risk to the funding which could arise as a result of the ending of the BSF programme and the winding up of Partnerships for Schools, a key criterion in reviewing potential sites has been the speed with which a development could be brought forward. Most of the sites reviewed could not be brought forward quickly for the following reasons:
  - They are in third party ownership and the site would need to be acquired; and/or
  - There is unlikely to be a willing vendor at an affordable value; and/or
  - The intended educational use conflicts with the current planning designation of the area (for example, sites in Algores Way, Wisbech and Thorby Avenue, March are designated for business and commercial use)

or are outside the development area altogether, or conflict with other planning policies (for example, provision of public open space or playing fields); and/or

- The character of the area is not ideal for the intended use (for example, sites in industrial or predominantly residential areas).

2.4 Of several sites considered in Wisbech and March, the site with the most potential to bring forward quickly is land in the County Council's ownership at Somers Road in Wisbech. A site plan is attached at Appendix 1.

2.5 The advantages and disadvantages of this site are summarised below.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The site is surplus and been held for a number of years pending an alternative use either within the public sector or for a more commercial development when the residential property market in the town is stronger</li> <li>• The site is in the County Council's ownership and would not, therefore, need to be acquired from a third party vendor who could set the price and timescale</li> <li>• A facility in this location could be developed with possible alternative uses if the PRU provision is no longer required in the future</li> <li>• Offers the best prospect of securing the BSF investment in the remaining time available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential development constraints exist associated with its location in the Wisbech Conservation Area, flood zone 3 location and the mature habitat currently on site which could make it difficult to develop an affordable scheme within the available budget<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Capital receipt forgone – the site has a potential disposal value for the County Council</li> <li>• The site immediately adjoins on one side a small area forming a car park owned by Fenland District Council along most of the frontage to Coalwharfe Road. A joint development of these two areas would make the best use of the site and potentially offers a better return to both authorities</li> </ul>

2.6 The site has been surplus for some time. Developing part of it to meet this service need would be a viable use of this surplus asset in the absence of ready alternatives.

2.7 The site would be developed with potential future use in mind. It would also need to be developed sensitively with the neighbouring uses which include a residential home, some private dwellings and a substantial factory.

2.8 These and other site-related issues, including the exact location of the facility on the site and the extent of land required, would have to be addressed through the master-planning and planning processes which would be the next

<sup>1</sup> Note: these constraints exist whatever the potential use of the site

step if Cabinet is content to endorse the use of this site for the development of the Fenland campus of The County School.

### **3. ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES AND WAYS OF WORKING**

#### **3.1 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people when they need it most**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

#### **3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives in their communities**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

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

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- A currently vacant plot close to the centre of Wisbech would be developed for the provision of an important educational facility for the Fenland community
- Aspirations for the use of this unit include community use of appropriate facilities out of hours and possible alternative use of the site to respond to an increase or reduction in demand for the unit's services in the longer term.

#### **3.4 Ways of Working**

The following bullet points set out implications identified by officers for working together:

- A Local Education Partnership joint venture company (Cambridgeshire Learning and Community Partnerships) has been established to deliver the BSF projects in Fenland. Building on the successful delivery of these projects to date, this vehicle has the potential to deliver other schools and non-schools capital projects in the future.

### **4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

#### **4.1 Resource and Performance Implications**

There is an opportunity cost to developing the Fenland campus of The County School on the Somers Road site. The site would not then be available for disposal to realise its full capital value or for other uses in conjunction with other public or private sector partners.

The site has recently been valued. Prudential borrowing costs associated with the capital receipt foregone for the site in the County Council's ownership (assuming borrowing and payback over a 40-year period) would be in the order of £818,000. The average annual cost would be approximately £20,000 per annum.

## 4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant risks identified by officers:

- Funding for the County School Fenland campus project could be withdrawn by Partnerships for Schools. The best way to mitigate this risk is to be in a position to confirm an appropriately consented site as part of the Council's Stage 0 submission in early 2012.
- The funding provided by Partnerships for Schools for the project may be insufficient to meet the costs of developing the facility on the Somers Road site. Further feasibility work is being undertaken to identify the extent of this risk. However, the quicker the project is progressed the further the existing funding will go.
- Planning permission may not be secured for the site. Development of the Somers Road site will be subject to the normal Town and Country Planning process. A robust planning application will need to be prepared to support development on this site.

## 4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

The unit provides an important extension to educational provision within Fenland by providing an alternative to mainstream secondary school for some Key Stage 4 students who require additional support.

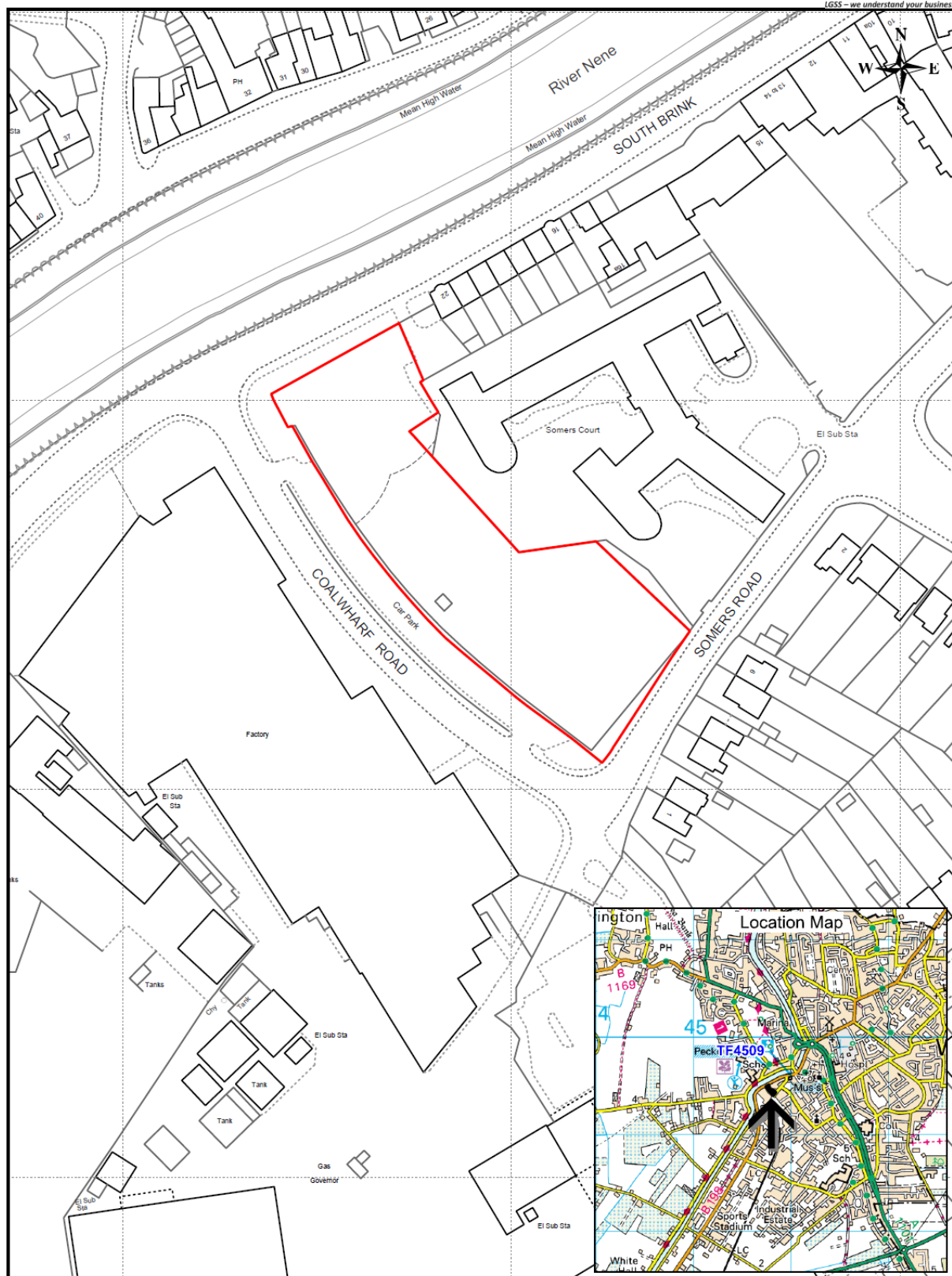
## 4.4 Engagement and Consultation

Public and stakeholder consultation will be a necessary part of the development of detailed proposals for the site and the planning application in due course.

Source Documents	Location
Previous Cabinet Reports	.

## Appendix 1 – Site Plan, Somers Road, Wisbech

USRN:00501 Land at Somers Road, Wisbech



Scale (at A4): 1:1250  
 Date: 31st May 2011  
 By: bs270  
 File: \\CCC.Cambridgeshire.gov.uk\gis\Res\PPd\Estates\NON-FARMS\Enquiries\11-05-31 Somers Rd, Wisbech.wor (Job No.2099)

© Crown copyright and database rights 2011 Ordnance Survey 100023205

