

**EXPANDING PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION IN WISBECH**

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

*Meeting Date:* **16<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

*From:* **Adrian Loades, Executive Director: Children, Families and Adults Services**

*Electoral division(s):* **Wisbech North, Wisbech South and Roman Bank and Peckover**

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

*Purpose:* **To inform the Committee of the work undertaken to secure the expansion of primary school provision in Wisbech and to seek its support for a proposal by the Brooke Weston Trust for the opening, in September 2016, of a new 420 place primary school as a Free School to be co-located with the Thomas Clarkson Academy (TCA). The Brooke Weston Trust is already the sponsor of this secondary school academy which serves Wisbech and the surrounding rural area.**

*Recommendation:* **It is recommended that:**

- (a) the Committee supports the bid proposal by the Brooke Weston Trust for the opening of a new 420 place primary school in Wisbech to be co-located with the Thomas Clarkson Academy.**
- (b) a statement of the County Council's support for the proposal is included within the Trust's bid documentation to be submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) prior to the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014 deadline.**

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## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 In recent years the Council has been under pressure to provide additional primary school places in Wisbech Town in response to rising birth rates and inward migration. In response, within the last three years additional capacity has been provided through the permanent expansion of Peckover Primary School (120 additional places, 0.5 Forms of Entry (FE)) and The Orchards Primary School (210 additional places, 1FE).
- 1.2 During this time, it has also been necessary to provide a temporary classroom at both Elm Road Primary School and Clarkson Infant and Nursery School. These temporary classrooms provided an additional 30 places at each of these schools.
- 1.3 The latest data from the National Health Service (NHS) indicates that further expansion of primary provision in the Town is required by September 2016 to meet predicted demand.
- 1.4 The NHS data does not yet include the impact of major house building identified in the Fenland Local Plan which was adopted in May this year. The Local Plan is for the period up to 2031. It provides for 11,000 new homes across the District during this period, 3000 of which are allocated to Wisbech. In addition, a further 550 homes are allocated to the East of Wisbech in the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council planning area.
- 1.5 There is also a need to allow for some surplus capacity (5%) in line with Department for Education (DfE) guidance to provide sufficient flexibility for the operation of parental preference and to meet demand from families moving into the Town during the course of the school year (in year admissions).
- 1.6 On the basis of the forecast data and the other information available it is considered appropriate to plan to expand primary school provision in the Town by 2FE. This would provide an additional 60 Reception places each year, the year of entry into primary school, and a total of 420 additional primary places across the primary phase of education (seven years). The Council's current policy is to provide facilities for early years and childcare at all new primary schools.
- 1.7 Following a detailed site search and option appraisal, the only site which has been identified as having the capacity to support an expansion of this size is that of the Thomas Clarkson Academy on the south western edge of the Town. The school is sponsored by the Brooke Weston Trust. The Trust has stated its support for the proposal to co-locate a new 420 place primary school with the Thomas Clarkson Academy. It is in the process of preparing an application to establish the school as a Free School.
- 1.8 The Brooke Weston Trust application will seek to secure capital

funding from the Department for Education (DfE) Free Schools programme based upon the estimated costs established by Council's own feasibility study (£7.8m)

## 2 MAIN ISSUES

### 2.1 Demography

- 2.1.1 The latest pupil forecast data for the catchment areas served by the primary schools within Wisbech (NHS cohort data for 0-4 year olds) are set out in the table below. The data confirms that further expansion of primary school provision is required if sufficient places are to be provided for the number of 4 year olds predicted to be living in the Wisbech area by 2016.

School	*PAN/Places	NHS January 2014 Forecasts				
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Clarkson Infant & St Peters Junior	60	55	46	50	59	53
Elm Road Primary	30	71	67	77	83	93
Nene Infant & Ramnoth Junior	60	69	77	68	75	81
Orchards Primary	90	115	116	112	129	107
Peckover Primary	60	36	49	33	36	36
<b>Totals</b>	300	346	355	340	382	373
<b>+/- Places/PAN</b>		-46	-55	-40	-82	-73
<b>+/- Places/PAN 87%**</b>		301 -1	309 -9	296 4	333 -33	325 -25

\*Published Admission Number – the limit on the number of children who can be admitted to the school.

\*\*The rolling average percentage of the Town's NHS registered 4 year olds who are admitted to a school in the Town. In some individual years the turn up rate can be higher.

Based on the 87% rolling average, an additional 33 Reception places are required by September 2016, with a further 25 Reception places required the following year. If all four year olds living in Wisbech wished to attend one of the Town's schools, an additional 82 Reception places would be required in September 2016 and a further 73 places in 2017. However, this is highly unlikely as there is an established trend for pupils living in Wisbech to seek places at surrounding village schools. In addition, there will also be a small number of pupils who will enter private education and a number of families who may move from Wisbech to other areas before their children reach school age. The Council is not able to track these movements through the demographic and admissions data that it holds but these factors will contribute, in part, to the average turn up rate of 87%.

- 2.1.2 Pupil numbers arising from Local Plan housing allocations that come forward between now and 2018 will generate additional pupil

numbers to those included within the NHS 0-4 cohort pupil data.

## **2.2 Option Appraisals**

- 2.2.1 It has been difficult to identify options for such a significant expansion of primary school provision in the Town. Existing primary schools have already been expanded, where possible, and all but one of the remainder are on restricted sites and offer either very limited or no potential to expand. The only site that has some remaining potential for expansion is that shared by the Clarkson Infant and Nursery School and St Peter's Voluntary Aided (VA) Church of England Junior School. This would only deliver a further 30 places for 4 year olds (210 places in total) and, therefore, would be unlikely to meet the entire need for additional places suggested by the forecast data.

A further consideration is that both schools have and are experiencing a range of management, organisational and performance issues. Clarkson Infant and Nursery School is recruiting a new head teacher. St Peter's Junior School is in Ofsted's 'serious weaknesses' category and is in the process of becoming a sponsored Academy and joining the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust. In the circumstances, officers' recommendation is that expansion should be regarded as a longer term option and not something to be undertaken at this present time.

- 2.2.2 Other sites in the Town have also been considered. However, all but the Thomas Clarkson Academy site and that of the College of West Anglia's Isle College Campus on Ramnoth Road were ruled out for various reasons. These included insufficient site area and capacity, planning and highways constraints and/or the excessive cost of development and construction. After initial interest, the College of West Anglia decided that they did not wish to restrict the potential for alternative educational uses on their campus or their ability to respond to future changes in education policy and the opportunities they may present. As a result, the Thomas Clarkson Academy is, at present, the best option available to the Council to achieve its required expansion of primary school capacity by September 2016.
- 2.2.3 The option appraisal work established that there are relatively few obstacles to the successful development of a primary school on the Thomas Clarkson Academy site. The site is leased to the Academy's sponsor, the Brooke Weston Trust (125 year academy lease). The Trust will only consider a co-located primary school on the site if it is the sponsor which rules out using the established commissioning approach of the Council.

## **2.3 New School Commissioning Process**

- 2.3.1 The Council's approach to the commissioning of new schools

under the provisions of the Education Act 2011 (and previously the Education and Inspections Act 2006) has been to seek proposals from a range of potential sponsors to open either a new Academy or Free School. The Council then evaluates these proposals, identifies its preferred sponsor and makes a recommendation to the Secretary of State (SoS). The SoS then makes the final decision on who will sponsor the new school. The process is a competitive one and seeks to ensure that the best education proposal is selected.

2.3.2 The majority of new schools have been commissioned using the process outlined above. However, the Council has acknowledged the need for some flexibility in how new schools are commissioned where local circumstances require a different approach. Specifically, the Council has:

- previously supported an application (bid) by the Comberton Village College Academy Trust to establish the new secondary school in Cambourne (Cambourne Village College) required to provide basic need places as a Free School. The overwhelming view of the local community in this instance was that any new secondary school provision in Cambourne should have a strong link to Comberton Village College (CVC), the catchment area school for Cambourne at the time, as well as being both popular and successful, having achieved an outstanding OfSTED rating.
- recently agreed to enter into partnership with Peterborough City Council (PCC) to commission secondary school places for pupils living in the Yaxley and Farcet area at a new school to serve the housing development at Hampton Gardens. The Children and Young People (CYP) Committee were advised of this at their July meeting.

PCC will commission the new school to open as a Free School in the expectation that the (DfE) will make capital funding available and may provide additional revenue support. The Council will be participating in PCC's process to identify the Free School sponsor and will provide a statement of support for the identified sponsor's Free School application to the DfE.

2.3.3 Officers consider that the circumstances which apply to the expansion of primary school provision in Wisbech also support an alternative approach to the commissioning of the additional places that the Council needs to provide.

2.3.4 The Brooke Weston Trust is a well established educational organisation and DfE approved sponsor operating seven schools in Northamptonshire in addition to the two schools in Wisbech (Thomas Clarkson Academy and Peckover Primary School. These are a mix of secondary, all through and primary schools; many of which have undergone successful recent inspections by the Office

for Standards in Education (OfSTED). In addition, the Trust operates a Free School in Corby, the Corby Technical School, which was graded outstanding in all areas by OfSTED as recently as May 2014.

- 2.3.5 It is hoped that this overall context will contribute to the Free School application being considered favourably by DfE, particularly if it is also accompanied by a strong statement of support from the Council.

## 2.4 **Early years and Childcare Provision**

- 2.4.1 There is an urgent need for additional early years and childcare places in Wisbech and the new statutory duty placed on local authorities to extend this provision for funded two year olds will add to this existing pressure. Detailed work is currently being undertaken to assess the level of need and its distribution across the Town. The opening of a new school on a generously sized site, co-located with Thomas Clarkson Academy will provide opportunities for the development of early years and childcare facilities alongside the school accommodation should they be required. An opportunity on this scale is unlikely to be available on existing school sites or in the current private, voluntary and independent settings within the Town. However, as capital provided through the Free Schools programme is only to support the provision made for school aged children, any early years and childcare provision would have to be funded by the Council from its capital programme even if the Brooke Weston Trust Free School application is approved by the DfE.

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

- 3.1 **Developing the Local Economy for the Benefit of All**  
Providing access to local and high quality mainstream education will enhance the skills of the local workforce. The school, together with any new early years and childcare provision which is established will also provide local employment.
- 3.2 **Helping People Live Healthy and Independent Lives**  
If pupils have access to local schools and associated services, they are more likely to walk or cycle rather than travel by bus or car. It is likely to be easier for them to access out-of-school activities such as sport and homework clubs and to 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**  
The Thomas Clarkson Academy, site of the new free primary school, has the potential to accommodate early years and childcare as well as a 420 place primary school. This would include provision for vulnerable two year olds.

#### **4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

##### **4.1 Resource Implications**

4.1.1 The submission of a successful Free School application has the potential to provide most of the capital funding for the new school (£7.8m) with the exception of any funding that may be required for early years and childcare facilities on site. If the Free School bid is unsuccessful the Council will need to identify an additional £5m of capital funding if it is to proceed with the implementation of the scheme and meet its statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of school places in the Town. At present only £2.709m is included in 2015/16 in the draft CYP capital programme for the provision of additional primary school places in Wisbech.

4.1.2 While there are advantages to securing capital in 2015-16 from the Free School programme to support the CYP capital programme, it should be remembered that in the longer term the DfE will deduct funding received to provide additional basic need places through this route from the Council's future allocations. Basic need allocations have already been made to cover the period up to 2017 so the impact of a future reduction in the Council's allocation will not be felt immediately.

4.1.3 The possible need to provide an additional £5m for the implementation of this particular proposal will need to be considered within the context of the overall pressures on the CYP capital programme (agenda item no. 4) It is extremely unlikely that the outcome of the Free School application (bid) will be known before the Council approves the CYP Capital programme in February 2015. However, the position may become clearer as the application (bid) progresses through the DfE's own internal assessment processes. Any information received will be used to inform future decision making on the capital programme.

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

4.2.1 The Council, as the local Children's Services Authority, has a statutory duty to provide a school place for every child living in its area of responsibility who is of school age and whose parents want their child educated in the state funded sector. To achieve this, the Council has to keep the number of school places under review and to take appropriate steps to manage the position where necessary.

4.2.2 If the free school application (bid) is unsuccessful, the Council will have to review its commissioning approach because a school on this site can only be sponsored by the Brooke Weston Trust. The Council would also have to revisit some of the less attractive options referred to in paragraphs 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 of the report if it did not proceed with the provision of a primary school on the TCA site.

A feasibility study commissioned by the Council concluded that the

site could accommodate a primary school alongside the secondary school. Local planning policies support the principle of education related development on this site. The major planning risk arises from the potential for an objection from Sport England arising from the loss of some playing field area and tennis courts. However, mitigation measures are available which would minimise the loss of playing field space and allow the relocation of the tennis courts if required. Early engagement with Sport England will be necessary to secure its support for the proposal and avoid the submission of an objection.

- 4.2.3 The Thomas Clarkson Academy was re-built under the Building Schools for the Future programme and funded through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). The Brooke Weston Trust, as the sponsor of TCA, occupies the site through the grant of a 125 year academy lease. The current lease reflects the terms of the PFI contract. As the proposed new primary school will be funded through a different route, legal advice has been sought on the implications for the academy lease agreement. The advice received is that it will need to be varied to reflect the new defined non-PFI site area occupied by the primary school, but that these changes are considered to be straightforward.

#### **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. The Brooke Weston Trust, if it procures the design and construction of the buildings, would be required to reflect the SEND requirements contained in the various DfE building bulletins.

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

- 4.4.1 The limited number of options available for expanding primary school provision in the Town was reported to the Planning Places Project Board in July 2013. The Board, which was chaired by Councillor David Harty in his capacity as Cabinet Member for Learning, suggested that the potential to co-locate a primary school on the site of the Thomas Clarkson Academy (TCA) secondary school should be investigated.
- 4.4.2 Consultation on the proposal took place with the Wisbech Schools Partnership in March 2014, prior to work commencing with the Brooke Weston Trust on the application (bid).
- 4.4.3 The Free School application (bid) process requires the potential sponsor to undertake local consultation on its proposal and demonstrate the need/demand for the school being proposed. The Brooke Weston Trust held a stakeholder meeting in July which local County Councillors were invited to attend. A consultation/information leaflet has been prepared by the Trust and



was available at the stakeholder meeting and will be used by the Trust to seek the views of parents prior to submission of the bid in October. The outcome of consultation will form part of the bid evidence. The leaflet is re-produced in **Appendix 1** to the report.

#### **4.5 Public Health Implications**

4.5.1 The primary school will be accessible to pupils as either pedestrians or cyclists. It will also serve a local need as the most significant mismatch between the number of places available and the demand for places is in the area of Wisbech served by the nearby Elm Road Primary School. This will further boost the numbers accessing the school by cycle or car.

#### **4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

4.6.1 This has been covered in other sections of the report.

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
Report to Wisbech Schools Partnership – March 2014 Report to CYP spokes – August 2014 Feasibility Study by WS Atkins – March 2014 Brooke Weston Consultation Leaflet – July 2014 Report to Planning Places Project Board – July 2013	<i>Room B202, Castle Court, Cambridge</i> .