

**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES - 4**  
**NOVEMBER 2013**  
**NEW SCHOOLS FOR GROVE & WANTAGE: REPORT ON PUBLIC**  
**CONSULTATION**

**Report by Director for Children's Services**

**Introduction: the need for school growth in Grove & Wantage**

1. The Vale of the White Horse District Council's draft Local Plan shows the Grove & Wantage area is planned to grow by up to 5,050 homes by 2029. In addition to several small developments, the largest housing developments planned are:
  - Grove Airfield – 2,500 homes.
  - Crab Hill (north east of Wantage) – 1,500 homes.
  - Monk's Farm (north of Grove) – 750 homes.
  - Stockham Farm – 200+ homes.
2. There is continuing uncertainty about the timescales and other details of the proposed housing developments may change, but it is clear that the growing population of the area will need new schools. The emerging Grove Airfield development masterplan includes sites for two primary schools and a secondary school, and the emerging Crab Hill development masterplan includes a primary school site. The Monk's Farm development is at an earlier stage of planning, but may also be able to provide a primary school site.
3. Where new academies are required to meet the needs of population growth such as this, the process for the identification of sponsors, as approved by the Cabinet meeting of 4 September 2012, is:
  - i. Undertake a public consultation to identify the academy model to be implemented.
  - ii. Invite initial expressions of interest in running the school through DfE website set up for this purpose.
  - iii. Assess expressions of interest and then invite detailed bids from three or fewer providers to show clear plans of how they will contribute to the raising of education standards, add diversity of choice and which best fits the local requirements and meets the needs of those within groups offered specific protection under s149 Equality Act 2010.
  - iv. Assess bids against criteria and rank in order of preference. Agree a preferred option to be approved by Lead Member for Education or Cabinet as appropriate.
  - v. Submit report to Secretary of State for decision.
  - vi. Proposal developed with provider approved by Secretary of State through sharing vision of community, county and sponsor.

4. The public consultation to inform the development of specifications for the new schools in Grove and Wantage has now taken place. The purpose of this Report is to feed back on the outcomes of the consultation, and seek Cabinet Member approval for those elements of the strategic model of school provision for the area that can be decided upon at this stage.

## **Background**

5. The expected pupil generation of new housing development in Grove & Wantage has been modeled using the council's PopCal tool, based on current knowledge about the timing of house building and the types and sizes of housing. The housing mixes assumed for the purposes of pupil estimations are compliant with the relevant district council policies, except where site-specific information is available.
6. The calculation of need for new schools is made in the context of the potential of existing schools to accommodate more children.
7. In recent years, there have been expansions of primary school capacity at Grove CE Primary School (which increased from 0.5 form entry to 1 form entry through the use of temporary accommodation) and Charlton Primary School in NE Wantage (which is increasing from 1.5 form entry to 2 form entry with additional permanent accommodation). This has relieved the pressure on school places previously experienced in the area from existing population growth. However, future housing development will create an urgent need for new primary schools.
8. It had previously been suggested that the first Grove Airfield primary school could be a relocated and expanded Grove CE Primary School, with disposal of the current Grove CE Primary School site. While this offered advantages in allowing the "new" school to become quickly established and sustainable, delays in the Grove Airfield development have resulted in a long period of uncertainty for Grove CE Primary School, which has needed to respond to underlying population growth in the meantime. Given the continuing uncertainty over when a new school site would become available on Grove Airfield, a decision on whether to keep Grove CE School on its current site would allow the school and the county council to plan for its future accommodation needs.
9. The county council's policy regarding secondary school provision in Grove and Wantage, most recently considered by Cabinet in September 2009, has been for a new 1200 place secondary school to be required on Grove Airfield, alongside a previously proposed reduction in capacity of King Alfred's School (now Academy) in Wantage. This policy was informed by local consultation in 2007, which had identified a preference for two schools across Grove and Wantage rather than one large school serving both communities. On this basis, developer contribution negotiations have assumed that new developments would contribute S106 funding towards the cost of providing the new Grove secondary school.
10. However, since this time there have been significant changes in: demographic pressure (with rapid growth in primary school pupil numbers in the area); school organisation legislation (King Alfred's converted to an academy in

2011, and the process for establishing new schools has altered); and timescales, quantities and locations of proposed housing growth. As a result, and in order to inform ongoing negotiations with the Vale of White Horse District Council and housing developers, it is necessary to review and confirm, the proposed secondary school solution for the area.

## **Primary school options**

11. In Grove, the Grove Airfield development is expected to produce enough children to fill the equivalent of a 3 form entry primary school, and the Monk's Farm development is expected to produce enough children to fill the equivalent of a 1 form entry primary school. Options for how the necessary additional four forms of entry of primary school provision could be organised include:
  - i. A single new 3 form entry primary school on Grove Airfield and a new 1 form entry primary school on Monk's Farm.
  - ii. A new 2 form entry and a new 1 form entry primary school on Grove Airfield and a new 1 form entry primary school on Monk's Farm.
  - iii. Two 2 form entry schools on Grove Airfield, one of which would be a relocated Grove CE Primary School, and a 1 form entry new school on Monk's Farm.
  - iv. Two new 2 form entry schools on Grove Airfield, with children from Monk's Farm attending either one of these, or one of the existing primary schools in Grove.
  - v. A new 1 form entry and 2 form entry school on Grove Airfield, to meet the needs of Grove Airfield, with Grove CE Primary School expanded to 2 form entry to meet the needs of the Monk's Farm development.
12. The current Grove CE Primary School operates at 1 form of entry, but to do so is dependent on temporary accommodation. To maintain this size permanently the school would require investment in its accommodation. As a permanent 1 form entry school, it would be able to meet the need from the 133 homes which have received a resolution to grant outline planning permission at Old Station Road, north of Grove, should this development generate children before any new schools are built. It has been suggested that the school could also meet the need arising from the longer term proposed additional housing north of Grove, at Monk's Farm, by expanding to 2 form entry size. However, the school's current site area is broadly only in line with the expectation for a 1 form entry school, so for the school to expand further, additional site area would be needed, as well as additional permanent buildings. There is adjoining land that might be suitable for the purposes of expanding the school site, should it be made available for this purpose.
13. The Crab Hill development is expected to produce enough children to fill a 2 form entry primary school. This is an effective and efficient size of school which is common across the county, and it is therefore proposed that a new 2 form entry primary school should be opened within the Crab Hill development. (This has been communicated to the district and the developers through extensive pre-application discussions and the consultation on the current Outline planning application.)

## Secondary school options

14. The strategic housing developments are currently estimated to provide 900 additional secondary school children, but this number will vary if the timescale of building or the type of houses changes. There is uncertainty about the timing of the predicted increase in numbers of secondary school pupils. King Alfred's Academy currently provides 310 places per year group. The number of children in primary schools in the area has risen in recent years, and year groups due to start secondary school from 2016 onwards are already larger than 310. King Alfred's existing sites cannot accommodate the number of additional pupils expected in the area, should all the proposed housing developments be implemented.
15. More secondary school capacity will therefore need to be provided through one or more of the following options:
  - i. Opening a new secondary school on Grove Airfield – either 11-16 or 11-19 age ranges, run by an academy provider identified through the competitive process as outlined above, which could be a new or existing local provider.
  - ii. Consult with King Alfred's to expand onto an additional site at Grove Airfield to provide for local children from Grove.
  - iii. Opening a 14-19 college on Grove Airfield – for example a University Technical College or Studio School, with younger secondary aged children attending King Alfred's.
16. The planning of new secondary school capacity in the area is compromised by continuing uncertainty over the timescale of the Grove Airfield development, which is due to provide a site for a new school. Without this site, options are very constrained, as King Alfred's will be experiencing pressure on its admission number from existing demographic growth by 2016.
17. Significant housing growth ahead of a new secondary school site becoming available at Grove Airfield could result in:
  - Pressure on places at King Alfred's. As King Alfred's currently draws pupils from an area wider than its formal catchment, in the first instance rising local demand which exceeds King Alfred's capacity would be expected to limit how many places were available to those living outside the catchment, through the operation of King Alfred's Admissions Rules. (The creation of new secondary educational alternatives in Didcot over this time period may reduce the demand for places at King Alfred's, particularly if the post-14 age group is attracted to the UTC in Didcot, but this is unpredictable.)
  - Constraints on King Alfred's ability to implement its own site development plans, if it needs to accommodate more pupils than currently planned.
  - The potential need for additional temporary accommodation on the King Alfred's sites to cater for interim demand. There may be limited options for locating such accommodation on the academy's constrained sites.
  - If King Alfred's is not able to accommodate local demand, there will be a need to transport pupils to other schools. The nearest secondary schools likely to have capacity are 9 or 10 miles away, so there could be a significant transport cost for the county council.

- If the new Grove secondary school opens after pupils from early housing development have started attending King Alfred's or other schools, either those schools may experience an outflow of pupils moving to the new school, which could destabilise their budgets, or the new school will grow more slowly than it would otherwise, challenging its budget. The longer population growth continues before the new school opens, the greater this impact will be.
  - Reduced or uncertain demand for places at the new Grove school may deter some potential academy providers, or increase the costs to the county council of supporting the new academy while its pupil numbers grow to a self-sustaining level.
18. The impact of uncertainty over timing of the new secondary school at Grove Airfield could to some extent be reduced if King Alfred's were to operate the new school as an additional site, as it would then be able to manage budgets, staffing and timetables across both establishments. However, this solution would limit the increase in choice and diversity of secondary schooling in the area.
19. It is still possible that there could be significant housing growth in the area but without Grove Airfield, and thus without the option for a new school. This would require expansion of King Alfred's on its existing sites, and could prevent disposal of their third site. Without Grove Airfield, total pupil generation would be significantly reduced.

## **Consultation**

20. The public consultation to inform the progression of the development of a strategic model of school provision for the Grove & Wantage area was conducted by the School Organisation & Planning team from 20 May – 15 July 2013. The consultation also performed the following functions:
- gathering local community views to help shape the later specification of schools and choice of sponsor/s;
  - inviting organisations and individuals with specialist knowledge to provide evidence on local need;
  - acting as pre-notification to potential school sponsors of the future bidding rounds.
21. The consultation was publicised through the county council and district council websites and local media as well as through posters and leaflets distributed by schools, local employers and local networks. Two "drop-in" sessions were held in Grove and Wantage to allow interested parties to talk to officers about the proposals, and a briefing session was held for local district and county council members.
22. Despite very good attendance at both the informal drop-in sessions, the formal response rate to the consultation was low. 36 responses were received: 33% of these were residents of Grove; 19% were residents of Wantage; 28% were from parents / carers of primary age children and 8% were parent / carers of secondary age children. 36% were members of local organisations or groups.

23. While there was a diversity of views submitted, there were some themes that were repeated; however, given the low response level there is some doubt over how truly representative the views expressed are. The main themes are:
- 11 responses in favour of the Church of England Diocese being the sponsor of one or more new schools. 7 of these specified the new secondary school, 2 of these specified both secondary and primary schools.
  - 7 responses in favour of Grove CE Primary School remaining on its existing site and being expanded and invested in, rather than relocating. One of these responses was submitted by the governors of the school and is attached as Annex 1. No responses supported the relocation.
  - 6 responses in favour of two new 2 form entry primary schools being built on Grove Airfield instead of a new school being built on Monk's Farm; 3 responses supported a new school on Monk's Farm.
  - Only 1 response supported a 3 form entry primary school.
  - 10 responses calling for expansion of existing schools in the area in addition to new schools being built.
  - 22 responses stating a preference for a standalone academy secondary school, as opposed to an extension of King Alfred's School. Most of these expressed a desire for more choice of provision in the area.
24. The King Alfred's Governing Body and Leadership Team responded that *"King Alfred's, which it is hoped will soon be part of the newly formed Vale Academy Trust with Wantage C E Primary School and Charlton Primary School, is looking forward to working with the Local Authority and the local community to ensure that whatever the solution for Grove, there is outstanding school provision across both the primary and secondary sector which can serve the needs of the local population for decades to come. King Alfred's and the Vale Academy Trust, once formed, are keen to be involved in these exciting developments and to lead provision that would encompass education from 3-16 within the local area of Grove. This would include considering how best to work with the new school across Wantage and Grove so that sixth form provision remains on the current King Alfred's Centre Site as part of a large, vibrant and successful sixth form offer. Opportunities for any new schools in Grove to share services, governance, leadership and management with the Vale Academy Trust would be most welcomed."*

### **Next steps & recommendations**

25. The Cabinet Member is requested to approve the following proposed primary school strategy for Grove & Wantage:
- Maintain Grove CE Primary School in its current location, and work with the school to plan suitable accommodation for it to operate as a 1 form entry primary school, serving its existing community, as well as housing development in the close vicinity. As the school's current capacity is dependent on temporary accommodation, developer contributions will be sought towards permanent extension from developments which are judged to have a closer geographic and temporal relationship to Grove CE School than to the planned new schools. If the Monk's Farm development requires growth in school capacity before new schools are possible on Grove Airfield, the county council would welcome discussion

with the Monk's Farm developer about how additional site area could be provided for Grove CE School to allow it to further expand.

- Maintain the requirement for two 2 form entry primary schools on the Grove Airfield development. Grove Airfield itself is expected to require, and thus fund, one 2 form entry school and one 1 form entry school; the latter would be expanded to 2 form entry in response to other relevant local housing development, such as that proposed for Monk's Farm (unless an alternative solution has already been delivered due to relative timescales of developments). Such housing development would be expected to fund all additional costs of providing the second form of entry, whether this is required at the same time of the initial construction of the school or at a later stage. If the relative timings of developments are such that the Grove Airfield new schools do not offer a solution, such developments would be expected to provide alternatives, for example at Grove CE Primary School as outlined above or another new school, acceptable to the county council. The county council will object to housing proposals if it does not agree that acceptable school provision can be made.
- Maintain the requirement for a new 2 form entry primary school on the Crab Hill development, to be fully funded by the developer
- Academy providers for new schools will be sought in due course, once the timescale for opening each new school is available.
- The site for the first new school on Grove Airfield, and the new school on Crab Hill, will need to be made available by the developers at the earliest practicable date, to allow timely delivery. The delivery timescale for the site of the second new school on Grove Airfield will depend on the speed of housing growth.
- Continue to review local school capacity with respect to changing housing development details and demographic pressure, and if necessary, work with the existing schools to plan expansions of capacity either on an interim or permanent basis.

26. The Cabinet Member is requested to approve the following proposed secondary school strategy for Grove & Wantage:

- Maintain the requirement for a new secondary school within the Grove Airfield development, on a site sufficient for up to 1200 pupils. The eventual size of school will need to be determined based on further details of housing size, type and timing, as well as evidence on underlying demand for school places.
- Based on current information about future pupil numbers, it is estimated that the new school will need to provide for 900 additional pupils as a result of housing development.
- Relevant housing developments should be required to contribute towards the funding of this new school on a pro rata basis, according to the projected pupil generation of each development, and based on the costs of a 900 place school.
- The site for the new school will need to be made available by the Grove Airfield at the earliest practicable date, to allow timely delivery.
- Details of the nature of the new school may need to be subject to further consultation as part of the process for identifying an academy provider, once the timescale for opening the new school is available.
- Continue to work with King Alfred's to identify and plan for the emerging pressures on secondary school capacity ahead of the new Grove school

opening, and to respond to any changes in housing development proposals.

27. Further reports will be submitted to Cabinet in due course as part of the process for identifying new academy providers, but in the absence of confirmed timescales for the provision of new schools, it is not yet possible to start these processes.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

28. The direct financial implication of this report is the potential cost of expansion and investment in Grove CE Primary School's buildings to provide sufficient permanent accommodation. This would be further investigated through an option appraisal to identify the scope of works and estimated cost. A decision to take forward any accommodation improvements would be taken in light of available resources and would be subject to separate approval in line with OCC capital governance requirements.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

29. **The Cabinet Member is asked to note the outcomes of the consultation into new schools for Grove & Wantage and RECOMMENDED to approve the strategies set out in paragraphs 25 and 26 for expansion of school capacity in Grove and Wantage.**

#### **JIM LEIVERS**

##### **Director for Children's Services**

Contact Officer: Barbara Chillman, Pupil Place Planning Manager  
01865 816459

Background Papers Annex 1 Formal response to consultation from Governing  
Body of Grove CE Primary School

November 2013