

Division(s): Bicester South

COPY

CABINET – 27 NOVEMBER 2012**PROPOSAL TO EXPAND FIVE ACRES PRIMARY SCHOOL,
AMBROSDEN****Report by Director for Children's Services****Introduction**

1. Five Acres Primary School is located in Ambrosden village near Bicester. Approximately half the children on roll are from Service families posted to the Army base nearby, and who form a significant section of the local community.
2. The school's published admission number was until recently 30. However the school has admitted over this number for the last few years in agreement with the Local Authority, to meet growth in demand for pupil places and fluctuations as a result of troop movement. For September 2012 the Admission Number rose to 45, which more accurately reflects the actual intake of pupils into the Reception (F1) class each year. However demand for pupil places increased still further due to small-scale housing development in the area and troop movements, and Five Acres agreed at the request of the Authority to admit up to 60 pupils in September 2012.
3. Cherwell District Council has included Ambrosden in its list of villages in which it expects to approve housing under their Local Plan. This would further increase demand for places at the school. Significant additional housing is already being built in Bicester and more is planned, and schools in this partnership are expected to operate at or near capacity because of this. There has been some small scale housing development in the Ambrosden area and a planning application by the MoD to develop land at Graven Hill, near Ambrosden, means that additional class space might also be required to meet demand from the first phases of this housing development, which would be built ahead of a new primary school.
4. Five Acres Primary School is a school for 4-11 year olds. The Five Acres Nursery School is already federated with the school and is run by the same governing body and Headteacher. A public consultation will commence in December 2012 relating to a proposal for the school to alter its lower age limit to effectively "take over" the nursery provision as part of the school. 55 out of the 60 available places in F1 (Reception) were initially allocated for September 2012. Due to the nature of the local community being partly composed of Service families, the numbers on roll at this school fluctuate, sometimes with little notice.

5. There are five statutory stages for a proposal to expand a school:
- i. Consultation;
 - ii. publication of a statutory notice;
 - iii. representation;
 - iv. decision;
 - v. implementation.

This proposal has completed the first consultation stage, and a decision is now sought as to whether to proceed to publication of a statutory notice and representation.

The Proposal

6. The proposal is to increase the formal published admission number from 45 to 60 children, on a permanent basis from September 2014 (the admission number for 2013 is already published at 45 but if this proposal is approved the school will admit 60). This would bring the number of children on roll at the school up to a maximum of 420 children in F1 to Year 6.
7. To accommodate this growth in pupil numbers, there will be some extension of the school's buildings, and a feasibility study is underway as to how this can best be provided.

Representations

8. During the Stage 1 consultation phase (10th September 2012 – 22nd October 2012) an informal drop-in session was held at the school for parents to raise any queries about the proposal with a county council officer. A consultation leaflet (Annex 1) was sent to parents of children at Five Acres Primary School, as well as to local councillors, Bicester Town Council, partnership schools and early years providers in the area, libraries and other stakeholders; it was also available on the OCC public website, together with full details of the various ways of responding. A link was also set up on the school's website to the consultation.
9. Nine responses to the consultation were received. Seven respondents supported the proposal in principle. One opposed the proposal in principle, while one expressed no opinion in principle but raised a concern.
10. The reasons given for supporting the proposal were:
- Need for additional pupil places in Ambrosden area, to prevent local children having to travel elsewhere.
 - This is a good school, and more children should have the opportunity to be taught there.

11. The concerns raised by respondents were:
- That troop movements mean fluctuating numbers of pupils and so the expansion may not be needed.
 - That there may be an increase in traffic around the school, or parking issues.
 - That being a larger school will affect the ethos of the school.

Officer comment: As detailed above, the Authority and school are aware of the fluctuating nature of pupil numbers at Five Acres Primary. However, the view is that other factors such as housing in the area and the increased popularity of the school with parents due to an Ofsted rating of "Good" outweigh this consideration. Additionally, it is council policy to retain a level of surplus places in primary schools in order to cope with just such fluctuations.

Any building scheme approved at the school would be subject to the usual Planning regulations, which includes scrutiny by Transportation & Highways for traffic issues. The county council's policy is to encourage walking and cycling to school and this is supported strongly by Five Acres' Headteacher, who has stated that an already firm policy of pedestrian and traffic management will be continually monitored and if necessary, adapted, to ensure any increase in traffic does not adversely affect the school. As the vast majority of pupils attending the school live close by in Ambrosden the expectation from both school and county council is that they will not require a car to get to school. No additional parking facilities will be provided for parents' use.

The proposal is for the admission number at Five Acres to increase to 60 permanently, making Five Acres a 2 form entry school. There are good examples of 2fe schools in Oxfordshire reporting an excellent "community feel" and the Headteacher at Five Acres has been supportive of the proposal to grow, expressing no concern over ethos or educational standards. The proposal for growth of the school is linked to it serving the growing community it is situated in: the majority of children attending live in Ambrosden.

12. At the drop-in session held at the school for parents, the following additional points were discussed and responded to by the officer present and the Headteacher:
- Query as to the location and design of the new accommodation, should the proposal be approved.
 - Query with regard to school assemblies and lunch organisation when additional pupils were on roll.
 - Opinion expressed that more pupils attending the school is a positive thing, and that the teaching at the school is of high quality.
 - Query about whether additional parental car parking facilities would be planned.

13. With respect to accommodation, the feasibility study now in progress will identify how accommodation can be provided to meet the statutory requirements for a 2 form entry school. The Headteacher at the drop-in session assured the parents that the school would be capable of managing the necessary changes relating to assemblies and lunchtimes were the school to expand. As previously stated, there is no plan to increase car parking facilities at the school as a result of this proposal, and the view of the school is that parents should only drive to school when there is no other suitable option.
14. As objections in relation to the proposal have been raised, the decision on whether to proceed to publish a formal statutory proposal is referred to the Cabinet.

Making a Decision

15. Sections 18 to 24 of the Education & Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) ["the Prescribed Alterations Regulations"] establish the procedures that must be followed when enlarging school premises. Local authorities also have a duty to have regard to statutory guidance, in this particular case 'Expanding a Maintained Mainstream School by Enlargement or Adding a Sixth Form: A Guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies ("the Guidance")'.
16. The Prescribed Alterations Regulations require proposers to consult interested parties and the Guidance lists these at paragraph 1.3. The Cabinet must be satisfied that the statutory consultation has been properly carried out prior to the publication of the notice. Annex 2 provides details of the County Council's consultation with interested parties that are required to be consulted with under the Prescribed Alterations Regulations. The period of consultation is not prescribed by legislation, although the Guidance recommends a minimum of 4 weeks. The consultation period was in line with the Guidance having run from 10th September 2012 – 22nd October 2012, thereby exceeding the four week minimum requirement. The consultation was therefore carried out in accordance with the Prescribed Alterations Regulations.
17. A decision is now required as to whether to publish formal proposals for this expansion. If approved, a statutory notice would be published, followed by a formal representation period of four weeks. The decision-making power in terms of determining the notice will lie with the Cabinet or the Cabinet Member for School Improvement, and a report will be put to Cabinet if representations are received, for a final decision in due course.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

18. Equality Impact Assessment of Oxfordshire's Pupil Place Plan (June 2011) identified that increasing school places at the heart of their communities has a positive impact on equalities through promoting social inclusion and minimising barriers to accessing education.

Financial and Staff Implications

19. The direct financial implication of this report is the cost of the statutory process recommended, which is planned for and met within the normal CE&F budget provision. There are no significant financial implications or risks at this stage. If the proposal proceeds, following statutory consultation there would be another report to Cabinet in due course seeking a final decision on whether to expand the school.
20. The financial implications of this report are linked to the capital works that will be carried out should the proposal be approved. Publication of a statutory proposal to expand the school requires confirmation from the county council that funds will be made available for the necessary capital costs. The Capital Investment Board (CIB) has approved funding for the initial feasibility work to establish the preferred option for meeting the additional accommodation needs. Resources for the capital works required for this expansion have been identified within the Capital programme 2011/12–2015/16 (existing demographic pupil provision – basic needs programme). In accordance with OCC Capital Governance requirements this will be the subject to a separate Stage 2 – Full Business Case/ Project Approval in due course
21. There will also be on-costs to the school for additional staff and for increased maintenance requirements. The day to day revenue costs for repair and maintenance and staffing costs must be met through the schools delegated budget as part of the Council's Fair Funding arrangements, which will be updated to meet revised government requirements from April 2013.
22. Resources for School Budget Shares are provided by government through the Dedicated Schools Grant, which will increase proportionately to increases in overall pupil numbers in Oxfordshire. Additional pupils will be reflected in an adjustment in the school's funding formula which applies numbers of pupils on roll and their characteristics.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the publication of a statutory notice for the expansion of Five Acres Primary School, Ambrosden.

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Annex 1 Consultation leaflet
Annex 2 List of interested parties consulted