

**CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION
24 JANUARY 2017**

**REPORT ON THE PROPOSED EXPANSION OF LAUNTON CE
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Report by Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. This report follows a public consultation and Statutory Notice period relating to a proposal to expand Launton CE Primary School. The proposal was requested by the school's Governing Body and the county council commissioned an option appraisal to assess the additional accommodation requirements.
2. The initial public consultation ran from 14 September – 12 October 2016. The consultation leaflet is attached at Annex 1 and was circulated to all parents/carers of pupils at the school, staff and governors, appropriate county council teams, District, Council and Parish councillors, the local library and others. It was also available on the county council consultations webpages through its "current consultations" listing.
3. Following completion of the consultation, and pending the final conclusions of the feasibility assessment undertaken by the council's property consultant, county council officers made the decision to proceed with publishing a Public Notice. This was done to ensure that, if the expansion were to be approved, this would be decided in time to inform the 2017 Reception allocations.
4. The Public Notice is attached at Annex 2. It was published in the Bicester Advertiser on 3 November 2016 and was also posted at the school's entrance and on the school website and county council website. The Notice period ran until the 1 December 2016. It was accompanied by a Full Proposal document, which is attached at Annex 3, and which was available to read online at the Oxfordshire County Council public website, with paper copies by request.
5. The decision-making power in terms of determining the proposal in this case lies with the Cabinet Member for Education.
6. For the reasons outlined below, the recommendation of this report is to reject the proposal to expand the school at this time.

The Proposal

7. Launton village is part of the Bicester partnership of schools, where pupil numbers have risen and large strategic housing developments are planned.

To ensure sufficient pupil places are available a number of new schools are planned, and some existing schools are being expanded. Within Launton village there has been some housing development permitted.

8. This proposal was to expand Launton Primary School from its current Planned Admission Number (PAN) of 20 to one of 30 (growing the school to a full 1 form entry) on a permanent basis from September 2017. Ahead of this, the school had chosen to admit over its PAN in some years in order to meet the demand for places, most notably in 2015 when it admitted 30 children into the Reception year.
9. The Governing Body of Launton CE Primary School fully supports the proposed school expansion.

Representations

10. The initial public consultation generated 27 responses. 25 of these raised concerns about the proposal to expand the school, 2 supported the proposal without raising any concerns, while 11 gave reasons for support, but also raised concerns about it. One of the responses raising concerns was from Launton Parish Council, with others from local residents, and parents of pupils at the school.
11. The main concern raised by respondents was the impact the expansion of the school would have on traffic and parking in the village and the consequent implications for the safety of children and other pedestrians. Examples of existing traffic issues, lack of parking facilities for school staff and poor parking by parents were cited by 20 respondents.
12. The other most common concern was the insufficient external play space at the school, with the existing space deemed by respondents to be already small for the number of children currently at the school.
13. Three formal representations (responses) were made to the subsequent Public Notice, which was published following the initial consultation. All objected to the proposal. One was a formal objection from Launton Parish Council and is attached at Annex 4. The other two were from a local resident and a parent of a child at the school. All cited concerns about the impact on traffic and parking as their reason for objecting.
14. There are, therefore, significant local concerns about the proposed expansion and limited evidence of local support at this time.

Capital investment and school planning implications

15. Prior to 2016, the school operated from five classrooms, providing 150 places in total and supporting an admission number of 20. In some years the school admitted more than 20 children, in order to meet the demand for places; in 2015 it admitted 30 children into the Reception year.
16. To provide flexibility for the school to manage pupil numbers, the council undertook internal alterations during 2016 at a cost of £27,500. These

improved the layout of the area being used as a Reception classroom and a room previously used for withdrawal. A new external walkway around the school was created to remove the previous circulation route through a classroom. This work has provided a better working environment for the school, and created the flexibility for the school to now operate out of 6 classrooms rather than 5, giving a total capacity of 180 places. If the school expanded permanently to 1 form entry, these works would form phase 1 of the expansion, but they also in isolation provide sufficient accommodation to enable the school to admit more than 20 children in years when there is particularly high demand for places.

17. For the proposed permanent expansion to an admission number of 30, a second phase of capital works would be required to provide one further classroom space. This additional classroom would increase the school capacity to 210.
18. Oxfordshire County Council's property consultant (Carillion) was requested to identify options for how the physical expansion of the school could be achieved on the site. Their initial assessment had identified that it should be possible to meet the need by constructing a small extension to provide a classroom and library/withdrawal room. As part of this solution additional playground area would also be provided. The Options Appraisal estimated the cost of both phases (the internal alterations already carried out in 2016 and the additional classroom/playground) at £580k (inclusive of allowances for risk and contingency). On this basis, more detailed feasibility assessment was commissioned, and it was decided to proceed with the statutory consultation process into expanding the school to 1 form entry.
19. Since the Statutory Notice consultation, further feasibility assessment has identified significant constraints which prohibit the additional necessary accommodation being provided as initially proposed. Several alternative solutions for the second phase have been explored but all of these result in a much higher cost than had been initially estimated. The preferred option is to provide the required space by constructing 2 new classrooms on top of the existing hall/classroom building (one of the classrooms being to reprovide an existing classroom on the ground floor which would be converted to provide the staircase to the new first floor and a library/resource area). The cost of doing this, and providing additional playground, has been estimated as £1.1m. The other options explored, including providing the classroom accommodation in a relocatable modular building, range in cost from £0.8m to £1.2m.
20. As the phase 2 capital works would add 30 places to the school's capacity, the cost per pupil place of the options identified would be in the range £28k-£41k, with the preferred option costed at £35k per additional place created.
21. In comparison, the cost used by the county council for the purposes of seeking developer contributions towards primary school expansion is £12,688 per pupil place (@3rd Quarter 2015), based on Department for Education (DfE) advice weighted for Oxfordshire.
22. Due to the unusually high cost of the capital works currently identified as necessary to allow the school to expand, and in the context of local concerns

about the school's expansion, it is the recommendation of officers that the proposed expansion does not represent good value for money, and should be refused at this time. Should a better value solution be identified, or should additional funding become available, or should the need for additional places increase, a new proposal to expand could be initiated.

23. The consequence of refusing this proposed expansion would be that the school's admission number remains at 20. The internal alterations recently carried out will provide the school with flexibility to sometimes take over this number, in years when there is particularly high demand for places. As a result, the school is expected to have sufficient capacity for its designated area population, including already permitted housing growth. If there is significant further housing growth approved for the village, the school may not have sufficient capacity, but expansion possibilities could then be reassessed in that light.
24. Without expansion, as local housing development leads to population growth in the village, there will be reduced opportunities for families living outside of Launton CE Primary School's designated area to secure places at the school. Sufficient capacity exists at other schools in the Bicester area for these children, but there may be a reduction in the number of parents who secure a place at their preferred school.
25. Without expansion, while children moving into Launton village before starting school would be expected to be able to secure places at the school, there is a risk that older children may find their particular year group is full and have to travel to school elsewhere. However, this risk has been partly mitigated by the internal alterations which increase the governors' ability to be flexible in how the school manages pupil numbers to meet local demand.

Legal background

26. Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure sufficiency of school places. This duty will be met without the expansion of Launton CE Primary School, as sufficient places existing across the Bicester partnership.
27. The expansion of a maintained school is subject to the "*Guidance*", as set out in "*Making Prescribed Alterations to Mainstream Schools*" published April 2016. The Guidance states that the statutory proposal must contain sufficient information for interested parties to make a decision on whether to support or challenge the proposed change. The proposal should be accessible to all interested parties and should therefore use 'plain English'. The full proposal must be published on a website (e.g. the school or LA's website) along with a statement setting out:
 - how copies of the proposal may be obtained;
 - that anybody can object to, or comment on, the proposal;
 - the date that the representation period ends;
 - and the address to which objections or comments should be submitted.

A brief notice (including details on how the full proposal can be accessed e.g. the website address) must be published in a local newspaper. Within one

week of the date of publication on the website, the proposer must send a copy of the proposal and the information set out in the paragraph above to the governing body and any other body or person that the proposer thinks is appropriate.

28. The county council confirms that it has adhered to the above Guidance.
29. The *Guidance for Decision-makers* sets out factors which should be considered in deciding this proposal. Of particular relevance to this proposal are the following factors.
30. **Education standards and diversity of provision:** Decision-makers should consider the quality and diversity of schools in the relevant area and whether the proposal will meet or affect the needs of parents; raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps. In considering whether to formally approve the proposal, the Cabinet Member should be satisfied that the proposals will contribute to the accessing of excellent education provision and consider the impact on safeguarding and wellbeing. He should pay particular attention to the effect on groups that tend to under-perform including children from certain ethnic minorities and deprived backgrounds.
31. Launton Primary School is an Ofsted-rated “Good” school, and (based on 2016 performance data) is in the top quartile of Oxfordshire primary schools. Expansion would therefore increase the number of places available at good schools, but other nearby schools are also rated “Good”. Without expansion of this school there may be a reduction in parents securing their first preference school, but there is not expected to be a detrimental effect on education standards.
32. **Demand v. need:** In assessing the demand for new school places the decision-maker should consider the evidence presented for any projected increase in pupil population (such as planned housing developments) and any new provision opening in the area. The decision-maker should take into account the quality and popularity of the schools in which spare capacity exists and evidence of parents’ aspirations for places in the school proposed for expansion.
33. The alterations already carried out at Launton Primary School provide it with the flexibility to meet the local demand for places, without the school permanently expanding to 1 form entry. It may be that the school is unable to fully meet the demand from parents living outside the school’s designated area. There is not a basic need at this time for further expansion at Launton, as the school currently is able to admit some children from Bicester, and sufficient school places in the Bicester area can be provided from already implemented expansions and new schools. This assessment would need to be revised if significant additional housing growth is permitted in Launton.
34. **School size:** Decision-makers should not make blanket assumptions that schools should be of a certain size to be good schools, although the viability and cost-effectiveness of a proposal is an important factor for consideration.

35. Permanent expansion of the school would be expected to eventually increase the revenue cost-effectiveness of its operation, but this must be balanced against the high capital cost of the proposed expansion. Expansion would also enable it to teach in single age classes, rather than the current mixed age classes, but there is not clear evidence that this would improve education standards.
36. **Travel and accessibility:** Decision-makers should satisfy themselves that accessibility planning has been properly taken into account and the proposed changes should not adversely impact on disadvantaged groups. The decision-maker should bear in mind that a proposal should not unreasonably extend journey times or increase transport costs, or result in too many children being prevented from travelling sustainably due to unsuitable walking or cycling routes.
37. Launton Primary School is expected to have sufficient places for the local community. At this stage, further expansion would create places which might attract families living further away, and thus has potential to increase road traffic related to the school, which was the major concern of the local residents who objected to the expansion.
38. **Funding and land:** The decision-maker should be satisfied that any land, premises or necessary funding required to implement the proposal will be available and that all relevant local parties (e.g. trustees or religious authority) have given their agreement.
39. The intention was that this expansion would be largely funded from developer contributions resulting from local housing growth. With the current level of housing growth, these contributions would fall significantly short of the revised project costs, and the consequent funding gap would have to be covered by the county council.

Decision

27. In considering the proposals for a school expansion, the Cabinet Member can decide to:
 - reject the proposals;
 - approve the proposals without modifications; or
 - approve the proposals with such modifications as the local authority think desirable, having consulted the governing body.

RECOMMENDATIONS

28. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to reject the proposal to expand Launton CE Primary School at the current time.**

This is because the cost of the options currently identified for the physical expansion of the school's capacity do not represent good value for money.

