

CABINET – 21 MAY 2013

NEW SCHOOLS FOR DIDCOT: REPORT ON CONSULTATION AND APPROVAL FOR SPECIFICATION

Report by Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. Didcot is planned to grow by 9,000 homes over the next 20 to 25 years. The largest housing developments planned or being constructed are:
 - Great Western Park (GWP) – 3,300 homes being built.
 - Valley Park (west of GWP) – 2,300 homes proposed by Vale of White Horse.
 - North East Didcot – 2,030 homes in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.
 - There are also smaller developments proposed for Ladygrove East, Orchard Centre and Vauxhall Barracks.
2. The number of extra children needing school places will depend on the size, type and timing of the houses, but we estimate that by 2016 there could be 500-600 more primary aged children and 300 more secondary aged children in the town. Once all of the housing is complete, this is expected to rise to around 2000 extra primary-aged children and a similar number of secondary aged children. This growing population will need new schools: each of the major developments is expected to provide two new primary schools, and there is also a new school proposed as part of the Ladygrove East development. There will also be at least one new secondary school.
3. In the first instance, school models and providers need to be identified to meet the needs of the Great Western Park development. However, planning for these, in particular for secondary education, needs to take place within the longer term, broader context of development in Didcot.
4. The Cabinet meeting of 4 September 2012 approved a new process for the identification of sponsors for new academies to meet the needs of population growth such as this:
 - 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.

CA7

- 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.
5. The public consultation to inform the development of specifications for the new schools on Great Western Park, Didcot, has now taken place. On the basis of this a draft specification for new schools on Great Western Park has been developed. The purpose of this Report is to provide information on the outcomes of the consultation, and seek Cabinet approval to move onto the next stage of the academy process, inviting interested parties to submit outline expressions of interest to run one or more of the new schools, based on the proposed specification at Annex 1.

Background

6. The expected pupil generation of new housing development in Didcot 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 timing of houses on Great Western Park could vary depending on housing market conditions. The NE Didcot development has not yet secured planning permission, but is assumed for these purposes to start generating pupils in 2014/15. The Valley Park development lies within the VOWH district, and its timing will be dependent on the progress of the VOWH Local Plan: it is assumed to start generating pupils in 2018/19. The smaller developments at Ladygrove East and the Orchard Centre are assumed to start generating pupils from 2015/16 and that at Vauxhall Barracks in 2018/19. There is also expected to be housing development outside Didcot which will affect the number of secondary pupils, for example at the Harwell Science & Innovation Campus. The housing mixes assumed for the purposes of pupil estimations are assumed to be compliant with the relevant district council policies, except where site-specific information is available.
7. The calculation of need for new schools is made in the context of the potential of existing schools to accommodate more children. In particular Stephen Freeman Primary School was specifically expanded ahead of the housing development to ensure sufficient primary school places for the early generation of pupils. Willowcroft Primary School is also now increasing its intake by bringing into classroom use accommodation which was not previously needed. The two existing secondary schools currently have some spare places as the secondary pupil population as a whole has in recent years experienced a demographic dip.
8. At the same time as Oxfordshire County Council has been planning for new schools at Great Western Park, a proposal has been submitted to the DfE to create a University Technical College (UTC) in Didcot, with a planned opening date of 2015. This would provide 600 places for 14-19 year olds, and cover a 15 mile radius. It expects to draw approximately 50% of its intake from within 5 miles of Didcot, and therefore potentially offers approximately 300 additional places for the 14-19 age group to Didcot.
9. The UTC has received initial approval by the DfE, subject to a satisfactory funding agreement. There is still a possibility that the UTC will not proceed to opening, and planning to meet Didcot's needs must be flexible enough to

CA7

respond to this, as well as potentially other changes of circumstances over the long time span affecting the establishment of a new secondary school.

10. The proposed specification is based on the assumption that the UTC does open. This has delayed the need for a new secondary school, and removed the need for additional post-16 provision.

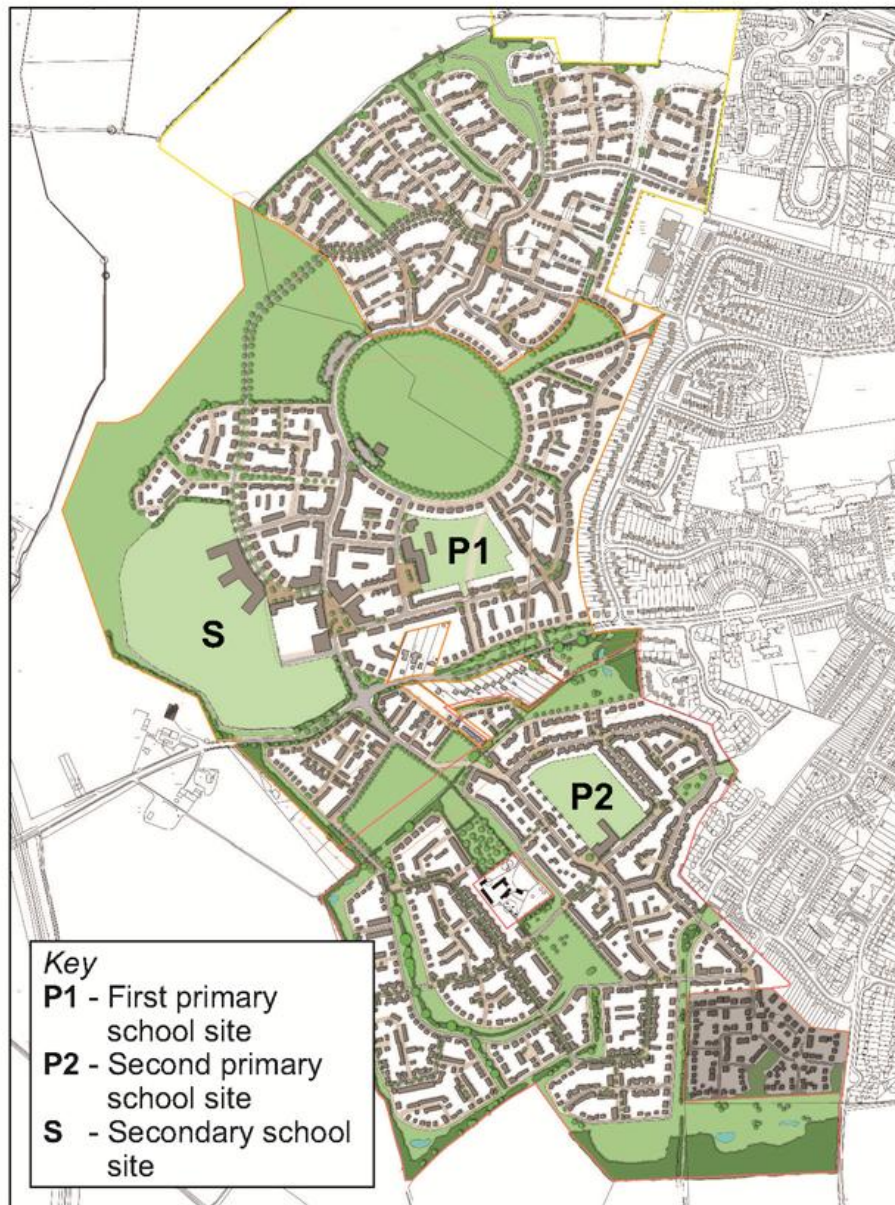
Consultation

11. The public consultation to inform the development of specifications for the new schools on Great Western Park, Didcot, was conducted by the School Organisation & Planning team 28 January – 31 March 2013:
 - To gather local community views to help shape the specification of schools and choice of sponsor.
 - To invite organisations and individuals with specialist knowledge to provide evidence on local need.
 - To act as pre-notification to potential sponsors of the future bidding rounds.
12. 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, the developers of Great Western Park and local networks such as the residents' association. Two "drop-in" sessions were held in Didcot to allow interested parties to talk to officers about the proposals. Briefing sessions were held for local members and schools, and education provision was discussed by Science Vale UK steering groups.
13. We received 133 written responses to the consultation. 30% of these were from parents of children currently at primary school; 16% from parents of children currently at secondary school; 15% from parents of children not yet at school. 22% were from staff/governors at primary schools and 8% from staff/governors at secondary schools. (NB some respondents counted in more than one of these categories.) 18% were from people with no current direct interest in schools as staff/governors or parents – these included potential academy providers and local councillors.
14. While there was a diversity of views submitted, there was broad consensus on the need for :
 - Co-educational secondary education.
 - Greater choice and diversity.
 - Greater provision of vocational courses and maths/science/technical courses.
 - Integrated provision for pupil with special educational needs.
15. Areas of less consensus included:
 - There is some demand for Catholic education, but also concern that a Catholic secondary school would not provide as much additional choice for the town, given the single-sex nature of existing provision.
 - There were mixed views about whether more than one school should be provided by the same provider, and whether the existing secondary schools should provide one or more of the new schools.

Proposed specification for new schools at Great Western Park

CA7

16. On the basis of the data available and the consultation responses, and assuming the opening of the UTC in September 2015, the draft specification seeks providers for the following schools:
 - Primary School 1, to open September 2015, growing to 2 forms of entry.
 - Primary School 2, to open September 2017 subject to the progress of the housing development and population growth, growing to 2 forms of entry.
 - A co-educational 11-16 secondary school, to open September 2017 subject to the progress of the housing development and population growth, growing to approximately 1200 places, with 7 forms of entry in Key Stage 3 and a probable 6 forms of entry in Key Stage 4 (reflecting the expected movement of some Key Stage 4 students to the UTC).
17. It is not proposed that the specification imposes restrictions on the nature of provider – e.g. faith organisations, or existing providers – given that the local consultation was inconclusive on these issues.
18. The specification invites interest from providers able and willing to work with the county council in enhancing SEN provision through integrated or co-located facilities, but does not specify these in detail. Discussions will be held with potential providers with a view to identifying where SEN provision could be included, given the site and financial constraints of the new schools.
19. These schools will be located on the sites previously identified within the Great Western Park master plan. Further discussion will be held with the UTC promoters and the DfE regarding the potential for the UTC and the secondary school to be co-located, sharing some facilities.



Other options considered

20. At this stage it was decided not to be more specific about the nature of the new schools, in order to attract as wide a selection of potential high quality sponsors as possible.
21. At an earlier stage of the process it was considered whether the existing secondary schools could be expanded instead of building a new school. The total scale of growth of Didcot's school population however would exceed the site capacities of the existing schools. Moreover, the consultation responses show a clear desire for more diversity in school provision in the town, and in particular for a choice of co-educational secondary provision. For these reasons it is considered that a new school will be required.
22. It was initially expected that the secondary school would need to open in 2016. However, the additional capacity provided by the UTC is calculated to delay the need for a new secondary school to 2017. If the UTC and the secondary school are to share facilities, any such facilities at the secondary school (for example sports provision) may need to be constructed ahead of schedule for the benefit of the UTC.

23. Early expectations were that the secondary school should include sixth form provision. However, given that the two existing secondary schools jointly operate co-educational sixth form provision, and as the UTC will create additional capacity for the post-16 age group, additional sixth form capacity is not currently justified by expected population growth. There is a risk that the absence of a sixth form may reduce the attractiveness of the school to potential sponsors. However, any eventual sponsor would have the scope to reconsider whether sixth form provision is viable in future years, based on actual pupil numbers.
24. Consideration was given to whether the secondary school should instead be located on the NE Didcot development. This would provide the added advantage of distributing school provision more equally across the town, potentially reducing travel to school distances, and was requested by some respondents to the consultation. However, there is less certainty about the timescale of the NE Didcot development, and keeping the school at Great Western Park provides opportunities for shared use of facilities with the UTC. For these reasons, it is considered that the new school should be located at Great Western Park.
25. The possibility of two new secondary schools for Didcot being required in the longer term – one at Great Western Park and one at NE Didcot – has been considered. However, based on current proposals for housing development, and in the context of the UTC providing some additional capacity, this does not currently appear justified or financially viable. A site for secondary school provision has been included in the draft master plan for NE Didcot, and open discussions have been held with the promoters of this site about the potential education requirements. It is proposed that the county council continues to maintain a requirement for this site to be protected until the VOWH Local Plan is adopted, at which time the situation will be reviewed in the light of the latest information about population and housing plans.

Next steps

26. Cabinet is requested to approve the draft specification attached as Annex 1 as the basis for stage (ii) of the academy provider process outlined in paragraph 4 above, the invitation of expressions of interest from potential providers. Such expressions of interest would be sought during June, and short-listed by officers over the summer, with short-listed applicants invited to submit a detailed proposal by October.
27. A further report would be submitted to Cabinet in December to seek a decision on which provider(s) the county council wishes to recommend to the DfE for approval.
28. Although we have not yet sought expressions of interest from potential academy providers, a number of organisations have already expressed clear intent to submit applications, and we are confident that these will result in a competitive selection process.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

29. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not.
30. The draft specification, as proposed, seeks to ensure increase equality of education provision by sex in that it proposes a co-educational secondary school in Didcot to supplement the existing single-sex education available. It seeks to increase equality of access to education for children with disabilities by specifically inviting proposals from sponsors able to provide additional SEN provision integrated or co-located with the new schools. It provides opportunities to increase equality of access to faith education, but potential faith providers will be assessed on the same criteria as non-faith providers.

Risks and mitigation

31. There is considerable uncertainty about the precise timing of need for new schools, as it will be influenced by factors outside the county council's control, including district council planning decisions and the housing market. To mitigate against this risk, providers will be sought who are able to be flexible in how quickly the new schools will grow. Providers will be specifically asked in the application process how they will manage these uncertainties. Until a funding agreement is signed with each provider, the county council will be able to renegotiate details of timing should conditions change.
32. If the specification proves unattractive to potential sponsors, we may not be able to identify sufficient providers. This risk is considered low, as there has already been interest expressed from a number of providers. Further mitigation against this risk is that we are seeking providers for Primary School 2 and the secondary school well in advance of need, to provide time for further investigation of the options. In cases where an academy provider cannot be identified, the DfE expects to be able to assist.

Financial and Staff Implications

33. The direct financial implication of this report is the cost of the process of seeking expressions of interest, which is planned for and met within the normal CE&F budget provision. There are no significant financial implications or risks at this stage.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to note the outcomes of the consultation into new schools for Didcot and RECOMMENDED to approve the specification as the basis for seeking academy providers for the Great Western Park schools.

CA7

Jim Leivers
Director for Children's Services

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

1 May 2013

Annex 1 Draft specification for new schools for Great Western Park, Didcot