

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES - 10 FEBRUARY 2014

NEW SCHOOL FOR BARTON WEST (BARTON PARK): REPORT ON CONSULTATION AND APPROVAL FOR SPECIFICATION

Report by Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. Outline planning permission has been granted by Oxford City Council for up to 885 new homes in the area to the north east of Oxford city between Barton and Northway. As part of the supporting infrastructure, a new primary school will be opened to serve the community.
2. The legal agreement accompanying the planning permission would require the new school buildings to be built by the time the development is expected to have generated 90 children of primary school age. However, it is intended to open the school sooner, to provide places for the children moving into the development early on. This will be achieved by opening the school in temporary accommodation on the site of Bayard's Hill Primary School, in Barton. The children on the new school's roll would then transfer to the new school building when it is ready. The exact dates will depend on the progress of the housing development but we are currently anticipating that the school would open initially in its temporary home in September 2015, and then move to its new buildings once completed, currently due to be 2016.
3. A site for the new school has been agreed with the developers, who will also be funding the construction costs in line with their expected pupil generation. In addition, Oxfordshire County Council is also working with existing secondary schools in Oxford to investigate ways of creating additional secondary pupil places as they become necessary. Funding for this has also been secured from the developers.
4. The primary school is expected to eventually grow to 2 form entry, which means it will eventually admit up to 60 children into its Reception class each year in two classes of 30. (As the local population grows; it is likely that the school would admit fewer children than this to start with.) When the school is full, it will accommodate up to 420 children from Reception to Year 6.

Background

5. Oxfordshire County Council will not run the new school. The 2011 Education Act says that all new schools are expected to be academies. This law means that they are not run by the county council except in exceptional circumstances. Instead, academies are run by independent academy trusts.

These trusts can be set up by lots of different organisations, including educational specialists, employers, existing local schools, charities, religious groups and community groups.

6. Oxfordshire County Council's role is to plan for and secure sufficient school places and to find a potential sponsor for the new school. The government has set out a bidding and selection process by which new school providers are chosen. The first part of the process is to write an educational specification for the new school in order to invite bids from potential academy trusts wanting to run the new it. The county council has completed a public consultation and has used responses received to it to inform the writing of the school's specification.
7. 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.
 - 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.
8. The public consultation to inform the development of a specification for the new school at Barton West (now named Barton Park), has now taken place. On the basis of this a draft specification for the new school has been developed. The purpose of this Report is to provide information on the outcomes of the consultation, and seek Cabinet Member 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.
9. The expected pupil generation of new housing in Barton West (Barton Park) 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 could vary depending on housing market conditions.

Consultation

10. The public consultation to inform the development of a specification for the new school was conducted by the School Organisation & Planning team 6 November – 18 December 2013:

- To gather local community views to help shape the specification of the school 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.
11. The consultation was publicised through the county council website and local media as well as through posters and leaflets distributed by schools, libraries and local networks such as the local churches and community centres. Two “drop-in” sessions were held in Barton to allow interested parties to talk to officers about the proposals. Briefing sessions were also held for local Members and for both Cherwell and Headington schools’ partnerships.
12. We received 45 responses to the consultation. 35% of these were from parents of children currently at primary school; 20% from parents of children currently at secondary school; 8% from parents of children not yet at school. (NB some respondents counted in more than one of these categories.)
13. There was a strong theme expressed by respondents on what type of academy trust they wanted to run the new school. (33 respondents) expressed a preference for a school with a broadly Christian or Church of England ethos, open to people of all faiths and none. Of these, 14 respondents were parents and others were local church members, a youth worker in Barton and the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education. Reasons given for this preference included:
- No nearby church schools. The nearest being St Andrews CE Primary in Headington, which is consistently over-subscribed.
 - Desire for the school to have a strong moral ethos.
 - Desire for the school to care for the “whole child” to support them whatever their ability and as part of their community.
 - Perception that church schools are popular with parents.
 - Perception that church schools have good local links in the community.
14. Although a high percentage of returns expressed a preference for a Christian ethos, this represents a small number of parents, and there were also responses that disagreed with the school being of a faith-based nature. The consultation is therefore not conclusive on this aspect.
15. Another strongly expressed theme to emerge from the responses was that local people want the school to establish innovative, creative and strong links with the local community and become a hub for all to use. There was a strong feeling that the new school must work with existing groups in Barton (18 respondents) and that it should have an inclusive ethos in terms of opening itself to the community in everything it does (17 respondents). Concern was expressed that if this were not the case, the new school would be isolated and cause division between “old” and “new” Barton.

Proposed specification for the new school at Barton West (Barton Park)

16. On the basis of the data available and the consultation responses, the draft specification seeks a provider for the new primary school at Barton West (Barton Park).
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 requires 8 places reserved for specialist resourced provision, primarily for children with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.
19. The school will be located on the site previously identified within the Barton West (Barton Park) master plan.

Next steps

20. Cabinet Member 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 7 above, the invitation of expressions of interest from potential providers. Such expressions of interest would be sought during spring 2014, and short-listed by officers, with short-listed applicants invited to submit a detailed proposal by the summer.
21. A further report would be submitted to Cabinet in July 2014 to seek a decision on which provider(s) the county council wishes to recommend to the DfE for approval.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

22. 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.
23. The draft specification seeks to increase equality of access to education for children with disabilities by including the provision of additional SEN provision. 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

24. There is a degree of uncertainty about the precise timescale of the school's growth, as it will be influenced by factors outside the county council's control, including the housing market. To mitigate against this risk, providers will be sought who are able to be flexible in how quickly the new school 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.
25. If the specification proves unattractive to potential sponsors, we may not be able to identify sufficient providers interested in running the school. In cases where an academy provider cannot be identified, the DfE expects to be able to assist.

Financial and Staff Implications

26. 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.
27. Additional revenue funding for specialist SEN resourced provision is referred to under "Supporting vulnerable learners and those with special educational needs". This funding will come from the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block, and will be factored into allocation decisions for this budget.
28. Local authorities are required to make provision in their growth funds to support new schools prior to opening, to cover set-up costs, as well as during the period until the school reaches full capacity, as during this period they are not able to benefit from economies of scale. These costs will need to come from the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, and Schools Forum will be asked to approve the allocation mechanism for such funding during 2014-15.

RECOMMENDATION

29. **The Cabinet is asked to note the outcomes of the consultation into a new school for Barton West (Barton Park) and RECOMMENDED to approve the specification as the basis for seeking academy providers for the school.**

JIM LEIVERS

Director for Children's Services

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

Background Papers:

Annex 1 Draft specification for new school for Barton West (Barton Park)

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