

CABINET – 15 SEPTEMBER 2009

SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION IN THE GROVE AND WANTAGE AREA

Report by Director for Children, Young People & Families

Introduction

1. Cabinet in June 2007 requested officers to report back on the implications of housing growth in the Grove and Wantage area on the provision of secondary school places. This report updates Cabinet on changes since then and proposes how to manage the secondary school implications.
2. The Wantage and Grove area has been identified by Vale of the White Horse District Council (VoWHDC) as offering suitable site(s) for significant additional housing. The former airfield at Grove has been identified in the VoWHDC Local Plan 2011 for the provision of 2,500 new dwellings (by 2021).
3. The South East Plan (published in May 2009) and the VoWHDC's Local Development Framework (LDF), have strategies for housing provision to 2026. The number of homes to be built in the Grove and Wantage area between 2006 and 2027 would be approximately 3,700 homes, or 5,200 homes if there is a strategic housing site at north east Wantage (both figures include 2,500 at the former airfield). In order to accommodate this level of growth we envisage that there would need to be two secondary schools in the Grove and Wantage area
4. Several reports considering both the future of the existing King Alfred's School, and how to meet the anticipated growth in demand for secondary school places arising from any development at Grove Airfield, have been considered by the Cabinet and previous Executive and Education Committee over the past decade: 20 March 2001; 6 February 2002; 5 February 2003; 9 December 2003; 20 June 2007. In addition a number of feasibility studies, the production of a detailed site development plan for King Alfred's School, and several rounds of public consultation have been undertaken over the past few years.
5. The current position is that there is agreement that the current 3 site King Alfred's School should be rationalised onto two sites with a concomitant net capacity reduction from 2250 to 1900 places. Cabinet at its meeting on 20 June 2007 adopted the principle that a new secondary school (at that time 600 places seemed appropriate) should be provided in Grove. A site has been earmarked in the developer's draft masterplan for the Grove airfield site for the construction of a 600 place secondary school with further land reserved to enable this to be expanded to 1,200 places to meet likely demand for school places from existing housing in Grove.

Recent Changes

6. The original housing mix proposed for Grove airfield generated a forecast secondary pupil population of c.600. However, the most recent proposed housing mix proposed by the developer would result in a much higher pupil generation rate.
7. In addition, a proposal to create a *further* c.1,500 new dwellings as a North East Wantage extension (part of the 5,200 dwellings in paragraph 3), has been put forward as one of two alternative sites for development in the VoWHDC Core Strategy Preferred Options document. A decision as to whether this site will be taken forward into the draft Core Strategy that will be submitted to the government for independent examination will be taken by the VoWHDC Cabinet in December 2009. Depending upon the housing mix of this development, this could create the need for between 300 and 660 additional secondary school places; the upper limit based on the revised Grove airfield housing mix.

Managing the Increased Demand for Secondary School Places

8. With just the Grove airfield development it was envisaged that the new secondary school would be built early on in the housing development and should be able to provide for the additional school places arising from the new housing. (In addition it was recognised that many Grove parents who currently send their children to King Alfred's might seek places at the new school, hence the identified need for a possible phased expansion to at least 1,200 places.) Therefore capacity at the school may need to be more than 1200 places and delivery staged.
9. It is possible that, if the site is adopted, the N.E.Wantage development may begin in advance of the Grove airfield development i.e. before additional secondary school places have been created through the construction of a new school. However, the Grove airfield developer has indicated that it is intending to submit an outline planning application in March 2010.
10. At present, King Alfred's School has c. 500 surplus places, many in temporary accommodation, spread across the three existing sites. Therefore, a limited increased demand for school places arising from a N.E.Wantage development could be accommodated, in the short term, in King Alfred's School. If these were to significantly exceed the difference between the current number on roll and the favoured 2 site capacity of 1,900 they could frustrate attempts to rationalise the school onto two sites until such time as the new Grove School were to open.
11. Given the possibility of two substantial residential developments it would be prudent to plan for two secondary schools in the Wantage and Grove area: in Wantage King Alfred's on two sites with an eventual capacity of 1,900 places and at Grove airfield a new school of *at least* 1,200 places, *including sixth form*, with the potential to be further expanded up to a maximum of c. 1500,

should the total demand for secondary school places exceed 3,100 in the area.

Financial and Staff Implications

12. The need for the new Grove airfield school arises from the increased demand for secondary school places and so it would need to be funded by developer contributions. However, based on the new housing mix, and consequent increased pupil generation, the proposed school site needs to be increased to be sufficient for *at least* a 1,500 place school (c.10 hectares). Should insufficient S.106 contributions and adequate site be secured this would pose a significant risk to the County Council's ability to meet the anticipated demand for secondary school places arising from the development and frustrate plans to rationalise King Alfred's School.
13. Although there is surplus capacity at King Alfred's School, much of it is in poor condition and/or temporary accommodation, and would not be able to provide the specialist facilities necessary to adequately accommodate additional pupils from a N.E.Wantage development. Appropriate S.106 contributions will need to be secured from the development of this site which, depending upon when the places are required, could be invested in King Alfred's School, as currently configured, or in the new two site school.
14. The rationalisation of King Alfred's School was included in the forward plan for 2011-12 and 2012-13 as a £12m self-financed scheme i.e. funded through a capital receipt from release for development of one of the three sites, to be realised *after* completion. However, pressure on the Children, Young People & Families capital programme mean that the earliest that resources to contribute towards 'forward funding' the scheme will be available is 2013-14. This would be through secondary school modernisation funding but even this figure is only indicative at this stage, as the period 2011-2014 is subject to the outcomes of the next Comprehensive Spending Review, with only allocations up to 2010-11 confirmed.
15. The recent downturn in the economy and the consequent fall in land values, and the ability of developers to progress schemes, has meant that King Alfred's School governors (who own the majority of the three school sites by reason of the school's Foundation status) are currently unable to realise the capital receipt necessary to part fund the process of developing a two site school. Although King Alfred's School governors will presumably, at some point, be able to realise a capital receipt, this will not be sufficient to fully implement the school's Site Development Plan. Therefore funding through the Building Schools for the Future programme will be required; it is possible that this will be forthcoming earlier than originally thought should the new Grove airfield school be delivered, through the BSF programme as individual projects are expected to have a 'geographic coherence'. Given the substantial costs of the reorganisation of the two secondary schools in Grove and Wantage to accommodate growth, there may well be a requirement for capital funding from sources other than developer contributions and Building Schools for the Future funding.

Estimated Costs

16. The estimated construction costs of a 1,200 place secondary school on the Grove airfield, based on 2nd quarter 2008 prices, are in the region of £30m. The long term development costs of rationalising King Alfred's School from 3 sites to two are estimated to be up to £27m, with a potential capital receipt from disposal of the redundant site of £8m - £9m. However, there is a less extensive 'interim solution' focussing most of the development on only one of the two retained sites, with an estimated cost of £16m. At present, other than Building Schools for the Future, there is no identified source of funding to bridge the gap between the costs of rationalising King Alfred's onto two sites and the capital receipt from disposal of the third site.

RECOMMENDATION

17. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
- (a) note the contents of this report and confirm that a new secondary school (with sixth form provision) should be planned and available prior to significant development as part of Grove airfield and/or North East Wantage; and**
 - (b) request officers, once Oxfordshire's position regarding Building Schools for the Future is confirmed, to work together with King Alfred's School governors to try to reach agreement on a strategy to achieve rationalisation of the school onto 2 sites.**

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Background papers: Nil

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August 2009