

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & CULTURAL SERVICES - 19 SEPTEMBER 2018**

### **NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL IN GRAVEN HILL, BICESTER REPORT ON CONSULTATION AND APPROVAL FOR SCHOOL SPECIFICATION**

**Report by Director for Children's Services**

#### **Introduction**

1. The host site for this planned new primary school is the 1900-home development south of Bicester, permitted as application 11/01494/OUT and known as Graven Hill.
2. The adopted Cherwell Local Plan plans for significant housing growth across Bicester, including:
  - Graven Hill: approximately 1,900 homes with this new primary school
  - South West Bicester: approximately 2,500 homes with new primary and secondary schools
  - The North-West Bicester eco-town: approximately 6,000 homes with new primary and secondary schools
  - Upper Heyford: approximately 2,400 homes with expansion of Heyford Park (all-through) Free School
  - South East Bicester: approximately 1,500 homes with a new primary school
3. There are also smaller developments proposed, including for surrounding villages such as Ambrosden, which may affect demand for school places in Bicester.
4. School capacity growth is being planned strategically across Bicester with current forecasts indicate that between 2017 and 2024 the number of primary pupils in the Bicester area will grow by 1,000 and the number of secondary pupils by 900, with significant further growth in the longer term. Projects to mitigate this includes a mixture of recent school expansions and new schools, including the school covered by this specification.
5. Planning for the new school is underway. At the time of consultation, the school was planned to open in September 2020. Based on updated information about the delivery of housing development the opening date has now been revised to September 2021.
6. This report summarises the consultation held regarding the proposed educational specification of the new primary school at Graven Hill, Bicester and seeks approval for the final specification. This will then be used as the basis for attracting potential academy sponsors.

## Background

7. Oxfordshire County Council will not run the new school. The 2011 Education Act says that all new schools are expected to be academies/free schools. 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.
8. Oxfordshire County Council's role is to plan for and secure sufficient school places and find a potential sponsor for the new schools. The government has set out a bidding and selection process for choosing new school providers. From this, 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:
  - I. Undertake a public consultation to identify the academy model to be implemented.
  - II. Invite initial expressions of interest in running the school, including through the DfE website.
  - 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 Regional Schools Commissioner for decision.
  - VI. Proposal developed with provider approved by Regional Schools Commissioner through sharing vision of community, county and sponsor.
9. The first part of the process is to write an educational specification for the new schools to invite bids from potential academy trusts wanting to run it. The public consultation on the draft specification for the primary school at Graven Hill, Bicester has now taken place. From this, the specification for the school has been finalised. The purpose of this Report is to provide information on the consultation outcomes, and seek Cabinet Member approval to move onto the next stage of the process: inviting interested parties to submit outline expressions of interest to run the school, based on the proposed specification at Annex 1.

## Consultation

10. The public consultation to inform the development of the education specification for the new primary school was conducted by the School Organisation & Planning team between 13 June 2018 – 24 July 2018. The purpose of the consultation was:
  - To invite comment on the draft education specification to be used as the basis of identifying an academy sponsor for the new school;
  - To act as pre-notification to potential sponsors of the future bidding process.

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11. The consultation was publicised through the county council consultations website and. Invitations to join the consultation were targeted at local councillors, schools, and other stakeholders.
12. There were 19 responses to the consultation, several from families planning to move to Graven Hill. Below is a summary of the key points.
  - 10 respondents (52%) believed that the school should open as multi-age entry, with all year groups available upon opening to accommodate all children moving into the development.
  - 6 respondents (31%) expressed a wish for a strong community focus with the ability for some school facilities to be opened to the public on a shared use basis.
  - 5 respondents (26%) also wanted the school to reflect the innovative nature of the development, such as using outdoor spaces for learning and to encourage good health and wellbeing, alongside energy efficient property design and sustainable travel.
  - 3 respondents (16%) raised points about the faith denomination of the school; however this was both favoured and objected to in the responses so the overall standpoint on this is inconclusive.
  - Other aspirations for the school included high educational standards; a strong focus on inclusion, with early intervention and family engagement to ensure all children can succeed; and a focus on mental/emotional health.
13. To secure an academy sponsor in appropriate time to allow the school to open in September 2021, approval is now sought for the educational specification for this school.

### **Proposed specification for the new school at Graven Hill, Bicester**

14. The school will be:
  - A 2-form entry school.
  - Age range: 2-11.
  - Admission number: 60 (potential for future expansion in the longer term)
  - Total places provided for Reception to Year 6: 420 places.
  - Inclusive of a nursery for 2- and 3- year olds: 90 FTE
  - Co-educational.
15. The school will also be expected to contribute towards meeting local needs for wraparound care and childcare.
16. The school's catchment is expected to be primarily the Graven Hill strategic development area to the south of Bicester but may draw from a wider area to meet population pressures across Bicester.
17. The detailed specification is provided in Annex 1.

### **Next steps**

18. The 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 9 above, the invitation of expressions of interest from potential

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providers. Such expressions of interest would be sought from late September 2018, and short-listed by officers, with short-listed applicants invited to submit a detailed proposal by January 2019.

19. The detailed proposals would then be assessed, and the Cabinet Member asked to approve a preferred provider for recommendation to the Regional Schools Commissioner for approval in spring 2019.

### **Equality and Inclusion Implications**

20. 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.
21. There are no equality and inclusion implications arising from this report.

### **Risks and mitigation**

22. 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 the provider, the county council will be able to renegotiate details of timing should conditions change.
23. If the specification proves unattractive to potential sponsors, we may not be able to identify sufficient providers interested in running the school. The county council is already aware of academy trusts interested in bidding for this school. In cases where an academy provider cannot be identified, the Department for Education expects to be able to assist.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

24. 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.
25. In respect of Basic Need places local authorities are required to make provision to support new schools prior to opening, to cover set-up costs, as well as during the period until the school attains its agreed number of year cohorts, as during this period they are not able to benefit from economies of scale. To this end, with Schools Forum agreement, the local authority will make funding available through the Growth Fund supported from allocation identified in the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

26. The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to approve the specification for the new primary school for Graven Hill, Bicester.

**LUCY BUTLER**

Director for Children's Services

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August 2018

**Annex 1:** Draft specification for new primary school at Graven Hill, Bicester.