

Agenda Item No: 7(f)**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL****CABINET****26 April 2018****Report of the Strategic Director for Children's Services****CHILDREN'S SERVICES - OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN WIRKSWORTH (YOUNG PEOPLE)****1. Purpose of Report**

To advise Cabinet of the responses to the Authority's consultation into the future of primary education in Wirksworth.

2. Information and Analysis

On 14 September 2017, Cabinet gave approval for an informal consultation to consider the future of primary education in Wirksworth. The Derbyshire Dales District Council Local Plan had identified two significant developments amounting to 771 houses in the town and they would potentially generate an additional 154 primary pupil places.

The consultation was held from Thursday 19 October 2017 until Thursday 23 November 2017. The consultation period was then extended until 20 January 2018. Early responses indicated that there was a desire to have a longer period of consultation. Although the consultation closed officially on 20 January, it was agreed that late responses would be accepted until Friday 9 March 2018.

The consultation document was published in the Derbyshire Times and Matlock Mercury as well as the Derbyshire County Council website. It was also circulated to all the schools in a 5-mile radius of Wirksworth, the Derby Diocese, Derby Diocese Academy Trust, Saint Robert Lawrence Catholic Academy Trust, the local MP & County Councillor, Derbyshire Dales District Council and the Wirksworth Town Council. There were 42 responses received before the formal end of consultation on 20 January 2018 and a further 9 between that date and 9 March 2018. At the request of the Town Council, there was also an information meeting held on 9 January 2018 for the local schools (including the secondary school) and early years providers.

The consultation covered two main issues and the responses are separated into those two areas.

Issue 1 - Should the existing infant and junior schools be replaced with a new school to serve the whole of Wirksworth OR should the existing infant and junior schools be retained and a new additional primary school be provided to serve the population increase in Wirksworth?

There were 11 respondents who favoured having a new school to serve the whole of Wirksworth. There was support for the provision of education in a primary setting rather than in separate infant and junior schools, with a single team of staff providing consistency across education. Respondents felt that the existing schools had condition issues and did not meet the needs of staff and students. It was also felt that a single school would offer economies of scale and make the school more financially viable. There was concern, however, that the proposed sites did not offer the best location to serve the whole town.

There were 13 respondents who favoured retaining the existing provision and the creation of an additional primary school to serve the new housing developments. There was strong support for the existing schools; in particular for their central location. The smaller schools, and in particular the separation of infant and junior, was considered best for the children and for the style and history of the town.

There were a small number of responses that suggested that the current sites should be expanded to meet the needs of the town and that the acquisition of additional land at the junior school should be considered. There was concern that the net capacity of the junior school was incorrect. The capacity is due for review and is artificially low at the moment, however the revised figure may not address the needs of the new development.

There were 11 respondents who felt that they were unable to comment on the options because there was insufficient time to consider the proposal. There was concern that the decisions being made would affect the town for many generations to come and the process had not allowed sufficient time to consider all aspects.

Issue 2 - Where would be the best location for a new school whether it is a replacement school for existing pupils and pupils generated by the new development, or a new stand-alone school to address population increase through the growth of Wirksworth.

The 3 sites proposed were Cromford Road, Middle Peak Quarry site (SE corner) or Middle Peak Quarry site (adjacent to the main road with access off Middleton Road)

Cromford Road – There were 29 responses in favour of the Cromford Road site. Support was based on its proximity to roads, level access and the ability for pupils and parents to access the site on foot. There was, however, still concern about the distance of the site from the centre of the town and its relationship with housing, particularly that in the south. There were respondents who favoured this site for a single primary school to serve the town although the site is not large enough for that option. There was a view that, as the currently notified site, it should be retained for use in the future once the decision about the future of primary education in the town had been made.

Middle Peak Quarry site (SE Corner) – there was only one response in support of this site. The majority were strongly opposed to it on the basis that access from West End was unsafe with steep, narrow roads and limited pavements. Failure to provide safe pedestrian access would result in an increase in traffic which would have an unacceptable effect on the town both in environmental and health terms. There was also concern that the site was too far from the housing areas in the town.

Middle Peak Quarry site (adjacent to Middleton Road) – There were 7 respondents who supported this site but some felt that it was the site best suited to serve the new community from the housing development with road and bus links. There was concern, however, that it might adversely impact on the school at Middleton.

There was general concern that the sites in the consultation were not centrally located to serve the whole town and would not encourage children to walk to school. A number favoured the former notified site of the Meadows and requested that it be re-considered. It had been assessed as unsuitable for development and is now designated as open space. One respondent challenged the scoring of the sites, however, the scoring was included in the consultation paper to assist consultees to consider the options and was not intended to influence views.

There was a number of responses on topics outside the 2 main issues. The developer advised the Authority that the number of houses on the Cromford Road site was 150 and not 126 as stated in the document. There was a concern that early years had not been included in the consultation, however, this would be discussed at a later date once sufficiency in the area had been assessed. The absence of secondary education from the consultation was raised but that would also be the subject of later discussion.

Authority Comments

The Authority acknowledges the demand for further consultation on whether to locate all the primary education in the town on to one site or retain the existing provision and build a new school to serve the housing development when it takes place. Whilst there was strong support for retaining the notified site on Cromford Road (even though the view was that it was not well sited to serve all the existing housing), the site is too small to deliver a single primary school to serve the town. Retention of the Cromford Road site would therefore limit the options under consideration. In addition, the housing that is proposed at the Cromford Road site will not generate a need for a new school as the pupils can be accommodated in the existing schools with some adjustments to capacity at the junior school. The site would therefore remain dormant until the Middle Peak development took place.

Releasing the notified site at Cromford Road and replacing it with a notified site at Middle Peak Quarry (adjacent to the main road) would allow the Cromford Road development to take place but secure an alternative site large enough to accommodate up to a 3 form entry school, whilst the Authority continues to consult on the future of primary education in the town and also respond to the demand for a more central site to be identified. Alternative proposals would then be subject to further consultation.

3. Financial Considerations

The funding would depend on the options chosen. The Authority would seek S106 contributions from the developer(s) of the new housing to fund a new school but that funding would relate to a school to serve the pupils generated by the housing growth. If the Authority decided to re-locate all the existing schools onto one site, additional funding would be required through the annual DfE capital grant, Council borrowings or capital receipts from the vacated sites.

4. Social Value Considerations

The provision of schools in the town to meet the needs of current and future residents is a critical factor in ensuring that the settlement is sustainable. Whichever option is chosen, the new school will deliver facilities to the current standards and enhance primary school provision in Wirksworth.

5. Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered:- prevention of crime & disorder, equality of opportunity, environmental, health, legal & human rights, human resources, property and transport considerations.

6. Key Decision Yes

7. Call-in

Is it necessary for the call-in period to be waived in respect of the decisions being proposed in the report? No

8. Background Papers

These are held on file in the Children's Services Development Section.

9. Officer Recommendation

That Cabinet notes the response to the consultation and approves:-

The de-notification of the Cromford Road site.

The notification of the Middle Peak site (adjacent to the main road with access off Middleton Road).

The investigation of alternative sites for primary education in Wirksworth.

Jane Parfremment
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