

## **REVIEW OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION IN THE FENLAND DISTRICT**

### **PROPOSAL FOR A NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL IN WISBECH**

#### **BACKGROUND CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

#### **1 PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to:

- Draw attention to the rising number of primary aged pupils across Fenland, the impact of proposed new housing and the resultant pressure to provide additional places in secondary schools in the District.
- Outline the conclusions of the Council's review of secondary school provision in Fenland and its recommendations in respect of each of the four market towns within the District; Wisbech, Chatteris, March and Whittlesey.
- Seek, in principle support for the proposal to provide a new secondary school in Wisbech in response to the forecast demand for places and expand provision in March, Chatteris and Whittlesey when required.
- Obtain the views of parents and the local community on the Council's early site search work, which identified the site of the former College of West Anglia (CWA) horticultural and equine facility adjacent to Meadowgate School, as having the potential to be developed for a secondary school (location plan included).

OR

- For respondents to identify and consider whether there are any alternative sites within Wisbech that may provide a better site for a secondary school and which the Council should consider

## 2. BACKGROUND

### Demography

There are four secondary schools in Fenland: Neale-Wade Academy (March), Thomas Clarkson Academy (Wisbech), Sir Harry Smith Community College (Whittlesey) and Cromwell Community College (Chatteris). There is a distance of between 6-13 miles separating each school (measured in a straight line).

A review of secondary school provision in Fenland was undertaken in response to:

- demographic change (the population of the District has grown by 13.9% to 95,300 since 2001)
- rising pupil numbers in the primary schools and
- the proposed levels of housing development (11,000 homes across the District in the period up to 2031) included in the Fenland District Local Plan (2014).

The housing is allocated in the Local Plan across the four market Towns as follows:

- 3,000 homes in Wisbech;
- 4,200 homes in March;
- 2,600 homes distributed around the market towns of Chatteris and Whittlesey; and
- the remaining 1,203 homes delivered across a number of smaller sites in the outlying villages.

If all of this housing comes forward in the period to 2031 an additional 15 forms of entry (FE)<sup>1</sup> or 2250 places for 11-15 year olds would be required across the District as a whole. However, not all this housing will be built at once and the growth in pupil numbers of secondary school age often takes some time to appear as new housing tends to be occupied by younger families.

In the early period of the Local Plan the growth in secondary school numbers is going to be driven by the increase in the number of 0-4 year olds already living in Fenland and the rising primary school rolls moving into the secondary school sector. The Council can forecast these numbers up to 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> A form of entry (FE) = 30 children e.g. secondary school described as 5FE has capacity to provide for 150 children in each of the 5 year groups, 750 in total (30x5x5).

### **Response to Planned Growth - Phase 1 of the Review:**

In response to the planned housing growth and population changes in Fenland, the Council took the decision in 2014 to undertake a review of the current pattern of secondary school provision across the District, which included consultation with key stakeholders.

The Council, in anticipation of the need to provide additional secondary school capacity in the District has undertaken, during 2015, extensive site search work in both Wisbech and March to identify potentially suitable sites for a secondary school. This work identified the former College of West Anglia (CWA) horticultural and equine facility adjacent to Meadowgate School as having the most potential for the development of a secondary school. This site is available and there is a willing seller.

On 9 February 2016, the Council's Children and Young People (CYP) Committee considered both the impact of this demographic change and the outcome of the (Phase 1) consultation and concluded that additional capacity was required in the Wisbech area and to a lesser extent in the March area. The Committee supported the identified need for a new secondary school in Wisbech and that such a proposal should be the subject of further stakeholder (Phase 2) consultation during the autumn term 2016. In anticipation of the phase two consultation, the Council has continued its search for suitable sites for a secondary school in both the Wisbech and March areas.

In support of this decision, financial provision of £23m has been made in the Council's Children, Families and Adults capital programme in 2019/20 for the building of a new secondary school.

The Council has also identified the need for a modest expansion of the existing secondary schools in both Chatteris and Whittlesey. It also considers that an additional secondary school will only be required in March should the high levels of housing development identified in the Fenland Local Plan materialise in the period beyond 2024.

### **Potential Location of a New Secondary School.**

The aforementioned site search work identified the former College of West Anglia (CWA) horticultural and equine facility adjacent to Meadowgate School as having the most potential for the development of a secondary school (location plan attached). This site is available and there is a willing seller. However, the identified site presents some challenges, primarily relating to transport and access and its location to the south of the Town not too far from the existing Thomas Clarkson Academy. For these reasons, the Council is seeking your views not only on the CWA site but whether there are any alternative sites for the location of a secondary school within the Town which might be more suitable. The council has already looked at a number of alternative sites across Wisbech but these have not been considered suitable so we would particularly welcome your views on this issue.

Since adopting this proposal the Council has also been made aware that Meadowgate School is in the process of making an application to the Department for Education (DfE) for the establishment of a Free School for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) also on the CWA site.

Whilst there is space to accommodate both the ASD Free School and the proposed secondary school on this site, should both schools be established there, their combined impact would be greater.

### **Wisbech Garden Town Initiative**

Following the decisions made by the Council's CYP Committee, Fenland District Council announced a proposal to make Wisbech a 'Garden Town' as part of the government's devolution initiative. The Garden Town proposal could help to ease the housing pressures around Cambridge with up to 8,000-10,000 new builds possible, including starter homes, self-builds and a retirement village. There are also hopes to create a Local Enterprise Zone.

Progress on this initiative needs to be closely monitored as higher levels of development than those proposed in the Local Plan may require the provision of more secondary school places than currently planned. Where that additional development takes place in the Town may also require a reconsideration of the best location for any new secondary school.

### 3. THE PROPOSALS

#### Wisbech

It is proposed that a new secondary school in Wisbech will be provided towards the end of the present decade for the following reasons:

- The future demand for additional places is greatest within Wisbech. By 2024 it is forecast that an additional 210 Year 7 places (7 forms of entry FE)) will be required for children transferring from primary to secondary school. This is based on schools census and birth data.
- Presently Wisbech experiences the greatest out of county migration of secondary school pupils. The January 2014 census recorded a total of 110 eleven year olds from the Thomas Clarkson catchment area attending secondary school provision in the neighbouring authorities of Lincolnshire (66) Norfolk (41) and Peterborough (3). As Lincolnshire, and Norfolk in particular come under pressure for places the ability of Wisbech children to attend outside the County Boundary will be diminished.
- The Neale-Wade Academy will also, over time, have less room for students from Wisbech as the town of March is also identified within the Fenland Local Plan for substantial levels of new housing development. Currently 154 secondary age pupils from Wisbech attend Neal Wade Academy.
- It is already the case that there are more children living in the catchment area of the Thomas Clarkson Academy than there are places available. It is only parents' preference for attending secondary schools elsewhere (e.g. the Neale-Wade Academy, Lincolnshire and Norfolk) that means there are sufficient places available at present.
- The pupils who will require secondary school places between now and 2024 are already living in the Wisbech area. This means that the future demand for places is not wholly reliant on the pace or level of housing development which is uncertain in an area such as Fenland where overall development viability is an issue. There is, therefore, less risk in opening a new secondary school in Wisbech, than elsewhere in Fenland, and creating surplus capacity where it is not needed. This can have a detrimental or destabilising effect on existing schools.

As stated above, the Council has already made financial provision in its capital programme for 2019/20 of £23m. This is sufficient to allow for the opening of a new secondary school of between 4FE (600 places) and 5FE (750 places) by September 2020. However, the sum of money and the timing will be kept under annual review. This will allow the Council to be flexible about when the new school will open, its initial size and how it will 'grow' the school in line with the anticipated increasing demand for places (7FE) through to 2024.

### **March**

There is no immediate pressure in March arising from the ageing through of the current primary cohorts attending the schools in the Neale-Wade Academy catchment area through to the secondary phase of education. Any requirement for additional secondary school capacity will require substantial housing allocations in the Local Plan to come forward during the period which ends in 2031. However, at present the development of these major strategic sites has stalled as overall master planning of these sites has yet to take place. In addition, there remain challenges around their commercial viability.

Although there is no immediate need for a new secondary school in March, given the difficulty in identifying the large sites required and that it is unlikely that housing development in Fenland will provide these sites as part of the developers' financial contribution, it is considered prudent for the Council to continue its current site search work and bring it to a conclusion.

At the same time pupil numbers will be kept under annual review.

### **Chatteris and Whittlesey**

There is no immediate pressure on the secondary schools serving the towns of Chatteris and Whittlesey. Whilst housing development is planned it is at a lower level than in Wisbech and March. The Fenland Local Plan proposes 2600 homes distributed between the market towns of Chatteris and Whittlesey.

This level of housing growth will generate additional pupil numbers but the demand for places can be accommodated through the modest expansion of these schools when required.

#### **4. WHY PROPOSE THE CWA SITE IN WISBECH FOR A NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL?**

The CWA site is the former horticultural and equine facility adjacent to Meadowgate School. This site is vacant as the CWA have consolidated these courses at its Milton Campus. The site is still owned by CWA which has delayed its decision to dispose of the site after learning of the Council's interest.

A detailed site assessment report concluded that part or all of the CWA land is suitable for the development of a secondary school. The size of the site is sufficient to accommodate a number of different layouts. This could be important as additional land may need to be acquired to improve access for all modes of transport and to accommodate the proposal being prepared by Meadowgate School for a new Specialist ASD Free School.

There is a need to develop secondary school provision in Fenland by the end of the decade and this site offers sufficient land to realise the proposal and meet the required timescales for delivery. The site is also available and there is a willing vendor.

When considering other sites, which may be preferable in terms of their overall location and journey times for students, their suitability and deliverability within the timescales required to meet the need for places will also be essential considerations.

## 5. NEXT STEPS

The Council will:

- Consult with key stakeholders over the autumn term 2016;
- In particular, we would like answers to and views on the questions set out and submitted via our online Smart Survey or the attached comment sheet
- Review and collate responses at the end of October 2016 before drafting final recommendations for the CYP Committee's consideration in November 2016.

The preferred form of response, saving time and postage would be to complete the short **online survey at the following link.**

<http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/proposalforasecondaryschoolinthefenlands>

A comment sheet is attached for your response. **The deadline for receipt of comments by 21st October 2016.**

The views expressed during this consultation will be considered by officers and, in consultation with the local County Councillors representing the electoral divisions in the Fenland District, a recommendation will be made to the CYP Committee on whether to proceed with the current proposal or to develop and implement alternative options.

**REVIEW OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION IN THE FENLAND DISTRICT**

**PROPOSAL FOR A NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL IN WISBECH**

Please **tick** to indicate if you are a:

MEMBER OF SCHOOL STAFF	
SCHOOL GOVERNOR/TRUST MEMBER	
PARENT/CARER OF A SCHOOL CHILD	
PARENT/CARER OF A YOUNGER CHILD	
ELECTED COUNCILLOR	
MEMBER OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY	
MEMBER OF AN EXTERNAL LOCAL AUTHORITY	

\*I agree/\*disagree with the proposal to provide a new school in Wisbech

\*I agree/\*disagree that the school should be sited on land adjacent to Meadowgate School

\*I agree/\*disagree with the proposal to defer the provision of a new secondary school in March until substantial housing development has taken place

\*I agree/\*disagree with the proposal for the modest expansion of the existing secondary schools in Chatteris and Whittlesey when required

\*Please delete as appropriate

Comments: (please continue on the reverse of this sheet)

*Comments should be sent by **Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016** to:*

*Ian Trafford, Education Officer*

*Childrens, Families & Adults Services*

*Box CC1206, Castle Court*

*Castle Hill, Cambridge*

*CB3 0AP*

*Tel: 01223 699803*

*Or by email to: [ian.trafford@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:ian.trafford@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)*

# Map of the Meadowgate Site

Cambridgeshire County Council

