

STAUNTON ON WYE PRIMARY SCHOOL: REPLACEMENT AIDED SCHOOL PROJECT

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN'S SERVICES

CABINET

27 MARCH 2008

Wards Affected

Wormsley Ridge

Castle

Purpose

Cabinet to approve the provision of a new build replacement school for Staunton on Wye.

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards.

It was included in the Forward Plan.

Recommendations

THAT Cabinet supports the Governors' project to provide a new school building for 70 pupils in Staunton on Wye.

Reasons

In 2000 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (then DfES) made a grant available to the Trustee Governors of this aided school to meet 90% of the net costs of new accommodation. This grant is dependent on the Local Authority supporting the scheme. The Department for Children, Schools and Families require an explicit expression of support from the Local Authority before 31 March 2008. Otherwise they will withdraw their offer, and place the resources back into the national fund used to fund aided schools across the country.

Considerations

1. Staunton on Wye Primary School is a 3 class school accommodated in a 3 storey Victorian Gothic Listed Building within a complex built and managed by the Jarvis Trust. Although this provides a fascinating local history, the 19th Century school accommodation is not appropriate to meeting the needs of all children in the 21st Century. There is no disabled access to the upper floors, which also rely on the adjoining but empty building as a means of emergency fire exit.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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2. In terms of physical condition and suitability of teaching spaces it is one of the worst Primary Schools in the County, requiring over £177,000 to repair the building fabric. In the past roof materials have fallen into playground areas, and a ceiling in the hall has collapsed. It remains an expensive building for the Governors to maintain.
3. In December 2000 the DCSF recognised this, and offered 90% funding towards the net cost of a new school. Since then there have been difficulties in identifying a site and obtaining outline planning permission. The latter was achieved in January 2004 when outline permission was granted. This was valid for 5 years, subject to 3 reserved matters (approval of the details of the siting, design and external appearance of the buildings, the means of access thereto and the landscaping of the site) being resolved before January 2007.
4. In this period pupil numbers in the County and in the Weobley Pyramid of schools declined, and questions were raised about the wisdom of proceeding with this scheme. The reserved matters were not resolved, and planning permission has now lapsed. The Planning Service Officer has advised that he is unaware of any changed circumstances. However, the outcome of any further application cannot be pre-judged. Governors would have to reapply and the application should be resolved within 3 months.
5. The site has been purchased. The original owners or their successors are entitled to recover possession if the site is not used for a school within a specified period.

Financial Implications

6. In a project to provide a new aided school on a different site, the Local Authority has a duty to acquire the new site. This has been done at the cost of £92,500, (completed on 12 April 2007); the purchase includes the school's playing field. Within the purchase agreement there is a covenant which requires the new school to be completed and in use by the 12 April 2012. If this is not achieved the original owners have a right for the site to be returned into their ownership, albeit with the sum needed to purchase the site being credited to the Local Authority. The project to build the new school remains the responsibility of the School Governors and the appointed architects, using the 90% grant from DCSF, 10% contribution from Governors and the capital value of the existing site.
7. Upon completion of the works (in accordance with the practice adopted by DCSF for Aided Schools) the freehold ownership of the buildings, car park and all hard play areas would be transferred to the Governors. The Local Authority would retain ownership of the playing field areas. Estimates based on recent primary school buildings suggest that the new school will cost over £1,600,000.
8. The DCSF during the preparation of the project will review costings and its grant offer. The principle of 90% grant to the net cost of the project remains. The DCSF will increase the grant if inflation in the construction industry justifies it. A further valuation of the current site would also be needed.

Risk Management

The project is not a Local Authority project per se. Responsibility and financial risk lies with the School Governors. The Local Authority responsibility lies in its strategic planning and the risks lie in the impact of a decision on Staunton on Wye Primary School on the current and future pupils at surrounding primary schools, and in the reputation of the Local Authority in making a correct judgement on this matter.

Cabinet should be aware that unless the new accommodation is provided, or significant maintenance monies continue to be invested by the Governors, health and safety concerns for the well being of children will remain, and forced closure of the building (not necessarily the school) at some point in the future could not be ruled out.

Alternative Options

If the Cabinet does not make clear a decision to support the project to provide new accommodation before 31 March 2008, the DCSF will withdraw the funding on offer.

The alternative option is to maintain the school in its existing building, but this does not provide accommodation fit for 21st Century teaching and learning, and would require high levels of maintenance monies, and continuing monitoring of the health and safety situation.

Consultees

Numerous responses on the future of Staunton on Wye Primary School were received in the original School Review proposals (now withdrawn). Those who have children at the school and prospective parents argued strongly for the new school buildings. There is nervousness in surrounding schools on the impact that such a development would have over the future. Clearly there are mixed views but with the opportunity to provide such investment in a new school build being rare this is seen as an opportunity to improve the physical learning environment.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

DCSF email

DCSF Offer of Grant Letter

Letters/emails received on Staunton in School Review Process

Outline Planning Permission (9 January 2004)