

## Frequently asked questions and answers

### 1. Building Schools for the Future (BSF)

#### 1.1 Why Stevenage?

The choice of Building Schools for the Future priority areas was decided by the Department for Education and Skills. (DfES) Originally the Government prioritised areas which had the highest level of social deprivation and lowest achievement rates to receive investment first. Hertfordshire started bidding for BSF money as far back as 2003 but nowhere in the county qualified early in the programme when compared to other parts of the country.

The criteria have been enlarged since 2003 to include a Local Authority's readiness to deliver a large project of this kind and, on this basis, Stevenage is being funded in 2008/09. For many reasons the County Council considers that Stevenage is an excellent choice to benefit first from this substantial investment in our secondary schools.

#### 1.2 Why £145m and is it guaranteed?

The Government uses a formula based on the current and projected number of students. It also makes assumptions (which it makes nationally) about the proportion of our buildings which will need to be rebuilt or will need major remodelling or minor refurbishment. It also calculates how much money should be made available specifically for investment in Information Communications Technology (ICT) which it sees as a major part of transforming schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Those calculations led to an initial indication of approximately £145m, some of which will need to be provided from the County Council's own funding sources. The level of investment is not guaranteed and will be subject to further confirmation as we develop our proposals. The final approval is expected next spring once we have submitted our Outline Business Case to the Government.

#### 1.3 Will all the schools be re-built?

No, while £145m seems a lot of money, as explained, it is expected that only a proportion of our buildings will need to be completely rebuilt. At this point in time we expect to build two completely new school buildings. The remainder will be substantially refurbished with some new accommodation added.

## 2. The vision for Stevenage

### 2.1 What is the vision for Stevenage?

A summary of the vision for Stevenage is shown on page 2 of the consultation document for the review of secondary school places.

### 2.2 How did the vision come about and who was involved in creating it?

The County Council has worked with a group of key people involved in and responsible for education within the town. This includes the headteachers of primary, secondary and special schools, students, the college of further education, representatives of school governing bodies, politicians, and representatives of key organisations which have an important part to play in secondary education in Stevenage, including the Borough Council.

### 2.3 Why sixth forms and why not a sixth form college?

The consensus among the various groups consulted was that it is important for Stevenage to maintain its sixth forms. It was considered that schools without sixth forms would not attract or keep good quality teachers who are so important to maintaining and improving teaching and learning.

The changes in the curriculum for 14-19 year olds, introducing more vocational courses, also mean that it makes sense to make provision within schools rather than to introduce a break at 16. North Herts College is very supportive of this view and is working collaboratively with all the secondary schools to deliver courses on school sites as well as from its own buildings.

### 2.4 What is a trust school, why have an overarching trust in Stevenage?

Trust arrangements are being considered for Stevenage community secondary schools because the Government is keen to see a wider range and diversity of schools and considers it to be essentially related to the investment being made to achieve transformation of the town's schools. Trust status is not something that the Local Authority can impose on schools but must be sought by governing bodies. Discussions are on-going, and proposals may be made by the schools in the future to move to a different status.

A trust school is a form of foundation school, which is its own admitting authority and owns its own buildings and grounds. The concept of an overarching trust for the town is to maintain and strengthen the current informal collaborative working arrangements between the community secondary and special schools in the town.

## 3. The area review

### 3.1 Why can't you just improve the existing schools? Why change?

It is important that we spend the money wisely – there won't be another opportunity like it. We need to make sure we have schools that are able to provide for the needs of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At present many of our school buildings are tired, reaching the end of their planned life span and no longer ideal for the kind of education schools want to deliver. BSF funding will enable us to provide much more suitable, modern buildings.

We therefore need to consider what will be needed in the future taking into account the changing shape of the town, the numbers of students expected, and where schools currently are and need to be in relation to that. The present mainstream secondary schools are relatively small, some are virtually next door to each other, and some parents and students find they cannot gain places in either their nearest schools or the school they prefer. A better geographical spread of larger schools will help to overcome these problems.

### 3.2 Why do schools need to be 8 forms of entry (f.e.)? Why is this so important if it means that a school will need to close?

Those involved in considering the vision for the future of education in Stevenage consider that schools should be large enough to be efficient, and to support suitably sized sixth forms, whilst being able to maintain the close working relationships between staff and students. They feel ideally they should be 8 f.e. (taking 8 groups of 30 students each year). That, coupled with the need to change the distribution of schools within the town, leads to the need to close a school.

### 3.3 Why are you planning for 10 years ahead? What about future expansion of the town beyond that?

The 10 year planning timescale is based on advice from the Government in relation to BSF funding. It will ensure that we are not building to meet short term needs only to find there is a requirement to add to them immediately after.

The County Council is making sure, where possible, that the school sites will be large enough for future expansion should that be necessary.

## 4. The proposals

### 4.1 What is a Published Admission Number (PAN)?

It is the proposed maximum number of students to be admitted into year 7 in each secondary school. It is determined on a yearly basis by the admitting authority which is the Local Authority for all schools in Stevenage with the exception of John Henry Newman RC, which is a voluntary-aided school and is its own admitting authority.

### 4.2 The proposals are for 2011. Why so far away? Why make proposals now?

2011 is the first date we expect the first building work to be complete. This is because of the timescales attached to the BSF programme. We have to publish proposals now so that it is clear which schools the building works will be based on in order to obtain approval from the Government next Spring. We appreciate that it is a long time to wait for change and it is important that parents, staff and students understand that change is not imminent and that it will be 'business as usual' for some time to come.

### 4.3 Why close Heathcote school? Can't you move it to the new site in the north?

The reason for choosing Heathcote is primarily a matter of geography. Heathcote and Barnwell schools are in the south of the town and we do not need two 8 f.e schools there. We believe there needs to be one school in that part of the town and Barnwell school has recently expanded and has more students.

Moving Heathcote school to the new site in the north of the town is not proposed because it would be so far away from the current site that it would be too disruptive to pupils and staff. Also, as it serves a completely different community it would be deemed a new school and therefore subject to the competition regulations. That means that Heathcote school would need to close anyway and a competition for other potential proposers to run the new school would have to be held. This would not only disrupt the project timetable but would be unhelpful to the leadership, staff and pupils of the school.

### 4.4 Why mention the possibility of Marriotts and Thomas Alleyne schools closing? Was this really necessary?

The County Council does not own all the sites required to provide schools in the north and centre of the town. The timescales for the BSF decisions mean that we need to complete our reorganisation proposals by the end of the year. Although we don't anticipate insurmountable problems on either of these sites (as we have already had discussions with the current owners)

it is important that we plan for the unlikely event that one or the other site is not available so that we can legally bring about the alternative option, should it be required, in time to meet the BSF timetable. We don't want to alarm parents, students and staff but it would be irresponsible if we didn't point out this possibility at this stage.

## **4.5 Why chose to move Thomas Alleyne rather than Barclay school?**

The two school sites are adjacent to each other and there isn't the need for two schools in that locality. Some of the Thomas Alleyne buildings are very old and are not appropriate for education use in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Barclay school is larger and moving it would disrupt more students. We will need to continue to use some of its buildings because they are listed. The enlargement of Barclay school will mean that the Thomas Alleyne playing fields will continue to be used. Investment in completely new buildings in another site in the north of the town would secure the continuation of the oldest secondary school in the town in brand new buildings.

## **5. Special schools**

### **5.1 Why are special schools included?**

BSF investment is intended to transform secondary education, whichever sector is involved.

### **5.2 Why leave Larwood school out?**

As Larwood school is a special school for primary aged pupils only it does not qualify for BSF funding.

### **5.3 Why relocate special schools to mainstream school sites? What are the benefits?**

The mainstream and special schools already collaborate. Some consider that closer physical proximity would better enhance that collaboration and provide easier, more convenient access to curriculum and facilities. They consider that there would be educational and social benefits to all students.

### **5.4 Why can't you just improve the current special school buildings?**

That is a possibility and is included in the options.

### **5.5 Why make more proposals for The Valley School than the other special schools?**

Similar options are being proposed for this school as for the other special schools involved i.e. it could stay where it is or be re-located to a

mainstream school site. The reason that some of the options are proposed is because the moderate learning difficulties of its students could be met in mainstream schools (although it is recognised that some children have other, more complex needs). The County Council is keen to hear your views on all the options proposed.

## **5.6 I am worried about my child's placement. Who can I speak to about this?**

Contact the Special Needs Team Manager from the area in which you live.

## **6. Transitional arrangements**

### **6.1 What will happen to the Heathcote students? Where are they going to go to school when the change happens? Why can't you say now?**

The change is not going to happen until at least 2011 and it will depend on which proposals are agreed and which schools are approved for expansion first. The County Council intends to offer places as soon as possible at one or two named schools to students at Heathcote school at the time of closure. Those schools would already have benefited from rebuilding or refurbishment and expansion, so that there will only be one change for Heathcote students. The County Council and the school, with the support of all other schools in the town, will work hard to maintain and secure confidence in the quality of teaching and learning within Heathcote school.

### **6.2 Can I move my child before this happens?**

The County Council and all schools would counsel you to think carefully about this. Remember, all schools will be undergoing potentially significant building works and be subject to some disruption while that is going on. Heathcote school would not, and it is not intended to move its students until other schools have gone through their expansion works. The important issue is what is best for your child and, if you insist that a move is right, you will be entitled to move your child to another school provided it has space in the relevant year group. Please remember though, these are only proposals and no decisions will be taken until the end of this year and none will be implemented until 2011, which is several years away.

### **6.3 How are you going to carry out all this building work and not disrupt my child's education?**

Careful plans will be put in place to minimise disruption at each site. Schools, staff and parents will be involved in that planning. Students will also be involved with architects in the design and planning for change of school buildings. Some disruption will be inevitable but everyone will work together to make sure that maintaining the quality of teaching and learning is of prime importance. This is a major opportunity for Stevenage but we

recognise the need to minimise any disruption during the period of transition.

## **6.4 Will I get help if I have to pay for a new uniform?**

You may be entitled to help for this.

## **6.5 What about staff? How are you going to make sure that you keep staff in our schools?**

The County Council has an excellent record of managing change resulting from school reorganisations. All staff in Stevenage secondary schools can be confident that their futures will continue to be high on the list of priorities for schools, both individually and collectively, and for the local authority.

BSF will bring changes which will be implemented over a fairly long time-scale. The County Council is working closely with all the Stevenage secondary headteachers to ensure that continuity of education is maintained, that there will be job security for all staff, and that all staff will have chances to develop their careers as part of the opportunities BSF will provide.

## **7. The consultation process**

### **7.1 How can I get involved and make my views known?**

You can do so in several ways, in writing using the form at the end of the consultation document, on-line, by e mail etc. You can also attend one of the public meetings which are indicated in the consultation document. This is a consultation and we really do want to hear your views.

### **7.2 I can't see that there is a meeting for Nobel/Barnwell/Barclay/John Henry Newman. Why, and which meeting should I attend?**

All the meetings are public meetings and as such anyone can attend. We have ensured that there are meetings at each of the schools for which there are significant proposals, i.e. potential closure or move. The two general meetings identified, both to be held at Round Diamond School, are intended for people related to the other schools in the town but of course anyone can attend those too.

### **7.3 How can I really influence the decision makers?**

By attending the meetings and letting us have your views in writing. All meetings are recorded and transcripts will be posted on our website. Each written communication is made available to all County Councillors. They are

also analysed and key issues summarised for the Education Panel and Cabinet meetings.

**7.4 Can I be present at the County Council meetings when this subject is discussed and decisions are taken?**

Both the Education Panel and Cabinet meetings are held in public. The dates are given at the end of the consultation document.