

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY, 23 JULY 2001 AT 10AM**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
MONDAY 23 JULY 2001 AT 2.15PM**

Agenda Item
No.

12

**PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES IN SOUTH WEST
HERTFORDSHIRE**

Report of The Director of Children, Schools & Families

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1. Purpose of the report

- To consider the outcomes of feasibility work and discussion with schools on the package of proposals for secondary provision in South West Hertfordshire as authorised by Cabinet on 18 December 2000;
- To assess the options available and;
- To determine which of the options should be pursued, having considered the comments of the CSF Select Committee.

2. Summary

2.1 On 18 December 2000 the Cabinet authorised officers to proceed with the development of feasibility studies and discussions with schools about a package to:

- expand Rickmansworth School by 1FE (on the assumption that Rickmansworth School deliver changes to their admission criteria);
- expand Queens' School by 1FE;
- provide essential accommodation at Bushey Hall and Westfield Schools to maintain existing admission numbers.

2.1.1 It was estimated that 2 forms of entry would be required in S W Herts between 2000-2006. For the year 2000/2001 there is a surplus of 100 places. Including an additional

form of entry at Queens' school for September 2002 there would be sufficient provision in South West Herts.

2.2 Accommodation

- 2.2.1 Feasibility work for the expansion of Queens' School by 1 FE has been completed and shows the proposed work would be appropriate. This has been approved by the governors. The estimated cost is £1.45m. Queens' School would accept an additional form of entry in September 2002.
- 2.2.2 The estimated cost of the proposed work for Bushey Hall and Westfield is £350,000. This will enable both schools to maintain current levels of admission.
- 2.2.3 A proposal for expanding Rickmansworth School to accommodate an additional form of entry (including some improved core facilities prioritised as essential by the school) has been developed. The estimated cost is £1.4m. Further improvements are now being sought by the school, i.e. extensions to the Hall, dining room and replacement of some of the school's mobile accommodation. These additional requests are unrealistic within the remit of the Basic Need review.
- 2.2.4 Following previous discussions with Officers the governors of St Clement Danes considered some of the practicalities of further expansion by an additional form of entry at a subcommittee meeting on 22 June 2001. As a result of these discussions the full governing body at its meeting on 16 July 2001 will be considering a proposal that the school should expand to accommodate a further form of entry. Officers have visited the school on a number of occasions, have had detailed discussions with the school concerning accommodation requirements and have formulated a proposal for future expansion. This feasibility work has identified suitable locations for the construction of additional accommodation. Expansion of the school is dependent upon the purchase of adjacent land for playing field purposes in order to satisfy DfES requirements.
- 2.2.5 The feasibility of expanding Westfield has also been investigated as an alternative should negotiations with Rickmansworth and St Clement Danes Schools fail to achieve a satisfactory outcome. This is discussed more fully in section 6 of this report.

2.3 Admissions

- 2.3.1 To date the governors of Rickmansworth School have given no indication of any change to admissions. A possible approach to a change in admission criteria which would address local need can be found in section 3 of this report.
- 2.3.2 Discussions with St Clement Danes School have focused upon the number of out county children gaining places. It is inevitable that the location of the school, so close to the Buckinghamshire border, means that some out county children will gain places at the school. At the request of the LEA, the head teacher has supplied data that demonstrates that the intake of out county non- siblings has reduced over the period of the last three years. However the LEA does need to find a way to ensure that children local to the school would not be disadvantaged by expansion and this will be further considered by the governors on the 16 July.

2.3.3 There are no considerations regarding admissions for Queens', Bushey Hall and Westfield Schools.

2.4 The comments of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee on the 11 July 2001 will be reported to the Cabinet on 23 July 2001.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The amount of Basic Need funding is £2.87m. A deliverable package for the expansion of Queens' and Rickmansworth schools, including work at Bushey Hall and Westfield Schools is presented in the report at an estimated cost of £3.22m (i.e. a shortfall of £350k that would have to be met as a first claim on the 2002/2003 Capital programme). The additional core and specialist accommodation needs identified by Rickmansworth School would need to be considered for inclusion in future Capital programmes.

3.2 The total estimated cost for the proposed scheme for Queen's, Bushey Hall, Westfield, and St Clement Danes Schools is £2.92m (i.e. a shortfall of £50K which would need to be met from the 2002/2003 Capital Programme). The estimate for work at St Clement Danes School is £1.1m based upon phase 1 feasibility work. Further feasibility work into location and accommodation requirements may reveal the need for possibly 2 additional classrooms to the proposed work described in section 7 of this report.

3.3 Expansion of St Clement Danes by one form of entry would be appropriate. The response to initial discussions has been positive although there are many details to resolve and officers are waiting on the response of the full governing body at its meeting on the 16 July 2001. The school has indicated that it would be willing to meet with officers and Members immediately after that meeting should there be a favourable response.

3.4 Essential accommodation for expansion at Queens' and Westfield Schools, together with the essential work at Bushey Hall School, can be achieved within the available budget providing that the additional work required for Science and Technology at Westfield can be phased within the capital programme for 2002/2003. The cost of the first phase of proposed work at Westfield School is estimated at £1.3m, bringing the total cost of the package to £2.87m. The estimated cost of the work for the second phase at Westfield School is £350k, bringing the cost of the total package for Option 3 to £3.22m (i.e. a shortfall of £350k, which would need to be met from the Capital Programme).

3.5 Because of the uncertainty around Rickmansworth School and St Clement Danes School officers have undertaken initial feasibility work into the expansion of Westfield School. Westfield School is demonstrating rising levels of achievement and has just secured Technology College status.

3.6 Members will need to determine whether or not to authorise officers:

- (i) to proceed with the proposed works at Queens' School, Bushey Hall School, and £250,000 worth of work at Westfield School.

- (ii) to ask the governors of Queens' School to publish statutory notices for the expansion of the school by 1FE from September 2002.
- (iii) **either**
- to pursue the proposal for accommodation at Rickmansworth School as summarised in paragraph 2.3.3 on the understanding that:
 - remaining accommodation deficiencies identified by the school could only be considered in the future Capital Programme; and
 - further discussions about admissions mean that local children disadvantaged by existing criteria are able to secure places at Rickmansworth School.
- or**
- to pursue the possibility of expanding St Clement Danes School, ensuring that future expansion meets local need.
- (iv) to undertake detailed feasibility work for the possible expansion of Westfield School in preparation for implementation should negotiations with Rickmansworth and St Clement Danes Schools fail to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

1. Background

- 1.1 Basic Need Funding of £2.87 million has been secured from the DfEE to provide 416 additional secondary school places (11-18) to meet forecasted demand in South West Herts. This works out at £6890 per place.
- 1.2 Members agreed that additional places should be provided by expanding well performing schools where this is physically possible. They also said this should not result in more out county children being admitted; and asked officers, in their discussion with schools that might be expanded, to ensure co-operation in devising admission criteria to ensure that this additional investment benefits Hertfordshire children.
- 1.3 On 18 December 2000 the Cabinet authorised officers to proceed with the development of feasibility studies and discussions with schools about a package to:
 - expand Rickmansworth School by 1FE (on the assumption that Rickmansworth School deliver changes to their admission criteria);
 - expand Queens' School by 1FE;
 - provide essential accommodation at Bushey Hall and Westfield Schools to maintain existing admission numbers.
- 1.4 It was agreed that feasibility work should also take into account the possibility of expanding Rickmansworth School by more than 1FE.

2. Approach

- 2.1 The discussions with schools, development work and feasibility studies were approached on the following basis:
 - an assessment of existing accommodation and organisation
 - an analysis of future needs to accommodate a further form of entry
 - a fair distribution of funding available
 - potential changes to admission criteria that would ensure that the additional places went to Hertfordshire children.
- 2.2 Essential work required to meet requirements for Bushey Hall School, Westfield School and Queens' School was clearly identified and feasibility studies commissioned.
- 2.3 Discussions with Rickmansworth School identified an expectation by the school that existing accommodation deficiencies would be taken into account in any scheme to expand the school and that the feasibility study would need to be undertaken in this context. The school had submitted a bid to the Capital programme for a classroom block to replace four existing double mobile classrooms.
- 2.4 Although the governors of St Clement Danes had initially been reluctant to consider further expansion, subsequent meetings with the school revealed a willingness to discuss the feasibility of taking an additional form of entry. Therefore in light of the site and financial difficulties associated with Rickmansworth School officers have proceeded to investigate this option.

2.5 The next 5 sections summarise the position at each of the schools.

3. Rickmansworth School

Accommodation

- 3.1 Rickmansworth School does not have an easy site to expand and the initial enthusiasm of the governors has weakened and there is a new headteacher since the original discussions.
- 3.2 Some buildings are in a poor condition; there are 4 double mobiles; and although there was some new development during the era of grant-maintained status, it did not have as beneficial an impact as elsewhere.
- 3.3 The feasibility work established that a building scheme that addressed the list of deficiencies identified by the school, as well as providing the accommodation for a further form of entry, exceeded the budget available by £2.615m. The projected work was also seen by the governors as being disruptive to the running of the school.
- 3.4 However an alternative location at the school has been identified and a deliverable and fair package has now been devised which would provide the additional accommodation required for the expansion of the school. Briefly this includes a 6 classroom block, a new library, conversion of the existing library to a science laboratory and associated work for additional team playing space, car parking and highways improvements. The estimated cost for this scheme would be £1.4m. (Estimate category B) This is an outline estimate of price per square metre based upon broad design criteria.
- 3.5 The area of the proposed location for a new classroom block is sufficient to sustain additional building at a later date (i.e. accommodation to replace 8 unsatisfactory classrooms currently in mobiles). Additionally, it is proposed that a new library would release space in the existing main building for a new science laboratory.
- 3.6 However, the governors have indicated that they are unwilling to accept a scheme that only provides classrooms for additional pupils without a full commitment to a further building programme to address all the school's deficiencies.

Admission

- 3.7 The admission criteria for Rickmansworth School are complicated and already use postcodes. An analysis of pupil allocations for Rickmansworth School for the last three years indicates fluctuating levels of admission for children, particularly from the Croxley Green area and also from out of the County. Therefore it can be concluded that children living closest to the school experience difficulty in securing places under existing criteria.
- 3.8 Initially the governors indicated a willingness to be flexible concerning changes to admission criteria and agreed to review their admission rules and seemed to accept the principle that expansion should not benefit out county children. To date there has been no further indication of change on their part to their rules.

- 3.9 The Code of Practice states that it is legal to give priority to some local children and therefore a more specific definition of the school's current postcode criteria could be considered.
- 3.10 Alternatively, the governors could replace the current nominated catchment area with the council districts of Watford and Three Rivers which should enable more local children to gain places at Rickmansworth School. Children from other areas of Hertfordshire and out of the County would still qualify under other criteria.
- 3.11 The Adjudicator's verbal advice is that no admitting authority has yet been challenged on the use of district council boundaries. However our legal advice is that the percentage weighting (95%) in Rickmansworth School's criteria, would be more open to challenge but that a modification of the post code criteria to meet the needs of the local community would be in accordance with the Code of Practice as stated above in paragraph 3.9. The governing body, as an admitting authority, would have to take its own legal advice about this.
- 3.12 Finally it is clear that the limitations of the site and the core accommodation exclude the possibility of expanding Rickmansworth School by more than one form of entry.

4. Queens' School

Accommodation

- 4.1 The proposed work at Queens' School will provide 8 new science laboratories and convert 6 existing laboratories into the additional 6 general classrooms required for an additional form of entry. The need for an additional 2 laboratories is supported by a curriculum analysis. The scheme is relatively straightforward and has the full support of the governing body. The estimated cost of the scheme is £1.45m. The estimate for the work is category C which is based upon an architect's feasibility study with enough design and specification information to allow consideration of an elemental cost plan and programme.
- 4.2 The school is situated on a large site and has the capacity for expansion. Planning permission for the new laboratories has already been obtained based upon the specific designs for a 12 laboratory block. The school has already completed phase one (4 labs) and the proposed work will complete the project.

Admissions

- 4.3 There are no admission complications. It is recognised that the school has a balanced intake and admits children from a wide area of South West Hertfordshire. An additional form of entry will enable the school to continue to meet this demand as well as absorb additional local children from new housing developments.
- 4.4 Previous reports stated that addressing the inadequate science accommodation at Queens' would significantly raise achievement and enable pupils to have full access to the science curriculum.

5. Bushey Hall School

- 5.1 The proposed work at Bushey Hall School will enable the school to maintain its current admission number of 240 by converting 7 classrooms unable to take classes of 30 into suitable accommodation capable of taking 4 full classes and the refurbishment of a science laboratory and technology room. This is estimated to cost £100K.

6. Westfield School

- 6.1 The school is now maintaining full admission intakes. Although there is some capacity at present due to lower numbers in previous years, the school will require the use of general classroom teaching space currently being used for drama teaching. The proposed building work at Westfield School for an additional drama facility, estimated at £250K, would enable the school to sustain a level of intake of 195 children per year. This requirement is supported by a full curriculum analysis, will relieve pressure upon existing timetable use of the Assembly Hall and release space for PE purposes.
- 6.2 Expanding Westfield to take a further form of entry (222 per year)
- 6.2.1 The feasibility of expanding Westfield has also been investigated as an alternative should negotiations with Rickmansworth and St Clement Danes Schools fail to achieve a satisfactory outcome.
- 6.2.2 The Westfield School site has the capacity to take additional building required for a further form of entry without compromising playing field. The site is not within the green belt.
- 6.2.3 Feasibility work has focused upon the provision required to maintain current intake, i.e. Drama space to relieve general teaching areas. The curriculum analysis revealed a need for increasing the size of technology accommodation in the future as the school moves towards its full capacity.
- 6.2.4 However, an additional form of entry would require at least 6 additional general classrooms and an additional Science laboratory. The existing dining facilities at the school are extremely cramped and would certainly require extending for the additional pupils.
- 6.2.5 Further feasibility work would be required to obtain estimated costings. An approximate figure for teaching accommodation would be £1.28m without the addition of the Science laboratory.
- 6.2.6 It is suggested that the work required for Westfield could be phased with the additional Science accommodation adaptations to technology provided in a second phase, as a commitment against the Capital Programme.

7. St Clement Danes School

Accommodation

- 7.1.1 Officers have continued regular discussions with many of the secondary schools in South West Herts in relation to their strategies for the general improvement of their accommodation and facilities to meet existing needs.
- 7.2 Within the context of this general planning for the area discussions have taken place with some governors and senior staff at St Clement Danes' School. These discussions have revealed a willingness by the school to take forward a proposal to the governing body on 16 July 2001 that the school should consider expansion by a further form of entry. St Clement Danes School recognises the increasing number of applicants from the local area wishing to attend the school.
- 7.3 Initial feasibility work has indicated that, provided a solution can be found to rectify any playing field deficiency, St Clement Danes' School has the site capacity for further expansion. Land adjacent to the school site could be purchased for playing field use.
- 7.4 To take an extra form of entry the school has identified existing accommodation deficiencies in the areas of Art, Technology and Music; and core facilities such as dining room accommodation. Work to address these needs has been estimated approximately at £1.1m. As stated in paragraph 3.2 of the summary to this report further feasibility work may reveal the need for possibly 2 additional classrooms.
- 7.5 Officers have identified suitable locations within the school site that would be suitable for additional building work and discussions with the school about accommodation requirements are ongoing.
- 7.6 Discussions are continuing with the school concerning accommodation needs to clarify a proposal before the meeting of the full governing body on 16 July 2001.

Admissions

- 7.7 When the Members Working Group were reviewing the overall admission situation in SW Hertfordshire, they agreed that a significant issue was the number of out county children gaining places in the area. It was recognised that the admission criteria of some foundation and voluntary aided schools in the Watford area were favourable to out county children. However, the geographical location of St Clement Danes School inevitably means that Buckinghamshire children will gain places at the school.
- 7.8 At the request of the LEA the school has produced data that demonstrates that the percentage of non-sibling out county children has decreased over the past three years. Should the school expand by a further form of entry, the LEA would seek assurance that the additional places would meet local needs within Hertfordshire.

8. Financial implications

The table below sets out the estimated costs for the original proposed package (Option 1) and an alternative package including St Clement Danes School rather than Rickmansworth School (Option 2) and finally Westfield (Option 3) instead of either St Clement Danes or Rickmansworth.

| | School | Cost | Category estimate | Total | Estimated Surplus/ Deficit on £2.87m |
|---|--|---|--------------------------|--|---|
| Estimated cost for Option 1 | Queens' Rickmansworth Bushey Hall Westfield Feasibility | £1.45m £1.4m £100k £250k £20k | C B C C | £3.22m | £350k deficit |
| Estimated cost for Option 2 (Further feasibility work on St Clement Danes required) | Queens' St Clement Danes Bushey Hall Westfield Feasibility | £1.45m £1.1m £100k £250k £20k | C A C C | £2.92m | £50k deficit |
| Estimated cost for Option 3 (Further feasibility work on Westfield for phase 1 & 2 required) | Queens' Bushey Hall Westfield – Phase 1 Westfield – Phase 2 Feasibility | £1.45m £100k £1.3m £350k £20k | C C A A | £2.87m (Westfield - Phase 1) £3.22m (Westfield - Phase 2) | £ no deficit £350k deficit |

8.1 The accommodation required for an additional form of entry by the schools in all options is more than the basic provision of additional general classrooms:

E.g.: specialist teaching space
or additional core accommodation
or specific site requirement associated with hard or soft play provision
or the need to address town planning requirements.

8.2 For these reasons estimated costs for schemes proposed in both Option 1 and Option 2 exceed the funding available. Members would need to agree to the shortfall being considered a priority against the Capital Programme 2002/2003. In the case of Option 2 an additional £50k would be required. Option 3 would require a commitment to the Capital Programme to implement Phase 2.

- 8.3 Costs for the essential work at Queens', Bushey Hall and Westfield schools in Options 1 and 2 have been fully tested. As already stated, the scheme at Queens' involves the completion of a fully designed project with planning approval.
- 8.4 Estimated costs for the work at Rickmansworth School are based upon detailed feasibility work and officers have taken professional advice concerning likely highways costs.
- 8.5 HCC land may be required for additional car parking. Disposal of this land for residential development in accordance with an existing outline planning permission, would be likely to produce a capital receipt to the County Council in the region of £150,000 - £200,000 (NB: this would need to be validated by a formal valuation).
- 8.6 DfES approval to use Basic Need funding at St Clement Danes School, a VA school, has been acquired should the proposed scheme be adopted.

9. Conclusion

9.1. Admissions

- 9.1.1 As stated earlier in this report, no changes to Queens' School admission criteria were requested. Current intakes are totally from Hertfordshire.
- 9.1.2 The governing body of St Clement Danes School will be considering the proposal to take a further form of entry in the context of the increasing demand for places from those Hertfordshire children in the locality currently unable to secure places at the school at its meeting on 16 July 2001.
- 9.1.3 Legal advice is that the introduction of a priority postcode within the postcode catchment criteria for Rickmansworth School would be less open to legal challenge than the use of council districts. Modifications to the current admission criteria giving priority to children living nearest to the school would seek to alleviate local parental pressure for additional places.

9.2 Accommodation

9.2.1 Queens' School

The school is physically and environmentally suitable for expansion and has the benefit of having planning permission for the proposals envisaged.

9.2.2 Bushey Hall School

The proposal allows for essential work to enable the school to maintain its current admission number which is crucial to overall provision requirements.

9.2.3 Westfield School

The development proposed will release essential general teaching space to enable the school to sustain its current level of intake. The Westfield School site does have the capacity for a further form of entry.

9.2.4 Rickmansworth School

Proposals contained in this report have been submitted following very careful consideration of the limitations of the site and based upon earlier feasibility work and would appear to represent a realistic and reasonable proposal.

9.2.5 St Clement Danes School

Initial feasibility work would indicate that the proposed work would enable the school to accept a further 1FE without the need (unlike Rickmansworth) for further major works to core accommodation. There is the issue of the requirement to purchase additional playing field space.

9.3 Finance

9.3.1 The cost estimates for Queens', Bushey Hall and Westfield Schools have been fully tested.

9.3.2 The estimates for Rickmansworth School are Category B and include all the anticipated associated expenditure. Including the other 3 schools the total for this option would exceed the available budget by £350k. In addition, if the HCC land were needed for additional car parking there would be a loss of a potential capital receipt of between £150k - £200k.

9.3.3 The St Clement Dane's scheme is only a Category A estimate and further work would need to be done to confirm the expenditure required. However the current total is only £50k above the total budget available.

9.3.4 The estimated costs for a scheme including a further form of entry at Westfield School would indicate that initial essential work could be achieved within the available budget. However, the school would need further work for additional Science accommodation.

10. The comments of the Select Committee on the points for consideration as set out in section 3.6 of this report will be submitted to Cabinet at the meeting on the 23 July 2001.