

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 16 DECEMBER 2002 AT 2.00 PM

Agenda Item No.

4

SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES IN CHESHUNT AND THE LOCATION FOR AN EXPANDED ST MARY'S HIGH SCHOOL.

Joint Report of the Corporate Director, People and Property, and the Director of Childrens Schools and Families Service

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Local Members: Michael Janes, Gerald Game, Moyra O'Neill, Dennis Clayton

1. Purpose of report

To receive a report on the progress of this project and to seek authorisation for the submission of planning applications for a) the new St Mary's High School and b) residential development on part of the existing St Mary's High School site.

2. Summary

- 2.1 On 23 July 2001 the Executive Committee agreed proposals for the expansion of secondary school provision in Cheshunt, based on proposals to rebuild St Mary's High School and extensions to Goffs and Turnford Schools. It has not been possible to secure the necessary town planning polices that would support the intended rebuilding of St Mary's on its current but expanded site, as envisaged then.
- 2.2 Land at Bury Green Farm, south of the present school site, has recently become available as an option for consideration, and is considered to be the best site for the relocation of St Mary's High School.
- 2.3 The County Council has sought agreement with the Borough of Broxbourne on policies within the draft Local Plan Review that support the schools expansion scheme.
- 2.4 The Borough Council's Planning and Licencing Committee, at its meeting on 4 December 2002, agreed to make modifications to their draft Local Plan Review that (a) identify land at Bury Green Farm as the site for the relocation

of St Mary's High School; and (b) remove the majority of the existing school site from the Green Belt and allocate that land it as a future housing site.

- 2.5 The provision of new buildings for St Mary's and the disposal of part of its existing site for housing development would be carried out jointly by the Diocese of St Albans and the County Council. It is now proposed that planning applications for the new school and for housing be prepared and submitted without further delay.
- 2.6 Since the sites of both applications are within the Green Belt in the adopted Broxbourne Local Plan, Cabinet authorisation is required for their submission to the relevant planning authorities.
- 2.7 If the planning authorities are minded to grant permission, the applications will need to be referred to the First Secretary of State as departures from the development plan.

3.0 Conclusions

- 3.1 A further solution for the relocation of St Mary's High School has now been identified by the County Council, the Borough Council and the Diocese of St Albans, working in partnership. The proposals now support the proposed new school buildings and housing development envisaged through policies in the emerging Local Plan Review.
- 3.2 It is appropriate to seek planning permission for both developments, and the Cabinet is asked to agree submission of planning applications for new school buildings for St Mary's and for housing development on part of the existing school site.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 Over the past three years and working in consultation with Broxbourne Borough Council and the Diocese of St Albans, as Trustees, several options have been investigated for relocation of St Mary's High School, Cheshunt. All of these options encountered objections from local residents but perhaps more significantly, raised town planning, highway and operational issues, which proved difficult to resolve.
- 4.2 Early this year the search for an alternative location for St Mary's was focussed on a site in County Council ownership at Bury Green Farm, about a half a mile south of the present school site. This 40 acre site is owned by the County Council let to the Borough Council on a 999 year lease and, until the end of 2001, was sublet by Broxbourne as an animal sanctuary.
- 4.3 The relocation of the school to Bury Green Farm would enable its present site to be vacated and part reallocated for residential development. A capital receipt from its disposal would provide funding not only towards the provision of the new St Mary's High School buildings, but also the expansion of the other two schools in the approved Cheshunt Schools Strategy, Goffs and Turnford.
- 4.4 Since both the Bury Green Farm site and the present St Mary's High site are within the Green Belt in the adopted Broxbourne Local Plan Review, the Borough Council needs to be satisfied that the very special circumstances exist to justify the proposed school and residential development as exceptions to Green Belt policy. For the Bury Green Farm site in particular, the County Council has been obliged to undertake detailed investigations relating to vehicular and pedestrian access to the proposed new school site. These feasibility studies have now been completed and have demonstrated to the Borough Council that the impact of both developments can be met. Accordingly, they have now agreed to introduce appropriate modifications to their emerging Local Plan Second Review.
- 4.5 A new local plan Policy EMP2 "Replacement of St Mary's High School" proposes that the Bury Green Farm site be allocated for the new school buildings. This Policy contains a number of points, which the school proposals will need to satisfy, but there are no apparent impediments to meeting the requirements.
- 4.6 Further changes are proposed to the current St Mary's High School site. The majority of the site is to be excluded from the Green Belt designation, and a new Policy H5, specific to the St Mary's site, is introduced allocating it as a new housing site to be developed in the second half of the plan period (2006 – 2011). Policy H5 identifies several requirements to be met in the development of the site, but all are considered appropriate and deliverable.
- 4.7 The Borough Council's Planning and Licencing Committee, at its meeting on 4 December 2002, agreed the new policies EMP2 and H5 as modifications to

their draft Local Plan Review. Following approval by the full Borough Council, the Second Deposit Plan incorporating the approved revisions is expected to be published by the Borough Council early in 2003, and to be followed by a six week public consultation period.

4.8 There are no changes to the proposals for expansion of the permanent accommodation of Goffs and Turnford schools within their existing sites. Planning permission has been granted for the additional accommodation at Goffs School. A planning application for the additional accommodation at Turnford School will be made in early 2003.

4.9 The earlier proposals for the development of playing fields at the Park Lane, Cheshunt site and for the development of housing and playing fields at the Jones Road/Silver Street, Goffs Oak site are not needed under this revised scheme.

5.0 Planning considerations

5.1 Whilst the inclusion in their emerging Local Plan Review of the new school site and the housing allocation on part of the present school site confirms the Borough Council's support for St Mary's High School 'package', the County Council wishes to make certain that these developments are achievable through the submission and approval of two planning applications.

5.2 (a) A 6 Form Entry (FE) Secondary School building (with expansion capacity to 8FE) on land at Bury Green Farm, Cheshunt. This will be a joint application by the County Council and the Diocese of St Albans and will be made under Regulation 3 of the Town & Country Planning General Regulations 1992. As such this application will be submitted to the County Council's Director of Environment, with the Borough Council as a consultee. The first plan attached shows the site marked by cross hatch.

5.3 (b) Proposed residential and related development on the greater part of the existing St Mary's High site. This also will be a joint application between HCC and the Diocese, but since it involves a development that neither party will carry out, it has to be submitted to the Borough Council for determination. The second plan attached shows the part of the site proposed for housing use marked by cross hatch.

5.4 Since the sites of both applications are currently within the Green Belt in the adopted District Local Plan, Cabinet authorisation is required for their submission as departures from the development plan.

5.5 The urgent need to submit both planning applications early in 2003 has been heightened by the protracted process in first identifying a new site for St Mary's High acceptable to the Borough Council and then securing the necessary modifications to their Local Plan Review. Even if these timeframes

are achieved, it is not expected that the new school building will be completed until Autumn 2005.

- 5.6 Because of the development plan departures, provided HCC and Broxbourne are minded to grant planning permission, both applications will stand to be referred to the First Secretary of State. It will be his decision either to call in the applications or not to intervene and leave their determination to the appropriate planning authorities.
- 5.7 Whilst it is anticipated that both the new school and the housing proposals will attract opposition from local residents, the county council can feel encouraged that, through the Local Plan Review modifications outlined above, the Borough Council has affirmed publicly its support for both schemes. The proposed release of much of the existing site of St Mary's High from the Green Belt will remove a fundamental objection to the sought after redevelopment for residential purposes.

6.0 Land ownership considerations

- 6.1 To achieve the intended developments and disposals it will be necessary for the Borough Council to surrender its lease of new school site at Bury Green Farm. It is anticipated that the Borough Council will be offered, in exchange, a lease of the County Council's site at Park Lane, Cheshunt. The County Council would then transfer to the Diocese of St Albans the site of the new school buildings in exchange for the existing school site. The County Council will arrange sale of the part of the existing school site to be used for housing, on behalf of the Diocese and itself and with the proceeds of sale being shared in agreed proportions. These arrangements will need to gain the approval of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 It is not proposed to rehearse the financial implications of the whole school expansion scheme in this report, just to indicate the implications for the County Council of the change from the earlier scheme contained in the report to the Executive Committee on 23 July 2001.
- 7.2 At that stage it was intended that County Council capital funding for the Cheshunt schools expansion scheme would come from the Basic Need approval and from the sale of 5 acres of land at Jones Road, Goffs Oak for housing.
- 7.3 Under the current scheme the County Council will share in the proceeds from the sale of the existing site of St Mary's. This is because the DfES recognises that the County Council originally provided the major parts of the site and is entitled to a share of the proceeds from that land and because the Diocese is prepared to agree an equitable sharing of the proceeds.

- 7.4 The actual share of proceeds will have regard to the respective areas of land being sold. The proposed housing site has a total area of about 11.6 acres, and of that about 6.7 areas was originally provided by the County Council and about 4.9 acres by the Diocese.
- 7.5 It is therefore expected that the level of capital receipt that will be available to the County Council from the current scheme will be no less favourable than from the earlier scheme.

8.0 EDUCATION CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Public consultation regarding the expansion of St Mary's High School is required and this will take place early in 2003. This is because the proposed location for the expansion has changed.

Background papers:

- Report to Executive Committee, Hertfordshire County Council, 23 July 2001
- Report to Planning and Licensing Committee, Borough of Broxbourne, 4 December 2002