

**PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF THE HAVERS INFANT AND THE FIRS JUNIOR SCHOOLS IN BISHOPS STORTFORD.**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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**1. Purpose of the report**

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the public consultation on the proposal to close The Havers Infant and The Firs Junior Schools in Bishops Stortford in order to create a new primary school on the junior school site in order that Cabinet can decide whether or not to publish a statutory notice to effect this change.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1. A public consultation document was issued on 12 September 2003 in response to a request from both schools. 54 out of 60 responses to the consultation have supported the proposal to amalgamate the two schools.
- 2.2. The only significant concern related to the time-scale for implementation. This has been addressed by bringing forward the opening of the new school by one term to April 2006.
- 2.3. The current Firs School site is the preferred site for the new school as it is large enough for the new 2FE primary school. The extension to The Firs buildings would be fully funded from the disposal of part of The Havers School site.
- 2.4. At its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January Schools Resources Panel recommended to Cabinet that a statutory notice should be published to effect the proposed amalgamation.

**3. Conclusion**

- 3.1. Cabinet will be asked to decide whether or not to publish statutory notices to close The Havers Infant and The Firs Junior Schools and to open a new primary school on the Firs Junior School site.

#### **4. Background**

- 4.1. The consultation document is attached to this report (Appendix 1). The consultation period has included meetings with Heads of both schools, governing bodies and a public meeting.

#### **5. Results of Consultation**

- 5.1 In total there were 60 responses to the consultation. Responses from Heads and Governors are appended to this report (Appendix 2). In summary:

- 54 agreed with the proposal
- 4 disagreed
- 2 Undecided

- 5.2 The key themes from the consultation were:

- That the amalgamation would make it easier for parents with children at each school to take their children to one site.
- That changing from an Infant School to a Junior School can be very daunting for children, but that this would not be necessary in an all-through Primary School. All children would know staff members from entry into the school. The curriculum would be easier to teach and there would be a smoother transition for children from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. That the amalgamation will create a larger staff, that would give a greater breadth of expertise and experience.
- That the time-scale of the proposed amalgamation is long and could lead to further falling rolls due to the uncertainty about the futures of The Firs and The Havers; that building work should commence earlier so that the new school could open in 2005 rather than 2006. The proposed time-scale could also make it more difficult for the two schools to remain financially viable. Teaching, and the children's education, could suffer due to staff anxiety, morale, motivation and retention.
- Concern regarding a problem with traffic at the new school site with the extra children on one site and the lack of parking. In responses it was thought consideration should be given to altering the entrance to The Firs to provide better access and a turning area for traffic.
- That all the buildings at the new school should be brand new. It was felt that the existing Firs buildings were in a bad condition and

needed refurbishment. It was thought that all the children and staff at the new school should benefit from brand new facilities. That there should not be old buildings attached on to the new building, as they will not appeal to prospective parents. That any money left over from the sale of The Havers site should be used to refurbish The Firs buildings.

- It was felt that disruption to the children during the building time should be kept to a minimum and the children's education should not be affected by the proposal.

5.3 In response to concerns raised above and at the public consultation meeting:

- It has been possible to bring forward the opening of the new school by one term to April 2006.
- A detailed analysis is being undertaken in order to understand the traffic implications of the proposal. Feasibility work includes parking and site access issues.
- The School Funding Unit intends to work closely with both schools prior to the proposed amalgamation in order to help them manage the financial impact of short term falling rolls, thus enabling the new school to open on a solid financial basis.
- A detailed analysis of the existing Firs buildings has been undertaken which has demonstrated that there are no significant condition or suitability issues, which need to be addressed as part of the proposal.

## 6. Planning issues

- 6.1 **Size of new school:** both schools have a current admission limit of 60. The Havers also has a 60 - place nursery class. The two schools currently have 335 pupils (excluding nursery), and, based on pupil forecast figures, this would increase to 398 (excluding nursery) in 2007. Therefore, if amalgamated, the capacity of the new school should remain at 2FE.
- 6.2 **Site and Town Planning:** the Firs site is large enough to accommodate an amalgamated primary school. The Havers site is not. The Firs site is therefore the preferred site for the new school.
- 6.3 Initial planning advice suggests that the built area of The Havers Infants site would have potential for residential development. This is subject to further discussion with East Herts District Council and with the DfES. The site would be sold for development with a lease back option to enable The Havers School to continue to operate whilst new buildings are built using the capital receipt from the Firs site.

- 6.4 The remaining land comprising the playing fields and some hard play area at The Havers will be retained. The nearest school to The Havers Infants is The Richard Whittington Primary; this school has insufficient site and playing field areas for the current size of the school. The remaining areas of The Havers site should be allocated to The Richard Whittington Primary as a detached playing field, which will allow the school to comply with the relevant regulations.
- 6.5 **Premises issues:** The Firs School would need to be expanded to accommodate the Havers School pupils and initial feasibility has taken place to show how this might be achieved. Both schools and Hertfordshire Property have been fully involved in planning the additional accommodation required at the Firs School site to accommodate Key Stage 1 children coming from the Havers site.
- 6.6 This new accommodation is likely to comprise the following:
- 1 Nursery classroom
  - 6 Key Stage 1 classrooms (2 each for Reception and Years 1 and 2)
  - Accommodation for a KS1 Nurture Group
  - Additional accommodation for music/drama activities, which would be flexible and can be used as additional dining space
  - Ancillary accommodation, including appropriate WC provision, classroom storage, circulation areas, office space for deputy head and plant room/cleaners storage
- 6.7 The staff room and administration areas of the existing Firs building would be extended to accommodate increased staff numbers. In addition, further hard play areas and appropriate parking would be constructed to deal with the increase of both staff and pupil numbers.
- 6.8 The feasibility work includes a detailed transport/highways study. This work is currently in progress and the final outcomes are not yet known. However an initial view at this stage suggests only modest alterations will be required. The initial cost estimate is included below.

## 7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. **Revenue:** In the medium term this proposal will lead to a significant revenue saving. However, there could be a net cost of up to £111,000 in 2006/07 resulting primarily from severance payments (this is a worse case scenario and includes redundancy and early retirement costs for the 3 posts that will be advertised nationally). It is anticipated that this would be a charge against the provision within the education budget for such costs.
- 7.2 **Capital:** An initial estimate sets the value of the proposed disposal site at £2,200,000. The initial estimate of the cost of providing the proposed

development at The Firs (inclusive of highway alterations, furnishing and fitting) is £2,200,000

- 7.3 The scheme is a self-funding proposal and as such costs will need to be contained within the anticipated receipt of £2.2 million. If estimated costs rise above this figure, economies will have to be made in order to reduce the scheme in line with this budget.
- 7.4 Subject to the necessary planning consents and DfES general consent, the capital receipt might be anticipated in the 2004 / 05 financial year. Work on the new build would start once the capital receipt is either in hand or phased payments commence. It is likely to be completed in March 2006.
- 7.4 It should be possible to organise the project to avoid any significant cash flow implications for the Council. However, if this cannot be achieved, any cash flow impact would need to be contained within the 2005/06 Children Schools and Families capital programme.

**Background information referred to by the author:**

Public Consultation Document – Published September 2003

**Appendices;**

Appendix 1 – Consultation Document

Appendix 2 – Consultation responses from Heads and Governors at affected schools.