

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2004 AT 2.00 P.M.**

Agenda Item No.

4

**REVIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN NORTH EAST WATFORD –
PHASE 2: proposal for the amalgamation of three schools, Garston
Infant School, Lea Farm Junior and Meriden Primary to create one new
primary school on the Lea Farm/ Garston schools site**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member:- Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the public consultation exercise relating to the amalgamation of Garston Infant School, Lea Farm Junior School and Meriden Primary School, to create one new primary school on the Garston/Lea Farm schools site.
- 1.2 To ask Cabinet to decide whether or not to publish statutory notices relating to this proposal.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The Resources Panel, at its meeting on 14 January 2004, recommended to Cabinet that it should authorise statutory notices to be published to close all three schools and to establish a new 3 form of entry primary school in their place, subject to further work being undertaken in order to decide which site should be used for the new school.
- 2.2 Further work has taken place, in the context of the Panel's recommendation shown above, to review the site, premises and travel to school issues relating to both the Meriden and Lea Farm/Garston sites.
- 2.3 The review has comprised the impact of the revisions recommended in the revised Building Bulletin regarding size of site, further feasibility work relating to size of the new school, and as a result of this how circulation spaces might be handled and phasing of building work, including disruption to children during the construction period. Travel to school themes have focused on discussions with Watford Borough Council, further liaison with the Community Police Team, further

analysis of distribution of the cohort, and the effect on either site of the number of children travelling to it.

- 2.4 The recommendations of the Resources Panel meeting, on 6 February 2004, will be reported separately.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to decide whether or not to publish statutory notices as set out above, and which site should be used for the new school.

4. Background

- 4.1 As reported to the Resources Panel meeting on 14 January 2004, feedback from stakeholders suggested that the new school might be positioned on the Meriden site. The officer advice was that this solution was possible, but might not be a viable option because it might not be possible to deliver the solution for September 2005, would cause a high degree of disruption to the pupils of Meriden School during the construction period and would utilise a site significantly smaller than the Garston/Lea Farm one. This report now deals with these issues.

5. Quality and Nature of Sites

- 5.1 The Meriden School site area for comparative purposes, exclusive of the nursery area, is 24,396 sqm. The Garston/Lea Farm combined school site area is 37,456 sqm, exclusive of the private nursery area and the proposed nursery. The Garston/Lea Farm site is 53.5% larger than Meriden site.
- 5.2 The current DfES Building Bulletin 82 formulas produce ranges of recommended school site areas. The range for a 3 form of entry school of 630 pupils is 22,845 sqm to 25,750 sqm. The current Meriden School site does meet this.
- 5.3 A draft of a new Building Bulletin, dated 3 November 2003, has been issued by the DfES, and this contains different formulas for schools covering the primary age range. By using these revised formulas, the range for a 3 form of entry school site area is 25,915 sqm to 30,430 sqm . The Meriden School site does not meet the minimum site area requirement under these draft standards. It is understood the new standards will be published in final format in Spring 2004.
- 5.4 There are regulations governing the area for team game playing fields which schools are required to meet. At this early design stage, under these regulations Meriden School can just meet the standard as a 3 form of entry school, but only if its habitat area is lost to level playing fields, and this would compromise the delivery of the full curriculum. Therefore, during the detailed design process there is likely to be

conflicting demands on the available space which may result in the need for a detached playing field.

- 5.5 In addition at Meriden, most of the space would have to be developed either as hard play area or open sports area and as a consequence there would be little space for soft play and opportunities for socialising.
- 5.6 On the other hand, the Garston/Lea Farm site would provide sufficient team game playing field space and provides a significant area within which to develop the schools grounds for curriculum needs and socialising.

Conclusion

- 5.7 In conclusion, the Meriden site would not meet the recommendations outlined in the revised draft Building Bulletin, and whilst meeting the regulations relating to team game playing fields, offers little space for soft play area. The Garston/Lea Farm site would meet the revised draft Building Bulletin site area and would provide sufficient space team game playing fields, and the needs of three form of entry school.

6.0 Premises Issues

Extent of accommodation

- 6.1 The scheme has been briefed to meet the forecast demand i.e. 19 classrooms, an ICT suite and an EBD room, and further feasibility work has been conducted on potential projects at both schools. These have been benchmarked against the standards used by the County Council and are outlined as follows:
- 6.2 **Garston/Lea Farm Scheme:** provides a simple single storey new block at the rear of the site, providing 10 classrooms. Internal alternations include the conversion of two classrooms to specialist teaching areas and a nursery (40 places) and the extension of the admin facilities into the existing infants dining space. The scheme includes the construction of two lifts to serve the existing upper storeys.
- 6.3 **Meriden Scheme:** two separate extensions providing a total of 7 classrooms, with new build specialist accommodation and extension to the hall. Also internal alterations, firstly to improve internal circulation and secondly to consolidate administration would be undertaken. A meeting took place between Mace and Paul Whitley Architects, originally commissioned by the school on their behalf, and there is broad agreement on the design solutions for the new accommodation.

Comments of Governors

- 6.4 A presentation was made to the Governing Bodies of Garston Infants School and Lea Farm Junior School, when the 3 form of entry scheme on the Garston/Lea Farm site was shared. The governors also had sight of the alternative scheme on the Meriden School site. The Governing Bodies have submitted a joint statement outlining the reasons why they believe the Garston/Lea Farm site is preferable and this is attached as Appendix 1.
- 6.5 A presentation was also made to the Governing Body of Meriden School, where both schemes were shared and compared. The Governing Body has submitted a report outlining why they feel the new school should be on their site and is attached as Appendix 2.

Disruption to Pupils

- 6.6 There will be disruption with either scheme, which may involve pupils or staff being decanted into temporary accommodation.
- 6.7 **Lea Farm/Garston Scheme:** the new build would take 10 months and should be completed by September 2005, the alternations to the teaching areas would also be prioritised but the new admin area might take longer to complete. What remains uncertain, is whether the internal alteration work can be contained within that period.
- 6.8 **Meriden Scheme:** following revision of the design, it has been possible to reduce the amount of new build/alterations now totalling three areas of work (as compared with four originally). By offering the reduced scheme at Meriden it has made disruption easier to manage. Mace have recommended that the work is carried out in a phased manner, although Paul Whitley Architects have a different opinion. Mace's recommendation is based on the issue of managing children, meeting health and safety standards and operational needs. Mace have indicated that there is a slightly higher risk of the September 2005 implementation date not being achieved for the Meriden scheme.

Conclusion

- 6.9 Both schemes continue to provide a suitable building solution, but there would be a slightly higher risk of the September 2005 date not being achieved on the Meriden site.

7. Travel to School

- 7.1 The Authority commissioned Wormald Burrows Partnership to carry out extensive travel to school assessment and analysis relating to this review. Full reports have been placed in the Members Room.

Implications common to both sites

- 7.2 The proposed amalgamation, regardless of choice of site, would not be expected to produce any significant changes in traffic levels on the A41 or other major roads because of the current volume on them.
- 7.3 On site car park works would require both schemes to remove trees to provide the necessary car parking.

Cow Lane Subway

- 7.4 As a result of amalgamating the three schools onto one site, be it the Garston/Lea Farm site or the Meriden site, there would be substantial increase in the predicted use of the existing subway, which is already reasonably well used at normal school times.
- 7.5 The predicted increased usage would from a security point of view, be regarded as a good measure, and this view is supported by the Police.
- 7.6 An allowance has been made to upgrade the subway by suitable improvement works to the drainage system and better lighting on the approaches, especially on the York Way side.
- 7.7 The possibility of further improvements have been discussed with the Community Police Team, because of the concern about the misuse of the subway in the evenings. Other improvements might be introduced, such as the provision of deterrent steel fencing on top of the subway walls, removing the end return walls to improve visibility, improving barriers at both ends, and deterrent planting, all of which would be a general community benefit, but beyond the County Council's responsibilities. We will be having further discussions about these improvements with the Community Police Team and Watford Borough Council.
- 7.8 It is feasible to establish primary walking bus routes which operate from up to one mile from the school site, and it is anticipated that to travel this distance would take twenty minutes. Designated pick up points would be established according to parental request along the route. No more than two routes are recommended to one primary school, with a ratio of one adult to six children, with a minimum of two adults. Such a scheme relies on local parental participation and would form part of the development of the School Travel Plan.

Increase in traffic within immediate vicinity of schools and car parking

Garston/Lea Farm 3 form of entry proposal

- 7.11 Whilst local residential roads are likely to experience a modest increase in traffic, assumed to be in the order of 93 cars in the am

period and 78 cars in the afternoon, with the proposed on site improvements to parking and drop facilities and an effective School Travel Plan to encourage more walking, the Garston/Lea Farm site could absorb this increase without much change to the level of on street parking.

- 7.12 In addition to the total of 80 car parking spaces provided on site to comply with Hertfordshire County Council Planning Guidance, a further 35 spaces will be provided to significantly lessen the existing overspill parking on First and Fourth Avenues.
- 7.13 Enquiries made to Watford Borough Council relating to potential parking schemes or waiting restrictions on First and Fourth Avenues, near the Garston/Lea Farm schools site have identified:
- a waiting restriction scheme to be investigated at the St Albans Road end of First Avenue, relating to junction visibility
 - a further investigation to be made of possible restrictions in First Avenue near Beken Court Turn junction where parking for Beken Court (Elderly Peoples Home) can cause problems.

Both these investigations are a considerable distance from the proposed school site, and are not particularly relevant.

- 7.14 Watford Borough Council have received complaints from residents near the school corner in First and Fourth Avenues relating to the restrictions which occur as a result of the school markings preventing residents from parking during the daytime. The Council does not have any direct or imminent proposals in this area.

Meriden School Site

- 7.15 Local roads are likely to experience a significant increase in the number of car journeys by ex Lea Farm/Garston pupils to the new school site.
- 7.16 The increase is estimated to be 125 cars in the am period and 114 cars in the pm period.
- 7.17 Due to Meriden site restrictions, it would only be feasible to provide 66 parking spaces on site, with the potential to provide an additional 32 spaces on Harvest End. Harvest End is a public highway, and whilst this additional parking could be provided, there would be a need to widen the road, and the spaces could not be designated for school use only. Even with the additional spaces provided on Harvest End, this would still result in a shortage of 23 places for the increased parking demand. This would add to the current situation of an estimated 62 parked cars outside the school site at any one time.

7.18 The location of the Meriden site, on a cul-de-sac, with narrow link roads, will not easily absorb the expected increase in traffic due to expected turning movements and increased 2-way flows.

Distribution of Pupils

7.19 Currently 32% of Garston/Lea Farm pupils live beyond 1 km of their school. If these children moved to the Meriden site this proportion would increase to 44%. In comparison currently 16% of Meriden pupils live beyond 1 km of their school, and if these children moved to the Garston/Lea Farm site, this would rise to just 17%.

7.20 In considering the overall distribution of children with a 3 form of entry school on the Meriden School site, 30% of the total cohort would live more than 1 km away, whereas if the new school were developed at the Garston/Lea Farm site, only 18% would live more than 1 km away.

7.21 In considering the distances children would have to travel to and from the proposed new school on the Garston/Lea Farm site, the shortest designated route, as defined for the purposes of allocating school places, has been used to measure spot travelling distances from the Meriden area.

7.22 Below is a table setting out examples of addresses in the area, comparing the distance to Meriden School with the distance to the proposed site. These addresses have been selected for illustrative purposes, with Eastlea Avenue identified as the most south easterly point of Meriden's main catchment area and Bovingdon Crescent to the north. The Pelhams and Gossamers have also been shown. The additional distance therefore which children would have to travel to the new school is not more than a few hundred metres. The table below is a comparison in metres from the addresses to Garston site, as compared to the current Meriden site.

Shortest Designated Routes				
Address	Garston		Meriden	
	Metres	Miles	Metres	Miles
Bovingdon Crescent, Watford WD259RA	891	0.55	1347	0.84
Eastlea Avenue, Watford WD259DG	1148	0.71	971	0.60
1 Pelhams, Watford WD259SY	631	0.39	454	0.28
1 The Gossamers Watford WD259AN	1035	0.64	903	0.56

Conclusion

7.23 There would be difficulty in getting sufficient car parking on the Meriden site to meet Hertfordshire County Council guidelines and there would be a significantly greater amount of traffic created around the Meriden site, than there would be around the Garston/Lea Farm site.

- 7.24 When comparing the cost of the improved parking scheme, both on and off site, the estimated cost of work is more expensive in the Meriden scheme than the estimated cost relating to the Garston/Lea Farm scheme.
- 7.25 On the Meriden site it would not be possible to accommodate a coach within the school grounds, although it is likely there would be space on Harvest End for coach turning manoeuvres. In comparison, the Garston/Lea Farm site would accommodate a coach on the school site.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The capital cost of developing the Lea Farm/Garston School to meet the needs of this review, amounts to £3,858,000. This would be met by disposals and raise of costs if necessary, topped up by the Primary Modernisation budget.
- 8.2 The capital cost of developing the Meriden School to meet the needs of this review, amounts to £4,015,000. This would be met by disposals and if necessary, topped up by the Primary Modernisation budget.

9. Summary of Pros and Cons

- 9.1 When comparing the building feasibility studies, there would be more or less the same level of disruption, however, there is a slightly higher risk of the Meriden scheme not being achieved for September 2005.
- 9.2 In considering the size of sites, the Garston/Lea Farm site is not only significantly larger, the effect would be to provide better facilities in terms of playing fields and meeting wider curriculum needs.
- 9.3 In travel to school terms and the management of traffic, it would be difficult to get the required amount of car parking on the Meriden site, and there would be a significantly greater increase in the amount of traffic around the Meriden site than the Garston/Lea Farm site.
- 9.4 By using the Garston/Lea Farm school site, far fewer children would have a higher distance to travel.
- 9.5 The capital cost of developing the Garston/Lea Farm school site would be less than developing the Meriden school site.