



Regeneration and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee

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Open Report

Report of: Heather Stone
(Policy & Monitoring Officer)

Land Use Implications of the Wyre Forest Schools Review

1. Purpose of Briefing Paper

- 1.1 To update Members of the latest position regarding the land use implications of the Wyre Forest Schools Review.

2. Introduction/ Background Information

- 2.1 Members may recall a previous report to the Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel in April 2006. Under the proposals contained in the Wyre Forest Schools Review, the number of mainstream schools dropped from 45 to 30 as the 3-tier system of first, middle and high schools was replaced by a 2-tier one of primary and secondary schools. The new system was implemented just over a year ago.
- 2.2 An officer working group comprising representatives from both Wyre Forest and Worcestershire County Council met regularly from July 2006 to September 2007 to discuss temporary accommodation needs, proposals for new build accommodation and the possible uses for surplus sites. Officers continue to meet on a regular basis to facilitate discussions pertaining to regeneration opportunities.
- 2.3 In addition to the review of mainstream schools, a separate review of schools catering for those with special educational needs in the Wyre Forest has also taken place.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 A number of sites are currently surplus as a result of schools closing at the end of the Summer term 2007:

1. Lea Street First School, Kidderminster – West Mercia Housing were looking at this for a possible Foyer scheme with new build affordable housing on the Cherry Orchard side. However, discussions with the County Council raised issues following a structural engineer's report which WCC are considering. Another Registered Social Landlord has recently expressed interest in taking on the site for an affordable housing scheme. If required, the County would consider splitting the site.
 2. Areley Common First School, Stourport on Severn – the County Council has recently submitted a planning application for 6 no. 5-bedroom dwellings.
 3. Sladen Middle School, Kidderminster – proposals have been drawn up for a Lifelong Learning Centre to be managed by Kidderminster College. This will provide facilities and resources for education and work skills development for young people aged 14-19 as well as a learning, leisure and community centre for local people. An application for capital funding has been submitted to the Learning and Skills Council for this new –build facility. A decision is due shortly. A key feature will be workshops for the new 14-19 Diploma in areas such as construction and engineering. Demolition of existing buildings is programmed for this autumn.
 4. Stone First School – discussions are being facilitated by the Head of Planning, Health and Environment with the Parish Council and the Diocese.
 5. St. Barnabas School, Kidderminster – the school is now used as a community hall and pre-school nursery
 6. Lickhill Middle School, Stourport on Severn – all school buildings have now been demolished. The site will be redeveloped as a new location for Stourport Primary School (currently on Tan Lane). Tan Lane is expected to be surplus to educational needs from September 2011. The current proposal is for a 2-form entry school with a Planned Admission Number of 60 up to Year 3 and 75 for Years 4 – 6. The decision by Worcestershire County Council Cabinet in July 2008 to close Lickhill Primary and amalgamate it with Stourport Primary has been called in. Cabinet Members have now been asked to reconsider their decision to close Lickhill Primary.
- Sion Hill Middle School, Kidderminster
- 3.2 There are currently 2 Pupil Referral Units operating from part of the site. Plans have recently been approved to convert / extend the main school building to provide office accommodation for Children's Services staff, a Training and Development Centre to serve North Worcestershire and another Pupil Referral Unit. This will involve relocating staff from other premises within County ownership which may then become surplus to requirements.

Wribbenhall (Bewdley Primary)

- 3.3 The school is due to relocate to the old Wribbenhall Middle School site on Stourport Road once building works are complete. Negotiations are well advanced for Community Housing to purchase the site for an affordable housing scheme.

Special Education

- 3.4 A review into special education in the Wyre Forest followed on from that of mainstream education. A decision has been taken to merge Blakebrook and Stourminster Schools and to provide a single school on the site of The Elms Centre adjacent to Baxter College and St. John's Primary on Habberley Road Kidderminster. It is anticipated that the new school will be completed by September 2013. This will be coeducational for 180 pupils aged 2 – 19. This will then free up the 2 existing sites on Bewdley Road and at Comberton Road for alternative uses. The County Council are looking to dispose of the Blakebrook School site together with the adjacent County Buildings site. However, they will be retaining the Listed School Hall which is used as Kidderminster Registry Office. The Old Coach House (part of the curtilage to the Listed Woodfield House) currently houses a Pupil Referral Unit. This will also become surplus to educational requirements and is likely to be disposed of separately from the rest of the site.

Building Schools for the Future

- 3.5 Worcestershire County Council submitted an application in April 2008 to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Partnerships for Schools (PfS) for early entry into the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. The submitted bid included complete new builds for Baxter College, King Charles I, Stourport College and Wolverley High with a partial rebuild of Bewdley High. It also included the new 2-19 Special School and a new secondary age Pupil Referral Unit. The County Council estimates that the funding required will be around £150million, but this will require confirmation from Partnerships for Schools, who will now work with the County to develop its plans further. The timeframe for completion of this building work is estimated to be 2013 at the earliest. It is not known at this stage whether King Charles I School will need to relocate to a new site. If it does, then the current site on Comberton Road / Hillgrove Crescent will also become surplus to educational requirements.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Although a year has passed since Wyre Forest schools changed from 3-tier to 2-tier, discussions are still progressing with the County regarding finding new uses and/or redeveloping redundant sites.

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