

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ADULT & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	19 JANUARY 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	THE HEIGHTS SCHOOL PERMANENT SITE CONSULTATION PROCESS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR ENNIS	PORTFOLIO:	EDUCATION
SERVICE:	EDUCATION	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	KEVIN MCDANIEL	TEL:	0118 9374240
JOB TITLE:	HEAD OF EDUCATION	E-MAIL:	<a href="mailto:Kevin.mcdaniel@reading.gov.uk">Kevin.mcdaniel@reading.gov.uk</a>

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report follows a request from the Education Funding Agency for Reading Borough Council to work with them to consult with residents about potential locations for The Heights free school.
- 1.2 The report sets out the overall decision making framework for Free Schools and the role of the planned consultation along with the actions that the Education Funding Agency are undertaking in preparation for the consultation before outlining the proposed process.
- 1.3 It considers the scope of the consultation including who will be consulted and proposes a three stage process before outlining the timetable of activity.
- 1.4 The consultation is the next step in a process being followed by the Education Funding Agency and the output from this consultation will be passed onto them for further consideration.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That committee endorse the proposed scope, approach, output and timetable for the consultation activity as set out in section 4.
- 2.2 That committee authorise officers to implement the consultation with the Education Funding Agency and in collaboration with the stakeholder group set out in section 6.

### 3. POLICY

- 3.1 Proposed Free School locations are determined by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) based on a balance of factors including demand, value for money and deliverability - the likelihood of actually being able to complete the building - of the project.
- 3.2 If the preferred site is not in EFA ownership, they will seek to acquire it and will engage with whichever process is required. In the event that the land is held in charitable trust, it is likely that the Charity Commission will have to agree with the overall proposal.
- 3.3 Once a site has been acquired, the EFA will develop detailed plans and have to comply with the requirements of the statutory planning processes. It is possible for a scheme to not achieve planning consent.
- 3.4 The proposed consultation relates to the identification phase as set out in 3.1 and therefore this process can only provide further information to the EFA. It cannot constitute a legally binding outcome and therefore cannot take the form of a referendum.

### 4. PROPOSAL

#### **The current position**

- 4.1 The EFA have identified that there are four sites which they consider to be still under consideration. They are:
  - High Ridge on Upper Warren Avenue, owned by the EFA
  - Mapledurham Playing Field, held in charitable trust
  - Albert Road Recreation Ground, held in charitable trust
  - Shipnells Farm ("Bugs Bottom") under covenant to the benefit of former developers
- 4.2 The consultation will focus on these locations, however the EFA have indicated that they will consider any other option within the catchment area of The Heights that meets their broad parameters and is supported by local people. It should be noted that in their recent review the EFA have already ruled out a number of site including a wide range of commercial options.
- 4.3 The EFA are seeking to understand the required scope for a preferred option to be supported by the community in order that they can make a decision to proceed in a specific direction.

#### **Consultation Reach**

- 4.4 There is concern that the outcome of the consultation could be impacted depending on the range of people whose voice can be heard and the relative weight given to those opinions.
- 4.5 There are two different types of groups who need to be engaged in the consultation. Those are geographic and participative groups and many individuals may be present in a number of those groups.

Geographic groups, defined by home address, who have an interest in the consultation include:

- a. The Heights catchment area
- b. The Caversham planning area for schools containing The Heights
- c. The Borough of Reading and the Parish of Mapledurham
- d. Within the development of "Bugs Bottom"

Participative groups, defined by those who take part in a particular activity, who have an interest in the consultation include:

- a. Users of Mapledurham playing field
- b. Users of the facilities at Albert Road recreation ground
- c. Users of the green space at Bugs Bottom
- d. Parents of children attending The Heights school
- e. Parents of children attending another school in the Caversham planning area for schools containing The Heights
- f. Parents of pre-school age children in The Heights catchment area
- g. Parents of pre-school age children in the Caversham planning area for schools containing The Heights

4.6 The stakeholder group will be consulted on the final list of groups that will be identified during the consultation process.

4.7 It would seem prudent to open the consultation exercise to anyone who wishes to express an opinion and ensure that the process captures sufficient information to enable the opinion to be attributed to one or more of the groups.

#### **Consultation Process**

4.7 It is proposed that the overall process will have three stages: awareness; information sharing; and expressions of preference, and each of these are set out below. The success of the overall consultation will be influenced by the number of people, organisations and groups that are engaged in all three stages.

4.8 The *Awareness* stage will be aimed at ensuring that as many people as possible in the consultation broad reach area are made aware of the process, the timetable and how they can express their preference. This will take the form of a marketing campaign including direct mail, press and social media coverage undertaken by the council. This should be supported by outreach from all stakeholder groups including schools.

4.9 The *Information* sharing stage will consist of a period of time during which anyone can access an information pack for each site. It is proposed to make these packs available from a website operated by Reading Borough Council and to encourage local residents groups to promote them to their members. It is hoped that the packs will facilitate informed discussion amongst the different communities and allow balanced considerations to be made.

4.10 The information packs will be authored by the EFA who are engaged with local stakeholder groups to define a common set of questions and related facts. The packs will have a consistent format, will include site maps and outline site proposals. It is the EFA's intention to work with the local stakeholder groups

to get a sign off on these packs before they are published for the consultation process. Residents should note that these packs will not be fully worked up scheme details but will outline the relative strengths and concerns about each site.

- 4.11 During this stage, it is proposed to hold an open meeting at which the EFA, RBC and a representative for each site will engage in a debate led by questions from the public. The stakeholder group will be consulted on the final makeup of the panel. It is suggested that this will be a large meeting and needs to be held within Caversham, attendance by ticket only, and attendees can submit initial questions in advance. The meeting should be recorded and published so that everyone who wishes can hear the whole debate.
- 4.12 The final stage, *Expressions of Preference*, will follow the open meeting and be an individual, online-only survey response, hosted by Reading Borough Council. Those without online access at home, can take part from any computer including those at libraries, in the Civic Offices or via any arrangements local groups wish to offer.
- 4.13 The survey site will provide a reference to all of the information packs and the recording of the open meeting along with the survey. Each respondent will be invited to consider each of the four sites in turn and answer the following three questions for each site:
- i. Would you support the school on this site? (Mandatory - Yes, No, Unsure)
  - ii. What is the key reason for your answer above? (Optional, limited text)
  - iii. What one thing would make you change your mind? (Optional, limited text)

It will then ask a preference ranking question which asks the respondent to rank the four sites from 1 to 4. This will be a Mandatory question and all sites to be included). Finally the respondent will optionally be able to offer an alternative option for consideration by the EFA in the form of a location and short comment. All of this information will be part of the published consultation data.

- 4.14 To submit a preference, the respondent will be asked to provide the following private information: Name, home address and email address. This information will be used to identify unique respondents and to ensure that the survey results are not skewed by multiple entries. By default only the first entry for a given name and home address will be included in the final data set, however the council will endeavour to resolve unintentional duplications. This information will not be part of the published consultation data.
- 4.15 The home address will be used to indicate which geographic groups the respondent represents and the respondent will be asked to self-select which user groups they are also members of. To finalise the preferences, respondents will be asked to agree that their input can be used for this purpose and no other.

#### **Consultation Output**

- 4.16 It is proposed that the data collected will be collated using the use and location data to summarise the expressed preferences in a way that will

enable meaningful consideration by the EFA. The stakeholder group will be consulted about the statistics produced.

- 4.17 The collated statistics and the underlying, anonymous data will be published by the council. The EFA will receive all of the data collected through the consultation process.

**Consultation Timescale**

- 4.18 There are a number of elements that have to come together to deliver this outline programme.

19th January	Policy Committee confirms process for consultation.
20th January	Consultation process begins with Awareness generation.
2nd February	Information packs are published by the EFA, bookings for open meeting begins.
17 <sup>th</sup> February	Open meeting initial question submission closes.
25 <sup>th</sup> February	Provisional date for Open meeting (TBC).
26 <sup>th</sup> February	Survey site opens with access to recording of Open meeting.
20 <sup>th</sup> March	Survey site closes.
30 <sup>th</sup> March	Consultation output is published and passed to the EFA.

**5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 5.1 This report contributes to ensuring that all young people in Reading have a school place to help them learn and achieve.

**6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 6.1 A number of local groups and individuals, who have been active within the location since the announcement of the site on Upper Warren Avenue was purchased, have been working together with the Council and Rob Wilson MP and want to see a clear process. This collection is referred to in this report as “the stakeholder group”.
- 6.2 The stakeholder group has already been invited to work with the EFA to ensure a consistent set of information is provided about each site. Each site will be outlined in responses to a series of questions which should provide a common base line of information on which people can be asked to comment.
- 6.3 Consultative work with this stakeholder group will continue to ensure that the information provided, process followed and questions asked are appropriate to support the aim of the consultation.
- 6.4 Local resident associations (as part of the stakeholder group) have offered to publicise the information on each site.

**7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 This report does not require an EIA.

**8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 This consultation is a non-statutory process. The council has been asked to assist the Education Funding Agency in collecting further information in order that they can make a decision about how to proceed with their Free School project.

8.2 It is recommended that respondents are advised, prior to making their submission, that all data collected will be passed onto the EFA for the purposes of their decision-making only.

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This process will require work from a number of Council teams throughout the next three months, through the prioritisation of existing resources. There are unbudgeted, external costs related to the consultation

9.2 The budgetary estimates for the external costs are broken down as follows.

Item	Estimate (£)
Direct Mail campaign	25,000
Open meeting event inc recording costs	5,500
Expenses for independent statistical validation	500

9.3 The council are in discussion with the EFA to establish how these costs will be met.