

Hi Rachel,

We have spoken on this, and you asked me to write to you to clarify where I believe we are in terms of making additional primary school provision to service the increasing demand for school spaces generated, at least in part, from the new West End housing envisaged in the West End Area Action Plan.

As you know, I am the Programme Co-ordinator for the Oxford West End Renaissance project, responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating all the various aspects of the West End project to ensure it is delivered as a well-planned and cohesive whole rather than as a series of individual market-led developments. This involves strategy development and implementation, overseeing infrastructure and public realm improvements (and how they're funded), and bringing forward each of the development sites themselves in a timely, integrated and coherent manner.

I am contracted by the Oxford West End Partnership, a partnership between the City and County Councils and SEEDA, and there is a clearly defined structure to the Partnership's governance of the total project. The three principal forums are:

The Programme Board - meets 6-weekly, ensures that all projects are set up under a recognised project management system, monitors individual project plans and the overall Programme Plan, and sets the agenda for Executive Committee meetings (see below).

The Steering Group - comprises representatives of the funding stakeholders, major landowners, heritage organisations and influential Government agencies. It has no formal executive responsibilities as such, but is an important information sharing forum, enabling us to balance the integration of members' plans within the overall programme, maximising synergies, resolving potential conflicts, and creating a shared purpose.

The Executive Committee - meets quarterly, and is THE decision-making forum, providing overall leadership, vision and direction. It comprises the Leaders, Chief Executives and senior Directors of both Councils and the SEEDA Regional Director.

A lot of work has been done to date on the whole question of anticipated education needs in the West End. In summary, this has identified that committed and planned housing development within the West End and immediately outlying areas up to 2016 is projected to give rise to the need for over 200 new state primary school places. It has also established that there is insufficient capacity within existing schools to accommodate these numbers, ergo, new school facilities would be required.

The Consultants, Mouchel, were engaged by the County Council to identify and report on possible sites for such a school, both within and outside the West End, and either new sites or extensions to existing school premises. They identified a number of options that have been debated at a number of West End meetings since the middle of 2008. This culminated in a paper which was presented to the Programme Board on 18 March 2009 at which the Board endorsed a "Statement of Intent", and requested that a more detailed paper be submitted to the Executive Committee meeting on 29 June 2009 which was to include details of fallback option(s). In short, the Statement of Intent set out that the West End partners would work together to develop a vision for a [new state primary] school at the heart of the West End community.

The most recent development in this process is that a further paper duly went to the 29 June Exec Committee asking the Exec to "note" (and, by implication, endorse) the Programme Board's commitment to the Statement of Intent; it also identified a possible fallback option, a new school at Bertie Place, New Hinksey, which is outside the West End. The Executive Committee asked that yet more work be done in terms of re-visiting the capacity issues of nearby schools and their potential for expansion, looking at what other authorities are doing nationally, and engaging with organisations such as the PCT, OCVC, etc to assess opportunities for joint useage (to optimise

value). They also asked that a further paper be submitted to the Programme Board meeting on 16 September 2009 in the form of a Business Case in support of the Statement of Intent. A draft of this document has been produced and comments are being sought prior to its presentation at the 16 September meeting.

As I now see it, there are two specific issues on which fundamental decisions are yet to be taken:

1. How any new school will be funded, bearing in mind that it will never stack up if funded solely from developer contributions (bearing in mind the land values in the area);
2. Exactly where the new school will go. The County Council have expressed a preference for the school to be situated on the Oxpens site, but other sites are also under consideration, including sites outside the West End area. Whilst the Statement of Intent refers to a school "at the heart of the West End", at the current time, no decision has been taken on which location will be pursued.

Summary

There is agreement across the three funding partners that the partners should work together to scope the opportunity for providing a new school at the heart of the West End. Absolutely no decision has been taken on whether or not it is going to go ahead in that form, and lots more work needs to be done on funding, site requirements/assessments, opportunities for community useage, etc, etc before any such decision can be taken. No timescales have been set down for the next steps in this process, although we may know more after the review of the draft "Business Case" at the Programme Board on 16 September.

I hope this helps, but don't hesitate to get back to me if further clarification is needed.

Best regards.

Bill

Bill Fox
Programme Co-ordinator
Oxford West End Renaissance Partnership
Ox 252682