

**Views on the most recent report to the portfolio holder re proposed expansion to
Wheelock Primary School**

Data presented to the Portfolio holder

Eight schools are in the Sandbach EIP. They work in a close collaboration which has been in existence for over 10 years. Whilst the proposal includes all 8 schools, the data is selective as to whether it refers to all 8 schools or 6 central schools to suit purpose. We believe the data should consistently refer to all 8 schools. Both Haslington schools are on the main route to Crewe or the motorway and therefore are regularly attended by Sandbach residents and should not be considered in isolation.

Paragraph 4:11 indicates that on current figures the number of residents in catchment for Wheelock has reduced from 61 in 2012 to 49 in 2013. In 2012, 70% of those children resident in catchment placed Wheelock as their first preference. A similar percentage would yield 35 children for 2013 (only 5 over PAN).

Paragraph 4:26 details the figures held to date for the September 2013 intake. There are 253 pupils resident in catchment for 275 places. This amounts to a current surplus of 22 places which indicates that there are sufficient places to accommodate those children resident in catchment for the forthcoming year. In addition, St Johns are capable of increasing their PAN from 25 to 30 and Offley from 45 to 60 (with no immediate capital spend) which would provide a further 20 places.

This would accord with the prediction that in 2013 there will still be 2% surplus places in all year groups in Sandbach.

The options appraisal

The options appraisal presented to Heads and Chairs at the meeting of 30th October clearly identifies three schools capable of meeting the criteria for expansion, namely Elworth CE, Offley primary and Wheelock Primary school yet only one of these has been investigated.

Paragraph 4:13 of the report purports to analyse alternative options but does not even mention Offley Primary School.

The Equality impact assessment

The initial document anticipated in year movement to Wheelock Primary indeed it cited as part of the rationale "flexibility to allow mid-year entrants". It did not, however, assess the impact that such movement would have on other local schools. All Heads pointed out their very real concerns that even a small bleed of pupils through in year movement would have a significant impact on their schools. The types of impact could potentially include redundancy of local staff or a reduction in support for vulnerable and minority groups in the community. This is particularly important at a time when the budget for special educational needs is being cut.

The latest EIA purports to address these concerns. It assesses any impact on other schools and stakeholders as neutral. This flies in the face of the opinions of all the other Head teachers with their considerable expertise and experience. The report writer states that the Local Authority will argue prejudice at any panel hearing implying that this will be sufficient to prevent in year movement. The reality is that panels are independent and frequently decide in favour of the applicant. The school will have sufficient space to accept more pupils and at

KS2 where infant class size rules do not apply, even a few extra pupils will fund a teaching assistant, allowing larger classes without prejudicing educational standards.

Relationships

The current proposal and the way it has been progressed has and continues to have an impact on the relationship between schools and the Local Authority. The consultation provoked a large response. 100% of parents at other schools objected to the proposal; 100% of teachers at other schools objected to the proposal; 100% of governors at other schools objected to the proposals. 7 out of the 8 Head teachers in the locality have concerns about the proposals. Not all the teachers at Wheelock support the proposal and only 60% of their parents. Further, none of the local residents were supportive, citing the difficulties already experienced along Crewe road. Whilst acknowledging the importance of pupil voice, if the Wheelock pupils are discounted from the process, 75% of those consulted were opposed to the proposal. To continue with the proposal would be flying in the face of the wishes of the local community.

Catchment areas

The distribution map for Wheelock school clearly shows that the majority of pupils come from the Ettiley Heath area. No consideration has been given to the possibility of re-defining the catchment areas. At present, Wheelock primary have up to 57 pupils who use council funded transport. These pupils reside nearer the Elworth schools but are in the Wheelock catchment area. Parking around Wheelock Primary is problematic and the route to school therefore considered dangerous. The cost of the transport is, we believe, £36,882.80 per annum (as opposed to £20,900 cited). There are currently 80 pupils eligible for subsidised transport but this figure will increase with the expansion of the school. Additional pupils may therefore mean an increase in transport at a cost both financially and environmentally.

Housing developments

We believe the current proposal is premature and does not take into account the proposed housing developments. These may, for example, have an impact on the appropriateness of historic catchment areas. Once the local plan is agreed and the validity of several of the applications assessed, the Local Authority will be better placed to take an informed view.

Increase in PAN

Pending a full analysis of impact and need, pupils could be accommodated within the current school organisation, assisted by an increase in PAN at two schools initially. St John's has the capacity to increase from 25 to 30 (1FE) and Offley primary from 45 to 60 (2FE). This solution would not require the immediate capital spend of £1.8m at a time of austerity when other parts of the education budget are being cut and would supply an immediate extra 20 places.

Other schools have indicated that they may also be prepared to increase their PAN in the long term to cater for an increase in the school population. Their proposals will require further analysis to assess impact and ensure that any expansion is appropriate to need. However, it would spread any increase throughout the town rather than concentrating it at one school.

Any increase in PAN at St John's does not require any capital spend and will assist with the efficient management of the school.

Offley primary can accommodate 60 pupils at KS1 but will require a remodel or expansion in 2015. The options analysis carried out in April 2012, revised in May 2012 stated:

Offley Primary: Number of children living in the catchment area has been rising over the last 4 years and for the last 3 years the number of 1st pref requests has been in excess of the PAN. Infant and Junior schools were amalgamated to form a primary school and the combined PAN was reduced to 45 from 60. School may have ability to expand with some internal reorganisation but this would need to be checked by feasibility study. School governors have expressed wish to expand to 60 and although this expansion would create in excess of the 91 places required at the moment the additional places could help toward extra places needed for the proposed housing developments or allow general surplus places for the area. See notes in relation to admission over PAN for Sep 2012 and when this year group reach KS2.

The Notes of 20/04/12 stated:

.... based on the authorities popular and successful criterion the alternative would be to expand Offley to 60 PAN thus creating a further 105 school places. School have requested to increase to 60 PAN and this may be achievable through some internal re organisation although feasibility study would be required to confirm this.

For September 2012 Offley Primary admitted 60 pupils which can be accommodated in KS1 year groups because they organise into 2 classes per year group. However difficulties to continue to admit 60 in reception i.e long term, would have implications for KS2 year groups because only have 6 classes (12 classes in total)(Reception intake become Junior in Sep 2015)

It is important to note that Offley will require some capital spend in any event, regardless of the decision over Wheelock primary because in 2012, 57 pupils were allocated to the school, despite only having 12 classes. This was understood at the time the additional pupils were allocated to the school. Any ultimate remodel/expansion will cost significantly less than the £1.8m proposed at Wheelock. The site at Offley has been assessed as suitable for expansion. Prior to the TLC process, which has been universally accepted as totally flawed with flawed outcomes, Offley was a 2FE. The school therefore has the appropriate infrastructure to develop easily and in a cost effective manner. In addition, as a result of its existing class structure and pupil numbers at KS2, in year movement will not be an issue for other schools, therefore they are supportive of such a proposal.

The process

There have been a significant number of objections raised regarding this proposal. Heads and Chairs have also raised concerns and put forward alternative proposals. Meetings held with Heads and Chairs on 30th October and 9th March were not minuted as stipulated in the regulations. Two documents purporting to be notes/minutes have been appended to the report. These have not been accepted by the Heads or Chairs attending those meetings and objections to them have been submitted to the report writer. At the meeting on 30th October, the question of minutes was raised and the group were specifically informed that no minutes would be taken. At the meeting on 9th November, the matter was again raised and the group were informed that some brief notes would be made on the specific matter of alternative suggestions including up to date school data, whether there was any ability to take further numbers or expand. It was specifically stated that these would be for Local Authority internal use only. The updated EIA has not taken account of the concerns raised.

Capital Spend

The capital spend proposed is considerable. The works include not only the extension of 4 classrooms but also general enhancement and improvement works:

4 Cloaks

4 Stores

New toilets

An extension to the staffroom

3 SEN/Group rooms

A remodel for the office/reception

Refurbishment of the staff toilets

An extension to the hall

Furniture and fitments

In addition requests have been made for a covered play area, hard standing, play equipment, improved parking and an upgrade to kitchen facilities.

Funding has been provided for a teacher and teaching assistant (although all requirements are met with the addition of a teacher).