

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Education & Children's Services **DATE:** 5 December 2013  
Scrutiny Panel

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Ruth Bagley, Chief Executive  
Tony Madden, Asset Management Project Officer

**CONTACT:** 01753 875657

**WARD(S):** All

**PORTFOLIO:** Councillor Pavitar Kaur Mann – Commissioner for Education and Children

### **PART I CONSIDERATION & COMMENT**

#### **SCHOOL PLACES STRATEGY**

##### **1 Purpose of Report**

In July 2013 the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel requested a report looking at School Places Planning. This report sets out the projected demand for school places and the emerging strategy to answer this demand.

##### **2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

That the Panel consider and comment on the principles and practical steps in the emerging strategy outlined.

##### **3 Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

Priorities:

- Economy and Skills – the delivery of school places for Slough residents will support delivery of skills and qualifications to young people in Slough and improve their life chances. However some uses of land may have greater value to the town's economy if used for purposes other than education.
- Health and Wellbeing – the delivery of well-designed schools with adequate outdoor space will provide an opportunity for young people to live active lifestyles and contribute to improved fitness and the reduction of childhood obesity and other health risks.
- Regeneration and Environment – using land to deliver school places may have regeneration value and may deliver environmental improvements or damage, e.g. through increased traffic levels. Other uses may have higher regeneration value and different environmental consequences.
- Housing – there is an acute shortage of developable land in the borough and a high pressure for both housing and education land. Decisions on use of land must balance the two needs as well as other needs for community facilities.

## 4 Other Implications

### (a) Financial

Delivery of the strategy will be dependent on:

- Effective use of the basic needs grant and other education funds available
- Support to government funded Free Schools where meeting the needs of Slough

The Council is also responsible for securing best value from its assets. The Council must balance educational and other community benefits from use of land and also balance the financial benefit which can be derived from other land uses.

### (b) Risk Management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating action</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Legal  Challenges from government and specific interest groups to overall strategy	Ensuring sound basis to strategy	Delivery of a coherent, comprehensive strategy will set the context for the long term
Property  Challenges from landowners  Planning challenges  Provisional sites not suitable	Negotiation (and possible CPO)  Sound holistic planning case to demonstrate that sites are best suited  Sound initial consideration avoiding wasted effort	Use of schools on some sites may regenerate the area
Human Rights  Challenges from specific interest groups	Sound basis to strategy  Appropriate consideration and consultation	
Health and Safety  Traffic risks	Avoiding sites which present high risks  Sound transport planning	
Employment Issues		
Equalities Issues  Challenges	Ensure needs of all parts of community are considered and balanced in the strategy	

Community Support Risk of objection	Consult as appropriate Communicate scale of the problem and benefits	
Communications	Effective communication plan	Improving understanding of the constraints under which the Council operates
Community Safety		
Financial Inability to resource need	Use available funding streams and delivery models Realistic scheme proposals	Supporting appropriate Free School promoters should target resource
Timetable for delivery Obstacles and delays	Effective project plan linked to projected need Resourcing of project team	
Project Capacity	Resourcing of project team matching manageable programme	
Other		

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act Implications of the proposed action.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

Decisions on different land uses and prioritising different school types will be supported by appropriate prior assessments.

## 5 Policy context

5.1 The Council has obligations to deliver school places for all Slough children but the opportunities for councils to deliver school places are limited. The principal route to build new schools is the government's Free Schools programme. This enables interested parties to propose new schools outside the present local authority framework. Councils are consulted for their views on proposals but the outcome may be that the Department for Education approves proposals which are not in line with the Council's assessment of need in timing, location or type. Many proposals are approved without a site identified and councils are then asked to assist in identifying sites whether in council, public or private ownership. The principal route to deliver school expansion is: Basic Needs Grant a central fund to which councils can bid on the basis of forecasted need. Councils can then work with schools to plan, prioritise and deliver a local expansion programme.

5.2 Council members and officers are acutely conscious that any proposals to deliver expansion on existing sites is subject to the agreement of headteachers and governors who have their own pressures and concerns about scalability, manageability and over-development. Slough's ability to influence development on existing school sites is increasingly limited. As more Slough schools become academies they have autonomy over the future use of land and buildings and new development, whilst always a process of negotiation, may become less easy to secure. The developing ideas below must be set in that context and it would be premature to presume approval even where discussions have been opened.

## **6 Population and forecasts of demand**

- 6.1 The delivery of new school places in Slough has typically been planned and delivered on a short to medium term basis, i.e. usually up to two years in advance. Effective planning has been hampered by government insistence that Slough's population was less than local evidence showed and by the inadequacy of the national formula for forecasting places. The Council has made considerable strides in developing a tool for more accurate longer term place planning. In the most recent years planning has matched demand.
- 6.2 Following the 2011 census the population of Slough is currently estimated as 144,988 (ONS June 2013 projection) and, on the basis of service activity, is believed within the local public sector to be still greater. Even without the evidence of that bigger population, Slough was still shown to have among the highest increases nationally (16%) between censuses. Whilst Slough's growth has in the past been partly attributable to inward migration, the bulk of the present and predicted increase now arises from a very high birth rate. Slough's population is weighted heavily to children and young adults which is driving the demand for school places, housing and jobs.
- 6.3 Place predictions are based on birth rate, known pre-school children, known primary children and an estimate of growth based on inward migration.
- 6.4 Slough also has high demands on particular schools from outside the borough, most notably on selective secondary schools and to a lesser extent on faith and on the girls secondary school. See Appendix A for current take up in secondary schools. As a result, whilst Slough provides the appropriate number of secondary places to serve our residents, about 24% of our secondary places are taken up by young people from out of borough. Consequently a similar number of places for Slough young people have to be delivered outside the borough.
- 6.5 In such a dynamic population as Slough's forecasting beyond three years remains uncertain. The present prediction is that Slough requires 15 forms of entry at primary level and 38 forms of entry at secondary level by 2021/22. In addition a corresponding increase in special needs placements is required. Primary schools are typically planned as 3 form of entry primary schools although expansions have resulted in 4 and even 5 form of entry schools. Secondary schools are now typically planned as 6 form of entry schools, although not all the schools in the borough have been built to that size.

## **7 Developable land**

- 7.1 There is an acute shortage of developable land within the borough boundaries. The material factors that affect the availability of developable land are:
- Slough occupies just 32.5 square kilometres.
  - It is built to its boundaries on the north and west.
  - The southern boundary is river valley and much of the undeveloped land (and significant areas of the developed land) is in flood plain.
  - The borough has the largest single-owned trading estate in Europe, and the area of land covered by this consequentially puts pressure on the rest of the borough. The trading estate is vibrant and is a substantial source of high value employment for the Thames Valley (about 35,000 people travel into Slough for work).
  - There is a network of valuable parks and public open space which provides sports and recreational space for the population and has considerable benefits in securing community health and wellbeing, community cohesion and community safety. Some of these areas have the benefit of legal protections and, given the densely built nature of the borough and the scale and growth of the population, their use for development is unthinkable.

## **8 Land use pressures**

- 8.1 There are competing demands on the available developable land for housing, education, leisure and community facilities, health centres and faith centres. The Borough Council has both a legal and functional responsibility to address these pressures and needs. Current priorities for land use are:
- Housing – acute housing shortages of all types, sizes and tenures and poor housing condition
  - Regeneration and environment – the need to improve the quality and maintenance of the built environment and the quality and usage of the green environment
  - Health – some of the shortest life-spans and poorest health outcomes in the south east
  - Jobs and skills – the need to maintain the number of jobs in the borough and to fit the local population with the skills to access them
- 8.2 The provision of adequate housing is potentially the most acute pressure on land. The borough is one of the three most densely occupied authorities in the UK. Family and affordable or social housing are in particularly short supply and housing pressures and prices are predicted to increase. Housing need, particularly for social and family housing, is projected to exceed planned supply or available land supply.
- 8.3 Population growth and the high priority for healthier and active lifestyles have increased the needs for formal and informal sports and leisure provision. The Council is developing a comprehensive leisure strategy to address demand and respond to the present low levels of physical activity in the borough and poor health outcomes.
- 8.4 GP practices are too small for their current customer demand and need to improve their facilities and similarly the demand for faith centres has outstripped provision. The Council is under pressure to identify and even provide sites to address all needs.

8.5 Land use planning, particularly the location of schools is influenced by traffic patterns. Slough's has very high levels of traffic movements. These are generated by commuter traffic in and out of the borough. School traffic in, out and around the borough is generated by the nature of the town's education provision, i.e. selective secondary schools and faith schools in both phases and the need for numerous children and young people to travel to the school of choice or the only school in which they can get a place. 34% of all traffic in the borough is generated by school traffic in contrast to a national average of 20%.

## **9 A new school places strategy**

9.1 The overwhelming priority of a school places strategy is to continue to deliver high quality and improving education to the young people of the borough. In addition any strategy should recognise the high levels of child obesity and poor levels of physical activity.

9.2 The principles of the emerging strategy are to:

- Prioritise expansion or delivery of schools to deliver maximise the benefit to Slough residents
- Support expansion of selective schools only where the expansion will not add to the imbalance between selective and non-selective places
- Allow for adequate playing fields on or very easily accessible to the site
- Maximise the available sources of funding or schemes for delivery
- Be part of a holistic plan for future developments in the borough
- Recognise that land use pressures must result in provision being made outside the borough
- Be sufficiently flexible to respond to acceleration or deceleration in demand.

9.3 The development of a new strategy has involved site identification, initial consultations of some relevant schools and discussions with possible promoters.

9.4 Site identification has involved:

- Examining existing school sites for expansion and/or ability to accommodate entirely new schools easily accessible to the site
- Examining sites within the Council's ownership
- Identifying sites adjoining or nearby secondary schools to create annexes
- Identifying suitable sites within the borough for new primary or secondary schools. This has included considering sites identified for the LABV.
- Identifying sites immediately outside the borough for new secondary schools.

9.5 In considering priorities on existing school sites the emerging strategy takes account of:

- Space available and particularly playing field area remaining after proposals
- Capacity to accommodate further responsibility and change
- Realistic capacity of a school to grow. For example, sites may be able to accommodate expansions but result in over large primary schools.
- Discussions with heads and governors which are in their preliminary stages

On potential new sites

- Land available by some means on or off the site for adequate playing fields
- Ownership constraints

And on all sites existing or new:

- Use of land constraints such as flooding, protected status, major utilities
- Traffic management issues, although virtually any development will exacerbate current congestion

- 9.6 Having identified a range of possible sites, more detailed planning has involved consideration of achieving a flexible and deliverable supply. Pragmatically it has been assumed that expansion on existing sites will be easier to achieve. This has been tempered by the recognition that this may create over-large schools unless an entirely new school or distinctive annex can be accommodated. To satisfy need, a combination of new schools and expansions will be required. To ensure flexibility, early or in principle agreement on new schools should be secured in company with a series of school expansions which can be brought forward as true pupil numbers become clear.
- 9.7 The emerging plan for primary schools (15 form of entry target) is to deliver three new 3 form of entry schools and the remainder by extension or annex. The potential options identified could exceed the requirement during the plan period. Tentative discussions are starting with heads and with the Slough Association of Primary Schools as a potential bidder for a new Free School.
- 9.8 The emerging plan for secondary schools (38 form of entry target) is again to deliver the majority of places through new schools and to seek extension or annex of other schools on existing or adjoining sites. Delivery is potentially supported by the DfE's current Free School approvals but they and we are struggling to find sufficient sites of sufficient size within the borough. The challenge is made greater because some approvals are unlikely to maximise the benefit to Slough children, so using valuable land to less than full effect and exacerbating our traffic problems. One proposal may distort further the balance of boys/girls in our non-selective schools with potential harmful effects to educational outcomes across the borough. Current approvals are as follows:
- Khalsa School (total 4 forms of entry but serving a far wider catchment) temporarily located by the DfE outside the borough boundary but uncertain
  - SASH School (at least 6 forms of entry for Slough) provisionally located at Castleview but dependent on other agreements
  - Lynch Hill School (6 forms of entry to Slough) potentially on a site identified by DfE on our boundaries but uncertain
  - Tauheedul Girls School (anticipated 4 forms of entry but some may be taken up by out of Slough residents) no site identified
- 9.9 Tentative discussions with Heads and Governors have suggested that we may be able to secure about 10 forms of entry by extension or annex and there are further options to explore.
- 9.10 We have also identified a very few sites within and around the borough where we believe a new secondary school could be accommodated. None of these is easy to secure for a selection of the following reasons:
- Site is in private ownership and may be difficult to secure at all or at reasonable cost
  - Site has insufficient space for playing fields
  - Site requires some form of joint arrangement with an existing school
  - Significant transport and planning matters to be overcome.

9.11 In short there is greater optimism about identifying and securing sites to deliver primary. If the majority of sites identified at 8.11 can be delivered secondary demand can be met.

## **10 Conclusion**

This report sets out our emerging strategy to deliver school places for all young people in the borough in the period to 21/22. It sets the strategy in the very challenging context of high demand and multiple competing pressures on the remaining developable land in the borough and the limits of the Council's powers and influence.

## **11 Appendices**

**A** Breakdown of admissions to Slough Secondary Schools as at May 2013

## **12 Background Papers**

None.