

CABINET MEMBER FOR WASTE, PROPERTY AND ENVIRONMENT – MR T R STURGIS

DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES

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REFERENCE: WPE- 002-11

Land Required to Facilitate Extension to Exeter House Special School

Purpose of Report

To gain Councillor approval for the initiation of a Land Transfer from Salisbury City Council and acquisition of land from the Diocesan Board of Education for the purposes of constructing an extension to Exeter House Special School, Salisbury.

Background

Exeter House School is a Community Special School and is maintained by Wiltshire Council. The school provides education for children from 3 – 19 years of age with a range of learning difficulties.

The purpose built special school has been on the current site since 1995. At that time there were 39 pupils in the school and the new building, intended for 60 pupils, seemed more than adequate. A few years on it became clear that the building would not meet the needs of all the pupils and mobile classrooms were added to the existing building. There are now 4 mobile classrooms and space is at a premium. At the time of writing there are 99 pupils in the school.

The school is situated on the outskirts of Salisbury, Wiltshire. The postal address is:

Exeter House School
Somerset Road
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP1 3BL

Exeter House School provides an extensive range of learning experiences in various settings including the school, the local community for visits and shopping, horse riding, swimming, work experience, mainstream schools and anything else that can be fitted into the school day. Pupils follow the National Curriculum which has been adapted to meet their individual needs and teachers are proficient in exploring all learning opportunities for pupils.

Pupils have the opportunity to take part in residential educational visits and new venues and activities are regularly explored. The school aims to create an exciting learning environment and the pupils work hard to create displays to inspire each other and visitors to the school. There are a number of outdoor learning spaces which include a sensory garden with rabbits and chickens, an environmental garden with a pond and sheep, a gazebo situated on the school field and all-weather teaching areas covered with canopies.

A feasibility study was commissioned and completed in early 2010 to identify the best way to extend the school. As a result of this feasibility, it was determined that the best option was to build the extension to the side of the existing school on land that had been transferred from Wiltshire County Council to Salisbury City Council as part of the unitary transition.

As the potential requirement for the land to extend the school was known at the time of transfer, there was an option included within the documentation to facilitate Salisbury City Council transferring the land to Wiltshire Council for the consideration of £1.00 (see attached extract).

Triggers for the instigation of the transfer are evidence of:

1. Planning permission and other consents
2. Confirmation that requisite funding is in place
3. Confirmation that the works will commence within 12 months of the transfer

A planning application for the scheme was determined at Strategic Committee on 16 March 2011 (REG 3 Application) and consent was granted (see attached Decision Notice).

The feasibility looked at various options to improve the flow of traffic into and around the site. Most pupils arrive and are collected from school by minibus. To facilitate clear ingress and egress from the site, it is proposed that an additional area of car parking is created to accommodate 25 cars.

Following discussions with the Head of St Marks School (Gareth Flemington), which is adjacent to Exeter House, and the Diocesan Board of Education Project Development Officer (Simon Franklin), it was agreed in principle for Wiltshire Council to acquire a piece of land to create the additional car park, in exchange for carrying out improvements to St Marks playground as part of the Exeter House School extension project up to a value of £80,000 (inclusive of all construction costs, fees etc.).

Main Considerations for the Council

1. Non-compliance with Building Bulletin 102 (BB102) "Designing for Disabled Children and Children with Special Educational Needs"
2. Increasing land ownership
3. Need to be able to comply with any planning conditions relating to the transferred land

Space analysis carried out as part of the feasibility demonstrates that for 106 pupils, based on the standards within BB102, Exeter House should have 3,656m² gross internal floor area but currently has 1,839m². This equates to 19m² per pupil instead of 34m² per pupil (inc. Post-16).

Obviously, transferring land back into the ownership of Wiltshire Council from Salisbury City Council and acquiring land from St Marks, increases the Council's land ownership and any on-going liabilities in relation to such land. This has to be balanced against the responsibility to provide suitable accommodation for disabled children and children with special educational needs across the County.

With regards to acquisition costs, the transfer of land from Salisbury City Council can be completed for £1 and the agreement with the Diocese to acquire the land from St Marks in exchange for improvement works carried out to their playground to the value of £80,000, has been provided for within the project budget i.e. funding is in place.

In terms of on-going liability, a large section of the land being transferred from Salisbury City Council will be used to build the extension and the remainder will continue in its current use as

open space. The on-going maintenance regime for this is negligible as it contains calcareous (chalky) unimproved grassland and is currently managed by infrequent cutting. The land being acquired from St Marks will be converted to parking spaces with associated landscaping works. Consequently, the future maintenance liability is also considered minimal, aside from re-surfacing works which will be required in the longer term as a result of general “wear and tear”.

In terms of planning conditions, (see attached Decision Notice) the two principle requirements are to produce a Landscape Management Plan and to comply with the submitted Ecological Report and Management Plan for the Bishopdown County Wildlife Site. These are reasonably straightforward conditions and a licence is currently being put in place with Salisbury City Council to permit Wiltshire Council access to the adjacent (larger) County Wildlife site to carry out works which form part of the ecological mitigation for the development.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

The land to be transferred from Salisbury City Council forms part of the Bishopdown County Wildlife site that includes a more extensive area of grassland to the north. Significant consultation has been undertaken with the County Ecologist and the County Wildlife Officer to assess the impact of the development and to formulate the mitigation plans.

The County Landscape Officer has also been a consultee of the pre-application and planning process, hence the condition relating to an approved Landscape Plan.

The Employers Requirements for the extension specify a BREEAM rating of Very Good to be achieved, with an aspiration to achieve an Excellent rating. A pre-construction BREEAM Assessment has been undertaken which demonstrates this is achievable.

There are limited opportunities for the use of renewable forms of energy within the scheme, but the planning consent includes for the provision of Solar Panels to the roof of the extension. Rainwater Harvesting also forms part of the scheme.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

There are no negative impacts with regards to Equalities, only improvement in the provision of education services to disabled children and children with special educational needs across the County.

Risk Assessment

There are no significant risks associated with the transfer of land and acquisition of land detailed within this report.

Financial Implications

There are negligible costs relating to the land transfer which include £1 payable to Salisbury City Council for the transfer of the land, plus legal fees in connection with the transfer and the licence for access to the broader County Wildlife site to carry out ecological mitigation works.

There are also legal fees relating to the acquisition of the land from St Marks (for the additional car parking) but the other professional and statutory fees associated with the improvement works to be carried out to St Marks playground are included within the £80,000 allowance within the project budget for these works. The agreement is capped at expenditure of £80,000 inclusive of fees. If the specified works can be completed for less than £80,000, the project will benefit from this saving.

There will be on-going maintenance costs for the additional land that is being transferred back to Wiltshire Council, but this will be minimal as it is open space and due to its ecological value the maintenance regime is based on minimal intervention i.e. grass cutting twice a year.

If the land is not transferred from Salisbury City Council to Wiltshire Council then the project to extend Exeter House Special School cannot proceed.

Legal Implications

Legal implications only relate to ownership liability as set out above.

As the project programme indicates a commencement on site in June 2011, there is a risk that the land transfer and land acquisition may not be completed by that date. Consequently, Wiltshire Council Legal department has been instructed to draft a Licence that will permit Wiltshire Council to commence preparation works and construction works to the land to be transferred, and to use the St Marks land as a contractor's compound during the construction phase of the project.

Options Considered

Do nothing – this is not an option as the school does not comply with BB102 “Designing for Disabled Children and Children with Special Educational Needs” guidelines for space standards, including minimum areas for all types of space.

The Feasibility study explored various options including 4 proposals for the extension and 3 proposals for the additional parking provision. The current proposal was recommended by the professional Design Team and has been agreed by the school and Wiltshire Council Strategic Property Services.

Reason for Proposal

To retrospectively accommodate the significant increase in pupil numbers at Exeter House Special School in line with Building Bulletin 102 recommendations on minimum space standards.

Proposal

The Council approves the transfer of land from Salisbury City Council to Wiltshire Council and the acquisition of land from the Diocesan Board of Education (at St Marks Church of England Junior School) to facilitate the construction of an extension to Exeter House Special School to comply with Building Bulletin 102 “Designing for Disabled Children and Children with Special Educational Needs” guidelines on minimum space standards.

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

Feasibility Report March 2010
Extract from land transfer
Project programme
Site plans (P-Site-26P01 and P-Site-50P1)