
Individual Cabinet Member Delegated Decision

Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills – Cllr Laura Mayes

Service: Children's Services

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Reference: CES-01-22

Statutory Notice for the proposed enlargement of Mere Primary School, Springfield Road, Mere, Wiltshire, BA12 6EW.

Purpose of Report

1. To ask the Cabinet Member to approve the statutory proposal published by Wiltshire Council on 20 January 2022. The notice proposed the enlargement of Mere School to provide a 1.5 Form of Entry (1.5FE), 315 place primary school. It is proposed to permanently increase the Published Admission Number (PAN) from 1 September 2022 when an increase of 15 additional pupils will be admitted into the Reception Year. Up to 45 Reception age pupils will be admitted in each subsequent year.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure effective school organisation and sufficient school places are provided across the Council area.

Background

3. Mere School already has more than 30 pupils in some year groups and is full to the current capacity of 210 pupils. At the time of writing, there are still around 100 houses with planning permission to be built in the school's catchment area which will generate approximately 30 additional primary age pupils.

Pupil forecasts, calculated summer 2021, indicate that numbers are expected to continue to grow at the school, with an increasing shortfall of spaces if the school does not expand. Expansion of school capacity is needed to meet the forecast demands of the growing population in the area, and to allow for population fluctuations and movement into the area by new families, including the new homes to be built in the town.

The expansion project at Mere School will provide 105 additional places (0.5FE) from September 2022 to address the anticipated deficit.

The Children's Centre located on the first floor of the Mere School building closed in 2019. The space has been vacant since and with minimal internal refurbishment can be converted to create the additional classrooms needed. The space can also accommodate a design and technology room with cooking facilities to expand the current curriculum offer in these subjects. No physical extension to the building will be required to support the expansion.

Consultation

Wiltshire Council widely consulted on the proposal to expand Mere School to provide 1.5 forms of entry (315 places). Consultation with a range of stakeholders took place between 1 November 2021 and 29 November 2021 and preceded publication of the statutory proposals on 20 January 2022. The Public Notice period of four weeks ended on 17 February 2022. The consultation included the following interested parties:

- Parents and carers of children at the school
- Teachers and support staff at the school
- Governors at the school
- Councillor George Jeans
- Mere Town Council
- Dorset County Council
- Mere Pre-School
- Whitesheet and Hindon Primary Schools
- Salisbury Diocese
- Information on the proposal and consultation was also included in publications of the Mere Matters local magazine.

No objections were received during the consultation periods. Mere Town Council confirmed their support of the proposal to expand Mere School and hoped that the increased car parking and drop off zones would succeed in addressing local highway issues. Two local residents also wrote in support of the proposals, one recognised the need for the additional places to meet local population growth. The other supported the proposal but also raised issues regarding the condition and road markings on local roads which have been passed to the highways service.

Main Considerations for the Council

4. The LA has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places across Wiltshire and projections indicate a need for an additional 0.5 Form of Entry (up to 105 places) in Mere. The additional places are required in September 2022.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

5. Not applicable.

Safeguarding Implications

6. All school projects are designed to ensure that schools provide safe and secure places for children and young people in the local community. If a decision was taken not to extend a school to meet demand in a local area then there is a risk

that young people would need to be transported to schools a long distance from their locality leaving them more vulnerable due to the distance they are from home.

At pick up and drop off times the access road to the school and neighbouring roads can become congested. There is currently no separation between vehicles and pedestrians which is a safeguarding concern and insufficient parking for both school staff, parents and visitors. As part of the expansion project the LA will work with Mere Town Council to create a dedicated drop off area for parents and significantly more parking spaces. This will reduce local congestion and make pick up and drop off safer for all. This element of the scheme is subject to planning consent.

Public Health Implications

7. As above, works to the car park to provide additional places and a dedicated drop off zone will make the site safer for all site users.

Procurement Implications

8. Responsibility for commissioning approved capital building projects rests with the Council's Strategic Assets and Facilities Management Team. Responsibility for approving related procurement activity rests with the Procurement Team. This decision will require the procurement of a works contract to deliver the additional school place capacity required and external car park works.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

9. Through detailed planning and effective design, officers continue to ensure that all accommodation improvements promote and deliver equality of opportunity and access to facilities.

The Local Authority has a duty and responsibility to provide sufficient mainstream school places to meet demand arising from all areas of the community.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

10. In all education-related capital investment schemes, officers continue to work with establishments to develop and enhance the learning environment taking account of sustainability and environmental impact, including the move towards reducing carbon emissions from schools for the benefit of pupils, staff and the community.

With ever increasing energy prices, every effort will be made through the refurbishment of the classroom spaces to reduce lifetime running costs. This will include providing additional insulation in the roof, new windows and new heating outlets.

Providing additional pupil places in Mere, should reduce future need for pupils to be transported to further afield to access education.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

11. If the decision is not taken, then there will be a short fall of primary school places in the Mere locality from September 2022 and an increasing number of parents/carers will not be able to secure a place for their child in a local school.

An urgent temporary solution would be required to provide additional places to meet the demand from children arising from the new housing.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

12. There is a financial risk that capital costs could increase and exceed the funding envelope agreed. To mitigate this, the project brief and specification will be in line with policy and the project management and design teams will ensure that where possible, value engineering exercises are undertaken to reduce costs and keep within budget.

There is a risk that the project could be delayed due to unforeseen circumstances. The phasing and timelines will be closely monitored monthly, to avoid slippage where at all possible.

Financial Implications

13. The funding for the provision of an additional 0.5FE (up to 105 additional places) for Mere School was approved by Cabinet in March 2021 and again in February 2022.

A capital budget of £1.1m has been agreed for delivery of the works required to provide the additional primary places and car parking. Some of this will be funded by Section 106 developer contributions with the additional costs met from the Council's basic need grant allocation. No capital costs for construction are expected to be incurred by the governing body.

Where any school increases its pupil numbers, there is a revenue budget formula funding lag. To counter this increase in PAN from 30 per year group to 45, the school is entitled to some one-off funding through the Council's Growth Fund, for the basic need expansion of the school.

Legal Implications

14. The Council has a duty to secure that sufficient school places are available in their area. These proposals will contribute to meeting that duty. There is a prescribed process that must be followed where it is proposed to increase the size of a school by more than a specified number of pupils. These proposals fall within those requirements and the relevant public notice has been published. The Council has a duty to consider any representations received as a result of that notice, before making a determination to approve or reject the proposal. Any approval may be made conditional on the grant of planning permission or other prescribed matters.

Alterations to Maintained schools, such as Mere School are governed by The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 (“Prescribed Alterations Regulations”). When exercising functions under these regulations regard must be had to guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE), “Making ‘prescribed alterations’ to maintained schools”, which sets out the procedure to be followed. The process as set out in the report follows that of the guidance.

Options Considered

15. As Mere School is the only primary school in Mere this is considered to be only viable option to meet the demand for places in the town.

Proposal

16. To approve the statutory proposal published by Wiltshire Council on 20 January 2022. The notice proposes the enlargement of the school to provide a 1.5 Form of Entry (1.5FE), 315 place primary school and to permanently increase the Planned Admission Number (PAN) to 45 with effect from September 2022 (subject to planning approval).

Reason for Proposal

17. The LA has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places across Wiltshire and projections indicate a need for an additional 0.5 Form of Entry (up to 105 places) in Mere. The expansion of Mere School on its existing site is the most appropriate solution to providing the required places in a timely way.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Statutory Notice

Background Papers

The following documents are available from the officer named above:

Feasibility Study - Expansion of Mere School

Copies of the 3 consultation responses mentioned above.