

By: Director - Operations
To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 17 July 2008
Subject: GOAT LEES – PARENTAL REPRESENTATIONS FOR NEW SCHOOL PROVISION
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: To consider parental representations for new school provision in Goat Lees, Ashford and recommend a way forward.

Introduction

1. (1) The Education Act 2006 imposed a new duty on Local Authorities to consider parental representations regarding school organisation in their area. These representations may arise due to perceived shortages of places in a location, or due to concerns at the quality of provision.

(2) Local Authorities are expected to consider representations received and respond accordingly. Appropriate responses include making the funding available to enable new provision to be created, fresh starting underperforming provision, or closing it to raise the capital for expanding better provision/creating new provision elsewhere, or rejecting the parental representation. If new provision is created, the Local Authority would normally be expected to run a competition to seek a promoter, although it is possible that in these circumstances the Secretary of State might consider an exemption and allow a parents group to promote the school without a competition.

Background

2. (1) In February 2008, this Board recommended that a public consultation be undertaken regarding new school provision in Repton Park in Ashford. This estate is under construction, with 1250 houses being built, in addition to the 85 replacement dwellings already built. The consultation meeting was attended by a number of residents from the Goat Lees estate in Ashford, which is about one and a half miles from Repton Park. The M20 separates these two estates.

(2) The Goat Lees estate was constructed between the years 1998 and 2005. 732 properties have been built. A developer contribution of a 1FE school site was provided. The condition is that a school must be substantially procured within 12 years of the commencement of the relevant phase of development or the site returned. For the avoidance of doubt, it is assumed that 1 January 2012 is the trigger day for returning the site (although legally it may be later).

(3) The residents from Goat Lees attended the consultation on Repton Park to make representations for a new school in their community. They were not opposed to a school being provided in Repton Park, as they recognised the

importance of such provision, and the impact a school has on creating a sense of community. The absence of a school in Goat Lees had, in residents' views, impacted negatively on their quality of life. Concerns were also raised about the perceived lack of availability of local provision and the increased car use as a consequence.

(4) In response to the residents' concerns, officers agreed to arrange a separate meeting in Goat Lees to discuss the matter further and agree a way forward.

Goat Lees Meeting

3. (1) The Local Member, Mr Richard King chaired the meeting. Mrs Elizabeth Tweed also attended as her division borders on the estate. The Ward Member from Ashford Borough Council, Mrs Rita Hawes, and the Parish Councillor (Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Parish Council) Mr John Hawes were in attendance. Around 23 members of the public attended, a number of whom came to the Repton Park meeting too.

(2) Leaflets advertising the meeting were hand delivered by volunteers to all addresses in the Goat Lees estate, and displayed in the local shop and at the community centre.

(3) In order to promote a discussion with the residents and interested parties, a presentation was made, following a similar format to that used in Repton Park.

Residents Views

4. (1) The majority of those attending appeared to be parents of pre-school children, who were keen to have a school in the community by the time their children started school. Details of the points raised by attendees are included at Appendix 1, but the key points are set out below:

- Children should be able to walk to school;
- Concerns that their children would not be able to obtain places at nearby primary schools in the future;
- The estate had been designed with cycle paths to facilitate safe walking and cycling within the locality;
- Anti-social behaviour in the area was attributed to the lack of community cohesion, something created by the absence of a school;
- If a school was not built, further housing would be created on the site;
- There were plans for up to 750 houses on the neighbouring Police Training Ground, which would generate an estimated 95 to 133 pupils of primary school age. These children would not have school places if the site had been handed back to the developer; and
- Further housing in the Kennington area had been earmarked in the Greater Ashford Development Framework, where there was little surplus school capacity.

(2) Residents agreed to survey local households to accurately establish the number of pre-school and school aged pupils in Goat Lees. Volunteers conducted 300 interviews, 21 leaflets were returned and 337 signatures collected in support of a new school.

(3) The survey covered about half of the houses in the estate. It therefore provides a helpful, albeit incomplete, picture which moves toward actual detail rather than the statistical modelling used by the Local Authority. The organisers found that there were:

- a) a higher proportion of under 5s compared with children aged 6 years and over (see Appendix 2)
- b) a significant number of households were planning to have children in the next couple of years (Appendix 3).

Need for School Provision

5. (1) Ashford is identified as a growth area by the Government with 30,000 houses expected to be built in the period 2001 to 2031.

(2) Appendix 5 shows the current school provision in Ashford and the Goat Lees site (labelled proposed school site). Appendix 6 provides details of the school places available. This indicates that within one mile of the site there were 37 vacant places against the January 08 school rolls. This is forecast to be 38 vacant places in 2011/12. The schools within one and two mile radii are full (two surplus places as a group) and again this is forecast to be the situation in 2011/12. The proposed school in Repton Park is intended to help alleviate this pressure and ensure that the pupils from the Repton Park development can access a local school.

(3) The Goat Lees development is built out. On the face of it the local schools can accommodate the existing and future pupils. Appendix 4 shows which maintained schools the current pupils who live in Goat Lees attend. This suggests that 68% of children attend a school within 2 miles. 86% attend a town school within 2 miles or Challock or Lady Joanna Thornhill primary schools which are the nearest village schools.

(4) The residents survey identified 159 children aged 5 to 11 years old. However, PLASC records show 250 children live in the estate and attend Kent maintained primary schools (see Appendix 4). These 250 children are included in our forecasts.

(5) KCC's statistical modelling would expect up to 180 pre-school children to live in the estate (new housing rate) and for this number to drop to around 105 pre-school aged children as the development matures (stock housing rate). Residents identified 104 children aged under 5 years, with 92 children planned within the next 5 years. Pre-school population data from the Primary Care Trust (PCT) indicates there are 135 pre-school children in the estate, resulting in between 31 and 36 reception aged children per year until 2011. Our forecasts use the PCT's data.

(6) The Greater Ashford development framework proposes 600 houses in Bockhanger Wood and 450 houses in Kennington during the period 2011-21. In the period 2021 – 2031 it proposes a further 200 homes in Bockhanger Wood.

Clearly these developments are speculative at this point and currently do not have any defined status in planning terms.

(7) Further, imminent development may occur at the Police Training Ground. Indications are that between 500 – 700 dwellings might be built on site. The development would be expected to produce between 95 – 133 pupils of primary school age (assuming 10% 1 bed flats, 30% 2 bed flats, and 60% houses). Again the development currently has no official status in planning terms. The Local Authority has also been approached for information on school places in connection with two development areas on the urban fringe on the A28 (600 houses). If any of these developments progressed there would be a shortfall of school places in the area. The difficulty, is knowing if, and when, planning permission might be granted on these sites, and when the house building would start, particularly in the current economic climate.

Area Education Officer's comments

6. (1) It is understandable that some residents of Goat Lees are campaigning for a school to be built as they anticipate this would meet the needs of families in the estate with primary aged children.

(2) Our forecasts include the 250 pupils currently living in the estate and attending school. These include the PCT data which corresponds to the pre-school population our modelling would expect. Clearly, the estate produces sufficient pupils to fill a 1FE school, but currently these pupils are able to access school places in nearby schools. Therefore, the need for a new school hinges on imminent further housing or reducing capacity at other schools.

(3) In view of the significant possibility of further housing development in the area, it would seem sensible to plan for a school on the Goat Lees site, and be ready to move forward quickly. It is therefore suggested that we conduct a public consultation on the need for a new school when a planning application for housing on either the Police Training Ground, or the sites on the A28, comes forward. This is earlier than normal, but does not commit the Authority to commissioning a school. A school competition (assuming no exemption is received) could then commence as soon as planning consent is granted and work starts on site.

Views of the Local Members

7. Mr Richard King is the Local Member for Ashford Rural West. Mrs Elizabeth Tweed is the Local Member for Ashford Central and her division borders on the Goat Lees estate. Both are fully supportive of the recommendation.

Views of the Cluster Board

8. The school site sits within the Ashford One Local Children's Partnership area. The Board has not yet been approached regarding the proposal.

Views of the Ashford Borough Council

9. At this stage the Council has not been approached, but previous discussions would indicate a desire to see the site used for a school or community facility.

Views of the Parish Council

10. The Council has not been approached at this stage, but has regularly requested updates on progress to delivering a school on the estate.

Resource Implications

Capital

11. (1) The school site in Goat Lees has been provided via developer contributions. Currently approximately £1.9m is available from cash contributions from developers of sites across Ashford which could be allocated to this project. We would anticipate a further £1.2m being collected from the Police Training Ground (assuming 500 dwellings and a 67:33 ratio of houses to flats). *Clearly this figure will be subject to negotiation by Ashford Borough Council and dependent upon the number and mix of housing.* A 1FE school currently costs between £3.5m and £3.9m with a possible further £350K for nursery provision. Inflation will increase these costs.

Revenue

(2) The revenue costs of a new school would be met from the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Equality Issues

12. (1) The proposal to consult on the need for a school does not in itself present any equalities issues, provided adequate consideration is given to ensuring consultation process is accessible to all members of the community.

(2) The school will be fully accessible, thereby increasing the range of provision available to pupils with a physical disability.

(3) If it is decided to proceed with creating a new school, an assessment will be made of the equalities issues arising from any proposal received.

Transport and Environmental Impact including Community Implications

13. (1) The majority of pupils expected to attend the school would live on Goat Lees. Over time, the number of children being transported by parents out of the estate would diminish thereby reducing the environmental impact.

(2) In line with Government expectation the school would be built to the rigorous environmental standards. Consideration would be given to the biodiversity issues during design and construction phases and the curriculum development.

School Effectiveness

14. (1) Creating a new school in Goat Lees could affect the rolls of the neighbouring schools, and have negative implications for school standards. It is important, therefore, that any new school is only provided if the need exists or

appropriate management action is taken to mitigate the impact on neighbouring schools.

(2) Any proposal to promote a new school would be assessed to ensure the promoters had the necessary experience or support to deliver high quality provision.

Proposed Timetable

15. (1) It is not possible, at this point, to give a timeline with dates, because the start date is not known. The timeline below sets out the process that we are likely to have to follow together with an indication of the length of time each stage takes:

Stage	Length of time	Cumulative timeline
Planning application received for housing	0	0
Undertake public consultation on need for school in Goat Lees	6 weeks (excluding school holidays)	6 weeks
Report back to SOAB	6 weeks	12 weeks
Planning Permission Granted	Unknown	Unknown
Cabinet Member agrees to school competition	2 weeks	2 weeks
Competition Notice issued	2 weeks	4 weeks
Competition Closes	16 weeks	20 weeks
Consideration of proposals and place 2 nd notice	3 weeks	23 weeks
Publish 2 nd Public Notice	6 weeks	29 weeks
Public views reported to SOAB	4 weeks	33 weeks
Cabinet Member decides competition	Immediately	33 weeks

(2) The above timeline does not include the design, planning and build processes for the school building. These could run in parallel with the above process if there was an urgent need.

Recommendation

16. The Board is asked to recommend that a public consultation on the need for school provision in Goat Lees be undertaken once a planning application has been received relating to either, the Police Training Ground or land on the urban fringe off the A28 in Ashford.

David Adams
Area Education Officer
Ashford and Shepway
Tel: 01233 898559

The Local Member is Mr Richard King.

Background documents:

- (1) Education & Inspection Act 2006
- (2) DCSF document, 'Duty to Respond to Parental Representations about the Provision of Schools'.