

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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| Date of meeting: 23 October 2014 | AGENDA ITEM NO: 6 |
| Report title: NW Bicester Phase 1 Primary School - an update | |
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Board on the progress made towards the delivery of the Phase 1 Primary School and advise on its opening date.

2. Background

- 2.1 Members of the Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board (EBSDB) previously expressed an aspiration that the Phase 1 Primary School at NW Bicester should open as early as possible, to provide primary school places to meet the demand coming from the first occupiers.
- 2.2 On the basis of advice from officers from OCC's Children, Education and Families Directorate, EBSDB Members eventually agreed that the school could open on the NW Bicester site in September 2016 (i.e. a year after the first homes are built on site), provided that the school would open on a temporary basis in Sept 2015 in the new St Edburg's Primary School which would be up and running on the SW Bicester site.

3. Where are we now?

- 3.1 Good progress has been made on securing the Phase 1 Primary School as follows:
- The allocated site has now been transferred to OCC by the developer;
 - The funding is in place to deliver the first phase of the school;
 - The design of the new school is well advanced and is shortly to be the subject of a full planning application;
 - The Department for Education has confirmed that ministerial approval has been granted for OCC's preferred choice of sponsor, the White Horse Federation.

4. Update on Phase 1 Primary School opening

- 4.1 In the light of changing circumstances, it is now recommended that the opening date of the NW Bicester Phase 1 Primary School should be changed to September 2016. This is because of the following reasons:

a) Revised expectations of housing occupations

The Phase 1 sales period is not expected to commence until the end of August 2015. If the school were to open in September 2015, there is a risk that there would be no potential pupils living in the development at that time. There is a further risk that parents who do not intend to move to the development could apply for places at the school, and under Admissions

Regulations could not be prevented from occupying school places which then would not be available when children do move onto the development. Early opening of the school could therefore have the effect of increasing travel distances to school rather than decreasing them.

b) Number of children generated from the site in the first year does not justify early temporary provision

Based on the revised estimates of housing delivery, the number of homes due to be occupied on the NW Bicester site by the end of the school year Sept 2015 – July 2016 is expected to generate between 30-40 primary school children. However, those children moving in already of school age may be settled in nearby schools and may therefore want to stay put. The number of children living in the development and also seeking a school place at the new school is likely to be less than a classful, and it cannot be predicted at which stage of the school year they would arrive. Moreover, the children would be of all ages, and it is not viable to open all 7 year groups in the first year of operation, as some could have only 1 or 2 children in them. Not all of the children expected to be resident on the development would therefore be able to take up a place at the school in the first year, further reducing the viability of opening the school early.

c) Delayed opening to the new St Edburg's School at SW Bicester

It is now not expected that the new St Edburg's School building at SW Bicester will open before September 2015. If there are any further delays to the St Edburg's building programme, it would not be possible for the NW Bicester school to open temporarily on the St Edburg's site in 2015 as previously proposed. Even if St Edburg's is able to move for September 2015, it would not be reasonable to expect the management of St Edburg's School to have to face the twin challenges of relocating their school and playing host to the new school at the same time.

If the school is to open in September 2015 therefore, we would be faced with identifying somewhere that could host the school for the first year in temporary accommodation (which would incur additional costs). Given the risk noted above that there will be insufficient pupils by this time to justify such disruption, this is not considered to be the best way to start the new NW Bicester school.

d) View of the Phase 1 School Sponsors

Strong sponsors have been secured for the new school, who are committed to meeting the needs of the growing community. Given the uncertainties noted above, the view of the sponsors is that they can best ensure a strong start for the school by opening in September 2016. Opening earlier would undermine financial planning for the new school, as the number of pupils expected would not generate sufficient revenue to cover costs, even with the additional revenue funding support which will be provided by the county council, and thus increase the challenges of delivering excellent education.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 In summary, the combination of circumstances as set out above has resulted in OCC reviewing opening the temporary school in September 2015 and coming to the conclusion that this is no longer operationally possible or desirable.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 The Board is asked to note the progress being made on the Phase 1 Primary School and note the new timescale for its opening.