

**Meeting date:** 11 January 2021  
**Report to:** Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children,  
Education & Skills



**Subject/report title:** Proposal to expand Cheswick Green Primary School  
**Report from:** Director of Children's Services and Skills  
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**Wards affected:**

Blythe

**Public/private report:** Public

**Exempt by virtue of paragraph:** N/A

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**1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 To update Cabinet Member on the outcome of the consultation process with parents, residents and the wider education community on the proposal to expand Cheswick Green Primary School.

**2. Decision(s) recommended**

2.1 To consider the outcome of the consultation process

2.2 Approve that Officers move to the next stage of the process and publish a statutory proposal.

**3. Matters for Consideration**

3.1 On 21 October 2020, Cabinet Member considered a report that sought approval to carry out a period of consultation on the proposal to expand Cheswick Green Primary school.

3.2 The School Organisation Plan 2019, and the update for 2020/21 which was approved on 30 November 2020, identified the need to add school places to meet the additional demand from the strategic housing site at Blythe Valley Park, to ensure that the Council meets its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places.

3.3 Detailed feasibility work, carried out with the School, has identified a building scheme that could now be developed and the Governing Body of the School have approved

the proposal, in principle.

- 3.4 The consultation process started on 9 November with a closing date of 18 December (6 school weeks). Information was published on the Council website and circulated widely. Due to the pandemic it has not been possible to offer drop in sessions at the school. However plans of the current and proposed school building have been published alongside the consultation information on the Council website and officers have offered an 'ask a question' process and a telephone helpline to support the consultation. Virtual meetings with officers were offered to both the Parish Council and the Residents Association, but so far this offer has not been taken up. Ward Members have been kept informed throughout the process.
- 3.5 128 responses have been received to the consultation process and these are included in Appendix A. Email responses are attached at Appendix A1, the response of the Cheswick Green Residents is attached at Appendix A2, Cheswick Green Parish Council is included at Appendix A3 (appendix 2 & 3 have not been published), Ward Members and other local councillors at Appendix A4 and the responses to the online survey at Appendix A5.
- 3.6 Overwhelmingly the main theme raised as part of the consultation process is traffic and parking around the School site and the impact this has on residents in the area
- 3.7 In addition, concerns have been raised about whether the proposed expansion of accommodation is appropriate, including its impact on play space and the school field, staff parking and the impact on facilities such as the hall that are not being expanded.
- 3.8 A summary of the key issues raised and an officer response is included in Appendix B.
- 3.9 A number of responses to this consultation question why the delivery of additional primary school places was not considered at the time that the housing development was being considered. The Parish Council and the Residents Association were a key consultees to the Blythe Valley Park planning application in 2016 and both carried out separate resident surveys. Their representations to the planning application and the impact of the development on Cheswick Green Village was considered by Planning Committee at that stage. The implications for school places was considered as part of the planning report and the planning permission for the development was approved on this basis.
- 3.10 The detailed response by the Parish Council, to the planning application, outlined a range of concerns about the Blythe Valley development however it noted that the size of the development did not support the creation of a new school and that school places would need to be added at an existing school. With regards to primary education they concluded:-  
  
*The Parish Council considers that the expansion of Cheswick Green Primary School offers the best location to accommodate the demand for primary school places associated with existing and future properties in the area.*
- 3.11 The most significant concern from families and residents on the implications of this proposal are on traffic and parking around the school site. A number of consultation

responses have provided suggestions on how the Council could mitigate some of the impact of the additional cars and this feedback from the community will be fed into an independent traffic and highways assessment that is being undertaken as part of this expansion proposal. Highways matters will be considered in detail, as part of any planning application and there will be a need for Officers to outline what mitigation measures can be put in place to make the development acceptable in planning terms. The outcomes of this consultation process will support and shape the development of the planning application. The planning process itself is subject to consultation and will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to examine the details of the proposed mitigation measures and comment on them.

- 3.12 The school expansion proposal and the related planning application will seek to try and address some of the accessibility issues for the additional families accessing Cheswick Green Primary School from Blythe Valley Park. However, it is important to note that the funding for additional school places or the need to provide additional school places cannot be the sole driver to resolve the accessibility issues for families living in Blythe Valley Park to local amenities.
- 3.13 If approved, the school expansion proposal will move to a statutory process. This will require the publication of a statutory proposal and a further four week consultation period, where interested parties have a final opportunity to register any comments and objections to the proposals before a final decision is made, potentially in March 2021.
- 3.14 In addition, Officers will also commence the planning application process, which will seek to provide more clarity around transport and highways issues.

#### **4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**

- 4.1 The consultation process asked for views on alternative options for providing the additional places required. Two main alternative options have come forward:-
- Providing a new school at Blythe Valley Park
  - Spreading the additional pupils over a number of neighbouring schools
- 4.2 **New School** - A key part of any business case for opening a school is evidencing sufficient demand. Blythe Valley Park is expected to generate in the region of 210 primary age pupils (one form entry). This calculation assumes that all families are new to the area and require a new school place. However, a proportion of families will already have children in schools in Solihull and will choose to leave them at their existing school rather than change schools. Some families will express preferences for schools other than their local school, such as a faith school.
- 4.3 This expansion of 210 places at Cheswick Green Primary School will also cater for the new development at Cheswick Place (Mount Dairy Farm) and will provide sufficient places to meet the demand from both housing developments.
- 4.4 When the planning application for Blythe Valley Park was considered in 2016, the issue of additional school places was addressed in the planning application papers. The expansion of an existing school site was acknowledged and accepted and a S106

agreement was put in place to secure the additional primary and secondary school places that were needed. Therefore a site for a new school has not been identified.

- 4.5 The Council could seek the development of a free school using the DfE free school presumption process. As part of this process, the Council would be responsible not only for providing a site, but also for the capital funding required for the provision of a new school. The S106 funding secured from the Blythe Valley Park for the delivery of primary school places is insufficient to build a new school, even if a school site could be identified.
- 4.6 A free school application to open a school in the Blythe Valley area, was made by a multi academy trust in January 2017, through the DfE's free school wave process. However, after consideration by the DfE, the application was rejected on the grounds of insufficient demand.
- 4.7 **Spread the places over neighbouring schools** – it is not a credible option to spread the additional places across other local schools. Very few schools have surplus space that could be readily used to take additional pupils above and beyond their published admission number so this would require adding additional accommodation at a number of schools and across all age ranges. Primary classes are capped at 30 in Key Stage 1 so this would also mean that each school that took the additional numbers would have to have additional teaching staff to ensure that class size limits were maintained. A class of 25 pupils provides sufficient resources, such as funding for a teacher, classes less than this make a class unviable to maintain.
- 4.8 Alternatively consultation responses are suggesting that pupils be offered places, within existing capacity, at other schools in the area. Parental preference and admissions criteria are the key drivers with regards to the allocation of school places. It is not within the gift of the Council to 'share' the pupils out across a number of schools as places have to be allocated within strict criteria order and taking account of parental preference.
- 4.9 All properties in Solihull are located within a primary and secondary school catchment area. The catchment area system is designed to provide reassurance to families that they have a high priority at a local school should they express a preference for it. The Blythe Valley development sits within the catchment area of Cheswick Green Primary School because this is the closest school. If pupils living in Blythe Valley cannot access a school place at Cheswick Green Primary School they do not have a high priority at any other school based on their home location.
- 4.10 This approach would put families living in Blythe Valley Park at a disadvantage when applying for a primary school place. Families could find themselves unable to access a local place and then having to accept a place some considerable distance from home, after all other places have been offered. This will have further implications for the School transport budget.

## **5. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

- 5.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for children living in its area. Blythe Valley Park is a strategic housing development approved by the Council in 2016 and, as acknowledged within the planning application, will require the

creation of additional primary school places.

- 5.2 When the planning application for Blythe Valley Park was considered by Planning Committee in 2016, the need to expand a local school was acknowledged and accepted. Cheswick Green Primary School was identified as the closest and most appropriate school. The housing development sits within the catchment area for the school and supports the principle of providing local school places for families. S106 funding to support the expansion has been secured from the developers to support the expansion. This proposal now seeks to implement that element of the planning application. The national Policy Planning Framework (NPPF 2019) identifies the need for planning authorities to give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools.
- 5.3 Feasibility work has identified that the expanded school building can be accommodated on the school site, and has been approved in principle by the Governing Body of the School.

## 6. Implications and Considerations

- 6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>Economy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Revitalising our towns and local centres.</li> <li>2. UK Central (UKC) and maximising the opportunities of HS2.</li> <li>3. Increase the supply of housing, especially affordable and social housing.</li> </ol>	<p>This proposal seeks to provide additional school places required to meet the demand from Blythe Valley, a strategic housing site with planning approval for 750 dwellings.</p> <p>The Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for families living in Solihull.</p>
<p>Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Enhance Solihull's natural environment.</li> <li>5. Improve Solihull's air quality.</li> <li>6. Reduce Solihull's net carbon emissions.</li> </ol>	<p>Cheswick Green Primary School is the closest school to the development. As part of the planning application for the proposal a traffic and highways assessment will be undertaken to look at the impact of the increase in the number of pupils and the possible mitigation solutions.</p>
<p>People and Communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Take action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities.</li> <li>8. Enable communities to thrive.</li> <li>9. Sustainable, quality, affordable provision for adults &amp; children with complex needs.</li> </ol>	<p>Increasing the number of school places in good and outstanding schools will ensure that high quality school places are available for families moving into the new development. This proposal seeks to provide a cost effective solution to the need to provide additional school places.</p>

## 6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 This reports outlines the details of the 6 week consultation period that has been undertaken and the key issues that have arisen as a result.

6.2.2 If approval is given to move to the next stage of the statutory process then there will be a further 4 week consultation period.

6.2.3 Statutory consultation will also be undertaken as part of the planning application process.

## 6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 Revenue – Additional pupils generate additional Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which funds extra pupils. In addition, School Forum has approved growth criteria to identify additional revenue funding for those schools experiencing growth in pupil numbers. There is an annual specific grant to fund the revenue cost of pupil growth in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which for 2020-21 is £728,500.

6.3.2 S106 funding has been secured and is expected to cover the capital cost of additional school places required as a result of both the Mount Dairy Farm and the Blythe Valley Park housing developments. This S106 agreement names Cheswick Green Primary School as a receiving school for the funding, this funding could be withdrawn in the event that this expansion were not to go ahead. The Children's Services Capital Programme currently includes budgetary provision of circa £2.5M for this proposal but will be updated to reflect the latest feasibility scheme.

## 6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 The Council has a legal duty to ensure there are sufficient school places to meet the needs of Solihull children and is required to follow the statutory process when considering the school expansion.

## 6.5 Risk implications:

6.5.1 The key risk is that the additional school places cannot be provided in time to meet the growth in demand from the developments.

6.5.2 The possible impact on the Council's transport budget should children have to be educated at schools further away from home.

6.5.3 This expansion requires significant additional accommodation to be provided at the school and will be subject to a full planning application.

6.5.4 That the mitigation required to make the development acceptable in transport and highways terms are unaffordable.

## 6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 This proposal seeks to ensure that the families moving into the Blythe Valley Park and Mount Dairy Farm housing developments have access to a local school place.

6.6.2 The proposal will expand the number of good and outstanding school places available.

**7. List of appendices referred to**

7.1 Appendix A – Responses to the consultation process.

7.2 Appendix B – Key issues.

**8. Background papers used to compile this report**

8.1 School Organisation Plan 2019 and 2020

8.2 Planning Committee Report - 30 November 2016

**9. List of other relevant documents**

9.1 None