

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 2 September 2021

Report of the Head of Service - Asset Management

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
Clitheroe

Feedback from Consultation on Additional Primary School Places for Clitheroe and Next Steps

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Executive Summary

This report provides feedback to Cabinet on the consultation to provide additional primary school places in Clitheroe, by extending the age range of Ribblesdale High School.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Note the consultation that has been undertaken and the responses that were received in respect of the authority's proposal; and
- (ii) Agree to the authority publishing a Statutory Notice of its proposal to extend the age range of Ribblesdale High School to allow for the admission of 30 reception pupils per year to be admitted to the school from September 2023. This will be enabled by providing accommodation on the Higher Standen site.

Background and Advice

Following an initial period of consultation on the potential provision of a new primary school in Clitheroe, Cabinet agreed on 10 June 2021 to begin a further period of consultation on an alternative proposal. This is to provide the additional primary school places by extending the age range of Ribblesdale High School.

The proposal would see 210 primary school places provided in a new building on the site reserved on the Higher Standen Farm development, Pendle Road, Clitheroe and

the places would be made available starting from admission to Reception Year in September 2023.

Whilst the initial intention was to also consider the inclusion of a Special Educational Needs Inclusion unit as part of the proposal, further consideration led to a decision not to pursue this option as part of this current proposal. This was because the school was not in a priority area for provision of a unit, and the incremental growth of the primary phase would mean that it would be some time before sufficient places could be made available.

Consultation

A period of consultation was undertaken between 28 June 2021 and 23 July 2021.

A total of 23 consultation responses were received. Of the 23 responses 52% were positive and 35% were opposed to the proposal. The remainder were neutral.

Although the majority of responses were in support of the proposal (57% of respondents indicated a 'clear need for school places'), a number of concerns were identified by interested parties. Based on the scale of response for each of these concerns, key points have been addressed below.

A secondary school is not best placed to provide primary places

Some respondents raised concerns with the assumption that a high-quality secondary education provider could create high quality primary education, and the lack of experience in delivering primary provision at the school (teaching, learning, curriculum, management, governance etc). Concerns were also raised about the risk of the school's management team being distracted by the new build.

Response:

The leaders of Ribblesdale High School (including senior leaders and the Governing Board) have received advice from senior advisers at the county council who have expertise in primary education provision.

The Governing Board of the school will initially identify a staffing structure and will look to appoint a headteacher/head of school who will be a key person in ensuring the right people, with appropriate expertise and knowledge of the primary curriculum and early years, are appointed, with Local Authority advisers able to support the recruitment process. Lancashire County Council also has specific consultants with significant experience which can be drawn upon, to provide support as required, including with curriculum development.

The membership of the Governing Board will be reviewed, to ensure that there is representation of primary school staff, to support the strategic leadership of both phases of the school.

This will, in effect, allow the school to develop a curriculum spanning 12 years from reception to year 11, providing benefits to both the primary and secondary phase, particularly with reading development over the 12 years.

Ribblesdale High School will be guided, supported and challenged by Lancashire County Council School Improvement Officers, in terms of the deployment of time and attention and careful consideration of participation in any other initiatives, in order for school leaders to have the required capacity for the development of the primary phase and for maintaining the current provision in the secondary phase.

The school has also had recent experience of dealing with a building project on the secondary school site, when additional secondary places were provided.

Provision of an 'all-through' school may affect the application process to year 7

There was a concern that providing the places in an all-through school would remove the need for some pupils to make an application for places in Year 7, through the coordinated admissions route, or that it would involve admissions criteria that allowed for all primary phase pupils at Ribblesdale to have preferential access to the high school. Concern was raised that this may destabilise the school population in existing schools. Suggestions were made that, to protect other schools, a careful opening phasing plan would be required, and restrictions put in place to prevent automatic entry to the high school.

Response:

The council acknowledges that, as "through schools" are not given any attention in the Department for Education's Schools Admissions Code, we can only work on the premise of other regulations and guidance. Having considered the admission criteria for other 4-16 schools, it is clear that primary aged pupils in the proposed primary phase of a through school would have priority for secondary school places at the school as they are placed on the admission register when they join the school and can only be removed from roll in the event of a permanent exclusion, an agreed removal from roll due to a move out of area, a parent's decision to opt for Elective Home Education or the admission to a new school.

However, this should be balanced with the fact that, in response to growing demand for places in the area, the council has recently provided 30 additional secondary places per year at Ribblesdale High School which should go some way to offsetting the effect of 30 primary pupils per year progressing from the primary phase.

Traffic and Transport

Similar responses to the previous consultation for the site were made on this topic, with concerns raised in relation to volume of traffic; parking; and pollution.

Response:

Should the proposal proceed, the planning application process would include a traffic and transport impact assessment, together with an environmental impact

assessment or environmental statement to consider these issues. This planning application process would allow interested parties to express their specific concerns at this stage.

As part of the expansion a green travel plan would need to be developed. A key aspect of this travel plan is to consider issues such as traffic volume, pollution (air and noise) and sustainable transport options.

Risk to local schools

Some concern was raised regarding the number of places needed, and the risk that provision of additional places may lead to surplus places in other local schools, putting them at risk. Suggestions were made that there was no need for additional places, (although the need for places had been established during the previous consultation period.) Some respondents suggested that the needs of the area would be better served by Ribblesdale raising the age range (to provide sixth form places) instead of lowering it.

Response:

The pupil projections that have identified the significant shortfall in primary school places are based on a position where all other local schools would also fill.

The incremental growth of the primary phase at Ribblesdale High School would also mean that the impact on existing schools would be minimised, whilst ensuring that Lancashire County Council takes the required steps to meet its sufficiency obligations.

Local schools could provide the places needed

Some respondents suggested that local schools could provide the places required, either in their current buildings or through expansion.

Engagement has taken place with local primary schools in relation to the possibility of providing the additional places needed through school expansion. However, the scale of the new place demand over the longer term, together with the site constraints of the existing local schools, means that expansion opportunities are limited and insufficient for the long term need of the area. This was the position as reported in the 11 June 2020 Cabinet report, and subsequent updated pupil projections continue to support this position.

Based on the level of housing planned for Clitheroe, it is anticipated that a further form of entry of places, over and above those being proposed at this time, will be needed in the future so it is prudent to secure the additional capacity provided by the new site.

The places should be provided at a new school, which should be an Academy in line with Department for Education guidance

A couple of respondents were concerned that the fact that Lancashire County Council has taken a decision to consult on an all-through school implies opposition to academies.

Response:

Cabinet considered the relative risks of expanding Ribblesdale with the establishment of a new school and made the decision to pursue the expansion of the High School.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Having considered the feedback from the consultation, it is recommended that Cabinet agrees to the authority publishing a Statutory Notice of its proposal to extend the age range of Ribblesdale High School, by providing accommodation on the Higher Standen site, to allow for 30 reception pupils per year to be admitted to the school from September 2023.

Risk management

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Legal Requirements

If additional primary school places are not created, there is a risk that the authority would fail in its statutory responsibility to make sure that a maintained school place is available to all Lancashire children of the appropriate age range that want one. Providing additional places increases the overall capacity in the area and, if birth rates fall or planned housing development fails to materialise in the future, there may be surplus places, with the possibility that the impact may be felt greatest by one or a small number of neighbouring schools. If the authority delays its statutory consultation or decision making in respect of the provision of primary school places in the Clitheroe area, there is a real risk that buoyant birth rates will lead to emergency action, rather than planned additional places. Emergency action can be disruptive for both the affected school and the families involved in the primary allocation of places and can impact negatively on the schools' capital programme.

The process

In accordance with Department of Education Guidance, the following process is required to extend the age range of a school:

Stage	Draft timescale
Informal consultation	June/July 2021
Cabinet decision to proceed with Statutory notice CURRENT STAGE	September 2021

Statutory notice stage (4 weeks in term time)	September/October 2021
Cabinet Decision	December 2021
Implementation	Sept 2023

Financial

The physical capacity for the school to provide the primary phase places would be provided via a building provided by the council, via the basic need programme, supplemented by developer contributions. Approvals for the costing and funding thereof will be sought with the final approval decision to be brought in December.

Additional revenue funding would be required to meet the projected growth in pupil numbers. Revenue funding would be found from the Dedicated Schools Grant, which is increased in line with rising pupil numbers.

Land and Property

The Higher Standen site is secured with a Section 106 agreement and steps are currently being taken to transfer the land to the county council.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A