

INPUT TO NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1. VISION

Our vision is 'Creating Futures' - the futures of our students - ensuring that they leave us 'future ready' with the educational qualifications and skills to provide the foundations for success in the workplace and beyond.

Quality of teaching and learning is paramount and the quality of the learning environment is an essential ingredient in delivering an excellent educational experience. It is incumbent on the Governing Body and PTA to seek to provide the most aspirational, inspiring learning environment it can for our students.

We are also very much a school that is at the heart of its community. Sports, performing arts and meeting facilities are open for community use after school hours and at weekends. Heart of England has also recently been chosen as the local provider for the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

2. CONTEXT

2.1 School

The majority of school buildings were erected in 1957 catering for 450 students. The sixth form for up to 100 students was added in the late 1970s. Current student capacity is 1325 students, 1075 in the lower school and 250 in the sixth form.

As the demand for school places increased, due to the expansion of Balsall Common and surrounding areas within catchment, further buildings were added in the 1970s and 1980s including the Sports Hall, Enterprise and Sixth Form extension. More recently 2008 saw the construction of the Dance Studio supported by National Lottery monies and in 2010 an extension to Hampton was completed adding 8 much needed extra classrooms to replace 20 year old terrapin huts.

When the school was under Local Authority control it did not receive significant infrastructure funding. SMBC, chose for good reason, to focus its school building and renovation programme on schools in the north of the borough. Consequently many schools in South Solihull with older building stock have seen the fabric and quality of their buildings deteriorate.

Since becoming an academy in 2011, the school has been successful in securing Capital Improvement Fund (CIF) monies from the Education Funding Agency for vital maintenance works such as roof and window replacement, as well as fire safety systems and electrical works to remain legislatively compliant.

However there is no funding available from Government either for other categories of renovation/improvement or for new facilities.

To bridge some of this gap the Governing Body has funded from reserves the renovation of the reception, main school hall and gym changing rooms and a refresh of social space in the sixth form. External funding mainly from local parish councils and Berkswell Charities has provided the opportunity to realise smaller projects such as the extension of music practice rooms.

In summary, the majority of school buildings will be 60 years old next year. Many of the classrooms are tired, worn and uninspiring, particularly those with specialist equipment for example, science, food technology and resistant materials that house ancient equipment dating back to the original 1957 build.

Against a national educational backdrop of real terms funding reduction for schools with many now going into budget deficit the Governing Body is not in a position to fund significant facility projects. The fairer funding proposal even when implemented will only facilitate the opportunity to maintain operational services rather than to generate extra monies for infrastructure spending.

Hence the only real opportunity for the school to secure funds for additional/improved facilities that benefit both the school and the wider community will come from external grants or from Community Infrastructure Levy monies.

2.2 Draft Local Plan Implications

Heart of England currently takes a number of students beyond its stated catchment of Balsall Common, Berkswell, Temple Balsall, Meriden and Hampton parishes, with students coming from other areas of Solihull as well as cross-border from Coventry and Warwickshire.

It is anticipated that proposed housing development options resulting in an additional circa 1000 households in Balsall Common, together with the projected rise in birth rate would result in the catchment area tightening considerably.

The housing development options currently being proposed as part of the Draft Local Plan might also see the school's playing fields at Holly Lane released for residential development within the next 5 years.

As a part of its academisation, the school has a 125 year lease on this land with the Local Authority. Should the Holly Lane development option be approved then the school would require a similar sized footprint in close proximity to the main school buildings.

It is understood that Balsall Common Primary School has proposed that the school be rebuilt on a new site to accommodate a four-form entry provision.

Should this be the case and the current site of the primary school become vacant then this would present the opportunity for Heart of England to be compensated for the loss of Holly Lane playing fields and retain the current primary school site for educational use.

3. KEY INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

As part of its strategic review process, the Governing Body at Heart of England has analysed the potential options and opportunities that could arise as a result of the proposed expansion of Balsall Common as part of the Draft Local Plan. The overall conclusion is that we firmly believe that our current location puts us at the heart of our community and we would wish to retain this location.

A newly built replacement school on the current site would be highly desirable but the cost may be prohibitive. We have therefore concentrated at this stage on identifying the key infrastructure improvements based on the current building stock detailed below that we believe will most benefit both students and community users.

We would like these requirements to be seriously considered as part of the creation of the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

3.1 Sports Facilities

The school's sports facilities are limited and ageing - the one exception is the dance studio and changing rooms funded by the National Lottery. The facility is used by both the school and out-of-hours by numerous external clubs.

3.1.1 All-weather pitch

We are one of very few Solihull secondary schools without an all-weather pitch. The nearest is at Warwick University, not easily available or accessible other than by car. The addition of an all-weather pitch would have significant benefits for student and community users alike.

Impact

- Increased opportunity for sports participation all year round for all users
- Wider range of sports on offer
- More flexible use of playing field space enabling greater utilisation
- All weather training facilities for local clubs
- Supports the school's strategic aim to offer high performance sporting opportunities to students

3.1.2 Sports Hall

The Sports Hall was added in the 1970s. It is of block construction with a perspex type roof and concrete floor. As well as being a sports facility, whole school assemblies and all main examinations, both GCSE and A Level, are held in the Sports Hall. Increasing air traffic noise due to planes flying directly over the school and weather issues cause considerable distraction during exam time.

In summary, there are significant issues with frequent leaks, temperature control (too cold in winter, too hot in summer) and noise.

Impact

- Increased breadth and quality of sports provision for students and community users
- Supports the school's strategic aim to offer high performance sporting opportunities to students
- Indoor training facilities for local clubs, for example, cricket, tennis and rugby
- Examinations can be taken in quiet, pleasant environment giving students the best opportunity to achieve outstanding outcomes

3.1.3 Gym

The gym dates back to 1957. It has recently benefited from a new roof meaning it is now water tight and warm but the facilities are as they were in 1957. The objective here is renovation i.e. a new floor and better breadth and quality of equipment.

Impact

- Higher quality provision for students and community users, such as the local netball and badminton clubs.

3.2 Performing Arts

The school has two theatre type performance facilities, the main school hall and the much smaller drama studio. The main hall has been used from its inception to stage both school and local amateur dramatics and musical performances, examples being Centre Stage and Balsall Common singers.

The drama studio provides a practice space for the school's musicians and bands. Despite a rich tradition of high quality school and external productions, the school's facilities can best be described as very tired. The stage equipment and acoustics reflect its primary use as a school hall rather than a performing venue.

As stand alone theatres in small provincial locations are notoriously uneconomic, the opportunity to augment the school's performing arts facilities with a purpose build theatre for student and community use offering significant school and wider community benefits is extremely appealing.

Impact

- Enriched curriculum offering providing students with high quality performing arts opportunities
- Economically sustainable - part of the school buildings maintenance cost structure and income generation from external lettings
- Enhanced facilities for local drama and musical groups
- Community access to high quality musical, drama and arts performances

3.3 Curriculum

Many of the school's classrooms are in need of refurbishment, particularly those with specialist equipment that has not been replaced since the school was built.

3.3.1 Specialist Classrooms

The majority of **Science** classrooms still retain their original 1957 equipment. We consistently deliver outstanding science results despite such poor facilities and limited ability to prove theory through practical experimentation. Our students and staff deserve facilities that reflect their aspirations of excellence in teaching and learning.

Food Technology and Product Design and Technology teaching facilities are also woeful with much equipment being worthy of a place in a 1950s museum display.

Impact

- Inspiring learning environment for students
- Improved student outcomes

3.3.2 New Sixth Form Block

The school has a highly successful Sixth Form housed in Leveson Block together with some social sciences and arts classrooms serving the lower school. The sixth form extension was built in 1970s to cater for a maximum capacity of 100 students. Numbers in the last 15 years range from 210 to 240 depending on the number of students achieving the entry criteria. 90% of students come from the lower school.

We are committed to ensure that we can provide a post 16 education for all local students who meet the entry criteria.

There is significant overcrowding with limited study and social space due to building under-capacity. Most school sixth form insist on students remaining on site for the whole school day to ensure an optimal learning and study experience. Heart of England is unable to do this as there is insufficient space to house all of our students at one time.

The Governing Body has allocated monies from reserves this year to complete a refresh/redecoration programme but without additional building facilities overcrowding and limited facilities remains a significant problem.

A new purpose built sixth form block would enable the school to address the problems caused by long term higher demand vs. available facility capacity. It is anticipated that demand for places will increase as the number of households within Balsall Common grows. As a school we do not want to be in the position where we are unable to provide post 16 places for local students who meet the entry criteria.

Impact

- Inspiring learning environment for students to compete with other providers
- Increased on-site study and social space
- Meeting local demand for places
- Better student outcomes

3.4 Catering/Dining Facilities

As outlined the original 1957 was for a school of 450 students with an additional 100 sixth form 100 places added in the late 1970s. The current school population is more than double the original capacity.

The current catering facilities designed to cover the original capacity of 450 students are wholly inadequate both from the perspective of kitchen preparation space and student eating areas. The school is unable to provide facilities for all students to sit and eat lunch, even with phased dining. Huge queues form in a very small area as students purchase food.

The school would very much like to extend its food preparation and dining facilities to address capacity issues but just as importantly to make the experience of eating a healthy lunch, a comfortable and social one for students and staff.

Impact

- Increased catering capacity at both break and lunch
- Provision of adequate dining space
- Greatly enhanced lunch experience
- Less queues and thus less opportunity for behaviour issues to arise

Anne Lycett
Chair of Governors
15 November 2016