



**WOKINGHAM  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Tel: 0118 974 6247  
Email: paul.feven@wokingham.gov.uk  
Fax: 0118 974 6135  
Date: 15th December 2016

Parent/carers  
Aldryngton Primary School  
Earley

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Children's Services

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P.O. Box 156

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Shute End, Wokingham

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Berkshire RG40 1WN

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Tel: (0118) 974 6105

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Fax: (0118) 974 6135

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Minicom No: (0118) 974 6991

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DX: 33506 – Wokingham

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Dear parents/carers,

### **Proposal for expansion of Aldryngton Primary School**

Wokingham Borough Council faces challenges with the number of school places available to parents in Earley. The key challenge is that there are too few primary school places to meet current and future need.

The council's strategy for primary school places projected a need for 45 additional places per year in Earley. Without this need being met, parents will have reduced chances of obtaining a local school for their children. Recent experience has been that some parents have not received any offers for their preferred schools within Earley. Thirty places are being created at Loddon Primary School leaving 15 additional primary schools places projected as required in Earley from 2017.

The council is legally required to take action in order to ensure schools are able to meet the local need for school places. This needs to be seen in the context of the impact of expansion on the school and the local area.

Aldryngton Primary School has been identified as the apparent best option for further expansion in order to provide Earley parents with needed school places. As you are aware, this is an outstanding school offering a high standard of teaching and learning. The proposal will lead to investment in the school including the development of an additional two storey teaching block with a large school hall and an ICT suite. The aging temporary classrooms at the entrance to the school will be replaced in the process.

If the council takes no action in advance to meet the demand for school places as projected next year, this could lead to short-term measures being introduced in Earley schools such as "bulge classes" and temporary facilities. Children would also be more likely to have to travel further to schools in other areas. The proposal to expand Aldryngton is a key part of the plan to avoid these problems re-occurring in 2017.

At this point no formal decisions have been made. The proposed expansion is being progressed including a planning application submitted in early December 2016 in order to be ready if demand rises as forecast. However, the final decision on whether to expand the school will be taken in the light of actual information on the demand for

school places in March 2017. If expansion is not required, the proposal will not continue for 2017. If granted, planning consent would be valid for 3 years so the scheme could be implemented in a subsequent year in the event that demand rises as projected.

We know that some Aldryngton parents are concerned about the impact of the proposal to expand the school. With these concerns in mind, I have attached a briefing on the background to these proposals and the concerns that have been raised by individual parents and as part of a petition signed by parents recently.

I would also like to invite you to a meeting to discuss these issues. At the meeting we will set out the background to the proposed scheme, the details of the proposals and listen to the views of parents and carers. These views will be shared with the council's planning department in order to be considered as part of the process considering the proposed development. Views will also be considered as part of the statutory school organisation consultation which will commence later in January and, subject to planning approval, will inform the final decision on whether to proceed with this proposal.

The meeting will be in two parts with the first section focused on parents and carers. The second section will be open to other members of the local community who will be able to view plans for the proposed expansion.

I hope you will be able to attend and take part in the discussions.

**Venue: Maiden Erlegh School, Silverdale Road**

**Date: Monday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

**Time: 7pm (parents meeting) followed by 8.15 (open to the local community)**

Yours sincerely



Paul Feven

Interim Head of Strategic Commissioning

Wokingham Borough Council

## BRIEFING FOR PARENTS

# Proposal to expand Aldryngton Primary School to meet the need for school places in Earley December 2016

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### **The need for school places**

*In April 2016 all Reception places were allocated across Earley, leaving no capacity for incoming families. In the Designated Area for Aldryngton, 13 children could not be offered a Reception place at the school along with a further 3 children (living outside the area) who had older siblings attending the school. Two children are now being provided with transport to schools outside the area, while the recent expansion of Loddon School meant that a local school was available.*

*A similar level of demand was seen in 2015 when 30 children across Earley were allocated places outside the area. These parents did not receive any offers within their preferred schools.*

*Currently, there are 59 Earley children (across all primary year groups) requiring special transport arrangements to attend schools outside their local area due to the lack of available school placements.*

*There are effectively no places available in any year groups in Earley aside from a few places within Year 1 in a newly opened class at Loddon Primary School.*

The council's strategy for primary school places projected a need for 45 additional places per year in Earley. The projections are based on data including ward level birth data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), housing developments across the Earley area, and school placement data from previous years. The increase in demand for school placements is driven by a number of factors including housing "churn", where older households are being replaced by younger families and housing development. As an illustration of this, in 2014 Wokingham lost 460 people aged 50-69 years and gained 670 people aged 25-44 years old (Source: ONS).

Thirty of the 45 required places are being created at Loddon Primary School leaving 15 additional primary schools places required in Earley from 2017.

### **Options**

The council has sought to manage increases in school places through a planned programme of new school development and existing school expansion schemes on the basis of *projected* need. The alternative of waiting until actual admissions data is available has, in the past, meant that schools have had to accept bulge classes close to the start of the academic year. This approach can make teacher recruitment problematic as well as the need for temporary accommodation that too often was not completed by the required time.

Alternative options for increasing school places have been explored including rebuilding or expanding existing schools.

Loddon and Radstock Primary Schools were initially identified by the council's consultant architects as the best location in terms of *space*, with Aldryngton being a secondary option.

Other factors have since made Aldryngton the preferred option:

- The projected requirement is half a class (15 places) rather than a full class. Expanding Radstock by a full class would lead to 15 places per year above the forecast need. This would be a more expensive project and create the risk that other schools would be unable to fill classes and so see their standards and viability at risk.
- Expanding Radstock by only half a class would require the school to develop a mixed age class, which is not seen as a preferred option where a school has not chosen to organise classes in this way.
- However, mixed age classes are already a feature at Aldryngton and preferred by the school.

Aldryngton School therefore enables the right amount of expansion, without impacting on the school's preferred form of teaching.

## The proposal to expand

The proposal includes

- A new two storey block to make maximum use of existing space, replacing the temporary buildings currently used by the school but which require investment.
- A new playing area using an all-weather surface which, because of their greater resilience and potential for use throughout the year, count as double the area of grass in DfE guidance for sports pitches.
- Additional car parking for staff

The proposal also means that:

- There will be a smaller amount of grassed areas, mitigated by the increase in the all-weather surfaces that will be built. Sport England will be consulted as part of the development of this proposal.
- The swimming pool will need to be removed as this is the best location for the new two-story block. Other sites have been considered but would further reduce the amount of grassed area. The alternative of building on top of the pool has been considered but not recommended due to likely prohibitive cost and the adverse impact on surrounding homes of building a taller building on the school site.

Other external features the school has created (story teller area, long jump pit, adventure playground etc.) will be retained, replaced or re-sited as necessary. Trees are protected in the planning process although some removal and replacement may be required.

## Consultation

Aside from the forthcoming meeting for parents, parents and local people will also be formally consulted as part of the Council's planning process. This consultation will be conducted through letters, public notices and on line. In addition to the consultation under the Planning Act there will

be a formal school organisation consultation through the publication of proposals in a local paper and on the Council’s website commencing later in January.

## Issues raised by parents and the school

Concern from parents	Brief response
<p><b>Size</b></p> <p>The school site is too small to build upon and will prevent the school from being able to operate normally e.g. reduced opportunities for out of school activity including PTA fundraising events</p>	<p>Many schools are developed and expanded on constrained sites. There are examples of good and outstanding schools in towns and cities with sites that are smaller than Aldryngton’s.</p> <p>Many schools on more constrained sites do provide a range of fund raising events across the year and there is nothing to prevent this being the case with Aldryngton. The new school hall will present new opportunities because of its increased size and greater separation from other school facilities.</p>
<p><b>Traffic</b></p> <p>The expansion will generate more traffic which will be unmanageable</p>	<p>The council has completed two transport assessments conducted independently by qualified transport consultants – the first as part of the initial feasibility study; the second as part of the submission for planning consent. Both considered that the scheme was viable considering the traffic impacts associated with expansion. The most recent report found that there was adequate on-street car parking in the vicinity of the school taking account of the proposal to expand the school.</p> <p>Both staff and school run traffic impacts would need to be managed however including the desire of car driving parents to drop their children close to the entrance.</p> <p>Since staff arrive before children (and leave after them) the extra staff vehicle movements are unlikely to be a major concern locally. The staff will need additional parking which will be provided on site.</p>
<p><b>Admissions</b></p> <p><i>The proposals are not necessary - real demand for school places would be reduced if fraud was eliminated.</i></p>	<p>The council’s school admissions team works closely with our internal audit team to identify any fraudulent, inaccurate and misleading applications (including checking on the reasons for leaving the last address). Every year a number of applications are re-prioritised and offers withdrawn as a result of this work.</p> <p>Parents are, however, able to choose where they live to gain admission to a particular school and we cannot discriminate against people who rent rather than purchase. Where parents own locally but choose to rent we require 12 months occupation of the rented property before the closing date. Whether people buy or rent they can relocate after their child has been admitted to school without losing their place. The council will shortly start consultation on the 2018-19</p>

Concern from parents	Brief response
	<p>Admissions Arrangements and this includes proposals to strengthen arrangements to ensure that permanent addresses are used when allocating school places.</p> <p>Once a child has started at a school there is an increased barrier to withdrawing offers and the statutory school admissions guide suggests places should not be withdrawn if a child has been on the school roll for over a term.</p>
<p><b>Admissions</b></p> <p><i>The proposals are not necessary because two schools admit children from the Reading area showing that Wokingham has sufficient capacity to meet local need.</i></p>	<p>Two schools have admitted a significant number of children from Reading (Earley St Peters and Whiteknights). However, the Earley children that have been allocated places outside the area did <b>not</b> apply to these two schools, do not in the main live in the designated areas of these schools and have in most cases used all their four preferences for other Earley schools near their homes.</p> <p>These two schools sit on the edge of both the borough and the area with the greatest demand pressure, but are also very accessible for many Reading families. It is unlawful to reserve places for Wokingham children so this cross border movement is something we have to work with.</p>
<p><b>School standards</b></p> <p><i>It will not be possible to recruit Staff (and some could leave).</i></p>	<p>Other schools identified in the strategy implementation plan have successfully recruited sufficient staff for an enlarged school from September 2016.</p>
<p><b>School standards</b></p> <p><i>The school will lose edge by having to abandon mixed age teaching and setting.</i></p>	<p>The school will be able to continue with mixed age teaching. Instead of operating with 3 mixed age classes per pair of year groups the school could operate with 4 such classes and set for specific subjects across these mixed year groups.</p>
<p><b>Finance</b></p> <p><i>The school (separately) state that they are sustainable with 315 on roll and that this would be negatively impacted by school expansion.</i></p>	<p>Larger schools do have greater financial resilience. In this proposal, average class size would increase from 28.6 to 30 (when full). Per pupil funding covers both the classroom teacher and a proportion of costs incurred outside the classroom. Having larger average class sizes and an increased number of classes means that this “pot” for out of classroom costs is larger. Schools can spend this money for the benefit of pupils. So, while the school is indeed viable as it stands and is an outstanding provider, the school is likely to be more resilient for the future at a larger size.</p>