

Objection in respect of the planned expansion of Aldryngton Primary School from a 1.5 entry school to a 2.0 entry school - September 2017 onwards.

Summary of concerns detailed below:

Demand for places -

Data does not demonstrate a need for additional places in the area. The expansion is likely to generate a surplus of places well in excess of the 5% government recommendation.

Financial implications:

The cost of the build project is excessive particularly when calculated on a per pupil place basis.

Schools left with unfilled places will suffer a financial consequence which might only be mitigated by redundancies.

Admissions:

The data suggests that demand for places in Earley will reduce. Increasing the PAN for Aldryngton will increase availability of places at the school by 33%. The consequence of this will be that more places will be offered to those out of the designated area which could have longer term impact and instability due to future sibling applications.

Traffic:

Significant concerns regarding the exiting safety levels at the exit and entrance points to the school. Without expansion, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils travelling to school by car. With a 33% increase in pupil numbers, many of which will likely be travelling from beyond the school's designated area, this trend is likely to continue as the school expands. Whilst fewer pupils are likely to be diverted out of the area as a consequence of the expansion, over-provision within Earley would result in more local traffic and the associated risks that would create.

The expansion consultation places emphasis on the allocation of places in 2015 and how it was not possible to offer places to 30 children in Earley schools. That was rectified by the expansion of Loddon Primary School and in 2016 no child was diverted beyond Earley. How is the 2015 admission data relevant now? This is a strategic plan for the future. There is no entitlement in law for every child to be allocated a place in their designated area school. The proposal to create shared designated area for Loddon Primary School and Aldryngton Primary School will allow children from Aldryngton Primary School designated area to have a priority for admission to Loddon Primary School should they be unable to gain admission to Aldryngton Primary School.

With the extra 30 places at Loddon included in the data - it shows 1% surplus in 2017 and from 2018 a surplus of 8% = 38 children. With a further 15 places at Aldryngton Primary School, there would be a total 53 surplus; nine places more than the extra places created by the expansion of both Loddon Primary School and Aldryngton Primary School. The total expected cost of these projects is £7.3 million. Each surplus place would cost the Council £137,735. Is this appropriate spending of public money - particularly when taking into account the following statement, in papers submitted to the Executive in January 2016:-

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context

'Two schools see significant inflows from Reading:

- However, this isn't causing the problem; Earley children who were unable to get a place did not live near these schools and parents did not request placements there'*

As Aldryngton Primary School is close to the Reading border, the straight line distance could mean places going to Reading parents.

In 2016 the majority of children who could not be admitted to Aldryngton Primary School were admitted to Loddon Primary School. If Aldryngton Primary School is expanded this could leave a surplus of 15 places together with a further surplus created by children living in Loddon Primary School catchment area who will obtain one of the additional 15 places at Aldryngton Primary School.

The Effect on other Schools

If the data is correct and there is nothing to indicate that this data is wildly inaccurate it is highly unlikely that the surplus places will be spread out across all the Earley Schools. It will probably have the biggest impact on Loddon Primary School. Is the Council setting aside funding to support redundancy of staff and funding to support schools with surplus places? The extreme pressures on school budgets means schools cannot manage surplus places. Fewer pupils, means less funding for schools. It may suit the Council to have surplus places but that does not suit the schools. The Council has a duty to ensure the expansion does not impact on other schools.

Objectives

The objectives claimed by The Council is that the expansion will enable an increased number of children to attend an over-subscribed 'Outstanding' School and ensure there are sufficient primary school places in Earley to meet the needs of Earley resident children. To support these objectives the Council will need to consider the impact on families and make amendments to their Primary School Admission Policy. This suggests that the expansion of Aldryngton Primary School will make provision for children beyond the designated area in the wider Earley area. As these children will be admitted based on parental preference, then any younger siblings of these children would not have any sibling protection. Should it not be possible to offer non designated area siblings a place at any time in future admission years, parents would have children at different schools. Is it appropriate to provide additional places and actively encourages parents to apply for an outstanding school rather than their local school which will probably have places available and then give them no protection for siblings.

Value for Money

The proposal for Aldryngton Primary School is expected to cost £4.8 million for 15 places a year - total of 105 places.

The expansion of Loddon Primary School for 30 places - total of 210 places is expected to cost £2.5 million. The Council are justifying this and making a case for value for money because the proposed new building will replace both temporary and 50 year old permanent buildings. The only reason that the Council have to replace the temporary buildings is because they must provide additional car parking for the extra staff and the only possible site for this is the current location of three temporary classrooms. Very expensive car parking! The plan does not include removal of any of the current 50 year old permanent building - just a change of use. An emphasis is made of the provision of a new ICT suite. The school currently has an excellent ICT suite but it has to move to another location in the school because of the need to expand the Early Years classrooms to accommodate the additional places. The school will gain a MUGA - multi use games area. This is a necessity to ensure the expansion does not reduce the amount of play area and gain planning permission. None of the proposals are necessary if the school was not expanding. Is this really a justifiable value for money for 15 extra places a year?

Safety of Pupils - Traffic

The Council agree that the site already has congested traffic and a drop off area for parents would not be possible because of that congestion and the restricted site entrance. Their solution to the current congestion and mitigation to their proposal to allow 105 more children to enter the site, is that the school should amend their travel plan to encourage parents to reduce car drop offs and car share. The school already actively discourages parents from using cars near the site but despite this, there has been an increase in car use in the last four years by 19%, even though the children admitted to the school have come from closer to the school. The expansion will, as predicated by the Council increase the number of cars by 26 which is based on the current home addresses of children on roll. The expansion will allow children to come to the school from further away and that would suggest that there will be more than 26 additional cars near the site.

The safeguarding of our children is a prime requirement of the Governing Body. The Governors would be failing in their duty if they did not object to the expansion on the grounds that the safety of the children will be at risk. The Council have failed to find a solution to protect the children entering the school site from Silverdale Road. There has been no recognition of the traffic issues around the site. No other primary school in the Earley area and probably in Wokingham is faced with the same traffic challenges outside their site entrances. The site entrance is shared with the biggest Wokingham secondary school, a library, a community centre, a pre-school and public right of way for residents as pedestrians and on bicycles. Cars, lorries, and bicycles enter site entrance and shopping parade without any clear direction, stopping and parking randomly outside designated parking areas. Older children from Maiden Erlegh are unsupervised and gather around the shops spilling onto the parking area and roadways. There is a bus stop on Silverdale Road near the entrance to the schools which causes increases traffic congestion when there is a bus stopped. Parents bringing their children on foot have to negotiate their way through this chaotic situation.

More children and parents using this entrance can only result in a higher risk level. The latest traffic survey indicates there is sufficient parking in six surrounding roads. Parents dropping off their children are not interested in parking away from the site as that is not close enough for them. If, as the Council says, the majority of children live less than 0.5 of a kilometre away why would they park in the surrounding roads which are probably 0.3 of a kilometre away? The Council state that the traffic has no impact on the wider area. We challenge this statement - traffic is very heavy on Wilderness Road as the main through route for traffic into and out of Reading and traffic cannot easily feed into this road from the Betchworth Avenue/ Silverdale Road junction. Traffic is queuing on Betchworth Avenue and Silverdale Road from 8.00am beyond the site entrance of the schools. Silverdale Road is a main through route from Lower Earley to Wilderness Road. The expansion of Loddon Primary School will also contribute to additional traffic on the road. The expansion of two schools on an already congested road must have an impact on the wider area.

Yours sincerely



Mrs Ann Mckie

Vice - chair governing body of Aldryngton Primary School