

TITLE Growth Fund Strategic Update

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Schools Forum on 14 October 2020

WARD All

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OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

That there will be sufficient school places for Wokingham resident children.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council's adopted primary and secondary school strategies are noted.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Growth Fund exists to fund school growth. Growth is linked to:

- changing local birth rates,
- the impact of migration into the borough (particularly into new homes) and
- the number of children moving across borough boundaries for their education.

Other factors (independent education and home education in particular) are thought to be less important, because numbers of children are relatively small and there has been no evidence of significant changes in these numbers.

Note that although the Council has duties to ensure place sufficiency across a wide age span (up to 25 for young people with SEND) growth funding is only applicable to pre-16 children (so this documents does not consider 6th form or other post 16 needs).

Although there is no statutory need to plan future school provision, there is a statutory requirement to ensure there are sufficient school places. To ensure places are provided in a timely and effective manor the council makes long-term plans for the primary and secondary sectors. The alternative would be to provide places alongside each allocation round, whenever it was judged that additional capacity was required and to accept that very young children would need to be bussed across the borough as a matter of course. Experience indicates that this is an inefficient and ineffective approach, with particular risks of late delivery of accommodation (or even of schemes being refused planning permission).

The Council has adopted strategies for school places for both the primary and secondary school phases. The primary strategy was adopted by the Council's Executive in 2018 for the period 2018 to 2028 (although it is expected to be reviewed at shorter intervals) and the secondary strategy was adopted in 2017 to cover the period 2017 to 2020. The secondary strategy will be renewed shortly. The existing strategies can be read [here](#).

The primary strategy established that growth would be local and related to the major development areas (in particular the four Strategic Development Locations of Shinfield, Arborfield Garrison and North and South Wokingham). Woodley was identified as an area

where an increased number of births pointed to a need for additional accommodation. The North (north of Woodley and the A329M), Earley, and the South East (Crowthorne in Wokingham Without and established Finchampstead settlements) were identified as areas where there was no case to increase capacity. The strategy goes further than this though, and acknowledges there may be a need to rationalise provision to ensure a good fit between population and schools:

“That in the medium and long term the current projections indicate the need for additional school places is linked to the provision of new housing. Although adopted Strategic Development Location (SDL) and future Local Plan Update housing will lead to a new population geography overall demand may not change or any borough level increase may be less than the new provision required to service new developments. This points to a need to create new provision where demand rises and a possible need to rationalise provision in other areas to ensure schools are sustainable.”

The secondary strategy was written as a short-term strategy because of the ongoing work on the Local Plan Update. The priorities it identified were:

- A likely need for up to 100 additional Year 7 places from 2019/20.
- Preparatory work for 270 permanent places after 2019/20 was required.

It was noted though that the number of Wokingham Borough school places taken by out of borough children could fall, and that the rising numbers of Wokingham resident children might simply lead to a fall in the number of places taken by non-Wokingham resident children (and in this case there could be no need to provide additional accommodation).

Since the strategies were written growth needs have continued to evolve. In particular: As forecast demand has increased in the area of continued housing development:

In the primary Sector:

- Demand in the Shinfield area has risen due to continued housebuilding so that all places in Shinfield primary schools, including the new Alder Grove CoE School were filled in 2020.
- Demand has also risen in the area around the Arborfield Garrison (also in the South West Planning area).
- No additional capacity was required in Woodley (demand increased to just under 400 allocated Reception places, but no additional capacity was required).
- Other areas see continued shortfalls.

In the secondary sector:

- No additional capacity has been required, but on offer day places have been over allocated.
- Increased numbers from the primary sector are likely to create an increased risk of additional Year 7 capacity being required between 2021/22 and 2023/24 (after which point Year 7 numbers are likely to fall, in line with current primary school Year 3 rolls).
- Given this peak in 2023/24, there is no current indication that permanent additional capacity is required.
- It is hoped that current underused capacity can be accessed, supporting schools with depressed rolls and minimising the need to invest in temporary accommodation to manage a “bulge” in demand.

Although the long-term impact of Covid-19 cannot be predicted, it is known that building has started again at sites across the borough.

Proposed changes to National Planning policy point to continued high rates of new home construction locally, with a need for new development sites. These are likely to be at a scale that will require new school provision (at least in the primary sector).

The implications of this for the growth fund are:

- There will be a continued need to support new primary schools, albeit only the Matthews Green and Arborfield Primary Schools (Farley Hill) have any near future support requirements. The three remaining schools (Wokingham Town South, Spencers Wood and Arborfield (2)) are not required in the immediate future. This reflects the likely impact of the ongoing housebuilding programme in the borough.
- There is no expectation that a new secondary school will be required in the next decade. However, there may be a need to support Year 7 growth classes, in line with need from 2021 onwards.
- There will be a continuing need to support growth in Key Stage 2, for at least the next three years.
- National Planning Policy could lead to accelerated housebuilding in the borough, with an increased number of children requiring school places. This is a very recent proposal and no work to understand the implications for the Borough's population has been completed, yet.
- Covid-19 may have slowed housebuilding initially, but house builders have returned to site and report significant future build programmes.

Background

The current long term plans for school provision in Wokingham are centred around the borough's statutory Core Strategy. This is the borough wide spatial masterplan for the development of new homes across the borough, adopted in 2010 for the period until 2026. In line with national planning policy this set out an integrated plan for the delivery of 13,000 homes, incorporating the infrastructure (roads, leisure facilities and schools) necessary to ensure that (within reasonable bounds) the new communities were self sufficient. The forward to the Core Strategy established that whatever the local concerns about the number of homes required by national policy, the principle of focused, infrastructure rich development was one that was supported by the borough community. Development would largely be delivered through four large scale developments (North and South Wokingham Town, Shinfield and Arborfield Garrison):

"The strategy is the result of extensive consultation and the consideration of options. The key message from the community was that development should be concentrated in a few locations. This would enable the character of the existing residential areas to be protected and the resulting communities to be high quality and infrastructure rich."

"Overall, by 2026, the Core Strategy sets out to protect key features of the borough's landscape, ecology, heritage and environment. It seeks to ensure that everyone has good access to services such as schools, health and community facilities that are fit for the 21st Century."

Infrastructure in the Core Strategy included a new secondary school (now Bohunt Wokingham), and 7 new primary schools (two of which are now open).

While the Local Plan Update (ongoing) is looking at development needs beyond 2026, it is not revisiting the long established infrastructure plans for the established SDL areas.

The scale and geography of the new SDL communities is such that existing local schools (meaning those within walking distance) will not have capacity to meet needs generated by the new development as they are built out. A long established rule of thumb is that 1,000 established homes generates around 30 children per year. On this basis the long term needs of the new communities, as planned in 2010, would be:

SDL	Homes	Children per year
North Wokingham	1,500	45
South Wokingham	2,500	75
Arborfield	3,500	105
Shinfield	2,500	75
Total	10,000	300
NB - Shinfield and North Wokingham Town home numbers have increased significantly since the adoption of the Core Strategy		

Note that survey evidence indicates that the short-term impact of new development is a much higher child yield (so higher demand for school places) than is seen from long established developments.

All these developments are underway. The only significant delayed development is part of the South Wokingham SDL, south of the railway line, reflecting site access challenges.

Not providing additional capacity within the SDLs would mean that local schools would be unable to meet all demand, with the implication that children would either need to be placed out of area or insufficient places would be available to meet statutory duties.

In the long term the Council has a need to ensure that not only are sufficient places available, but that they are provided near where children live. This is to ensure that where possible, children have access to local schools (schools within walking distance of their homes), that traffic congestion is minimised, to maximise the achievement of parental preferences and to minimise council home to school transport spend. Experience indicates that diverting children out of their home area also leads to transience, with a high rates of churn as parents seek to place their children into local schools. This is detrimental to both their education and the schools themselves.

Two of the four SDLs are in rural areas, Shinfield and Arborfield. These have limited local provision and school place offers outside this area leads to children being bussed to schools beyond walking distance.

In the Shinfield area two schools are planned: on the edge of the Shinfield Village (in the Shinfield West development) and on the edge of Spencers Wood. The Shinfield West School (now the Alder Grove CoE School) has opened offering 30 place this September. The Spencers Wood school has an identified site, but no agreed delivery timetable.

Two schools are planned for the Arborfield Garrison, the first is on target to be ready to open in September 2021 (where it is expected that the Farley Hill will relocate, growing in line with local need). No delivery timetable has been agreed for the second school.

The Arborfield Garrison has no current schools within the SDL boundaries. The community is currently served by a small number within statutory walking distance of at least some homes:

- the Coombes CoE School (in Arborfield Cross)
- the Gorse Ride Infant and Junior and Nine Mile Ride Primary schools (in Finchampstead).

Otherwise the area is served by the Farley Hill Primary School (with no safe walking route to the SDL) and a number of students attend other non-local schools (e.g. Finchampstead VA CoE School).

Three schools were planned for the two Wokingham Town SDLs: one in Matthews Green (North Wokingham SDL), planned to be completed in 2021 (opening date to be confirmed) and two in the South Wokingham SDL (Floreat Montague Park, open 2016) and another school south of the railway, no opening date set.

The two Wokingham SDLs are on the fringe of the Wokingham Town and Winnersh areas, and consequently have access to a greater number of schools. However, they create significant new developments that may be poorly served by existing schools: **Matthew Green and Bell Farm developments** (north west Wokingham), 1,000 homes near to the fully subscribed Emmbrook Infant and Junior Schools. Currently alternative

places are available in Wokingham Town East Schools. These are within statutory walking distance, but at distance where most children will be driven to school.

South Wokingham (south of the railway): integration into existing communities will be challenged by the barrier of the railway line (albeit there are a number of crossing points).

Analysis of Issues

Demography

The future population of the borough is key to any long-term analysis of school place needs (and so to the growth fund). The ONS (Office for National Statistics) provides long-term projections of the Borough's population in single years of age. The most recent statistics are based on 2018 data and extend to 2043. These indicate:

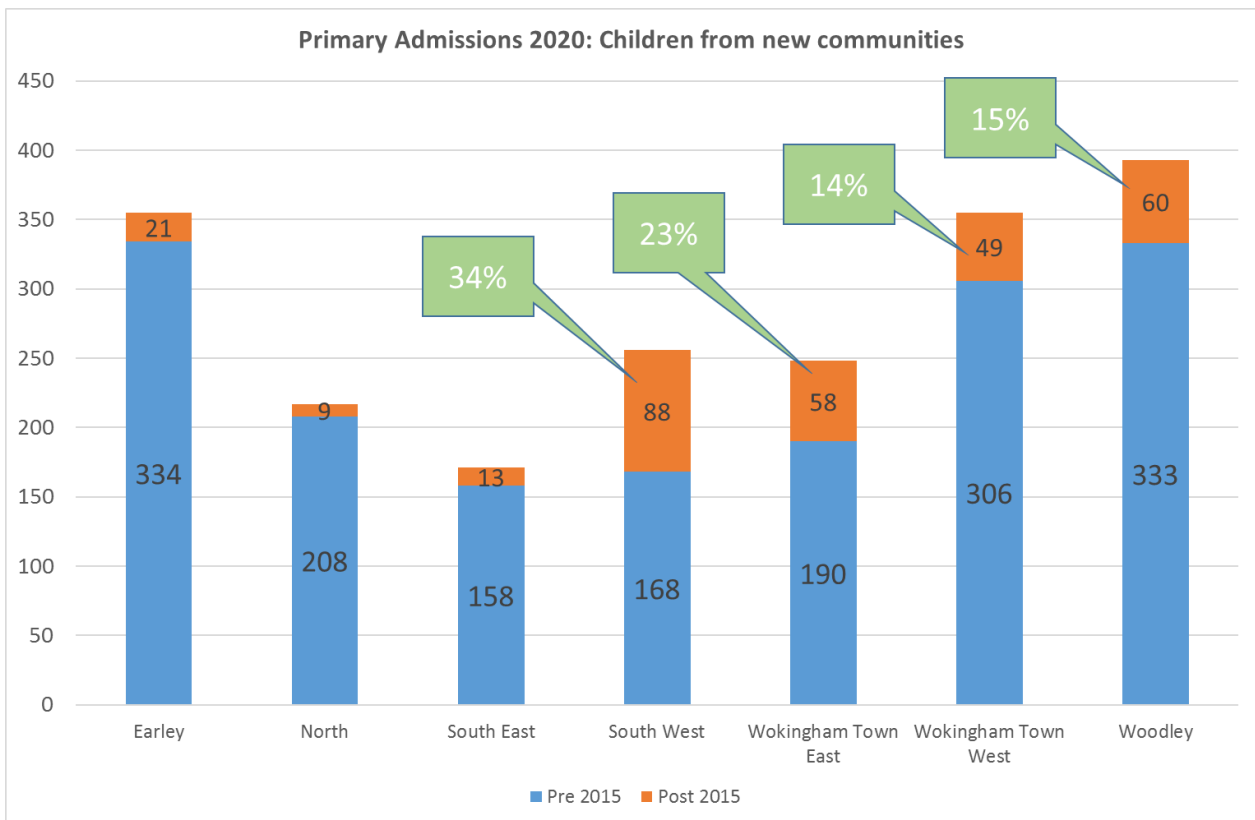
- A 10% decrease in the number of children of primary school age from 2020 (17,023) to 2033 (15,241) (steadier numbers after 2033).
- A 13% increase in the number of statutory school age children from 2020 (11,942) to 2025 (13,448) with numbers then decreasing to 2020 levels by 2035.
- A 30% increase in the number of young people of sixth form age from 2020 (4,263) to 2028 (5,557), then decreasing towards (but not back to) 2020 levels throughout the period to 2043.

Housing impacts

Until now Housing Need (the calculation of the number of new homes required in the borough) has largely been driven by the ONS household projections. These in turn are derived from the ONS population projection. An additional element relates to the affordability of new homes and has been responsible for approximately 1/3rd of the annual housing need total. Only this element can be expected to provide additional children (additional to the ONS projections).

However, housing developers have been building homes at a markedly higher rate than is indicated by the housing need calculations and the impact of this is likely to be reflected in future population and household projections.

These new homes are already having a significant impact on school rolls. The graph below is based on the 2020 admissions round and shows the number and proportion of children from new (post 2015) developments by planning area. It can be seen that as many as 1/3 of Wokingham Borough children allocated school places in the southwest area live in new developments, with 14% to 23% of allocations in other areas of significant development coming from new developments. Areas without significant development see between 4 and 8% of their Reception rolls from new post code areas.



National Planning Policy

It is likely that proposed changes to national planning policy will need to significant changes to the number of new homes to be constructed in the borough.

Firstly, the government is consulting on changing the housing need calculation to one that puts a markedly higher emphasis on the affordability of homes. This would lead to a near doubling of the housing need figures (from circa 800 home p.a. to circa 1,600 homes p.a.). This is slightly above the number of homes delivered in the last full year, noting that this figure was (possibly) a record rate of development in the borough. Dependent on the actual number of homes delivered, this has the potential to significantly increase the number of children in the borough, over the number in the projection. It is likely (given the historic impact of development) that this will have the greatest initial impact on the early years sector, before higher numbers work their way through the various education phases.

Secondly, the government is consulting on a major reform of the planning system (“Planning for the Future”), with a view to ensure “more land is available for development where it is needed”. The practical implication of these proposals would be to embed higher construction rates.

Traveling to School

The journey to school is a key consideration, because any movement away from walking to school has implications for traffic congestion, air pollution and the borough’s carbon footprint. As journeys become longer, the Council may also have an obligation to provide free transport – adding to pressures on hard pressed budgets and creating additional congestion around school sites.

The Council's statutory duty to provide free transport applies when a child has no alternative to a journey of more than 2 miles (under 8s) or 3 miles (over 8s) by a safe walking route. Costs will depend on the number of children travelling together, the distance and the mode of transport. Secondary age transport is more likely to be on a public bus or school coach. Costs are therefore likely to be less than £1,000 per child per annum. Primary age transport is likely to be in a taxi, with low occupancy, with costs likely to be in the £5k to £10k per child range. The council will also offer mileage payments.

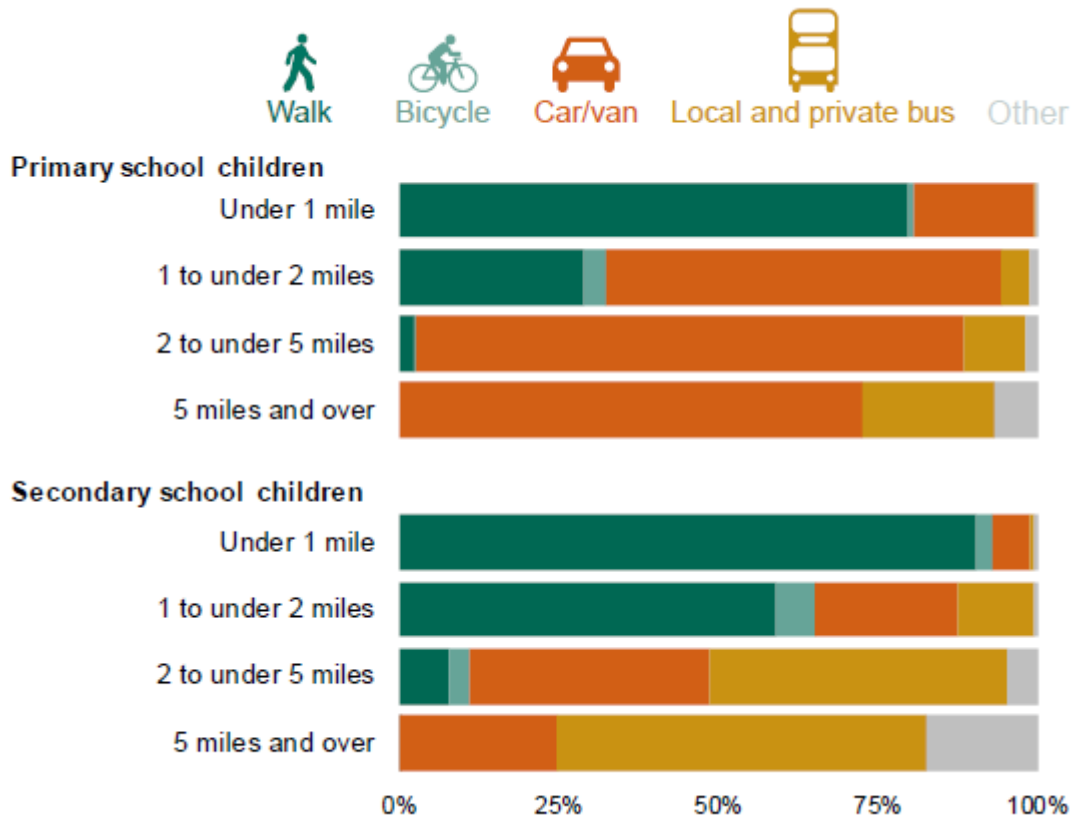
Below the statutory walking range the Council will ordinarily have no transport duty. However, it is known that the mode of transport for both primary and secondary age children is very distance dependent.

Where the journey is under 1 mile, 80% of primary age children walk to school (and 18% travel by car). Where the journey is over 1 miles the percentage walking drops to 19%, but the percentage driving increases to 71%. So, even when schools are with statutory walking distance of home, it is reasonable to expect that over 70% of school run trips will be made by car, adding to congestion and pollution around the school.

The effect is less marked for secondary school pupils with over half still walking at up to a 2 miles journey.

Department for Transport survey data is set out in the graph below.

Mode share of trips to and from school by length of trip: England, 2014 [\[NTS0614\]](#)



Covid-19 impacts

It is too soon to know the full impact of Covid-19, but to date although the initial impact was the cessation of housebuilding and the freezing of the housing market, there is

good reason to think that the market is showing strong signs of recovery, with housebuilders being active on sites across the borough. House builders report strong future build programmes, so current indications are that any adverse impacts have been short term.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£796K	Yes	Revenue (DSG)
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£600K	Yes	Revenue (DSG)
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£800K	Yes	Revenue (DSG)

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Although a number of expansion schemes are reaching the end of their growth phases there is likely to be a continuing need for growth in Key Stage 2 and there may be a need for additional Year 7 classes as high primary numbers reach the secondary sector. Provisional requirements for 2021/22 indicate that (assuming carry forward of this years budget surplus) the budget could be reduced to £600K. This includes a significant element for both Key Stage 2 and Year 7 bulge classes (both risk elements). Future years have not yet been calculated, but are expected to be similar to this year (but will be reduced if bulge class reserves are rolled forward).

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

Ensuring sufficient school places will benefit people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act. It will advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not by ensuring that all members of the community are able to access a school place, when required.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

N/A

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