

Briefing note on
Oak Tree SEND School, Winnersh
March 2021

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This briefing note sets out the background to the proposals for a new SEND school at Winnersh, Wokingham and updates on the work done to date and the future programme of work to school opening in September 2022.
- 1.2 This project is a joint project between the Department for Education, Wokingham Borough Council, Reading Borough Council, Brighter Futures for Children and The Maiden Erlegh Trust.

2. The school

- 2.1 The school will be a special free school, for 150 pupils (all ages), designated for children with autism (ASD) and Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties. The primary focus will be on higher achieving/more complex needs children (so not duplicating Addington with its Learning Disability focus or Chiltern Way Academy with its ASD plus challenging behaviour focus).
- 2.2 Provision of a new SEND school is intended to meet the increasing needs to children and young people with EHCPs, within both Wokingham and Reading boroughs. It will also provide more local provision, reducing the negative impact on children attending out of borough provision.
- 2.3 Wokingham Borough Council and Brighter Futures for Children, Reading are working on an agreement with the school about how allocations to the school will be made and how parents will be engaged in discussion about the new provision.
- 2.4 The school will be built and funded by the Department for Education. Revenue costs will come from the Local Authorities who commission places at the school.
- 2.5 The Maiden Erlegh Trust have been appointed by the DfE to run the school.

3. The site

- 3.1 A site for the school has been identified at Winnersh Farm, Winnersh. Previously a site identified in Reading borough was no longer available and another site in Wokingham borough, Hatch Farm Dairies, was deemed not suitable due to physical development challenges with the site.
- 3.2 Winnersh Farm is located on the eastern edge of Winnersh, adjacent to the M4 motorway and Wheatfield Primary School (see Fig 1 Site location plan). The site is in the ownership of Wokingham Borough Council.
- 3.3 The Oak Tree School¹ will sit at the western edge of the site, adjacent to Wheatfield Primary School. The school will be accessed from the new access road coming off Woodward Close. The access road will also provide a new access to allotments and the rest of the development site. (See Fig 2: Site masterplan).

¹ This is the working name for the school and may be subject to change

- 3.4 Significant technical assessments and planning has been undertaken to ensure the school is located in the part of the site least affected by potential noise and air quality issues from the motorway. Assessments have shown that these impacts are at an acceptable level for the safe operation of the school and its pupils and staff.
- 3.5 In September 2020 Wokingham Borough Council Executive approved the lease of the school site to the Department for Education for 125 years at nil rent.
- 3.6 The rest of the site is being promoted by Wokingham Borough Council for housing development (up to 95 residential units). Taylor Wimpey is likely to bring forward a residential development (circa 200 houses) on the land to the north of the site (not in WBC ownership).

4. Work done to date

- 4.1 In 2020 WBC appointed WSP to masterplan the Winnersh Farm site to plan for the provision of a new SEND school and housing development. The team has worked closely with the Department for Education design team to ensure the site masterplan provides all the necessary infrastructure to ensure the efficient and safe delivery and operation of the school and the housing development.
- 4.2 In August 2020 The Maiden Erlegh Trust were appointed to operate the school. Since their appointment, they have been working with the Department for Education, Wokingham Borough Council and Brighter Futures for Children on the detailed design and specification for the school.
- 4.3 In February 2021, Reds10 were appointed by the DfE as the main build contractor for the school.

5. Future programme

- 5.1 Public engagement on the overall masterplan for the site, including both the school and housing development will take place during March 2021 (starting week commencing 8th March). This engagement will help inform the subsequent planning applications on the site.
- 5.2 The DfE will conduct further public consultation on the more detailed design of the school, once their design is finalised. Expected April 2021.
- 5.3 Following public engagement, planning applications for the school (detailed planning application by the DfE) and the housing development (outline planning application by WBC) will be submitted in May 2021.
- 5.4 Subject to the grant of planning consent, construction of the school should start on site September 2021.
- 5.5 School opening is programmed for September 2022.

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Figure 1: Site Location Plan



Figure 2: Site Masterplan

