RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE DUNS PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE CURRENT EDUCATION SUPPORT CENTRES IN CHIRNSIDE AND COLDSTREAM

Report by Director of Education and Lifelong Learning

Scottish Borders Council

26 June 2013

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 This report sets out the results of the statutory consultation on the proposal to relocate Duns Primary School to the site of the former Berwickshire High School and to incorporate the current Education Support Centres in Coldstream and Chirnside Primary Schools into the relocated Duns Primary School.

1.2 Scottish Borders Council is committed to relocate Duns Primary School to the site of the former Berwickshire High School and has secured funding from Scottish Futures Trust to carry out the work.

1.3 As it is the intention to move the school to a new site and relocate the current Education Support Centres in Chirnside and Coldstream to that site, the Council is required to carry out a statutory consultation in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

1.4 A proposal paper, including a statement of education benefits, was produced and widely circulated to all stakeholders. This was followed by an online consultation, a Public Meeting and engagement with staff and pupils in the school. Education Scotland also visited the school and spoke to teachers, pupils and parents.

1.5 The consultation showed wide ranging support for the Council’s plan to relocate the school and incorporate the Education Support Centres although there was some concern around safe routes to school for pupils around the new site.

1.6 Council Officers are committed to an ongoing dialogue with all key stakeholders as plans for the relocated school develop.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Council:-

a) Notes the outcomes of the statutory consultation and the support for plans to relocate the current Duns Primary School to the site of the former Berwickshire High School.
b) Notes the outcomes of the statutory consultation and the support for plans to relocate the current Education Support Centres in Chirnside and Coldstream Primary School into the relocated Duns Primary School.

c) Commits to an ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders – staff, parents and pupils and the wider community as more detailed plans for the relocated school are developed.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The project to replace Duns Primary School will comprise relocating the Primary school into the former Berwickshire High School. Preliminary work to assess the feasibility of relocating the Primary school was undertaken as part of the Council’s 3 former High Schools Property Rationalisation Project to determine the future use of 3 former High School sites including the one at Duns. From this work it transpired that the former High School would potentially be a very good fit for a new Duns Primary School.

Furthermore, following engagement with the local Councillors, the school staff, Community Groups, local Community Councils and the community in general as part of this project, there was strong community support for relocating the primary school accordingly. As a consequence, this project was reflected in the Local Plan Amendment for Duns. As the Council already owns the former High School and its site, implementation of the project should be relatively straight-forward with no additional land to buy and no requirement for planning consent for change of use. Furthermore, the former High School is listed and with the most architecturally sensitive parts being re-used as a school, the prospects of obtaining listed building consent for any alterations are much better as this use would almost certainly be more sympathetic than attempting to put the building to an alternative use.

3.2 Currently within Berwickshire, specialist provision is based at two sites – Chirnside Primary School for children with complex needs and Coldstream Primary School for children with communication needs.

3.3 In addition, currently other children with specific needs require to travel from Berwickshire to provision in other parts of the Scottish Borders. This can cause distress for families having to consider their already vulnerable child being transported for several hours a day, especially in poor weather conditions. Additionally, moving children to provision in other parts of Scottish Borders has a significant annual travel cost to the Council. The establishment of a Support Centre in the relocated Duns Primary School would minimise the need for additional travel for many children.

3.4 The current base for children with complex needs at Chirnside is not fully accessible and is contributing to capacity issues for the school.

3.5 The relocation of Chirnside Specialist Provision to the new Duns Primary School would release spare capacity in Chirnside PS which would significantly decrease demand for capital for extension within schools’ work stream.

3.6 The relocation of Coldstream Specialist Provision to the new Duns Primary School would release spare capacity in Coldstream PS which would significantly decrease demand for capital for extension within schools’ work stream.
4 THE CONSULTATION

4.1 At their meeting on 27 November 2012 the Council’s Education Committee considered and approved a report initiating the statutory consultation on the proposal to relocate Duns primary School in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. As a result the following actions were agreed and implemented:

- an educational benefits statement was prepared
- a proposal paper was published
- notice of the proposal was given to the relevant consultees and invite representations
- a Public meeting was held
- the proposals were reviewed

Key stakeholders engaged in the consultation were:-

- The School Parent Council
- Parents
- Primary School parents who may be affected
- Pupils
- Staff
- Unions
- Community users of the school
- Local Community Council

4.2 The consultation process commenced on 4 February 2013 and ended on 15 March 2013. The proposal paper including the educational benefits statement was published on the Council website and the key stakeholders as outlined in paragraph 4.1 were contacted by letter. Local Ward Elected Members were also briefed. Due to adverse weather, the consultation period was extended as Education Scotland had to postpone their original programme of visits and reschedule some weeks later.

4.3 There were 8 responses to the proposal on the Council website. In general those who responded seem to support the proposals to relocate the school and understand the arguments put forward under the educational benefits statement. There was some frustration from the written submissions that parents had not yet had the opportunity to look at detailed plans for the relocated school. Many of the comments from the consultation were around the detail of the location, issues to do with pupil transport, road safety and concerns about the long term capacity of the re-located school. Also further clarification around the proposed location of the Jim Clark Museum on the site was required. All these issues will require to be picked up in the next stages of the planning process, ensuring that parents are fully engaged. The Department, along with the Headteacher, will consider how best to do this over the coming months. (A summary of the on-line responses are attached as Appendix 1 of this report).

4.4 On Monday 25 February a Public Meeting was held in Duns Primary School attended by around 100 people. The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning, presented a resume of the proposal paper and the educational benefits statement. Once again the general view was one of support for the proposal although again there was some frustration at the lack of detail as to the proposals for use of the former Berwickshire High School site. This included concerns around capacity, traffic management and
pupil safety. Again these issues will require to be picked up in the next stages of the planning process, ensuring that parents are fully engaged. The Department, along with the Headteacher, will consider how best to do this over the coming months. (A summary of the key issues raised at the Public Meeting are attached as Appendix 2 to this report).

4.5 There has been some consultation with pupils of Duns Primary School held on Monday 18 February 2013. This was with members of the Pupil Council who were given a short presentation about the background of the statutory consultation and asked for their initial views and thoughts. Members of the Pupil Council are planning ongoing dialogue and discussion with fellow pupils on this topic.

4.6 Education Scotland visited Duns, Chirnside and Coldstream and looked at:-

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the Council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the Council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal;
- the benefits which the Council believes will result from implementation of the proposal and the Council’s reasons for coming to these beliefs.

They concluded:-

a) The proposal from Scottish Borders Council to relocate Duns Primary School to a new location within the site of the former Berwickshire High School should have a positive impact on children’s educational experiences.

b) The current school buildings at Duns Primary School are in a declining physical state and opportunities to bring them up to an acceptable standard are not viable. Refurbishing the former Berwickshire High School, an architecturally listed building, is a well-considered and positive solution to the Council’s phased plans to improve the school estate and manage changing school rolls efficiently and effectively. Re-designed, purpose-built accommodation will offer an improved learning environment for staff and children, with spaces that are versatile and flexible enough to accommodate different group sizes and will support a variety of teaching styles and learning activities.

c) This proposal is also likely to improve the co-ordination and provision of specialist services for children with complex needs who live in Berwickshire. The creation of a Locality Support Centre on the single site is likely to lead towards better outcomes for the children, young people who attend it, along with their families. Learners will have access to a wider range of staff expertise and integrated services available to them, which can be used flexibly to meet their needs.

d) The Council needs to continue to engage with staff, children, their parents and carers and the residents of Duns, in order to keep them well informed and consulted fully about the proposed changes at future planning and design stages.
4.7 The Council published a final proposal paper which was placed on the Council website and circulated to parents within the school for final comment between the period 3 May and 26 May 2013. No additional comments were received.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 As a result of the statutory consultation and on evaluation of the range of responses from the Council website, the Public meeting, pupil views and feedback from Education Scotland, it is recommended that the Council proceed with plans to relocate Duns Primary School to the site of the former Berwickshire High School and to close the current specialist provision in Coldstream and Chirnside primary schools, relocating that provision to the new Duns Primary School. There were concerns from parents that there would be safe routes to school for pupils once the school was relocated and these concerns will be addressed in the next phase of project planning. The Education Department and the school are committed to ensuring there is continuing dialogue with parents, pupils, staff and the wider community as the project moves towards the detailed planning stage.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial
There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report.

6.2 Risk and Mitigations
(a) The report fully describes all the elements of risk that have been identified in relation to this project and no specific additional concerns need to be addressed.

6.3 Equalities
(a) An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on this proposal and it is anticipated that there are no adverse equality implications.

6.4 Acting Sustainably
(a) There are no economic, social or environmental effects as a result of this report or its recommendations

6.5 Carbon Management
(a) There is no impact on the Council’s carbon emissions as a result of this report or its recommendations

6.6 Rural Proofing
(a) N/A

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Head of Corporate Governance, the Head of Audit and Risk, the Clerk to the Council and the Head of Strategic Policy have been consulted and their comments incorporated in the final report.
Approved by

Director of Education & Lifelong Learning Signature – Glenn Rodger

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Background Papers:
Previous Minute Reference:

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