

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**EDUCATION, LIBRARIES AND LOCALISM CABINET PANEL
TUESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2018 AT 10:00AM**

**TO RECEIVE A PETITION FOR COUNCIL ACTION TO ADDRESS SOLUTIONS
TO PRIMARY PROVISION IN CENTRAL ST ALBANS**

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Executive Member: Terry Douris, Executive Member for Education, Libraries &
Localism Cabinet Panel

Local Members: Chris White - St Albans Central, Anthony Rowlands - St
Albans East, Sandy Walkington - St Albans South

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To inform the Education, Libraries and Localism Cabinet Panel of a Petition organised by the Permanent Expansion for Reception Places in St Albans Campaign Group. The petition requests Council action solutions for primary school provision in central St Albans.

2. Procedure

2.1 The Council's Petitions Scheme provides that:

“officers will prepare a Report for members setting out the background and other relevant information of which they are aware relating to the subject matter of the petition but will not give a recommendation as to how the Petition should be dealt with”

2.2 The Petitions Scheme further states:

“Following consideration of a Petition for Debate... the Panel can make a recommendation as follows:

- *refer the matter to Cabinet*
- *make a recommendation to officers as to how to respond to the petition*
- *request officers undertake further work and either liaise with the Local Member and relevant Executive Member before responding to the petition or bring the matter back to Panel*
- *Acknowledge the petition but recommend that no further action is taken.”*

3. The Issues raised in the petition

3.1 An e-petition was raised via Hertfordshire.gov website and attracted 295 signatures. It reads

“Urgent solutions required for primary school provision in St Albans.

We petition Hertfordshire County Council to address the inadequate provision of primary school places in the central area of St Albans (St Peter’s Ward and the station area) by expanding a local existing school and/or building a new school.

In the interim, to provide immediate relief by providing a bulge class to a city centre school.

School allocation data for September 2017 showed that 70 children in Central St Albans did not get one of their four ranked choices and have instead been offered a school that is miles from their home.

In addition, some parents felt the need to include a school far from their home in their choices in order to safeguard ‘choosing’ good schools. This has skewed the Council’s data, as it implies that parents have been given one of their preferred schools. The reality is that these parents would have preferred a local school and felt forced to choose larger schools a distance away to safeguard the quality of the schools that they chose.

Particularly, there is a ‘black hole’ around the station where children had no hope of getting into their nearest school, St Peter’s.

Under-provision in the central area is currently:

- *Pulling communities apart by sending a large number of children outside their local area for schooling*
- *Making St Albans a less attractive location for families to raise children*
- *Adding to the already congested rush hour traffic with associated environmental effects*
- *Making living in prime commuter territory untenable for those with young families*
- *Limiting the career and work options for parents forced into travelling greater distances at the start and end of the day*

This inadequate provision is exacerbated by the continuing building development in the area. For example, 80 dwellings on London Road (Gabriel Square) are being marketed to those with families. However, there is already insufficient provision for local primary schooling and without doubt these families will be in the same position in 2018/19

In the short term, we propose an additional bulge class in central St Albans for September 2017 to fulfil the specific demand for schools in this area. We understand that schools close to the City centre have this capacity.

In the long term our proposals are:

1. Permanent expansion of an existing local school to accommodate the children (both now and in the future) who are currently not served by any school.

2. Building a new school to support the growing local community.

We urge the council to re-evaluate the allocation of extra places for the long-term benefit of all central and all St Albans residents.

4. Background

4.1 The issue of primary school places is taken very seriously and the County Council is committed to ensuring that it meets rising demand. In response to 10,000 more children under the age of four in Hertfordshire today than a decade ago, it has already spent more than £200m providing additional places across the county.

4.2 In St Albans, at the primary phase, an additional nine forms of entry (FE) (equivalent to 270 extra permanent reception places each year) have been created since 2008 ensuring there are sufficient places for every child who needs one. This has included a new 2FE primary school (Alban City), providing additional capacity for the city centre, and a 2FE primary phase at Samuel Ryder Academy, both opening in 2012.

4.3 It is recognised that there is a concentration of demand in and around the city centre. However, identified expansion capacity is extremely limited, with town planning and/or highways issues making permanent expansion undeliverable on many sites. Additional permanent places have therefore, of necessity, been provided in the wider area. Expansions including those at Garden Fields, Bernard's Heath and Prae Wood schools have all provided additional high-quality places for St Albans families.

4.4 In 2016 St Albans City and District Council (SADC) submitted a draft Strategic Local Plan (SLP) to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that proposed over 9,000 dwellings across its plan period to 2031, of which over 5,000 were expected to be in St Albans. The plan recognised the need for additional primary school capacity in St Albans, to be delivered in the form of new primary schools. As part of the SADC local plan process, the county council commissioned external consultants to provide detailed technical information to SADC to help it identify and allocate suitable schools sites, particularly to serve the city centre, to help ensure that every child can be offered a local place.

4.5 However, SADC is currently reviewing its Local Plan as the DCLG concluded that it had not met its duty to co-operate. This may delay the allocation of new primary school sites. In addition, consultation on a new methodology for assessing housing needs has been published by central government. This means that there continues to be uncertainty over both

how much housing will be delivered and its distribution across the district, albeit the direction of travel indicates that the new plan is likely to result in higher housing numbers.

5. Primary Allocations 2017/18

- 5.1 The number of applications received for children living in St Albans for 2017 fell compared to 2016, with over 1FE fewer children seeking reception places compared to last year.
- 5.2 On allocation day 2017, every St Albans applicant was offered a reception place at a school within the city. There were also surplus places across the area, meaning vacancies in some schools.
- 5.3 In St Albans as with much of the county, there is a difference between what happens at allocation day and the final outcome of the process. There is always movement after allocation day as the County Council reallocates school places through the continuing interest process. This leads to improved outcomes and more applicants securing places at preferred schools. Following the first continuing interest run the number of non-ranked allocations dropped significantly and the number of surplus places across the city rose to 40. In August this had increased further to 47 vacancies and with the exception of one, all non-ranked allocated pupils were placed in schools under the statutory walking distance. The impact of excessive surplus spaces and the potential to undermine school effectiveness and standards had also to be considered. As such, no additional places have been made available for September 2017.
- 5.4 As at 24 November there were 51 reception vacancies in St Albans, including: Garden Fields, Margaret Wix, St John Fisher, Samuel Ryder and Killigrew.

6. Meeting Future Demand

- 6.1 The latest reception place forecast indicates that in the short term there are sufficient places across St Albans City. The table below shows the latest Summer 2017/18 forecast for the area.

Summer 2017/18 Interim Forecast

ST ALBANS CITY INC. ST MICHAELS		Actuals			Forecast		
School	School admissions 2017	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of reception places available	1,177	1,129	1,160	1,177	1,177	1,177	1,177
Demand				1,138	1,089	1,104	1,130
Surplus/Shortage				39	88	73	47
% Surplus/Shortage				3.3%	7.5%	6.2%	4.0%
No of FE				1.3	2.9	2.4	1.6

- 6.2 The forecast indicates that there should be surplus places across the period, with lower levels of demand forecast in 2018/19 and 2019/20. It is recognised, however, that there continue to be areas that have a high

concentration of demand within the city centre, particularly in light of housing development in the city centre and around London Road.

- 6.3 While in the shorter term there are sufficient places available across the city as a whole, longer term Office for National Statistics (ONS) projections suggest primary pupil numbers will continue to rise.
- 6.4 Creating permanent school places to meet rising pupil numbers is not always straight forward and the county council must work within the constraints that already exist in relation to many school sites. As part of the county council's annual primary expansion programme and ongoing representations to districts on local plan infrastructure needs, feasibility work is continually refreshed to assess potential options to permanently expand schools. Detailed feasibility work is being carried out on the capacity of St Peter's Primary School to expand permanently and the county council is working with the school to determine whether an expansion scheme could be designed which is both acceptable to the school and to the planning authority, given the various and significant site constraints.
- 6.5 A proposal for the County Council to part fund the permanent expansion of St Michael's C of E Primary School's by 0.3FE, an additional 8 reception places per year, from September 2018 was agreed by Cabinet in September 2017.
- 6.6 In the longer term, given the limitations on existing school sites and the anticipated level of new housing, further growth in pupil numbers in St Albans is likely to need to be supported through the provision of new primary schools.
- 6.7 Therefore, the County Council will continue to work with SADC and make formal representations asking for appropriate provision to be made within its Local Plan to support growing pupil numbers and new housing development in the City. This includes identifying new primary school sites, especially in areas where there is little or no potential to expand existing schools such as in and around the city centre.

7. Summary and Next Steps

- 7.1 In conclusion, the issues raised in this petition are recognised and understood. Officers will continue to update the Central St Albans Facebook Parent Action Group, having previously met with key group members to better understand their concerns, discuss their suggestions and answer questions on what action the county council can take to secure city centre education provision in St Albans.
- 7.2 This includes monitoring pupil numbers in and around the City, refreshing feasibility work on the expansion potential of schools, particularly those in and around the city centre. Specifically, the County Council will continue to explore whether a deliverable permanent expansion scheme at St Peter's

Primary School can be designed which is both acceptable to the school and planning authority.

- 7.3 The County Council will also continue to work with SADC and make representations regarding the revised Local Plan to ensure that new education provision can be brought forward to meet the growth in pupil numbers arising from development proposed.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications in relation to this report.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

- 9.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.
- 9.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.
- 9.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 9.4 No EqIA was undertaken for this report because the report does not impact on equalities or affect any of the protected characteristics which would require an EqIA to be completed.

Background Papers

None