RESPONSE TO AREAS OF CONCERN RAISED DURING CONSULTATION:
MAY AND JUNE 2011

1 Traffic, congestion, parking, access to the school, nuisance to residents

The overall aspiration is that primary school places are provided locally so that local children can safely and conveniently walk to school.

However, it is recognised that the issues surrounding traffic, congestion and access to the school site are significant ones. In seeking planning permission for these proposed developments, the planning and highways authorities will have to be satisfied that consideration has been given to the consequences of the development and reasonable steps taken in order to manage/mitigate any adverse effects. In preparation for the submission of planning applications, traffic impact assessments have been commissioned for each school within the proposed programme.

All schools in Sutton are required to have a School Travel Plan (STP). This is developed by schools in liaison with parents and with the Council. One of the aims of any STP is to minimise the amount of traffic congestion around schools and there is a range of strategies that can be employed in order to try to encourage alternative modes of travel, particularly walking. The more well known ones include park and stride schemes (which would involve drop off points), crocodiles/walking buses (with or without leaders), pupil buddy/walking partners, walk to school weeks, cycle training and cycle schemes (usually for older children), car sharing etc. Most if not all of Sutton’s schools will be aware of these – and others – and no doubt will have used them as part of their existing STP and will look at how they can use an effective range of strategies in any revised STP.

The circumstances facing each school are complex and none of the strategies mentioned above represents a solution in itself, but properly used and managed and with sustained “buy-in” from parents, they can make a real impact and significantly improve matters.

There are, of course, other measures associated with the further development of parking control zones and the way in which enforcement is managed which could be considered.

As indicated above, the proposed developments will proceed through the planning processes in the prescribed manner which will mean that interested parties from the public will be able to access information and comment on the proposals. Some consultees have expressed concerns that the tight timescales to deliver projects for September 2012 indicate that a truncated process will need to be followed in order to successfully achieve the proposals which is not the case.

Details of the timings have not been confirmed as yet but the probable time for the submission of the planning applications will be during August and September. The current planned (but unconfirmed) starts on site for building works will be at the very start of 2012.
2 The adequacy of the school's infrastructure and whether there would be sufficient facilities such as halls, dining spaces, small group rooms, offices, toilets etc

The strategy for the initial phases of expansion projects for September 2011 and 2012 is to provide classrooms for the additional children joining Key Stage 1 along with other essential ancillary accommodation such as circulation space and toilets. The Authority's view is that with this amount of growth in pupil numbers, the existing infrastructure of the schools being expanded will normally be sufficient.

In progressing to the provision of accommodation for children in Key Stage 2 (probably for 2014 onwards) there will be a similar core offer of classrooms and essential ancillary facilities. In addition, by this point, the demands on the existing infrastructure of expanded schools are likely to be such that provision of more and/or enhanced infrastructure will need to be considered. Clearly, there may be significant capital investment required in order to achieve this but the broad strategy is to provide appropriate and affordable infrastructure.

The Council will need to consider how the further needs, associated with the provision of other accommodation or in addressing the suitability (appropriateness and fitness-for-purpose) and the condition (state of repair and need for refurbishment) needs of the school can be addressed subject to the availability of further resources being made available from the Government.

3 The perception of larger schools becoming more impersonal, especially for younger children, and therefore a loss of “family” feel and possibly a change in the ethos.

The view of many headteachers, advisers, inspectors, educational psychologists and other experienced education professionals is that this is unlikely to occur because well managed schools with skilled and experienced staff will be proactive in assuring children do not experience any adverse reaction to the increase in school size. Staff will be very child focussed and child friendly and the overall management and operation of the school, which will aim for a calm and secure environment where children can engage in purposeful activities and flourish, will underpin all of this.

4 The reduction in the amount of outdoor play space because of encroachment of additional accommodation onto such spaces which would be compounded because more children would be using the space

One of the main principles informing the work of the core design teams working at each of the schools in the programme has been to seek to minimise the encroachment of the building footprint, where new buildings or extensions are required, onto existing play areas. Opportunities have also been taken to look once again at the way in which the various areas on the school site might best be used in future. Play spaces will be adjusted and, for example, at one school there are plans to provide access to a further hard play area.

Headteachers and senior staff are also looking at their overall management of children at the beginning and end of the school day and during breaks and lunchtimes.
5 Overcrowding/overdevelopment of the site leading to significant health and safety issues emerging because of the lack of space for children

Clearly, any proposal to expand a school opens up the possibility that pressure on space and existing facilities will be intensified. In the overall planning that is currently being undertaken, consideration is being given to these matters and wherever possible the favoured design solutions will seek to address them. For example, the overall use of areas of the site, for hard and soft play areas and for soft landscaping will be considered as will access and circulation routes onto and around the school site.

There are also management strategies that can be used to mitigate any pressures on available space within the school site and buildings. For example, by phasing breaks and lunchtimes for different pupil age groups or by planning the range of play activities and how they might best be supported by markings and equipment. Such matters can therefore be dealt with by the school through its management of children during the course of the school day and by the operation of clear procedures and routines which are well understood by all children.

The buildings proposed as part of the expansion programme should be sufficient to accommodate the projected numbers of pupils in terms of teaching areas, specialist spaces, circulation and the like. As indicated previously, in all of the schools in the expansion programme the other areas of the site are being looked at to optimise their use for hard and soft play, games and habitat areas. Circumstances should not therefore arise whereby the well-being, safety and security of children are compromised because the school has been expanded.

6 Criteria for the identification of schools for expansion

Projections for the growth in pupil numbers seeking a place at reception year indicated that for September 2011, there would be a shortfall of approximately 180 places, and, for September 2012 a shortfall of approximately 135 places were the Borough not to act by adding more provision. The most sensible way currently of adding these places is by adding a full form of entry (i.e. an additional 30 places) to a number of schools. This does not imply, however, that in any future phase of expansion after 2012, the Authority would not consider the provision of a new school as part of the overall programme of expansion.

It has not always been possible to identify schools for expansion immediately in the areas of growth, for example the centre of Sutton. Therefore we have taken a strategic view that expanded schools should be as near as possible (and therefore accessible) to the areas experiencing most growth. This often will mean that expanded schools could draw children from adjacent wards but which would still, nonetheless, continue to serve many children for whom the school is the nearest.

The schools have been identified on the basis that:

- They can be expanded (in terms of logistically being able to accept more pupils and of there being scope to create additional accommodation on site)
- They are located accessibly to where there is increased pressure on places
- They are sufficiently educationally secure and resilient to have the capacity to manage a significant increase in size without adverse impacts on standards
There is a clear aspiration on the part of the school to manage the expansion through the two-stage strategy, set out below.

- The expansion should provide good value for money.

7 The apparent lack of longer term planning for the accommodation of children at Key Stage 2 and the Council’s inability/unwillingness to confirm that resources would be available for such further expansion and to meet infrastructural shortfalls

The Local Authority believes that it is right to expand schools with good quality permanent accommodation rather than with temporary buildings where it is possible to do so, even though this approach requires considerable capital investment. Permanent expansion enables the provision of new facilities to accommodate an additional form of entry and therefore gives parents a much greater degree of reassurance that their children’s needs will be met.

At this stage, we are proposing to expand infant (Key Stage 1) provision only. Although in most cases it is recognised that we will almost certainly need to commit to junior (Key Stage 2) expansion, we will nonetheless have to monitor actual demand as new data becomes available and as new funding is allocated by the Government to support further development of provision to meet on-going future demand for Key Stage 2 expansion in a second phase from 2014 onwards.

There will have to be future considerations, given that the projections indicate that demand will peak and then decline, possibly towards the end of the decade, about the nature and mix of accommodation (permanent or temporary; general teaching only or a range of accommodation including studio spaces, office accommodation, halls etc) that should be offered to schools involved in the expansion programme.

On the more immediate but related matter the planning and process of building design for the Key Stage 1 projects, a number of parents have suggested that it is not possible for them as consultees to make an informed response unless and until the details of any proposed building works are shared and there is the opportunity to comment. While in some respects this appears not to be an unreasonable expectation, it has to be remembered that the consultation is not actually about the nature and detail of the buildings which will be provided but about the possibility of expanding schools by one form of entry.

The nature of the process in developing the new accommodation has been explained to consultees at the public meetings. It has been confirmed that a core group, which includes representatives from each of the schools are working on the KS1 project. Plans have now been sufficiently developed to have been shared more widely during July. This is part of the pre-planning application consultation on more detailed design proposals prior to planning applications (planned/anticipated to be during August and September).
8 Size being an important factor in the performance of a school with the perception that quality of education is adversely affected in large (3FE and 4FE) schools

An increasing body of evidence nationally indicates there is no proven link between primary school size and the effectiveness and quality of the education on offer. It is simply not the case that standards fall as school size increases. The strong indications are that school leadership, ethos and the quality of teaching and learning are the most important factors leading to high quality education.

Experience of large all-through primary schools, for example, those with four forms of entry (4FE – 840 children) or Junior schools (480 children on roll) is that under the right leadership, they can be – and often are – amongst the most successful in the country (Appendix 4).

9 Disruption of children’s education during building works to provide additional accommodation

The need to minimise any disruption of the progress of children already on the roll of the school during the building phase of any project will be a priority for all those who will be involved in the projects. The overall principle will be to manage each project to ensure that senior staff and governors’ time is used effectively so that focus can remain on standards/attainment/outcomes generally.

In terms of the more practical aspects of managing the continuing operation of the school, agreements are set out before any work commences on site with respect to control/management/liaison with contractors and control of the contractor’s compound(s), deliveries – entrance, timing, at ends of school days and in holidays. The Council also operates the Considerate Contractor Scheme or a similar scheme and use Contractors who are “known to us” because they are part of the Local Framework and therefore have good expertise in managing projects in schools. Finally measures are taken to ensure the security of the contractor’s compound, control of vehicles coming onto site, ensure avoidance of disruption of key events in the life of the school (Sats, parents' events, ceremonies and celebrations…) and maintain physical separation of contractors and staff/pupils.

Usually the experience has been that a major building project at a school can often offer exciting and interesting possibilities for the stimulation of enhanced curriculum activities with their pupils. Headteachers and staff almost always see the potential of the situation very quickly and seek to take every advantage of this for the benefit of the children at the school when the works are undertaken.
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