

Planning, Transport and Development

Chris Swanwick BA (Hons) MRTPI MIMgt – Director

Item 2

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Dear Paul

Draft School Organisation Plan 2003

Thank you for consulting Wycombe District Council on the above Plan.

This matter will be considered by the Council's Cabinet on 29 September – however I am aware that you have requested a response by 17 September in order to meet DfES targets. This letter should therefore be considered as a holding response and may be revised following the Cabinet meeting. This letter does not constitute an objection but should be considered as comments as follows:

- It is incorrect to state at paragraph 6.1 that revised population projections taking into account the results of the 2001 census are not available. Projections are available from the County Council, and whilst it is appreciated that these have yet to be broken down into ward level data the pupil projection numbers should be updated to take account of these, having regard to the fact that another School Organisation Plan is not required for 3 years.
- Appendix 7 to the School Organisation Plan lists a significant number of planning commitments as not occurring within the next 5 years. Wycombe District Council considers, as Local Planning Authority, that many of these sites will be developed in the next 5 years, delivering approximately 1250 dwellings in the High Wycombe & East Wycombe planning area and 100 dwellings in Marlow. It may well therefore be that the estimated distribution of demand for school spaces is incorrect. The detailed area projections should be updated to accommodate these dwellings. Agreement on the figures to be used has been reached with Paul Storey in your Policy, Performance and Information team and the County are urged to use these figures.
- The Planning area called "Great Marlow Area" is causing some confusion as this name normally covers the rural areas around, but not including, Marlow. It is suggested that this area be renamed "Marlow and surrounding area".
- Whilst the protection of small village infant schools is welcomed there is concern that there is no protection offered to primary schools in the larger villages/settlements.
- The Plan lacks a long term strategic vision, both with respect to the location of housing developments beyond 2008 and delivering wider policy objectives such as reducing the demand for travel.

- The Plan does not adequately cover the role of schools in their community and the potential negative impact of the loss of schools. The draft Plan fails to recognise fully the role that schools play in both the provision of land and buildings for community use and in their contribution to the social fabric of their local area.
- On the basis of the data in the draft plan there would appear to be no justification for collecting developer contributions from residential developments towards the provision of school accommodation in the Primary sector in most of the District as there is capacity in all planning areas in the District.
- Having regard to the above, particularly the failure to recognise the role of schools within the community, it is requested that joint Officer and Member working arrangements be established between Bucks County Council and Wycombe District Council to consider issues arising from possible school closures and amalgamations as soon as the issue arises. This would be on the basis of an agreed protocol.

Should you have any queries or points of clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Ian Fletcher
Principal Policy Officer

School Organisation response

Item 2: Wycombe District Council

Point 1

The School Organisation Plan that was consulted upon was a draft and at the time it was drawn up the revised population figures were not available. However they have now been received and the final version of the Plan reflects this.

Point 2

The final version of the plan has been updated to take into account the latest information from Wycombe District Council.

Point 3

The title of the planning area has been changed.

Point 4

The plan specifically refers to the Aim of the County Council to protect small village schools and generally to the importance of community cohesion, which offers protection to all sizes of communities in Buckinghamshire.

Point 5

DfES guidance is that the plan should be produced every 3 years and that it should cover a 5-year period. There are however population projections in the report that cover a period that extends beyond 2008. Separate plans and strategies are produced by the County Council to cover the issue of addressing the demand for travel.

Point 6

The plan clearly states the commitment of the County Council to protect small village schools and to work with its partners to address issues of community cohesion. The potential negative impact of the closure of schools is thoroughly investigated at officer and County Councillor level.

Under Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 34a the DfES expects the County Council to reduce the number of surplus places it has in the primary sector and an annual return has to be provided to the DfES.

Point 7

Although there is surplus capacity in some planning areas in others there is a deficit of places. With forthcoming housing developments there could be a need to ensure that developers make a contribution towards the cost of enhancing the facilities of the local community.

Point 8

There is no failure to recognise the role of schools within their community and indeed on a number of occasions within the Plan their importance is specifically mentioned and links to the County Council's strategies for supporting communities are mentioned.