
Halesowen Area Committee 2 July 2008

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Cradley High School Leisure Centre

Purpose of Report

1. On 14 November 2007 Halesowen Area Committee supported a motion to inform the Cabinet Member for Children's Services of four areas of concern (set out in paragraph 6). At a public meeting on 17 March 2008 ward councillors presented four options for the future use of the Cradley High School site. This report informs Halesowen Area Committee of the response to the concerns raised in November and the options presented on 17 March.

Background

2. Cradley High School opened around 1990. The annual birth rate in Dudley was at its highest in 1990/91 at over 4,100 per annum. The number of births fell year on year to around 3,300 by 2003/4. This fall of almost 20% has resulted in a severe decline in the demand for primary school places across Dudley from around 1995 and by around 2002, fewer children seeking secondary school places. The fall in demand was particularly evident in Halesowen with not enough children in the area to fill all of the secondary schools and too few of them opting for places at Cradley High School. A severe decline in admission numbers over five years resulted in the school becoming unable to provide the quality of education required within the resources available.
3. Proposals to close the school were made with a consultation document published in 2006. As the leisure facilities are part of Cradley High School they were included within the consultation document and in the prescribed information presented to School Organisation Committee in February 2007. On 7 February 2007 the independent School Organisation Committee approved proposals to close Cradley High School with effect from 31 August 2008. Implementation of the closure proposals required pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 to transfer to alternative secondary schools by 1 September 2007. Year 10 pupils continued into Year 11 to complete their statutory education at Cradley High School and will leave in the summer term 2008.
4. The school was built with facilities for indoor physical education. The accommodation, managed by the governing body includes a sports hall, small hall and changing facilities for boys and girls aged 11 – 16. As with a number of secondary schools, the facilities were made available for community use outside school hours and for a period of years the school received a small annual revenue grant from the Council. The facilities were not designed as a stand alone leisure centre and the level of funding was not sufficient to operate as a separate organisation. Staffing was provided by the school within their overall budget.

5. The statutory consultation on proposals to close Cradley high school did not include proposals for the future use of the site as decisions on school closures have to be made solely on educational grounds. Since the school manages the leisure facilities, and these are integral to the school building, these would close when the school closed.
6. Local Councillors, supported by a number of local residents, put a resolution to the Area Committee which was supported at the relevant Area Committee Meetings,
“That the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services be informed of the concerns of the Committee that:
 - (1) *No detailed discussion had taken place between the Directorates about the Cradley High School site and Cradley leisure centre site.*
 - (2) *No consultation had taken place with Members, stakeholders and the general public and that the Committee considers that it is in the Council’s and the public’s interest that such detailed public consultation should take place.*
 - (3) *The decision to declare the site of Cradley High School surplus to requirements for sale should be put in abeyance pending further information.*
 - (4) *Following further consultation the matter be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee with a full report and recommendations for further consideration.”*
7. The Council Strategy for Land and Property Disposal has been followed. The primary concern for Children’s Services was to reach a decision on the future of Cradley High School. The decision taken by School Organisation Committee triggered the process of land and property disposal through the Directorate of Law and Property (see paragraph 6 point 1). Council Directorates were notified in the normal way and no expressions of interest in the site were received.

As the leisure facilities are part of the school and not a separate organisation, the consultation document published in July 2006 fully addressed the requirements for consultation set out in legislation and guidance for school organisation changes (see paragraph 6 point 2). Paragraph 5.1 of the consultation document refers to community use and states;

“There is significant community use of the facilities at Cradley High. The school is utilised by nine badminton groups, a dancing group, a fitness group and a social club. Discussions will take place over the next year with these and other community groups, other Council services including sports and leisure, adult learning and FE Colleges. These discussions will include the possible retention of part of the existing buildings for community use. Agreement will need to be reached on the management of the facilities and how they will be paid for.”

Discussions have taken place with users of the facilities. Most users have found alternative provision and the Council is continuing to support the few groups that have not yet found alternatives.

A few questions were asked about the future of the leisure facilities and answers were provided to the individuals concerned and published. Consultation included Halesowen Area Committee. Reports have been produced regarding progress with the closure of Cradley High School and with particular reference to the future of the site for Halesowen Area Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services has not yet made a decision regarding the future of the Cradley High School site. Further information has been gathered which will inform this decision.

This report contains information about further consultation in paragraphs 8-14 and recommendations in paragraph 20 (see paragraph 6 point 4).

8. At a public meeting on 17 March 2008 ward councillors presented four options for the future use of the Cradley High School site. The paper circulated at the meeting and titled CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF CRADLEY HIGH SCHOOL AND LEISURE CENTRE SITE states that the options paper was put together following a recent meeting of the Cradley Forum and discussions between councillors, local residents and other local stakeholders.
9. The four options set out in the paper are repeated in italics in paragraphs 10-13. Each option has been considered in detail and comments are included after each option.
10. **Option 1**
Inclusion of the site within the Building Schools for the Future programme. The school site which will be vacated by the summer of 2008 has the potential to play a vital role(s) in this program. Currently the three secondary schools – two in Halesowen and one in Pedmore which are within 3 miles of the site have limited potential for expansion. Also within the area there is currently no provision other than Halesowen College for 16 – 19 year olds. Cradley provides a potential for either a linked school perhaps providing a base for sports development: a dedicated facility for 16 – 19 year olds or to be an extension of Halesowen College.

The government announced Building Schools for the Future (BSF) in 2003 as a major programme of capital investment to replace or refurbish every secondary school in England over the next 15 years. Groups of around 10 local authorities have entered the programme in each year. So far there have been six waves of local authorities totalling around 66 with several authorities such as Birmingham appearing in more than one wave. The conditions for entry to the programme are set by government and they are rigorous.

One particular condition is that the government will not fund proposals to create or replace school places that are not needed. Local authorities are required to produce detailed forecasts of pupil places as part of the business case for their BSF proposals. Dudley successfully employs a method of forecasting based on actual numbers of pupils in school and, using an average change over previous years, taking into account factors such as migration in and out of Dudley and housing developments, produce very accurate projections. Comparing projections in previous years with the actual figures, Dudley has consistently maintained accuracy within 0.5% or better. This is well within the standards expected nationally and Dudley is very confident of our secondary forecasts.

As a result of annual birth rates falling from a peak of around 4,100 in 1990/91 to around 3,300 in 2003/4 the demand for places in primary schools has fallen by almost 20% and this has been most evident in Halesowen. The lower numbers of primary age children looking for secondary school places is affecting demand and the number of schools with surplus places in the younger years groups is growing steadily. The number of secondary school places (net capacity) recorded in January 2008 was 21,597. With 20,300 children actually on a school roll there were 1297 surplus places. By 2015/16 the number of surplus places will have grown to around 2,200. In Halesowen three schools with a combined capacity of around 3,600 will be sufficient to meet local demand supported with additional opportunities at Pedmore, Thorns and Hillcrest. The government will be aware of these figures through the annual return that local authorities are required to make and which forms the basis for the amount of annual revenue funding that Dudley receives. They will also assess our BSF proposals very carefully and will not approve proposals to replace or create additional provision at Cradley because it is not needed and would not be considered as providing sufficient value for money.

There is sufficient provision for post 16 places available from Halesowen College and King Edward VI College in Stourbridge which offers very high quality provision for AS and A levels. The Halesowen Education Trust established with Earls, Leasowes, Windsor and Halesowen College have expressed no interest in using the Cradley High School site for post 16 provision. It is very unlikely that they would be able to identify sufficient budget to implement such a proposal of this kind.

Option 1 is not achievable as part of BSF funding and cannot be pursued further.

11. **Option 2**

Multi-departmental use: using the whole of the site to bring together various council and partner agencies onto one site. Within a reasonable radius of the site we have a number of areas of deprivation which would benefit hugely from a focussed approach which this site has the potential for.

As examples of potential users :

- 1. Youth services currently Halesowen and Lye have youth worker 'HQs' one based in Vicarage Road and one at Leasowes. There is potential to combine these two 'HQs' and provide a better service.*
- 2. PCT usage – currently there are plans to provide a health centre (LIFT) on Windmill Hill while this has definite advantages in promoting the regeneration of that area – the PCT would be able to utilise the current school building and would enhance its ability with the potential the on-site leisure facilities would provide.*
- 3. Police – there is no reason why Police could not use part of the school as a base to cover Quarry Bank, Cradley, Lye, Halesowen and parts of Sandwell.*
- 4. Focussed community usage – particularly dedicated youth facilities.*
- 5. A return to the use that the school had until relatively recently providing evening and adult education facilities.*

This is a small list of potential uses.

In addition the development of the Leisure Centre into a modern facility with enhanced facilities would supplement the Halesowen Leisure facilities which are currently forecast to be massively oversubscribed. More importantly there is, currently, a gap in provision in the area and that would be greatly increased with the loss of the Centre. We would envisage trust status for the centre with local interested people managing the centre and providing employment opportunities.

The Children's Plan – Building Brighter Futures builds on a series of national policy statements intended to increase access to services and to do so within the level of resource available. In this context, there is no clear rationale to show how combining the youth services from Leasowes and Lye for relocation at Cradley would result in an improved service. There is certainly no budget provision either to enable such a move or maintain operation within the existing Cradley building.

Discussions have been taking place with Dudley PCT regarding opportunities presented by BSF and the Primary Capital Programme for over two years. Major progress has been made in moving forward the development of specifications for improved medical facilities in all schools and discussions continue around how to improve access to health advice and support through schools as part of the national policy on improving health outcomes for children, young people and families. No interest has been raised by the PCT in using the Cradley High School accommodation or site for a potential health centre.

There are regular discussions with West Midlands Police and they play a full role in the Dudley Community Partnership, Children's Trust Executive and other forums. No expressions of interest have been received from the police about using Cradley for their own purposes or in partnership with other users.

With regard to the assertions that a developed, modern leisure centre would supplement Halesowen Leisure Centre which is 'forecast to be massively oversubscribed' and also the proposal of trust status.

Both the swimming pool and the health and fitness suite at Halesowen Leisure Centre are busy facilities. The swimming facilities have accommodated displaced users from Brierley Hill Leisure Centre whilst the Health and Fitness Suite has, following developments in 2006, increased its membership from just over 200 to 800 plus. The capacity will be further increased following the current extension of the health and fitness suite to provide additional capacity and membership numbers it is therefore not accurate to say that the venue is massively oversubscribed.

The option also refers to seeking trust status for the facility. Establishing a trust is a complex process that needs detailed consideration. This consideration was taken by the Cabinet in 2002 under the previous administration and it was resolved that trust status is not something that the Council is seeking to pursue for its mainstream leisure facilities.

Details of the costings have been provided for this "refurbishment option" and are estimated to be £2.4m; this could be reduced to £1.9m with the exclusion of the "Community Café" proposal. This option could cost more than a complete rebuild.

There is no capital or revenue funding identified within DUE for this option.

Option 2 is not widely supported by the range of users identified and with no identified budget this option cannot be pursued further.

12. **Option 3**

The development of a standalone leisure facility based around the current building and the use of the rest of the site for housing development.

1. *The development of the Leisure Centre into a modern facility with*

enhanced facilities would supplement the Halesowen Leisure facilities which are currently forecast to be undersupplied and more importantly fill the complete gap in provision that we currently have in the area and that would be greatly increased with a loss of the Centre. We would envisage trust status for the centre with local interested people managing the centre and providing employment opportunities.

2. *Funding for this work would come from development funding (106) and use of some of the proceeds from the sale of land for the development.*
3. *The developer would work in tandem with the Trust to provide a 21st century facility and use it as part of its 'ethos' for the development of the housing.*

A critical element of the BSF and Primary Capital Programme proposals is to complement existing facilities to enable schools to strengthen their roles within communities. Over the course of the BSF programme all secondary schools would have enhanced facilities for sport and recreation and create improved access to community use as part of the extended provision and development of community roles. This will result in a standard of facilities and infrastructure that could not be met at Cradley. As in option 2, details of the costings have been provided for this "refurbishment option", estimated to be £2.4m: this could be reduced to £1.9m with the exclusion of the "Community Café" proposal. This option could cost more than a complete rebuild.

The proposal within the option suggests that funding for the above could be found from the proceeds from the sale of the rest of the site and/or Section 106 developer contributions. This would be a policy decision of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Development Control process in relation to Section 106 contributions.

Comments regarding Halesowen Leisure Centre's facilities and Trust Management are as those given for Option 2 above.

There is no capital or revenue funding identified within DUE for this option.

Option 3 has very little potential to attract sufficient budget and is unlikely to result in the quality of facilities that will be available elsewhere e.g. Leasowes, Windsor, Earls, Pedmore, Thorns and Hillcrest schools.

13. **Option 4**

The development of a new build leisure and community facility based on the current site and the use of the rest of the site for housing development.

1. *This provides a potential for any developer to have the leisure facility fully integrated into a modern housing development.*
2. *It provides for a greener alternative for leisure provision and an integrated green approach to the whole development with the use of alternative energy sources – wind turbines – ground heat pumps – solar energy (the roof of the leisure centre)*
3. *The use of a Trust to develop the leisure centre opens up opportunities for funding that are not currently available.*
4. *Would have the effect of enhancing the whole area considerably integrating the park into the development seamlessly potentially increases the yield and therefore the potential for funds from the developer.*
5. *The potential for the LIFT project to be integrated opens up serious funding opportunities as well as perhaps the opportunity for a pool area with linked*

health and social provision.

No evidence has been provided that there will be sufficient demand in the area to maintain a privately funded leisure facility. Even if there were sufficient demand the likely costs to users may prohibit people with lower levels of income from using the facilities. No evidence has been provided that a Trust could provide sufficient funding to ensure the facility could be established and maintained at a lower cost to users.

To provide a replacement new leisure centre facility with comparable facilities to those provided in the existing leisure centre would cost in the region of £1.5 - £1.7m. For comparative purposes the new sports hall at Pensnett School built in 2004 cost £1.4m and the cost above takes account of inflationary increases since then plus the addition of a health and fitness facility that would be needed to increase usage and income.

There is no capital or revenue funding identified within DUE for this option.

Any development brief for the site would take into account local views and the need to enhance the facilities available within the public park area. There are also opportunities to improve the sustainability on any development through measures similar to those suggested e.g. solar energy, subject to planning requirements.

Option 4 may be possible to achieve but not within the timescale. Cradley High School closes 31 August 2008 and there will be no budget or staff to maintain the indoor leisure facilities. The Council does not have the resources to invest in developing this option further, particularly as it is contrary to existing BSF proposals which will result in improved access to high quality facilities from secondary school sites and the Cabinet decision (2002) not to pursue the development of Trusts for the provision of leisure facilities.

14. A further public meeting was held on 12 June at Cradley High School to report on the assessment of the four options presented by ward councillors at the 17 March meeting. Twenty seven people attended with the majority of comments made by ward councillors, MP and one resident. The comments focused on the process and the meeting closed with a request to consult widely with the local community. The Directorate of Children's Services does not have the resource to carry out further consultation.

Finance

15. Dudley receives funding for education directly from government based largely on the number of pupils attending schools and early years settings in the January prior to the start of the new financial year in April. Each school receives a share of this government allocation in accordance with the locally agreed Fair Funding Scheme largely based on the number of pupils attending that school. There is no other funding available and schools are not allowed to use their budgets to subsidise leisure activities for community use.
16. From 31 August there will be no further budget provision for Cradley High School and no funding for staff required to operate the indoor leisure facilities. In the context of recent damage to the accommodation, arrangements will be made to secure the premises to ensure the building is protected. These arrangements will mean that the building will no longer be accessible. Alternative changing facilities

will be provided for users of the sports fields by the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

17. The costs of consultation and the related processes have been met from existing budgets.

Law

18. The powers related to the provision of education and school buildings are covered in the relevant education acts.

Equality Impact

19. The proposal to close Cradley High School was based on the declining numbers of children attending. This resulted in severe financial difficulties and the inability of the school to offer the range and quality of opportunities required.

Processes required by legislation and guidance were followed including consultation with children and young people, parents and others. Pupils in years 7 to 9 transferred to other schools with more opportunities available and have settled in well. Pupils in Year 10 remained at Cradley for a further year and will shortly complete their statutory education.

The Primary Capital Programme and Building Schools for the Future will result in significant capital investment in schools that will result in better facilities and opportunities for all children and young people.

Recommendation

20. It is recommended that Halesowen Area Committee advise the Cabinet Member for Children's Services:
 - a. To dispose of the site: and:
 - b. in doing so, consider further the possibility of developing the site to improve facilities for the local community.



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