

Decision Sheet

Reference:	DCS/28/2008
Key Decision:	No
Decision Sheet Re:	Disposal of Cradley High School, Homer Hill Road, Halesowen.
Decision Maker:	Cllr Elizabeth Walker, Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Wards affected:	Cradley and Foxcote
Contains exempt information:	No

1. Decision

That the site of Cradley High School, Homer Hill Road, Halesowen, be declared surplus to requirements and sold on terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Law and Property.

2. Background

Cradley High School will close on 31 August 2008 following a decision by the independent Schools Organisation Committee in February 2007. Pupils then in Years 7 to 9, transferred to alternative schools by 1 September 2007. Pupils then in year 10, remained at the school to complete their statutory education. Although the School Organisation Committee decision was unanimous and therefore final, a relatively small number of people have continued a campaign to keep Cradley High School open or retain the site for some form of education or community purpose.

The site of the school defined on the attached map, is controlled by the Directorate of Children's Services and is now surplus to requirements. The School has used the adjacent Homer Hill Park for playing fields. Homer Hill Park is not included in this decision.

In accordance with the Land and Property Disposal Strategy, Council Directorates have been consulted and no operational use for the site has been identified.

Halesowen Area Committee were asked to advise the Cabinet Member for Children's Services on 14 November 2007 as part of Agenda Item 13, Applications in respect of land and property owned by the Council. Members expressed concerns about the closure of the leisure facilities at Cradley High School and the proposal to declare the site surplus to requirements. The concerns expressed by Lynda Waltho MP, Members and several members of the public focussed on a perceived lack of consultation on the leisure facilities, the need for secondary education in Cradley and loss of facilities for football. Members resolved to inform the Cabinet Member of their concerns that no detailed discussion had taken place between Directorates and no consultation had taken place with the general public. They also resolved that the decision should be put into abeyance pending further information and a further report to Halesowen Area Committee.

On 24 January Halesowen Area Committee considered a further report with additional background and details including capital and revenue implications of retaining the leisure facilities, current users and alternative provision. Some Members of the Committee and the public expressed concern that the decision to declare the site surplus appeared to have already been taken and that there had been no consultation with ward representatives, the public and service users of the sports facilities. Halesowen Area Committee agreed to implement the resolution of 14 November 2007.

Two public meetings were held to explain the implications for the leisure facilities, hear the views of users and consider alternative provision. At the 17 March meeting one service user became frustrated by the amount of time taken up with criticism of the process. Four options were presented

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by ward councillors to the Cabinet member for Children's Services. Commitment was given to consider the four options and report back to a further meeting. A promised meeting arranged for April was cancelled and rescheduled for the earliest possible date of 12 June. This meeting was attended by some 27 people and again criticised the process.

With regard to the process there are two important issues to consider. Firstly, Jim Knight MP, Minister of State for Schools and Learners, confirmed in a letter to John Freeman dated 20 November 2007, that both the School Organisation Committee and Dudley had met their respective duties regarding the proposals to close Cradley High School. Secondly, legal advice on the indoor sports facilities in the context of planning policy confirms that this site will be considered as a whole. The indoor sports facilities are part of the school and the dominant use is for education. The consultation process on the proposals to close the school covers the indoor sports facilities.

In line with paragraph 2.3, it is therefore proposed that the site be declared surplus to requirements and sold on terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Law and Property, taking into account the views of Halesowen Area Committee.

Halesowen Area Committee considered a third report on 2 July. There were strong objections from Members of the Committee and a small number of members of the public. Concerns remain about the perceived lack of consultation and a belief that Cradley will lose a valued facility. Assurances in writing and at previous meetings to invest in new changing room facilities for the football pitches and engage the community at the development phase for the Cradley High School site, have not addressed the concerns. At this stage all work is subject to normal planning legislation and guidance. Indoor sports facility users have secured or been offered alternative provision.

Halesowen Area Committee resolved:

It is also proposed that the Area Committee notes the outcome of the evaluation of the four options presented at a recent public meeting, and in the context of Option 4, asks the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, when considering the future of the site, to have regard for the possible development of the site for improved community facilities.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services is advised to declare the site surplus to requirements in line with paragraph 2.8 and take account of the resolution in paragraph 2.10 by advising the Director of Law and Property to take account of the resolution when disposing of the site, both in respect of community facilities and public open space.

(Further background information can be obtained from Ray Watson, ext 4203)

3. Financial Implications

The sale of the land will result in a capital receipt for the Council. It has been agreed by Cabinet that the capital receipts would be earmarked for development costs towards Building Schools for the Future.

4. Legal Implications

Section 123 of the Local Government Act, 1972 enables the Council to dispose of its interest in land at the best price reasonably obtainable.

5. Authorisation

Cllr Elizabeth Walker, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Signed:

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In consultation with:

John Freeman, Director of Children's Services

Signed:

Decision date: Monday, 21 July, 2008

Prepared by: Raymond Watson

Associated documents and images

No documents have been associated with this decision

Scanned Letter (pdf)

Consultation Document (pdf)

Report on responses to Consultation for Cradley Hi (pdf)