

Report to: **Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability**

Date: **11 July 2016**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title of report: **Proposed expansion of Meridian Community Primary School**

Purpose of report: **To seek Lead Member approval to publish statutory notices in respect of a proposal to enlarge Meridian Community Primary School for the 2018/19 academic year.**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) Authorise the publication of statutory notices in respect of a proposal to enlarge Meridian Community Primary School by one form of entry (30 places per year group, 210 places overall) for the 2018/19 academic year; and**
 - 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to amend the proposals prior to their publication if required.**
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1 Background

1.1 There has been an increasing demand for school places in Peacehaven and the surrounding areas. In recent years births in the Peacehaven area have risen from 175 in academic year 2003/04 to 254 in 2013/14. There are also plans to build around 900 new homes in Peacehaven and Telscombe between 2015 and 2030. As a result, a significant ongoing shortfall of school places is forecast in Peacehaven.

1.2 In response, the Local Authority undertook a period of public consultation on a proposal to enlarge Meridian Community Primary School for the 2018/19 academic year to create an additional form of entry (30 places per year group, 210 places overall) in Peacehaven. If the proposal is accepted then the school would grow gradually between September 2018 and September 2025 as it fills from reception year upwards. The school would reach capacity when it has 90 children in each year group from Reception to Year 6 – a total of 630 children taught in 21 classrooms.

2 Supporting information

2.1 Proposed changes to the organisation of schools have to be permitted by the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 ('the Regulations'). These proposals comply with this requirement on the basis that the Regulations permit an enlargement of the premises of the school which would increase the capacity of the school by:

- 1) more than 30 pupils; and
- 2) by 25% or 200 pupils (whichever is the lesser).

2.2 Public consultation took place over a 5 week period between 6 May and 10 June 2016. Approximately nine hundred and fifty (950) consultation documents were distributed to interested parties including: parents and carers, pupils, staff, local schools, the district and town councils, the local MP and the local community. The consultation was also made available on the Local Authority's website. **Appendix 1** explains the consultation process in more detail and sets out the responses received during the consultation period.

2.3 In addition, a public information event was held at the school on Tuesday 14 June primarily to communicate information to school stakeholders around the build element of the expansion prior to the submission of a planning application. The event was advertised via school book bags and flyers distributed to local households and the nursery. The event generated a turn-out of approximately 80 people, largely neighbours of the school. The architects, developers, the transport consultant and ESCC representatives were all available to discuss the plans and listen to comments and feedback.

2.4 In summary there was a mixed response to the consultation and the public information event. Those in favour of the proposal recognise the need for additional school places linked to new housing in the town and the benefits it would bring to an ever growing community. Those who raised concerns about the proposal did so generally for the following reasons:

- Traffic congestion and parking
- Loss of playing field and facilities
- Peacehaven Heights should be enlarged instead
- A new school should be built in the town

2.5 In response to these particular points:

- A number of people who raised parking and traffic congestion as an issue do not fundamentally object to the proposal to enlarge the school. Following feedback from the consultation and the public information event, the design team, including the transport consultant, has agreed to look at a series of highway improvements to ease congestion and irresponsible parking. These proposals are likely to include increased double yellow lines near the school site and the possibility of opening up an existing access point for site maintenance to parents and children. Any measures would require support from East Sussex Highways through the planning system.
- The school's facilities would be enlarged to accommodate the increased number of pupils. The Local Authority would ensure that the design solution makes best use of the site to create an environment that has a positive impact on teaching and learning.
- Peacehaven Heights Primary School was considered for expansion but the infant site is very restricted and does not have the capacity for enlargement. The cost of moving the whole school to the junior site and enlarging it was also considered but the site is smaller than the Meridian Community Primary School site and the cost of such a proposal would most likely exceed the resources available in the capital programme.
- A new school was also considered but a search for land in the town which could be developed for a new school proved unsuccessful. Even if the Local Authority had found a site that would be suitable it is likely that it would have had to purchase it – something the Local Authority does not have funding for in its capital programme. Another concern the Local Authority had about establishing a new one form entry primary school was how viable it might be in the long term in terms of its financial sustainability.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 In conclusion, there was a mixed response to the consultation with a number recognising the need for Meridian Community Primary School to grow. The main concerns raised related to traffic congestion and parking; the Local Authority believes that these concerns can be addressed through the detailed design and planning stage and the design team is already looking at a number of highway improvements that could be made subject to approval through the planning process.

3.2 The Local Authority has a legal duty to ensure there is sufficient school provision in Peacehaven to meet the increasing demand for places. It believes Meridian Community Primary School is the right solution to address the need for places and therefore recommends that the Lead Member:

- 1) Authorises the publication of statutory notices in respect of a proposal to enlarge Meridian Community Primary School by one form of entry (30 places per year group, 210 places overall) for the 2018/19 academic year; and
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services to amend the proposals prior to their publication if required.

3.3 Publication of notices would trigger a further 4 week period of consultation, known as the representation period, when people can again have their say on the proposal. Within two months of the end of the representation period, the Lead Member must make a final decision on the proposal taking into account the views of all those affected by the proposal or who have an interest in it. It is anticipated that a final decision would be taken in September 2016.

STUART GALLIMORE
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Gary Langford, Place Planning Manager
Tel. No: 01273 481758
Email: gary.langford@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillors Ian Buchanan and Philip Howson

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Consultation report

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None