
APPLICATION TO THE GROWTH FUND 2017/18 – ST GEORGE’S CE ACADEMY

Purpose of Report

1. To provide further detail on the application to the growth fund from St George’s Church of England Academy.

Background

Application to the Growth Fund 2017/18 – St George’s CE Academy

2. St George’s CE Academy is a 315 place school (45 children per year group) with nursery and wraparound care provision and is the only education provision in the village of Middleton St George. Following a devastating fire in 2003 the school was rebuilt and the number of places expanded to cater for a projected increased demand from the village. This capacity is now exhausted and the academy has been full in every year group for a number of years.
3. The Local Authority (LA) has requested that St George’s CE Academy and Diocese of Durham consider expanding St George’s by 105 places. The expansion is driven by committed housing development¹ in the village of Middleton St George with the first of the new homes expected to be occupied in summer 2017. The LA has a statutory obligation to ensure the provision of school places for the new housing.
4. The anticipated expansion of St George’s CE Academy was first agreed in 2012 as part of the School Organisation Plan 2013-2017 (SOP). In developing the SOP, all Darlington Head Teachers were invited to attend a series of cluster workshops across the town which examined the pupil place data and future projections. Through this process a broad consensus was generated on the schools which could provide additional places. This process resulted in several expansion projects being agreed which were then proposed to the steering group chaired by Councillor Hughes, and including the Director of People. Expansion projects approved included those for Mowden Infant and Junior School, Skerne Park Primary School, St Bede’s RC Primary School as well as the principle of expanding St George’s CE Primary School. The steering group reviewed the proposals and agreed the projects for inclusion in the SOP paper ahead of its approval by Cabinet in March 2013. The approved SOP is the framework within which the local authority works in partnership with schools (Schools@OneDarlington) to meet the demand of additional school places.
5. At that time, the expansion project at St George’s did not progress beyond feasibility stage. Emerging pupil projections suggested that the pressure on places experienced in admission year 2012-13 was a blip not a trend. Also at that time there was no new housing development impacting in the short to medium term to consider.

¹ Committed development is housing development with planning approval and housing development with a validated planning application and a high likelihood of securing approval.

6. In 2015 the decision to refuse planning application for 240 new homes in Middleton St George was overturned at Appeal by the Planning Inspector. In order to meet its statutory duty regarding provision of school places the LA had to find a solution to meet the expected demand from this development. St George's is the only education provision in the village and holds a deep commitment to responding positively to new members of the community, therefore the School and the Diocese were willing to work in partnership with the LA to revisit the proposal to expand.
7. Over the last 18 months the LA has worked with developers and landowners with interest in the village to bring other housing sites forward and developed the previously agreed expansion proposals for the school, in line with resulting evidence from housing demand.
8. There is now committed development of almost 900 new homes across four sites in Middleton St George and the 105 additional school places are projected to be full within four years (academic year 2020/21). The expansion is 100% funded by section 106 developer contributions and LA held Basic Need grant will only be utilised for cash flow in advance of the receipt of these developer funds. As the principle of the expansion had been previously agreed by head teachers and is in line with the SOP and previous cabinet approval the proposal to expand St George's was taken through the LA internal decision making processes and Cabinet approved the expansion in June 2016.
9. The LA are very conscious that it is critical to ensure there is a sufficient supply of new school places to meet the demand from the new housing provision in the village. The current sites identified for housing are being actively progressed by developers which will result in a critical mass of new homes being built over the shortest possible timeframe and as a result producing a high influx of pupils requiring new places. This is unlike any other recent expansions in the Borough, as this is in response to new housing development rather than a birth rate increase and therefore a slightly different approach is required.
10. To provide places for the additional children who will be living in the new houses, St George's are increasing their PAN from 45 to 60 from admission year 2017/18 intake onwards and rolling that throughout the school. However, because children of any age could move into the new houses as they are built, the school has been asked to provide a flexible approach to admitting children in all year groups in order to meet the demand from in year applications expected when older children and their families move into new homes in the village.
11. Throughout discussions all parties were clear that the project should remain consistent with the principles of the SOP and an expansion would only be progressed if it was not to the detriment of other Darlington schools.
12. St George's Academy currently has relatively few children from the town centre on roll and applications are more predominantly from families living in the village or new to the area.

13. St George's Academy will retain its existing admission policy for all applications. This policy ensures that priority is given to children from a faith background and who live within the parish boundaries. The criteria is as follows:
 - a. Looked after children and previously looked after children
 - b. Medical or social criteria
 - c. Children living within the parish boundaries (Ecclesiastical boundaries) of St Laurence's (Middleton St George) and St Andrew's (Sadberge). The following further order of priority will apply:
 - i. Children who will have an older sibling attending the school at the time of their admission.
 - ii. Faith criteria
 - iii. Children who live nearest the school
 - d. Children living outside the parish boundaries (Ecclesiastical boundaries) of St Laurence's (Middleton St George) and St Andrew's (Sadberge). The following further order of priority will apply:
 - i. Children who will have an older sibling attending the school at the time of their admission
 - ii. Faith criteria
 - e. Other Children

Proposal

14. In order for the school to expand and increase its capacity, certainty is required over funding to allow teaching staff to be recruited. Based on the latest advice regarding expected housing completion dates it is proposed that the expansion is managed as follows.
 - AWPU funding for 30 children (approx..£75,000) plus an additional funding allocation of £5000 to enable the school to employ an additional TA allowing the new places to be opened in admission year 2017/18
 - Further funding provided in due course in line with the growth fund formula, triggered by a minimum of 10 children, to enable the full 105 places to be made available by 2020/21 in line with expected demand from new housing development
15. This proposal provides a good balance of supply with expected demand of places to avoid detriment to other Darlington schools and offers a flexible response to in year applications from families moving into Middleton St George.

Recommendations

16. Approve the Growth Fund application from St George's CE Academy

Julia McCabe, Assets & School Place Planning Manager, Children & Adults Services