

**BRIEFING PAPER ON FUTURE SITE OPTIONS
FOR DORKING NURSERY SCHOOL**

MOLE VALLEY LOCAL COMMITTEE, 22 MAY 2002

KEY ISSUE:

This report provides a brief summary of the current situation relating to Dorking Nursery School and the development of the West Street site in Dorking.

SUMMARY:

The West Street site in Dorking, on which Dorking Nursery School (DNS) is located, is part of the property portfolio under the proposed Office Project (OP). Surrey County Council is committed to securing the future of this school, and all companies submitting bids under OP are being required to include provision for the continuation of DNS to a specification agreed by SCC.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

This report is for information only.

1. INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

- 1.2 Dorking Nursery School has occupied its present site for over 60 years. It is an outstanding nursery school, recognised by both Ofsted and the DfES as delivering some of the best early education provision in the country. Sue Beckett, the Headteacher, is a member of a ministerial advisory group on early education.
- 1.3 The school services children in the Dorking area primarily, though also takes children from further afield, particularly where they have been identified as having Special Educational Needs, or social needs. Over one third of children have SEN, many of them attending the Language Unit at the school.
- 1.4 The Pupil Admission Number is 47 FTE. Most pupils attend on a half time basis.
- 1.5 In addition to the educational provision, DNS provides Play and Learn sessions for parents and children under 3; extensive training opportunities for maintained and non-maintained early education practitioners; support services; a meeting place for local childminders and minded children; and enhanced links with other professionals such as Health Visitors and Speech and Language Therapists. These activities are funded by direct government grant as part of a national DfES initiative to ensure nursery schools deliver integrated care and education services and act as disseminators of outstanding practice. This grant has enabled DNS to expand into the adjoining former Performing Arts Library building, thus providing the additional space to develop the expanded range of activities required by DfES
- 1.6 The whole of SCC's freehold title at West Street has been included in the Office Project because of its considerable development potential. All bidders have been issued with a comprehensive brief and footprint as identification of suitable alternative accommodation is a requirement of any successful bid.
- 1.7 Under SCC's policy to develop a network of children's centres across the county, DNS would also need, in the future, to be able to offer full day care. Any alternative site would therefore need to be large enough to accommodate such a development.
- 1.8 DNS would be a strong contender for Early Excellence Centre (EEC) designation, given the outstanding quality of the early education provision. Once suitable alternative accommodation has been identified, SCC will be in a position to submit a bid for EEC status. If successful, this would provide national recognition as well as substantial capital and revenue funds.

2. OPTIONS AND TIMETABLE

- 2.1 Service delivery remains the County Council's priority. It has therefore been agreed that, if comprehensive development of the whole site is required, the developer will need to find an alternative suitable site for the nursery school, or fund the rebuilding/redevelopment of accommodation for the current level of services, or provide SCC with sufficient capital receipts to achieve this independently.
- 2.2 All possible sites will be explored, including those owned by Mole Valley District Council and other major landowners.
- 2.3 SCC is currently in stage 2 in the tender process and the timescale is as follows:
- final bids due – end May 2002
 - evaluation of bids – summer 2002
 - recommendation to Executive on preferred bidder – autumn 2002
 - contract placed – April 2003

3. CONSULTATIONS

- 3.1 Property Services will lead on consultation with stakeholders on behalf of the Office Project Team. It will be an essential part of the evaluation process and will include the Local Director & Local Committee, Dorking Nursery School, the Early Years and Childcare Service, local community groups and other stakeholders.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Surrey County Council is committed to ensuring the future of Dorking Nursery School either on the existing site or through relocation to a suitable alternative in the town centre area. The Office Project offers an opportunity to achieve a relocation to more modern accommodation and bring added benefits to young children in Dorking and its environs.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: None
