

7th May 2013

Steve McBurney
Commercial Estates Group
1st Floor, The Exchange
Station Parade
Harrogate
HG1 1TS

Dear Mr McBurney

PROPOSED NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL AT LAWSONSTEADS, WHALLEY

Further to our discussions over the past few weeks, I write to you to confirm the following.

Background / Context

The National Audit Office recently indicated that in England an extra 240,000 primary school places will need to be found by September 2014 to keep up with rising birth rates.

The Government now requires all Local Planning Authorities to demonstrate that they have a sufficient forward supply of sites for new homes and these new homes do need to be served with adequate primary and secondary schools.

Under the Free Schools Act, all new schools, must now be Free Schools which are funded directly by Central Government and which, on completion, become academies. Local Planning Authorities have a role in determining where they might be located through the planning process but, given the scale of the demographic issues flowing from the new houses, developers now need to be more creative in assisting with the provision of new schools rather than simply paying financial contributions through Section 106 Agreements (and in due course probably Community Infrastructure Levy payments) to the Local Planning and/or Education Authority to support education provision.

Developers need to increasingly make on-site provision for new schools and other important community services, in addition to discussing the building of innovative 21st century learning centres, as part of the planning process. Local Planning Authorities will need to be receptive to alternative procurement methods and payment regimes rather than simply expecting payments to be made directly to them or Local Education Authorities to manage procurement, delivery or maintenance.

It is against this national background that the School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA) is working in close partnership with a national developer/land promoter - Commercial Estates Group (CEG) - to establish a way forward in supporting the development of the high standards of education provision in new residential areas.

School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA)

The SPTA is an education charity that sponsors a chain of academies across the north of England including infant, primary, secondary and all through 11-19 schools. It has a proven track record of securing transformational change and sustainable school improvement, and currently works in partnership with several Local Authorities including Leeds, Doncaster, Nottinghamshire, Manchester, Bradford, Cheshire West and Hull.

The vision of the SPTA is to provide high quality education, and deliver the best outcomes for young people with an ethos based on four founding principles of Quality, Partnership, Aspiration and Responsibility. At its core, the SPTA provides outstanding educational provision for families, firmly rooted in the context of the local community. It seeks to promote a climate that supports lifelong learning, in a context of high expectations, support and adherence to traditional values.

The overall aim of the SPTA is to foster learning communities which promote and provide excellence in teaching, learning and relationships through high expectations and adherence to traditional values and standards. The SPTA believes in the autonomy of local schools and offers challenge and support on a school's journey of improvement. The partnership of schools encompasses academies and schools that are currently judged across the whole Ofsted effectiveness range of context, phase and geographical location including urban and rural schools, and those of religious character.

It is unlikely that any incoming Government is going to move away from the academy programme and, given the parlous state of the public purse, it will be keen to explore ways of delivering new schools in partnership with the private sector as part of the national house building programme.

CEG-SPTA Model

SPTA and CEG are already working together in partnership with Local Authorities to provide the best opportunities for education provision.

Recently the SPTA submitted a funding application to the Government for a one form entry primary free school in relation to a CEG project in Chester to make provision for young children moving into a large housing development by 3 major housebuilders. The proposal indicated that the landowner would assign the land to the SPTA and allocate the Section 106 Agreement contribution of £1.6m to support the building of the new school (estimated to be in the region of £2.4m).

Using this delivery model, the Government secures a new school for a much reduced cost and avoids the continuing capital funding liabilities associated with the expensive PFI and BSF initiatives. For the housebuilder, the presence of a high quality and achieving school progression route will considerably enhance the desirability of the location for potential purchasers of the new homes.

Free School applications set out the outline of the school, its education vision, the education plan for the pupils, evidence of the demand for the school, the capacity and capability of the school sponsored by the SPTA, the initial costs and financial viability, together with details of the proposed building(s). SPTA will work with local people to deliver the school and some will help shape and form the first governing body and seek to work in partnership with surrounding schools and Local Authorities. On completion, the new Free School will become an academy as is the norm and join the SPTA group of academies.

The SPTA provides professional support and advisory services to ensure all its academies receive appropriate guidance and direction to deliver improved standards of educational achievement. New schools that join the group will be linked into all these services and support structures. This will include engagement with the Core Improvement Team (CIT) of educational professionals to ensure consistent methods of operation and quality assurance for academies within the group. The CIT adds capacity for raising standards and challenges practice, pedagogy and methodology. Its key focus is school improvement. It currently comprises over 20 specialist staff, consultants and advisors dedicated to supporting its academies. However, the greatest resource for raising standards lies within the networked partnership of schools in the group, providing peer-led support in all areas.

Lawsonsteads, Whalley

Given the likely level of new housing development envisaged within Whalley (including the 260 dwellings proposed by CEG at Lawsonsteads) and the Ribble Valley generally, the SPTA believes that there will continue to be a strong demand for a new primary school in Whalley.

CEG's site at Lawsonsteads off Clitheroe Road provides a good and logical site for a new primary school. The SPTA notes that the Local Education Authority is supportive of the principle of a new primary school at the site (as indicated in correspondence to the Local Planning Authority dated 14th March 2013).

With regards the plot of land being offered for a new primary school within the site by CEG as part of outline planning application 3/2013/0137, the SPTA has undertaken some initial detailed design work in partnership with CEG. The SPTA's view is that the plot of land is suitable and feasible for the provision of a new primary free school. It is close to Clitheroe Road and thereby will minimise the journey to school length and duration for the remainder of Whalley. The plot of land's siting towards the front of the site also provides the opportunity to deliver the school early in the wider site's development should this be necessary in demand terms.

Assuming outline planning permission for the primary school is granted in Autumn /Winter 2013, it is possible that the Free School application could be submitted to the Government in December 2013 in parallel with, but not dependant on, an application for the approval of reserved matters. It is anticipated that reserved matters approval in Summer/Autumn 2014 to enable construction to start in late 2014 with the academy opening in Autumn 2015.

I trust that this is satisfactory for the time being. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Hirst', with a horizontal line underneath.

Paul Hirst
Director of Strategy