

7 December 2015

Agenda Item: 5

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR TRANSPORT, PROPERTY & ENVIRONMENT

PETITION RE EAST MARKHAM SCHOOL HALL

Purpose of the Report

1. This report advises the Committee about a Petition which has been received in respect of East Markham School Hall.

Information and Advice

2. A petition has recently been received signed by 186 people, requesting that the County Council provide East Markham School with a larger school hall. They feel that the education of the children attending the school is suffering and consider that they need a new hall due to:
 - a) older children cannot participate in sport during poor weather.
 - b) minimum school hall size as recommended by Department of Education is between 130 and 160m² with additional storage of 40 – 60m² – current hall at the school is 62m².
 - c) school performances have to be held in the Village Hall taking up valuable teaching time getting children to and from the hall and adding to the expense for the school.
 - d) planning of extra curricula activity is restricted due to the weather.
 - e) activities such as gymnastics have to be held away from school adding transportation costs for the school.
3. A letter has also been received from Robert Jenrick, MP for Newark, supporting the petition and urging the County Council to invest in the school to secure the future of this important facility for the local community. Whilst Mr Jenrick recognises the financial pressures faced by the Council he feels it is important to support rural primary schools and recognises the increased importance of such facilities in rural communities where alternatives are limited and often are some distance away.
4. The Governors state that in 2009 the school was assured by the County Council that they would have a hall built in 2011/12 and that on this basis they purchased additional land adjacent to the existing school to enable it to be constructed. The County Council is not aware of any request being made by the school that land be

purchased and it is understood that the school progressed this as a private purchase without reference to the County Council. A feasibility was undertaken for the construction of a new Hall in early 2013 but it was made clear to the school at that time that funding had not been secured and that the project was far from being approved.

5. The petition also refers to the Priority Schools Building Programme (PSBP) published in 2011. This was a government programme for the replacement of 'whole' schools in poor condition. East Markham School was not eligible for consideration in this initial, or subsequent rounds of the PSBP and at no time have the school been advised that their school would or could be the subject of a bid.
6. The Governors state that after further contact with local Councillors and their MP that a review was undertaken of the schools capital programme and that as a result East Markham School Hall was deemed unfit for purpose. In October 2012 they state that they were informed that a policy paper was due to go to committee and as a result, those schools without a hall would be prioritised according to the new policy. The school felt therefore that a new hall for the school was imminent.
7. The School's Capital Programme is constantly monitored to ensure the County Council's future and anticipated capital commitments both provide sufficient school places and remains within budget. Prior to this report, there have not been any other policy reports relating to the provision of school halls
8. There is no statutory requirement that a school must have a hall. There is guidance from the Department for Education for the construction of new schools which the County Council follows when constructing new schools and if an existing school is to be significantly expanded. The guidance suggests the minimum size for a hall for a small primary should be 140m², increasing to around 180m² for those with 210 pupils. Larger primaries are recommended to have an additional studio hall.
9. East Markham School has a published admission number of 15 per year which translates to an expected roll of 105 pupils. It has a room designated as a hall measuring 62m². There are approximately 100 primary phase schools across Nottinghamshire which have halls less than the 140m² recommended by the guidance. Eight primary phase schools are judged to have no designated hall space.
10. The County Council receives a capital grant from central government to address the need for additional school places and has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places at schools to meet demand. Whilst the County Council continually strives to construct cost effective solutions to meet its statutory duty, the available funding does not extend to addressing other school accommodation issues including school halls. Schools across the County have understood this financial challenge and have worked with the Council to provide additional classroom accommodation without any enhancement to their ancillary accommodation.
11. The National Curriculum requires that pupils develop a broad range of physical skills through a range of activities. It is not prescriptive how or where these activities should take place. It should be recognised that the most recent Ofsted inspection of East Markham School in February 2014 judges the school to be Good.

12. In addition the Council has embarked on an extensive five year capital programme involving some £90m of spend utilising funding that had been identified to support the cancelled Building Schools for the Future programme. This Schools Capital Refurbishment Programme (SCRCP) undertakes essential works, on a prioritised basis, to all of the Council's maintained schools in order to maintain them in a condition that is suitable for their continued use. This clearly represents a significant financial commitment from the County Council at a time of financial contraction. The remit of the programme, approved by Full Council, is not to address issues of sufficiency and suitability such as the provision of Halls. East Markham School has benefited from recently completed SCRCP works, addressing condition issues to the value of over £110,000.

13. Ideally, the County Council would wish to be in a position to be able to extend the hall at East Markham School, and at all other schools across the authority where no hall exists or where the current provision does not meet current guidance. However, the current and forecasted financial situation makes this an impossibility.

Other Options Considered

14. The establishment of any new Capital Initiative runs the risk of the County Council failing to meet its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places, due to limited funding.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

15. Given the current financial constraints and the budget available, the County Council must ensure that its statutory duties and high priority repairs are prioritised.

Statutory and Policy Implications

16. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

17. The implications for the service users are set out above in paragraph 2 above.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) It is recommended that the Committee notes the petition and recognises that the Council is not in a position to fund the Hall at East Markham Primary for the reasons detailed in the report.
- 2) It is further recommended that Committee agrees that a response to this effect be sent to the petitioner.

Jas Hundal
Service Director, Transport, Property and Environment

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Lynn Cave ext. 72086 or Sara Williams ext. 72359

Constitutional Comments (CEH 25.11.2015)

18.The recommendation falls within the remit of the Finance and Property Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SES 18/11/15)

19.There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

20.Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Letter from Robert Jenrick MP
Redacted version of petition (on request).

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

21.Ward(s): Tuxford
Member(s): Councillor John Ogle

File ref.: /SB/SB/
SP: 2971
Properties affected: 01020 - East Markham Primary School

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