

Feedback on consultation events on the new academy and leisure centre

Since early December there have been a number of public consultation channels open to residents to ask questions about the proposed new academy and leisure centre.

The outline planning application has been uploaded on to the planning portal of the Council's website and paper copies of the plans for both Consett and Stanley are available to view at the Civic Centre in Consett.

Further consultation opportunities on the outline planning application will be available until the end of January 2010.

During the initial consultation (pre-planning) the following questions were asked and our responses are set out below:

What is the justification for locating the new academy at Belle Vue?

The children, parents and teachers will find it a better, more central location, safer, and easier to access, with 82% of pupils at both schools being able to access the site within 20 minutes travelling time using public transport, on foot or by bicycle. There are already good public transport links to the Belle Vue site from the surrounding area.

The school and leisure facility will be based within the community they serve and are close to the town, which will encourage more use of the town centre.

The site will become a thriving community hub with the use of the school facilities for activities outside school hours, and the leisure facilities at any time. The new School and leisure provision will become the beating heart of the locality.

The rugby and football clubs will have long term benefits of improved facilities, and the remaining open space will be improved for use by local people.

Opportunity is created by leaving the Genesis site available for employment uses that can bring much needed jobs to Consett.

Why does the leisure centre need to be co-located with the academy when it was always planned for the Genesis site?

Co-joining the academy and leisure facilities provides a number of benefits, including:

- Extending both the community offer and school sport and PE offer by joining resources;
- Providing accessible opportunities for a large section of the town's young people contributing to government targets in participation, community access and the healthy lifestyles agenda;
- Significant economies of scale in capital procurement and therefore more facilities for our money
- The opportunity to reduce the ongoing cost of providing the services by sharing running costs.

All of the above are seen as being in the best interests of the pupils, school and community, ensuring that the physical infrastructure is in place to have a healthy community and high achieving pupils.

How much green space will be lost with this scheme?

Until the detail of the scheme is firmed up it is difficult to be precise on open space figures but we anticipate that less than 10% will be lost.

This needs considering in the context of access to playing pitches for which there is likely to be a net gain in Consett. In addition, a significant rise in the quality of provision can be anticipated.

The land is the site of former quarries and as such is open space with playing pitches, therefore it is managed space.

Is it true that the rugby and football ground have recently had £700K spent on improvements?

The Rugby Club undertook work to this value around 2004 to improve pitches and provide floodlighting to an additional pitch as well as minor works to the changing facility. The works were funded from a Sport England grant and as long as the existing facilities are replaced or improved as part of the new arrangements, there will be no claw-back on this grant.

Why do we need another master plan for Consett?

The town of Consett is identified within the recently approved Regeneration Statement as an important local centre for employment, shopping, leisure and public services within North Durham. The last master plan for Consett was produced in 1992 and the town deserves to have an up to date plan produced that will define Consett's distinctive role in the county.

Why do we need more consultation about the leisure centre, haven't we done all this before?

There has long been a need to replace the current swimming pool and leisure centre in Consett. Whilst there has been a range of consultation exercises over the last few years, it was felt that these had not been as wide ranging as they could have been. The current consultation will include a wider range of stakeholders, many whom have not been consulted with previously. In addition the resources available, location and demands of new provision have all changed since the last consultation; this in itself justifies further work to ensure new facilities are as future proof as possible and cater for the local community properly. We can only do that by asking them what kind of activities they want in the new facilities and aiming to meet this need as far as possible.

With a shared site for the academy and leisure centre are there safeguarding issues with children and young people?

This will be treated with the utmost importance by the Council. We already have examples of where this works well in Sunnydale School at Shildon and at the sixth form centre in Durham City. We are confident that this can work to the benefit of the young people accessing extra facilities without compromising their safety.

School buildings and grounds are designed with appropriate security measures to make sure that there would be no opportunity for any members of the public to enter the premises or grounds.

Congestion, particularly on Medomsley Road and Ashdale Road are bad enough at the moment.

The School Travel Plan Advisor for the Consett area, has assisted each of the schools to produce a School Travel Plan. The purpose of these documents is to reduce non-sustainable travel to the schools - basically reducing car use, both parents transporting students and staff travel. It will be a requirement for the academy to have a Travel Plan and as part of this, to actively encourage sustainable travel to the school.

This should not only address travel associated with the facility during the 'normal' school day, but also during the 'extended schools' period. As well as the Travel Plan including incentives to encourage sustainable travel choices, it is often necessary to complement these with disincentives to discourage car use. These disincentives may include limiting the amount of car parking spaces available and preventing or limiting parking spaces available in nearby streets.

As regards congestion this is mostly in the afternoon and is associated with patients parking who are attending the nearby dentists - parking occurs at the junction of Ashdale and Medomsley Roads. There are also some periodic problems when there is a major hearing at the Courts that generates some additional parking.

Other than those two specific issues, the Council's highways team certainly do not receive complaints regarding congestion which is usually a reasonable pointer towards there not being a significant problem.

At peak periods, traffic levels do increase but this is typical for the highway network at those times. The Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) has been undertaken for the planning application and the document is available to view at Consett Civic Centre and also on the planning portal of the Council's website. Highways engineers will need to fully consider the TIA before the planning application can be determined.

Where are the rugby and football pitches going to be relocated?

At this stage both clubs are willing to relocate to another site or sites within the town in exchange for improved facilities. This is being explored further with both Clubs to ensure that appropriate sites, capable of supporting their facilities and members requirements, are identified.

If the football and rugby pitches are being relocated will there be a gap between closing and opening at the new site –any new pitches will need time before they can be played on?

There should be no gap and enough time for pitches to mature. This will be managed by starting work on pitches as soon as an agreement has been reached with the Clubs. Current timescales will allow for a sequence of works that ensure the Clubs have facilities available to meet all their fixtures and commitments. The use of an artificial pitch is also being explored with the Football Club and should this be used the pitch would be ready to play on much earlier than turf.

What is being planned for the Genesis site and who decided that it was only suitable as an employment site?

The Genesis site isn't only suitable as an employment site, clearly other uses are acceptable. However, we recognise that there is tremendous value for Consett in having a site that can provide key employment opportunities, The master plan will provide a framework to deliver employment and business opportunities and the County Council's regeneration team will be attempting to maximise those opportunities in the future.

Will co-locating the leisure centre with the academy reduce leisure provision in Consett, rather than increase it?

Not at all, combining facilities will mean that there will be a greater range available to both the school and community users during their periods of peak demand. For example demand for 5-a-side courts, from community users, is at its peak during early evening slots when demand cannot be

met by current provision. By combining facilities the number of available courts is likely to double during this period. Dual use provision works on the basis that school demand is highest during the day and community use in the evenings and weekends. While the total quantum of facilities is not doubled it is a well proven approach to making more facilities available to both user groups. This is not to say, however, that there will be no community access during the day but that only those required will be made available thereby avoiding facilities sitting empty for prolonged periods.

Is it true that the academy will run on a split site for 4 terms before moving to the new building because we were always promised that this wouldn't happen?

The period between September 2011 and the opening of the new building will be managed to minimise any disruption to the leadership, staff and pupils in the successful education of young people in the predecessor schools.

When will works at the Civic Centre start?

No immediate works are currently planned for the Civic Centre site. The plans indicate that if proposals come to fruition then development on site would start early to mid 2011.

What will happen to the War Memorial currently situated in the car park of the Civic Centre?

Residents will be consulted on the specific location of the War Memorial which will be enhanced to reflect its importance to the Town either in its current location or in a location to be agreed.

What is planned for the two vacant school sites once the academy has been built?

Development briefs will be prepared for both sites which will be consulted upon with the local community and local residents will then be involved in any development opportunities that might come forward after the briefs have been prepared.

There doesn't seem to be sufficient parking areas for the sports facilities and the school?

The area for parking is determined by the Durham County Council policy for car parking at schools. The board for Building Schools for the Future increased the number of spaces proportionate to the numbers of staff and visitors.

The pool should be 8 lanes and not 6 or this will prevent ASA and learn to swim sessions meeting the demand

No decision has yet been made as to the size of pool to be provided (although indicatively a 25m x 6 lane main pool with smaller training pool have been assumed for costing purposes).

We are currently undertaking a wide consultation exercise with all current pool users; including detail discussions with both the Clubs and Leisureworks Trust which currently operates the existing pool in Consett and who are the main providers for learn to swim programmes. At the same time we are working with the education team to determine their requirements for both secondary and primary swimming. This information will then be used to draw up initial designs for the new facilities to accommodate all needs as best as possible. These will again be consulted upon widely around end of February/early March.

That said, however, the ability of the pool to accommodate a wide and varied programme of activity, including swimming lessons, is influenced more by the provision of flexibility than number of lanes. In particular having the following flexible features will be key:

- A two pool configuration (normally main pool and training pool) to allow multiple user groups to access the pool concurrently
- Having flexible depth via a mobile floor to ensure correct depth over a wide area for various client groups – greater numbers of similar groups using the pool at the same time and vital for accommodating swimming lessons.

Whilst clearly the number of lanes increases water space its main advantage is in relation to galas and the level of competition that can be accommodated.

Given that the new pool at Stanley was designed to fulfil this function within the former Derwentside area it is unlikely that the competition requirements of the Consett pool will be beyond local.

When will you be talking to parents about a joint curriculum for both schools?

Once the Expression of Interest is signed off formally by the Minister this will release some funding to appoint a management consultancy firm (required by DCSF) and an education advisor (again required by DCSF). At this point the project will be in the phase known as Feasibility, where such issues as joint curriculum will be discussed and approved by the project steering group. We would hope to consult with as wide a range of stakeholders as is possible during the Feasibility phase, and naturally inform parents, pupils and staff on a regular basis of discussions and outcomes.

Who decided that the academy would be on a split site for the

first 4 terms?

The period between September 2001 and the opening of the new building will be managed to minimise any disruption to the leadership, staff and pupils in the successful education of young people in the predecessor schools.

It was a condition of the entire BSF grant funding (affecting all schools and academies in Wave 6). We had to agree to the opening date of the academy in Sept 2011 to secure BSF wave 6 funding for all Durham schools.

Drainage is a problem at the Junior School so the academy site is sure to suffer – has this been checked out?

Flood zone mapping for the area shows that the site is not affected by any potential flood zones. The initial desk top assessment does not show any indication of flood risk. Further site investigations are currently being performed to check for any issues that might cause concern.