

The Arborfield Primary School Options

Invitation

Key stakeholders are invited to contribute to the development of options for the management of the Arborfield Primary School. Responses will help the council evaluate potential options and identify a preferred way forward, which will itself be the subject of a consultation.

Stakeholders are invited to comment on the proposals. Alternative analyses, with alternative conclusions are welcome.

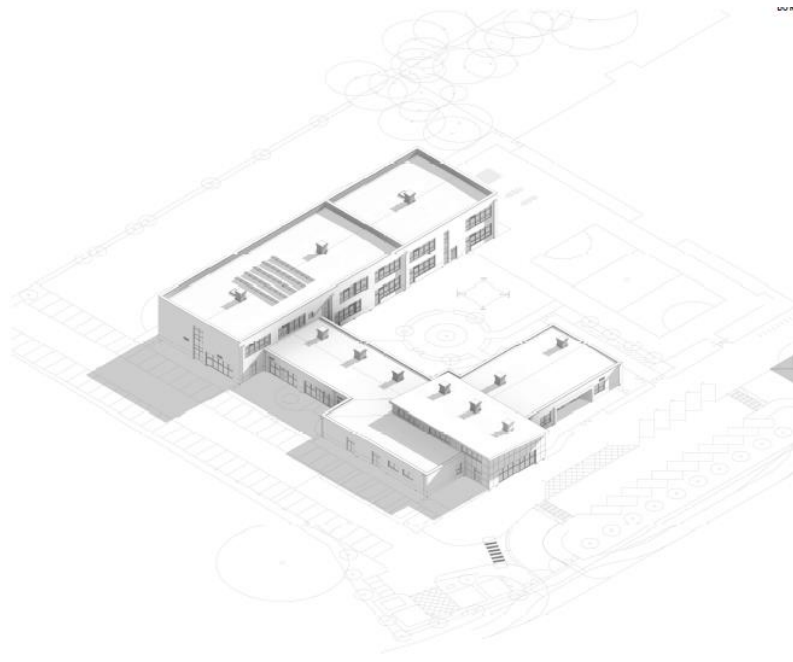
Responses should be sent to:

Piers.brunning@wokingham.gov.uk

By: 15th January 2020

Proposals summary

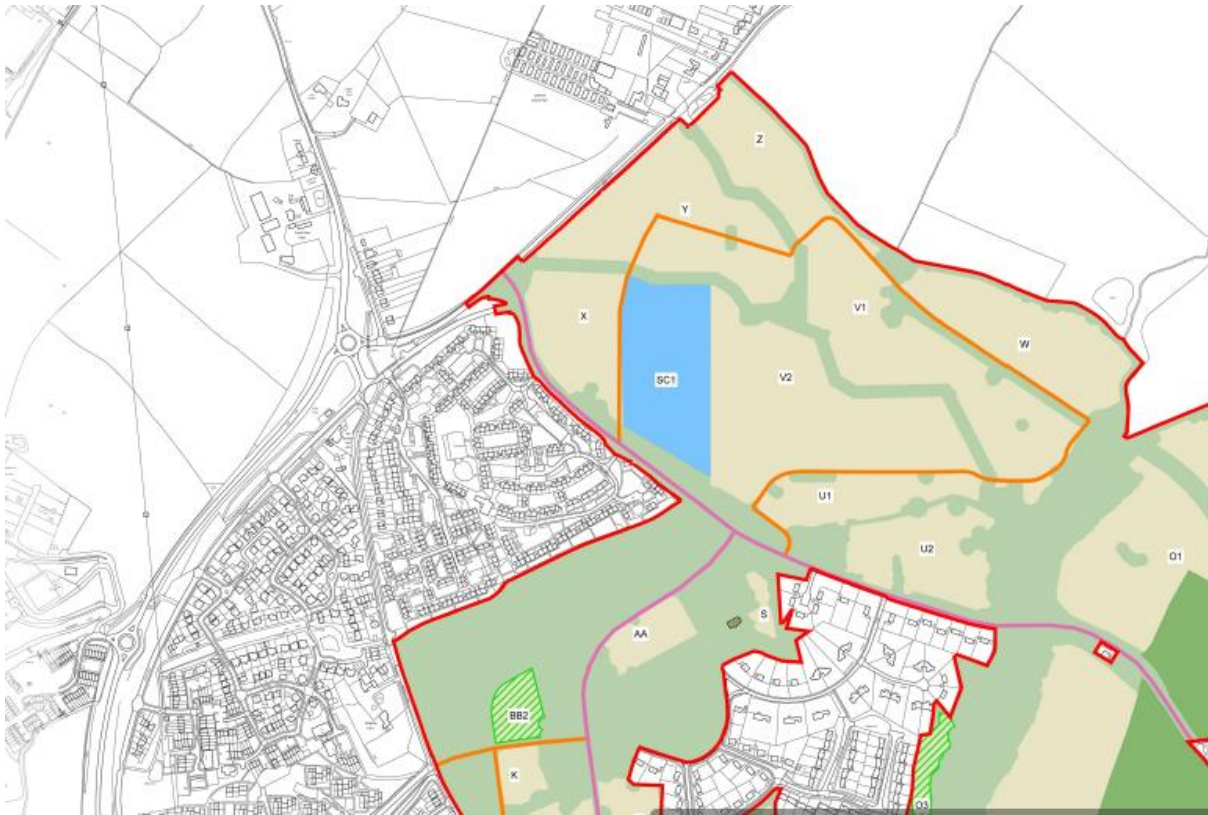
The new Arborfield Primary School premises are on target to be ready for occupation in September 2021. The school has planning permission, and detailed design and procurement work is currently underway, with a view to start construction work on site in 2020.



Initially, the premises will consist of a two-storey building, designed for 420 children plus a nursery, however planning permission has been granted for an extension to allow the premises to grow to 630 places should demand necessitate. The school will benefit from a large on-site all weather pitch, primarily provided to meet wider community needs (which the school will have sole access to during the school day). The premises will be built to DfE school accommodation standards through a modular form of construction, with units prefabricated in a factory and then brought

to the site for installation. This is an increasingly common form of construction and has been used for three new primary schools in the borough in the last decade.

The school (blue near rectangle marked SC1) is sited here:



Management options

Three options for the management of the new Arborfield Primary School premises have been identified:

1. To open the premises as a new Free School, (probably under a Multi Academy Trust).
2. To open the premises as part of a planned expansion of Farley Hill Primary School.
3. To open the premises as part of the planned expansion of another school.

Where the preferred option involves an Academy School or Trust, the DfE's Regional Schools Commissioner will be the final decision maker.

Each of these options has been evaluated in the light of three key considerations:

- A. How best to meet the needs of the new Arborfield Green community.
- B. How to support existing schools.
- C. School Organisation law.

Below, the three key considerations are set out in sufficient detail to support the evaluation of the management options in the final section ("Management options evaluation").

A. Meeting the needs of the new Arborfield Green Community

The Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location (SDL) will, on completion, bring 3,500 new homes to the former garrison site as part of a sustainable new community. Given the scale of this housing development two new primary schools and a secondary school were planned. The secondary school has opened as the Bohunt Wokingham School. The Arborfield Primary School is the first of the planned new primary schools. The second primary school is planned in the southern part of the SDL development (date to be agreed).

The SDL and the schools that currently serve it are within the council's South West Primary Schools Planning Area. This is the area served by the South West Schools Cluster, consisting of:

- Shinfield Infant and Nursery School
- Shinfield St Marys CoE Junior School
- Lambs Lane Primary School
- Grazeley Parochial CoE School
- The Coombes CoE Primary Academy
- Farley Hill Primary School

While currently considered as one area for school place planning purposes, the major communities in the south-west are separated by the Loddon River valley, with Shinfield Parish to the North West and the Arborfield, Barkham and Swallowfield communities to the South East. The area includes two of the borough's "SDLs – the South of the M4 SDL (2,500+ homes) and the Arborfield Garrison SDL (3,500 homes). The scale of housing development will require four new primary schools (two per SDL). The first of these new schools, in the South of the M4 SDL, has been built and is scheduled to open in September 2020.

Current roll projections (without additional housing)

The current roll projections take account of recent house building, through the effect new families have on the number of children admitted to local schools (compared to the number of children born to local families) and on changes to school rolls through the year. The projection does not though, take account of all the future housebuilding planned in both SDLs.

Neighbourhood: South West																									
	KS1			KS2																					
School Year	Year R*	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total Roll	Reception Places	School Capacity	+ / - Reception places	+ / - NC	% R +/-	% NC +/-											
2018/19	225	225	253	245	245	212	236	1,641	255	1,817	30	176	12%	10%											
2019/20	228	223	227	245	246	238	212	1,619	255	1,817	27	198	11%	11%											
2020/21	241	226	226	221	245	239	239	1,636	255	1,817	14	181	6%	10%											
2021/22	244	239	229	219	222	238	240	1,632	255	1,817	11	185	4%	10%											
2022/23	226	242	242	222	221	217	239	1,609	255	1,817	29	208	11%	11%											
2023/24	226	224	245	235	224	216	220	1,589	255	1,817	29	228	11%	13%											
2024/25	226	224	227	238	236	219	218	1,587	255	1,817	29	230	11%	13%											
2025/26	226	224	227	220	239	231	221	1,588	255	1,817	29	229	11%	13%											

Figure 1 Standard WBC Roll Projection

The standard roll projection for the South West area (Figure 1 above) suggests there will be sufficient primary school capacity in the South West area until (at least) 2025/26.

New Communities, and their impact on school rolls

The purpose of the new schools is to meet the needs of the new communities, created by housing development.

As noted above the standard roll projection does capture some of the impact of new housing. However, the number of homes expected to be built in the two SDL areas is expected to accelerate in the new housing developments in the Arborfield area and be maintained at a high level in the Shinfield area. Recent and historic surveys of the occupants of these new homes show high levels of child occupancy, with markedly high rates of occupancy by pre-school age children. It is a reasonable expectation that these new homes will lead to increased demand for school places.

Year	Arborfield	Barkham	Finchampstead	Shinfield	Swallowfield	Grand Total
2015/16	0	0	0	25	0	25
2016/17	57	0	0	174	0	231
2017/18	114	0	-2	421	-3	530
2018/19	117	10	-30	456	25	578
2019/20	257	0	0	450	0	707
2020/21	285	0	40	395	0	720
2021/22	153	0	101	300	0	554
2022/23	234	0	55	220	0	509
2023/24	190	0	90	129	20	429
2024/25	160	0	90	175	0	425
2025/26	160	0	90	142	0	392
2026/27	24	0	90	105	0	219
2027/28	0	0	90	78	0	168
2028/29	0	0	90	55	0	145
2029/30	0	0	90	4	0	94

Figure 2 – new homes completed and projected to be completed in the South West Planning Area (from Wokingham Five Year Land supply data March 2019)

The table above shows the number of new homes completed to date and those projected to be completed in both South of the M4 and Arborfield Garrison SDLs.

It can be seen that nearly 2,300 homes are expected to be completed in the Arborfield Garrison SDL area from 2019/20 onwards (with over 800 expected to be completed in the 3 years from 2019/20).

The council's new home child yield model takes account of high initial child yields, reduced child yield rates as annual house building phases age and an adjustment for the number of resident children already captured in the main roll projections.

A key question is: how many of the children likely to be "generated" by new developments are already taken account of in the main projection? One way of approaching this is to consider the relationship between the roll projection and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) population projection for school age children. The importance of the ONS Population Projection is that this provides the evidence

(through the ONS Household Projection) that shows the need for around 2/3rds of the new housing in the Borough. The closer the relationship between the council's roll projection and the ONS population projection, the more likely it is that the roll projection captures most of the children resident in the new communities. In fact the trajectories of the roll and ONS population projection are very similar, indicating that 2/3rds of the roll impact of new housing is already captured in the roll projection. This leaves the roll impact of 1/3 of the new housing (so 1/3 of the projected number of resident children in new developments) as being additional to the roll projection.

Planned Housing			Main Projection plus child yield surplus / deficit
No. of new homes	Resident Children (per school year)	No. of children on top of roll projections	
608	-		30
707	37	12	15
680	72	24	20
453	97	32	9
454	117	39	20
339	133	44	15
335	147	49	10
302	158	53	7

Figure 3 – the impact of additional housing in the South West Planning Area

The table above shows the number of new homes planned across the South West Planning Area, the total number of resident children in new developments, the number of these children who will be additional to the roll projections and what this means for Reception place availability in the area (taking account of 30 additional places planned at the new school in the South of the M4 SDL).

The forecast is that the additional places needed will be met by the new school in the South of the M4 SDL area, (to be known as the Alder Grove CoE Primary school).

This is though, just an estimate. The “real world” outcomes may be different. It is important therefore that whatever option is adopted, arrangements are such that:

- Total capacity in the Arborfield area can be “frozen” to ensure that the new premises do not create high levels of surplus places in local schools. This would be damaging to the education of children on the rolls of the schools with reduced rolls.
- That, given that “real world” rolls could exceed the projections, that there is flexibility to create additional capacity, at short notice.

B. Supporting existing schools

Schools are dependent on their roll numbers for their income, with funding largely dependent on the number of children attending. If the number of children attending a

school reduce unexpectedly this can lead to a need for rapid re-organisation to ensure that budgets are balanced. This can be harmful to the effective delivery of education. Sudden reductions in the number of children attending a school can threaten the viability of schools. For these reasons it is important to time the creation of new capacity so that local needs are met, and the long term viability of existing schools is maintained.

The Arborfield area is served by two local schools:

- The Coombes CoE Primary Academy (the Coombes) in Arborfield Cross (75 places per year / 525 places and a nursery)
- Farley Hill Primary School (Farley Hill) in Farley Hill (30 places per year / 210 places).

Although both schools are used by children living in the Arborfield Garrison area, neither has good walking accessibility. The Coombes is on the edge of the neighbouring Arborfield Cross community. It is though, within statutory walking distance (for children under the age of 8) of the northern part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL. In practise though, a very high proportion of children are driven to the school (causing considerable congestion around the entrance to the school). This reflects the distance (few children walk over ½ mile to school) and that the shortest route is along the A327. Although Farley Hill is a similar distance from the new community, there are no safe walking routes from the Arborfield area to the school, so nearly all children are driven to the school (again creating local school run traffic congestion)

The Coombes benefited from investment nearly ten years ago, (but this did not extend to a comprehensive refurbishment or rationalisation of the premises), while Farley Hill is a small village primary school, with a number of undersized classrooms.

Both schools draw significant proportions of their roll from the Arborfield Garrison area. Currently, the Farley Hill School is oversubscribed, while the Coombes School has 32 unfilled (out of 75 total) Reception places. The Coombes School is performing well, with “above average” progress scores at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 for reading, writing and maths. The popularity of the school may be reduced compared to Farley Hill School because of the poor Ofsted inspection that led to the school becoming an Academy, under the Keys Trust. Farley Hill is judged to be “Good” by Ofsted.

It is likely therefore that a new school on the Arborfield Garrison SDL would be popular, because it would be accessible to a large proportion of families and offer new facilities. If opened before there is sufficient local demand, the new school could have a disproportionate impact on the Coombes School, as the less popular of the two current schools. Without a significant increase in demand, the full 60 places per year planned at the new school could leave the Coombes with no Reception roll and the Farley Hill intake halved.

Given this, there is a need to ensure that new capacity is aligned to local need, as early delivery of new capacity could be damaging to education in the area.

C. School Organisation Law

New schools are inevitably Free Schools, as a matter of national policy and law (new community schools are effectively blocked). The local authorities can invite expressions of interest and make recommendations, but the final choice of Trust to run the school is made by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) on behalf of the DfE. The RSC is not bound to follow the local authority recommendation and the local authority can only make recommendations from those Trusts that have applied to run a new school. Judgements about which Trust to recommend will reflect an evaluation at a particular point in time, and the successful Trust may change fundamentally (or be absorbed into another Trust) at a later date. Once they have taken on a new school, the Trust may decide to act in a way that does not support the wider family of schools (for example, increasing the number of places offered above local need), without the local authority being able to prevent this. This approach may therefore lead to an effective organisation taking on the new school, but does carry appreciable risk.

A number of new schools have been opened through this route, including the Bohunt Wokingham School in Arborfield. The new Alder Grove CoE Primary School in the Shinfield will also be opened via this route.

Existing schools can take on a new site, either through relocation or expansion as an annexe. This can include maintained as well as Academy / Free Schools. However, national guidance is clear that expansion into an off-site annexe cannot be a “back door” route to open a new school. Extensive guidance sets out the tests that must be met to ensure that the annexe is fully part of the existing school. In brief the tests look at the community served by the school and the annexe, the governance of the school, and the functional integration of the new and old schools (looking at the management, staff and pupils). School expansion of a maintained school on this scale would be considered a “prescribed change” and as such would require a statutory consultation and decision making process.

Wokingham opened the Charvil Primary School as an annexe to the Piggott Secondary School (with that school becoming an all-through school). In neighbouring Bracknell the new primary school on the former Transport Laboratory site will open as a second site for Crowthorne Church of England School.

Relocation of an existing school could only be possible where the additional capacity (420 places) could be protected for the long-term development of the Arborfield Green development. Relocation of a maintained school that is more than two miles from the new site is a prescribed change in law, and would therefore also require a formal statutory consultation and decision making process to be followed.

Management options evaluation

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses	Evaluation
Open a new free school	<p>Could bring in a new to the borough (or existing) high standards Trust to run the school.</p> <p>All additional places would be available to meet needs generated by the new community.</p> <p>Would be compliant with education law and DfE expectations.</p>	<p>Could bring in a Trust that chooses to work against the interests of education across the wider area.</p> <p>Could lead to an oversupply of places (which would be detrimental to other local schools).</p> <p>There is no guarantee that there will be a number of high quality proposals for the council to evaluate.</p> <p>An unknown future opening date might not be attractive to all Trusts.</p> <p>Having a new building on site would inevitably generate a pressure to open it, even if the numbers of children requiring a local school places does not justify it, possibly to the detriment of education across the area.</p> <p>Does not offer an opportunity to address issues related to the current schools.</p>	<p>This would create a risk of an oversupply of places, which in turn could be to the detriment of education provision locally.</p> <p>It would though be compliant with law and national policy.</p>
Expand Farley Hill Primary School onto the site (Farley Hill would formally retain both sites, but in practise	<p>A known, popular, Ofsted Good school.</p> <p>Confidence that a high quality provider would run the school.</p> <p>Flexibility concerning the timing of the additional places (the number of offered places would depend on the level of demand locally – so the</p>	<p>This proposal could not be agreed if Farley Hill had a poor Ofsted inspection result in future.</p> <p>Re-opening the Farley Hill site at a later date would be unpopular with parents.</p> <p>Only one additional form of entry (30 places per year) would be available at short notice. Further expansion could be achieved by the reopening of the current Farley Hill site (which might not be</p>	<p>This proposal has a number of significant advantages over an entirely new school:</p> <p>It solves the problem associated</p>

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses	Evaluation
<p>would relocate to the new site. At the point at which the original Farley Hill Primary capacity is required, the Council would have the choice of building the third form of entry on the current site or re-opening the retained site.</p>	<p>school would only open a second form of entry if this would not lead to unsupportable levels of over supply of places at the Coombes school).</p> <p>Addresses known problems with the current Farley Hill Primary School premises (undersized classrooms).</p> <p>Addresses home to school traffic congestion issues in Farley Hill and has environmental benefits.</p> <p>Increases the number of children who could walk to school compared to the existing situation.</p> <p>Gives most current Farley Hill Primary families the option of attending a school within walking distance of home.</p>	<p>popular, but could be done at short notice) or building a new third form of entry extension to the new Arborfield premises.</p>	<p>with early provision of new capacity.</p> <p>It solves the problem of poor accommodation at Farley Hill Primary School.</p> <p>It solves school run traffic congestion in Farley Hill.</p> <p>It is compliant with school organisation law.</p>
<p>Expansion or relocation of another existing school to the site</p>	<p>Would increase the number of schools that could be considered to run the new site.</p> <p>Has the potential to improve provision used by other schools,</p>	<p>Most other schools are too far away (and therefore serve other communities). They would therefore not be eligible to run an annexe in this location, in accordance with the DfE's school organisation guidance</p> <p>Relocation is only practical if the school in question already serves the same community, and would be small enough to fit into the buildings, leaving places available for growth. The Coombes, the other local primary school, has equivalent local links to Farley Hill Primary</p>	<p>Only the Coombes has sufficient local connection for this option to be valid.</p> <p>Compared to the Farley Hill Primary School option, this option offers no advantages to</p>

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses	Evaluation
		<p>School. However, that school has too many children on roll to relocate to the site, but has too few Reception Year children to occupy two sites. This would therefore carry the risk that the new building would be ready for use in 2021, but could not open due to insufficient demand.</p> <p>The Coombes would need to use its existing buildings (which were remodelled and expanded in the last decade), so this would not lead to an improvement in the accommodation of that school.</p> <p>This option carries no obvious “green” dividend or reduction in traffic congestion because it does not potentially reduce the number of car trips, particularly to Farley Hill Village.</p> <p>There are no obvious benefits compared to the option of establishing a new Free School.</p>	<p>other schools or communities.</p> <p>This is not a viable option, taking account of local preferences, the communities served by other schools, the sizes of existing schools and the need to be compliant with the DfE’s guidance.</p>

Piers Brunning

Senior Specialist (People and Place)

Strategic and Commissioning

Wokingham Borough Council

26/11/2019