



Wednesday 1st March 2017

The Swan School – update

Dear Parent

I am pleased to be able to update you about the plans for Oxford's new secondary school, The Swan School. I know many local parents and residents, especially those with children in primary school, are eager for more news.

As you probably know, our proposal to establish The Swan School was accepted by the Government under the Free Schools programme. For the past few months the Education Funding Agency (EFA), which is part of the Department for Education, has been working intensively with the local authorities to find a viable site - which has proved very challenging due to the lack of available sites needed to accommodate such a secondary school in Oxford.

Although the EFA still needs to go through the necessary processes to finalise and secure the site, after careful consideration the EFA's conclusion is that the Harlow Centre in Old Marston is the only viable location that can cater to Oxford's need for secondary school places by 2019. This follows an extensive site search.

In this context, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet has now decided to make the site available to the Education Funding Agency, which will be responsible for developing the site and building the new school.

I am very pleased that this takes us one important step closer to establishing an excellent new school for Oxford.

Some have suggested that the new school should be sited in the south of Oxford, notably at Osney Mead. Before selecting the preferred site, the EFA explored a wide range of alternative options, including Osney Mead, which were discounted because they were either not available, not viable, or not deliverable to meet the needs of the school and the growing need for secondary school places in Oxford by 2019. The Agency also consulted with Oxfordshire County Council to ensure the site search was in the right catchment area to meet basic need for secondary school places.

The Council has confirmed that the Harlow Centre is an appropriate site to meet future need for secondary places because The Cherwell School nearby is a popular and over-subscribed school and the new academy would help in terms of planning for the future regarding school places, in this specific area of Oxford as well as across the whole city. If building were to be delayed while waiting for any potential future sites, many more Oxford parents would face difficulty in terms of school choice and travel times from 2019 onwards.

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As part of the project, the EFA is working closely with the highways and planning authorities to discuss potential alternative access arrangements for The Swan School, including the possibility of a separate entrance. The aim is to prevent any additional congestion around the existing access arrangements for St Nicholas Primary School and Meadowbrook College. Residents will be consulted as these plans progress.

Naturally we also recognise our responsibility for effective management of travel to the school once it is operational. We will be working with the local highways authority and the community on a travel plan to help mitigate the impact of pupils travelling to the school at peak hours, looking at a range of factors including the opening times of the area's schools.

The Education Funding Agency, which is responsible for developing the site and building the school, has confirmed that, due to the complexity and constraints of the site, it will not be ready to open the school in 2018. The opening date is now expected to be September 2019, rather than September 2018, subject to the usual planning permission and timescales for completing the construction work.

This is of course disappointing, but assuming the school can open in 2019 that will still be in time to cater for the expected increase in numbers of students moving up to secondary school that year. Meanwhile, to help reduce the current pressure on school places, The Cherwell School will increase its Year 7 intake by 15 pupils in 2017. Although the school is limited as to how far it can go because of classroom and site restrictions, it is making these extra places available before The Swan School opens to help the community and provide more choice for local parents in the meantime. My thanks to The Cherwell School for making this possible.

In the meantime, Oxfordshire County Council has also confirmed there are sufficient places in good and outstanding schools within Oxford's school system to accommodate children starting secondary school in 2017 and 2018.

The Swan School will be part of the River Learning Trust, which already includes The Cherwell School, Wheatley Park School, and Cutteslowe, New Marston, Wolvercote and Tower Hill primary schools. We are now looking forward to creating an outstanding new secondary school for Oxford.

Public consultation will form part of the free schools process and separate planning process for the new school, and we will be sure to keep you up to date with plans and progress.

Parents have been very supportive of the new school and I look forward to your continued support and involvement.

Yours sincerely



Paul James
Chief Executive, River Learning Trust