



Report of the Director of City Development

Executive Board

Date: 22nd August 2007

Subject: Draft Leeds Girls High School Planning & Development Brief

Electoral wards affected:

Headingley
Hyde Park & Woodhouse

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific implications for:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the gap

Eligible for call In

Not eligible for call in
(details contained in the report)

Executive Summary

This report considers the outcome of the consultation of the draft Planning Brief for Leeds Girl's High School, including the deputation to Council on 18 July 2007, and advises on the way forward.

Public consultation on the planning brief raised a large number of concerns and objections, which are summarised in the report. Given the nature of these objections the report sets out 3 options for Executive Board to consider in deciding how the brief can be progressed or whether, given the fundamental objections which have been raised to some aspects of the brief, it should be withdrawn and development proposals be dealt with through the planning application process.

The paper summarises the key principles of the Planning Brief which has been prepared to guide the future redevelopment of site following closure of the school's Headingley campus in July 2008.

The Brief seeks to provide an appropriate balance between facilitating a viable re-use of some school buildings, together with an appropriate level of new development, whilst also securing significant community benefits.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Executive Board of the outcome of the recent public consultation on the Leeds Girls High School Planning and Development Brief, and in the light of this to seek the Board's views on the way forward.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In January 2004, the Governors of Leeds Girls High School (LGHS) and Leeds Grammar School (LGS) announced that the two schools were to merge to form 'The Grammar School at Leeds' (GSAL). The merger will result in the relocation of all pupils 7 years and above and staff at LGHS to the current LGS site at Alwoodley Gates, Leeds.
- 2.2 In August 2006, the City Council resolved to grant full planning permission for alterations and extensions to the existing school buildings (30/618/05/FU) and associated highway works (06/00720/FU) in Alwoodley to enable this merger to take place.
- 2.3 As a consequence of the expansion of the Alwoodley Gates site, the current LGHS sites located on Victoria Road/Headingley Lane will become surplus to requirements. The school will vacate the sites in July 2008, thereafter the land will be unoccupied, with the exception of Ford House which is being retained to provide accommodation for the Pre School for children under 7 years of age.
- 2.4 The school occupies four sites, comprising the main school site bordered by Headingley Lane and Victoria Road; Ford House and its garden/sports pitch on the north side of Victoria Road; the swimming pool and gym and hockey pitch on the south side of Victoria Road; and the Elinor Lupton on Headingley Lane/Richmond Road. With the exception of the Victoria Road site, all lie within the Headingley Conservation Area. The Main School site includes a Grade II listed building (Rose Court) and three of the sites (excluding the Elinor Lupton Centre) have protected playing pitches.
- 2.5 A draft Planning & Development Brief has been prepared by GVA Grimley on behalf of the school (the Morley House Trust) in consultation with LCC. The aim of the brief is to help bring about a comprehensive approach to the re-use and redevelopment of the Main School site, Ford House Garden and Victoria Road site, as the basis for considering future planning applications. The Elinor Lupton Centre (Grade II listed building) is subject to separate negotiations, given the specific requirements for providing an alternative occupier for this building.
- 2.6 A key objective of this process has been to ensure that any future re-use and redevelopment of the site delivers a high quality scheme which respects its landscape setting and Conservation Area context and delivers lasting benefits to the local community. The brief is intended to prevent the individual parts of the campus from being considered in isolation of each other and to balance potential community benefits with development options across the whole school site.

3.0 KEY FEATURES OF THE DRAFT BRIEF

- 3.1 The key community benefits proposed in the Brief, and accepted by the school, are:
- Ford House Garden: to be given to the city council, with a capital sum to improve its quality and to maintain it thereafter, in order to create a new community park.
 - The retention of the school swimming pool and sports hall, to be owned and managed by a third party, but with a 'community access agreement' to ensure that there is affordable access to the facilities for local people.

- 3.2 Officers have pressed for the retention of this in the belief that it offers a unique opportunity to provide a facility of this kind in this area. The alternative was to allow the school or a future developer to demolish this building and to develop on its footprint. Given that the school would have had to sell this building at 'less than best' in order to secure its retention, officers accepted the principle of developing on the playing field at the rear of this building (a protected playing pitch on the Leeds UDP).
- 3.3 The possible development of this pitch and the tennis courts on the main school site, which are also classed as a protected playing field in the UDP, is however contingent upon the school being able to demonstrate compliance with the guidance contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) and satisfying Sport England that, in the round, they are providing replacement sports facilities of equal value. This assessment would include the additional facilities the school are providing at the Alwoodley site, together with the retained and improved (in terms of public access) greenspace and sports facilities in Headingley.
- 3.4 The current school campus is landscape dominated and the majority of it falls within the Headingley Conservation Area. The site not only contains a listed building but there are also several other listed buildings in close proximity which are relevant considerations in bringing forward a development scheme. Therefore, other key aims in the brief are to:
- Retain listed buildings and protect their setting
 - Retain other key buildings which have a positive effect on the character of the Conservation Area e.g. the main school building built in 1905.
 - Protect trees and maximise the amount of open greenspace on the main school site
 - Minimise vehicular access to/from Headingley Lane
 - Create new north-south pedestrian routes through the site
- 3.5 A further pre-requisite in developing the brief was to develop the site in a manner that was geared to family occupation in order to create a better housing mix and population balance in Headingley. The brief sought to avoid it being attractive to developers of student housing.

4.0 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Given the importance of this site to the Headingley and Hyde Park/Woodhouse communities there has been a prolonged period of public consultation which has lasted over 18 months and has entailed:-
- Tours of the site and buildings (including pool/gym) for ward members and community groups
 - Public meetings
 - Briefings to Plans Panel West and the Inner North West Committee
 - Briefings for a group of community representatives
 - Drop-in sessions/exhibitions at the school
- 4.2 Following this extensive informal consultation, the draft brief was published for comments on 24th May 2007 for a period of 5 weeks. However, in practice officers have accepted representations beyond this up to the deadline for this report (around 12 weeks in total).
- 4.3 The consultation was advertised by a variety of means, including site notices at all of

the school entrances, posters in buildings in the Hyde Park & Headingley area, a leaflet drop of approximately 10,000 homes and businesses in the locality of the school, press release and direct mail to local community groups and individuals. The brief was also made available for inspection in Headingley library, the Development Enquiry Centre in Leeds and at the school; the brief was also posted on the LCC and GSAL websites. Two drop-in sessions were also held at the school on Friday 8th June (4-8pm) and Saturday 9th June (10am-2pm).

5.0 SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

5.1 A total of 165 representations have been received. These were received from individuals, local community groups e.g. Friends of Woodhouse Moor, Leeds Girls High Action Group, and several organisations, e.g. Sport England, The Victorian Society and ASDA. In the main the representations focussed solely on the outstanding concerns of these groups, with little reference made to any content of the brief, which was supported. This is not unusual and mirrors the outcome of other consultation exercises. A summary of comments submitted (Appendix 1) is available for inspection upon request from the clerk named on the front sheet of this agenda.

The representations fit into the following broad categories:

A. Brownfield Land

5.2 The question of whether land could be classified as 'Brownfield Land' was raised by several respondents. It was felt that to classify parts of the school site, particularly the playing pitches, as previously developed land would be contrary to national planning advice.

B. Conservation Area/Listed Buildings

5.3 Concerns were raised by the majority of respondents over the appropriateness of any development on this site within the context of the Headingley conservation area. Little reference was made to the listed buildings on site although several respondents felt that there was a need to protect these as assets contributing to the character of the area.

C. Design

5.4 Objections were raised to the design parameters stated in the brief. In particular respondents were generally unhappy with the proposal to erect a 4-6 storey apartment block in the south-west corner of the Main school site. This was felt to be too high within the context of other buildings in the locality.

D. Sustainable design & construction

5.5 An issue raised by a small number of respondents was a desire to provide housing on-site which was sustainable in its design and construction. The development of these sites is felt by some people to be an opportunity to develop an eco-friendly, flagship development on a key site in Headingley/Hyde Park.

E. Greenspace/playing pitches

5.6 Greenspaces and playing pitches was a topic that consistently came up in representations. The general sentiment was that the area was felt to be deficient in greenspaces, both in terms of its proximity to N3 allocation (a defined area on the

Unitary Development Plan which depicts areas of greenspace shortage) and local perception of greenspace provision. Most respondents were in favour of promoting maximum retention of greenspace on the three sites and welcomed the idea of bringing forward Ford House Gardens as a community park.

- 5.7 It was felt however that building on any of the areas identified as N6 protected playing pitches would be unacceptable and cited a lack of pitches in this area, particularly for local schools i.e. Brudenell Primary School. Other reasons given were the negative impact on the health of the local population through loss of facilities, visual amenity of greenspaces, and that these proposals contravene both local and national planning guidance and the views of Sport England.

F. Housing

- 5.8 The density of the development proposed in the brief was in general felt to be too high. This was felt to be a problem in that higher density development was not felt to be conducive to the provision of family housing, the tenure which was supported by the majority of respondents. References were drawn to the imbalance of population within the Headingley/Hyde Park area in terms of a heavily weighted student population. According to respondents the brief did not go far enough to promote family housing and did not refer to the UDP's 'Area of housing mix' (policy H15) which attempts to redress the balance of housing types in this area. A fairly large proportion of respondents would not want to see student housing developed on these sites.
- 5.9 In terms of Affordable Housing the general consensus was that the brief should state the minimum 15% affordable housing required in this area be adhered to. Again, the majority of respondents felt that references to a reduction in this requirement should not be mentioned or encouraged in the brief.

G. Landscape & Ecology

- 5.10 The presence of a large number of mature trees was felt by the majority of respondents to represent an asset to the school campus and as such should be protected. They were also felt to form part of the character of the area. In terms of ecology several respondents raised concerns over the need to protect natural habitats on the three sites.

H. Public consultation period

- 5.11 The majority of respondents felt that the 5 week consultation period allotted was not sufficient for this type of document. Several respondents referenced the *Compact for Leeds* document which suggests an 8-12 week consultation period is appropriate for a council document.
- 5.12 Several respondents also felt that at this stage the brief should not bear the council's logo as it suggested endorsing a document which had not been ratified.
- 5.13 The effectiveness of targeting hard to reach groups was also questioned.

I. Sports Hall/ swimming pool

- 5.14 Overwhelming support was given for the retention of these facilities although concern was raised over the level and cost of community access and questioned the mechanism by which this would be ensured.

J. Transport

- 5.15 Transport was raised as an issue for the majority of respondents. Most felt that the local transport network was already under pressure and raised concerns over the impact a residential development will have on local roads. The general tone of comments was that not enough reference was made to the likely traffic impacts in the draft brief. This included concerns over car parking both on and off the sites.

K. Miscellaneous

- 5.16 Several respondents were unhappy with the format the document was produced in and argue that parts of the document were illegible or printed in such a way so as to confuse or mislead the public.
- 5.17 Several comments were made regarding the Elinor Lupton Centre – a property owned by the school but excluded from the brief. It was felt that this building should have been included in the development brief.

L. Sport England

- 5.18 As a statutory consultee on any planning application involving playing fields the views of Sport England were sought on the draft development brief. The main issues raised are discussed below:

- The need for a full PPG17 – greenspace – audit was raised and suggestions were made as to the strengthening of references to this in the development brief. The position of Sport England is that any loss of playing pitches would need to be justified through a PPG17 audit of existing facilities in Headingley and the needs of the existing and potential future users of the site.
- Re-provision of facilities at Alwoodley may be a consideration in justifying development of the playing pitches at the Headingley site although not outweighed by more pressing local requirements for sports facilities/greenspaces in Headingley.
- The classification of playing fields as brownfield land must not be included as this is contrary to national planning guidance.
- The issue over private/publicly accessible playing fields or sports facilities should not enter into an argument for redevelopment.
- The need to find a suitable operator for the sports hall/swimming pool should not be subject to a limited timescale as set out in the draft brief. Retention of the sports hall/swimming pool should be accompanied by a community access plan.

- 5.19 The **members for the Headingley & Hyde Park wards** have provided a collective response:-

- Building on the Victoria Road pitch would be contrary to policy and the playing pitch should not be built on;
- The proposed heights of buildings, particularly those proposed near to the Ford House greenspace at 6 storeys is too high;
- Affordable housing provision should be provided at the maximum levels dictated by policy;

- The brief makes no reference to the UDP policy context on student accommodation and should be included/referred to i.e. the Area of Housing Mix which replaced the Area of Student Housing Restraint (ASHORE);

The collective view of the members is that unless all four of these issues can be dealt with and the brief amended, the brief should not be pursued.

5.20 **Briefing to Plans Panel on 14th June 2007**

The following comments were made by Members:-

- 6 storey buildings to the Headingley Lane site would be too high and be unacceptable
- Nothing less than the standard affordable housing provision would be accepted
- Several Members expressed a preference for the Victoria Road and Ford House greenspace proposals to be reversed
- Concern at complying with greenspace/Greenfield policy – loss of playing fields
- Some concern at the Elinor Lupton building being left out of the brief

5.21 **Briefing to North West Inner Area Committee on 28th June 2007**

The following comments were made:-

- Concern regarding the lack of play space, both formal and informal in inner Leeds and the lack of safe places for children to play
- Buildings on the protected playing pitches is unacceptable
- Concern over heights of buildings

6.0 **RESPONSE TO DEPUTATION TO FULL COUNCIL & OTHER ISSUES RAISED BY REPRESENTATIONS**

6.1 A deputation was made to Full Council on 18th July on behalf of the Leeds Girls High Action Group in response to the draft brief. A response to the three key points made in this deputation is set out below, together with a general response to the main issues raised by all other representations during the consultation process.

6.2 **Need to balance the local population**

6.3 Concern has been raised at the effect of the student population on the long-term residents of Headingley and Hyde Park. The deputation argued that high quality, mixed, family housing would improve the area and encourage a wider range of local shops and amenities.

6.4 Officers agree with this general aim. However, planning policy does not enable the City Council to prevent all new student accommodation. The Area of Student Housing Restraint (ASHORE) policy previously proposed in the draft UDP Review restricted all new student accommodation within a defined boundary which included Headingley and Hyde Park. This policy was rejected by the UDP Review Inspector who recommended that it was replaced by Policy H15 (Area of Housing Mix), the objective of which is to ensure a balance of housing types in the defined area. The policy states that planning permission will be granted for housing intended for occupation by students, subject to the housing stock available for family occupation would not be unacceptably reduced in quantity and quality, together with other

requirements related to neighbours' living conditions, design and parking considerations and the stock of student housing.

6.5 The need for increased provision of family housing in this part of Leeds is recognised and the planning brief does state that the redevelopment of the school provides the opportunity to help re-establish a mixed and balanced local community through the development of a range and choice of non-student housing types and sizes. As such, careful consideration will be given to the need to provide family accommodation in light of all other planning considerations.

6.6 **Need to retain and increase greenspace**

6.7 The need to retain all greenspaces was another key point in the deputation and in many other representations. The school's agents will be required to provide a full assessment of playing pitch provision (PPG17) as part of the planning application submission. Development of any of the playing pitch land will be contingent upon Sport England (statutory consultee) being satisfied with the approach adopted.

6.8 Whilst it is recognised that a significant part of the developable area is allocated as protected playing pitches, this should be balanced with the package of benefits which have been achieved. The Ford House garden is currently in private use, but subject to the provisions in this brief being adopted, this site will become a publicly accessible area of greenspace provided at no cost to the Council together with funding for the laying out and future maintenance of the land. The existing swimming pool and gym will be retained and a community access agreement will be secured. This is considered to be a significant element of the wider package of community benefits consistent with the scale/nature of the development proposed.

6.9 Many representations argued that the Victoria Road pitch should be retained and managed as a sports pitch. However, if it was to be retained, it would clearly need an organisation to operate and manage the facility. With this in mind, officers have approached LMU, University of Leeds, Park Lane College and the Parks & Countryside service and all confirmed that they would not be interested in taking on responsibility for a single pitch in this location. It is poorly drained and if future use and maintenance is not secured it is likely to become a derelict site potentially subject to anti-social behaviour. The existing tennis courts on the main school site are also protected playing pitches, however as with the Victoria Road site, none of the agencies contacted are interested in taking on responsibility for them. As part of the redevelopment of the main school site, a significant area of informal on-site greenspace will be required to be provided within the design of the scheme.

6.10 **Traffic congestion on the A660**

6.11 Traffic is a key concern for the community. Whilst the removal of most of the school traffic (drop off & pick-up) is a benefit, people are clearly keen to see the development of the site as an opportunity to improve the overall situation. Officers recognise this and have stressed the point from the earliest discussions on the proposed amalgamation. A full transportation assessment will be required to be submitted as part of the planning application. This will include an assessment of the traffic generated from the redevelopment proposal and set out public transport provisions. The requirements of the new draft Supplementary Planning Documents on developer contributions to public transport and travel plans will be applied and Metro will be a consultee when the package of public transport measures are being drawn up.

6.12 **Density/Building heights**

6.13 Many representations, including the deputation to full Council, considered the proposed 4 to 6 storey development in the sw corner of the main school site to be excessive. This is a view shared by officers, see recommended changes in para. 9.3

6.14 **Affordable Housing**

6.15 The deputation and other representations argued that the affordable housing policy where by 15% provision is required will be applied. This view is also shared by officers; see recommended changes in section 9.3.

6.16 **Consultation Period**

6.17 A number of respondents argued that the consultation period was rushed. Officers do not accept this. Discussion with ward members and community representatives has been ongoing for a period of 18 months and officers have continued to accept representations well beyond the formal 5 week deposit period. Notwithstanding this, the advertised 5 week consultation period is in line with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which was considered by an independently appointed government inspector and which is also consistent with the Town & Country Planning (Local Development)(England) Regulations 2004.

6.18 **Use of the Council's logo on the brief**

6.19 A number of people questioned whether the Council's logo should have appeared on the brief, given that it was prepared by consultants working on behalf of the school, a private landowner. The Council's logo is included on the cover of the brief to reflect the partnership approach that was adopted between the city council and the school in order to bring forward an acceptable development solution for this important site and to facilitate public consultation, prior to detailed development proposals being drawn up. The intention from the outset was to secure Council approval of the brief.

6.20 **The other issues raised during the consultation:-**

6.21 The comments about the school sites not being wholly brownfield land are noted and should the brief be adopted, the text in the brief will be revised to reflect this. With regard to the appropriateness of additional development in the context of the site's Conservation Area status, the designation of a Conservation Area should not stifle new development. However the brief does point out that care needs to be taken over the siting, scale and design of new buildings to ensure it is sensitive to the character of the area. The brief also emphasises the requirement to protect Rose Court (a listed building) and its setting. The existing trees on the sites are also protected by the Conservation Area designation and the proposed loss of some trees would have to be agreed with the Council. With regard to requests for any development to be sustainable and eco-friendly, the brief already promotes sustainable construction methods.

7.0 **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Significant officer time has been invested in bringing forward the planning and development brief, both in terms of discussions with the school and their agent and the consultation with Ward Members and the local community. This process will continue with the preparation and submission of planning applications for the

redevelopment of the school sites.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

8.1 The development of the site of Leeds Girl's High School will need to be carried out in full consultation with the local community and ward members. The redevelopment and re-use of the school site in Headingley links to a number of the Council's strategic outcomes, including:

- All communities are thriving and harmonious places where people are happy to live
- All neighbourhoods are safe, clean, green and well maintained.

A total of 165 representations were submitted in response to the draft brief and a summary of the comments made (Appendix 1) is available for inspection from the clerk named on the front sheet of this agenda.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The draft planning & development brief has been prepared to enable a comprehensive approach to the future redevelopment of the school sites, which makes best use of the existing buildings by sympathetic conversion works together with an appropriate amount of new building. The Council's intention was to develop a meaningful agreement with the school on the overall redevelopment and re-use of the site in the context of the area's character, site constraints and planning policy. An overarching objective of this has been to ensure a development scheme which is sympathetic to the listed buildings, conservation area and valuable trees and landscape features. In addition, the brief has sought to deliver significant community benefits, as summarised in paras. 3.1 to 3.5 above.

9.2 It is recognised that the public consultation exercise has raised a considerable degree of interest and concern among residents and members. It is considered that many of these could be addressed by the proposed changes to the brief as set out below. However, there remain some fundamental tensions between the aspirations of the school and the expectations of the local community and elected members.

Proposed changes to the brief

9.3 Following consideration of the representations submitted it is considered that a number of changes should be made to the brief, as set out below. The paragraph numbers in italics refer to those in the brief:

- *Para 4.4* – This should be revised to distinguish between the area of existing buildings which should be classed as 'brownfield' and the other open area of greenspace or playing fields which are 'greenfield.'
- *Para 4.5* – It should be made clear that playing fields cannot be classified as previously developed land, in line with the guidance in PPG17, and that any proposed development would need to be justified by the guidance in PPG17.
- *Para 4.7* – This paragraph should refer to UDP Policy H15 and describe the policy objectives in the wider Area of housing Mix. Within this, there should be a stronger reference to the clear intention to design and market the school site for family housing in order to contribute towards a better housing mix and population balance in the area.
- *Para 4.8* – Need to emphasise that the overall design and layout of the development would be determined by its Conservation Area status and the need to protect existing trees.
- *Para 4.22* – Explain here what is meant by a PPG17 Assessment and that

any development on playing fields (e.g. Victoria Road pitch and the tennis courts on the main site) is contingent upon Sport England being satisfied with the replacement facilities being created.

- *Para 4.23* – Explain what a Transport Assessment is (referring to para 2.3 of PPG13) and refer to the emerging SPD's on Travel Plans and Public Transport Contributions. Also make it clear that Metro will be a statutory consultee on any future planning applications.
- *Para 4.42* - delete reference to any possible reduction in the affordable housing contribution. The requirement will be 15%.
- *Page 41- The parameters plan* – revise reference to the block adjacent to the Headingley Business Park from 4 – 6 storey to 3 – 4 storey

- 9.4 The school and their agents were consulted on these proposed changes and have stated (email dated 6 Aug. 2007) that they do not accept any reduction in density in the sw corner of the main site (4-6 storeys to 3-4 storeys) and the proposed change to para 4.42 relating to affordable housing. They wish to reserve their position on these matters until the submission of a planning application. The email also states that if the Council do not agree with this, the school would wish to disassociate itself from the brief, including the removal of its logo. Clearly, such a position would have other ramifications, including the potential loss of community benefits negotiated with the school.
- 9.5 Officers believe that the provisions in the brief offer an acceptable balance between facilitating a viable re-use of school buildings, together with an appropriate level of new development, and securing significant and long lasting benefits for the local community. If the changes to the brief set out in para 9.3 above are accepted, the only main area of contention left, as far as the local community is concerned, is about the future of the pitch at the rear of the sports hall on Victoria Road. Although the views expressed during the consultation about this site are understood, officers remain convinced that, in the context of the community benefits which have been negotiated and which are described in this report, the principle of allowing some residential development on this site is acceptable. This of course is also subject to Sport England being satisfied with the measures taken to compensate for this loss of a pitch. Clearly any housing scheme on this site would need to be designed carefully and incorporate an appropriate amount of greenspace in line with UDP Policy.
- 9.6 Accepting the above position (Option 1), i.e. keeping the brief essentially as it is, with the changes recommended in para. 9.3, would therefore still fall short of meeting the community's aspirations to protect all playing fields. Equally, as noted in para. 9.4, the High School would strongly oppose two key changes in the brief which are now recommended, relating to affordable housing and the height and density of development on the sw corner of the main school site.
- 9.7 Option 2 would be to change the brief more radically to meet the community's and elected member's wishes by protecting the playing fields from development (this would apply to the pitch behind the sports hall on Victoria Road and the tennis courts on the main school site). However, such an option would drive a deeper wedge between the school and the city council in relation to this site, to the extent that the school would withdraw from the brief. Clearly, there would be a high risk of the school also withdrawing the community benefits which they had provisionally agreed to in the emerging planning brief. It is the opinion of officers that it is not realistic to demand this and expect the same level of community benefits to be gained.
- 9.8 A third option would be to recognise that the Council's efforts to reach a broad agreement with the school, the local community and ward members on the

parameters for the redevelopment and re-use of the school has failed and that the brief should now be withdrawn. This would lead to the future of the school site being determined through the planning application process.

9.9 In short, it has not proved possible to satisfy all parties, which was the underlying ambition for the exercise in the first place.

9.10 Option 3 is therefore perhaps the logical outcome given present circumstances but clearly has drawbacks and Members should be mindful of the implications of the brief not being approved. Planning applications will inevitably be submitted, for either the whole campus or separate planning applications for each of the three school sites, rather than a package of proposals. This could lead to protracted negotiations and possible appeal in the event that the applications are refused. In such an event, a government Inspector's recommendations may not be in accord with the views of Members and the local community, particularly given that no agency has identified a need to take on the Victoria Road playing pitch. Without the benefit of a planning brief to guide development, it is likely that the application and appeal process would be prolonged with the associated uncertainty about the future use of the site. The school will become vacant after July 2008 and would be unoccupied with associated security concerns arising.

9.11 Also, in the absence of an approved brief, the community benefits described in this report, may not be realised. For example, the future use and maintenance of the Ford House garden would be uncertain, with potentially renewed pressure placed on the Council to accept some development on the site, a scenario which officers have firmly resisted to date. The gym and pool will become vacant after July 2008 and the school will not be in a position to reach a possible agreement for its sale and the associated arrangements for community access until the overall scope for development has been agreed. However, maintaining the building and internal plant following the school's closure in July 2008 may seriously jeopardise the possibility of it being retained as a community based facility. The gym and pool building could potentially be demolished in order to secure development value by providing new housing on this site. Under the current arrangements the School would accept "less than best" value for its disposal. However without the brief the school may seek to secure the site's full market value by redevelopment.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of these conclusions, Members are invited to consider the options set out in Section 9 of this report.