

New College Telford

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Tuesday 19 January 2010

Minutes

Present: Mr D Hopkins (Chairman)
Dr R Hargreaves
Mr G Clark

In attendance: Mr B Doyle (View Architects)
Mrs B Tyley
Mr P Taylor (Clerk)

1 Apologies

Mr M Crowson, Mr A Pickerin.

2 Confirmation of Minutes

With the amendment of two typographical errors ('policy' for 'policy' page 2 and 'officers of the' for 'offices of' page 3) the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting of 8 December 2009 were confirmed.

3 Declarations of Interest

None.

4 Accommodation

Mrs Tyley introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Committee, noting that the report provided up to date information on the proposals for investment in refectory, student social areas and teaching facilities. She summarised the consideration of proposals at previous Finance & General Purposes and Corporation meetings, and outlined the recent work with View Architects, undertaken to refine the preferred 'option 6', and referred to: developments in the canopy extension, reception layout, patio area, performing arts layout; the teaching and corridor spaces; and external design and finishes. She reported on the detailed cost estimates, included as a confidential appendix to the report, noting that the total estimated cost was

£2.46m, a figure within the cost used for financial modelling by the College, and that the estimated cost per square metre was well within LSC cost norms.

She reported on the proposed professional fees, noting that an allowance of £262k had been included in estimates, and drew the Committee's attention to the summary of fees set out in detail in the report. Mrs Tyley noted that the approach taken in securing professional services would meet the OJEC requirements for procurement within the EU. She referred to the previously completed 10 year planned maintenance programme for the College and the review currently underway to ensure the programme is revised in the light of the proposal and thereafter used to inform the financial plan and capital investment appraisal.

Mrs Tyley noted the consultations (undertaken and planned) on the proposal with staff, students and the LSC, and for planning purposes with officers of the local authority. In response to questions from Dr Hargreaves and Mr Hopkins, Mr Doyle described the main features of the planning process within local authorities, and confirmed that notwithstanding a generally positive response from local authority officers, the decision on planning approval would be taken by the planning authority, that is Members of the Council.

On the matter of consultation with the LSC, Mr Clark reminded members that under the College's current Financial Memorandum arrangements (which pertain to the end of March 2010) LSC approval is required. Thereafter there would be a need to involve the local authority and Young People's Learning Agency. The College would need to submit to the LSC: the property case, the education case, and the financial case, including capital investment appraisal. He noted that the LSC property advisor had visited the College and had indicated his strong support for the proposal.

On the matter of the financial case for the proposal, Mrs Tyley reported that work was underway on completion of the capital investment appraisal, and anticipated that when complete, it would successfully establish the affordability of the proposal. The detail would be prepared for presentation to the Corporation for its special meeting to consider the proposal in February.

In debate on the matter Dr Hargreaves and Mr Hopkins questioned whether making an investment of the size required by the proposal would place an undue burden on College finances such that it endangered the long term future of the College. In response, Mr Clark noted that conditions throughout the anticipated loan period (20 years) were impossible to forecast with any degree of accuracy. However, he noted that the forthcoming five year period was crucial for the College given the uncertainties of the context within which it operated. He commented that the proposal seemed to best remedy key shortcomings in College accommodation, and would help ensure continuing healthy student recruitment. He noted that healthy student recruitment was vital for the financial stability of the College and that not making the financial investment to improve accommodation was potentially a more significant risk for the College than making it. He felt that over the crucial period of the next five years a project of the size of the proposal was affordable. Mr Doyle

emphasised the point that the proposal was free standing, in that although it was carefully conceived to be consistent with other elements in the College 'master plan', it was entirely satisfactory as a 'standalone' development and did not commit the College to further investments on other phases.

At this point in proceedings Mr Doyle conducted a presentation on 'Option 6' the Refectory Project, and tabled a copy of the presentation (copy in minute book). He referred to the new build and refurbishment on the ground floor noting that the proposed entrance would be the main entry point for visitors to the College and students using 'B' block. Mr Clark confirmed that the new entrance would allow a marked improvement in security, particularly out of the College day. Mr Doyle referred to the significant improvement in refectory accommodation the proposal would bring, since there would be a much improved 'sense of space' in the new refectory engendered by the higher ceiling. In the matter of the new classroom accommodation on the first floor he noted the intention to ensure the development retained maximum flexibility by the use of moveable partitions. He noted also that a flexible partition would be significant in the use of the new performing arts/sports space, commenting that the partition envisaged would be perfectly capable of sufficient rigidity for the use of the space for ball sports.

On the matter of the classroom block, he suggested that increased flexibility could be offered by increasing corridor space to allow more social space for students. On construction detail, particularly the rear elevation, he referred to the curved roof profile and the intention to continue the roofing material down to the first floor exterior. Mr Doyle noted that currently there was no intention to alter the existing finish on the wall between the proposed classroom block and new entrance. Mr Hopkins commented that the existing wall finish was in a poor condition and it would provide an unattractive contrast with the new build, particularly in view of the fact that it would be part of the College very much on view being adjacent to the new entrance. Mrs Tyley undertook to re-examine the wall finish in the light of Mr Hopkins' comments. Mr Clark referred to the 'bonus' of the new flexible space that would become available in the former refectory area.

Turning to the proposed programme timeline, Mr Doyle summarised the main activities involved and the planned duration of each, noting the planned completion of new build and refurbishment by September 2011. In response to a question from Dr Hargreaves on critical areas and potential slippage, Mr Doyle commented that the programme timeline was achievable, and that there was some flexibility in that some phases, currently separated in time could in fact be overlapped. He concluded his presentation by summarising the main project risks.

Mr Hopkins thanked Mr Doyle, the Principal and Vice Principal for their contributions and noted that members of the Committee were very positive about the proposal, with satisfactory answers and explanations being given in response to any concerns and questions raised. The Committee resolved to congratulate all involved in developing the proposal, and to support the

ongoing work required to submit a full proposal to the Corporation on 9 February 2010.

Clerk's Note: at this point in proceedings, Mr Doyle left the meeting.

5 College Planning and Priorities

Mr Clark introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Committee, explaining that it provided further information about College planning processes, recent developments, and some re-prioritisation to meet the demands of a new year and new era. Mr Clark noted that in the period of intensive audits, extended reviews and assessments that culminated in the Ofsted inspection in mid-December 2009, considerable pressures were placed upon the College, and in particular had involved himself and the Vice Principal in many additional activities. As a consequence, there was a strong element of 'catch up' and re-prioritisation involved as the College entered 2010.

He reported on the designation of sixth form Colleges exercise, noting that the process would be completed by the end of March 2010, with a launch event for the new sector in April 2010.

On funding and planning, Mr Clark reported that the 'dialogue' meeting with the LSC and local authority in January 2010 had been positive.

Mr Clark reported on his determination, with the Vice Principal, to communicate to all members of staff the need to: (i) focus upon student learning, progress and achievement; and (ii) improve performance, particularly in terms of the key measure of success rates. He drew the Committee's attention to the main elements of the two displays used with College managers, that setting out the new Improvement Agenda, and that showing the College Planning Framework. He also noted the displays on Choices and Decisions, and Priorities used with College staff.

Mr Clark reported that College leaders were undertaking a thoroughgoing review to be completed by early February. His intention was to use the review to be able to provide the Corporation with a clear picture of the College situation, its performance and capacity to improve. He reported that he anticipated the need to make changes in College management.

6 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee will take place on Tuesday 23 February 2010. In accordance with past practice, a meeting of the Remuneration Committee will be held on the same evening.