

New College Corporation

Tuesday 9 February 2010

Minutes of Special Meeting

Present: Dr R Hargreaves (Chairman)
Dr S Ali
Miss J Almond (part)
Mrs S Bass
Miss G Bleasby
Mr G Clark
Mr M Crowson (part)
Mr J Dean
Mr J Dwane
Mr D Hopkins
Mr A Pickerin
Mr J Shaw
Mr S Walton

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

1 Apologies

Cllr I Fletcher, Mrs J Millington.

2 Confirmation of Minutes

In the light of shortcomings in the reproduction of the minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 15 December 2009, the Chairman determined that their consideration should be deferred to the next regular Corporation meeting to be held on 9 March 2010.

3 Declarations of Interest

The Chairman referred to the non pecuniary interest declared on the matter of College Accommodation by Miss Almond as Director of Children's Services for the local authority.

4 College Accommodation Proposals

The Chairman prefaced the consideration of the matter by encouraging all members to participate fully, and by stressing the importance of reaching a substantive decision, one way or the other, on the matter.

Mr Clark and Mrs Tyley introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Corporation noting that Mr Doyle from View Architects would present the latest proposals for the Corporation's consideration.

Mrs Tyley referred members to the summary overview of the proposals included as part of the report (document 01.10A). She summarised the work undertaken to consult upon and refine the proposals since the last consideration of the matter by the Corporation. She noted that the proposals were relevant to the College's most pressing needs, namely an overwhelming shortage in student dining and social space and a lack of general teaching accommodation. She summarised the key elements provided by the current proposals which involve more spacious: refectory and student social space, main reception area and disability access, changing, fitness and storage space, and general teaching accommodation.

Mr Clark commented that his view was that the proposal was essential to maintain the College's attraction to students in what was an increasingly challenging and competitive environment. He reported that he had contacted Wellington Town Council to inform them of the proposals, and thereafter a display of the intended development will be produced shortly for use in the College and for informal consultation with local residents. Mrs Tyley reported consideration of the proposals at the College's Estates Group and with members of the Student Council. In respect of the latter she noted that students had commented on the need for improvements in locker and changing facilities. They had also voiced strong views on the appearance of the College, noting particularly the extent to which they valued the 'traditional' elements of existing buildings, especially the façade to 'A' Block. In terms of the new facilities planned, Mr Clark noted that students were positive in their view of the interior elements, but were less so about the exterior.

Mrs Tyley reported on the meeting with Pravin Palmer, the LSC Property Advisor, noting his generally supportive view of the proposals and his willingness to give early consideration to them. It was felt that subject to the Corporation's decision, if appropriate information could be presented, outline LSC approval could be secured from the LSC by the end of March 2010. This would simplify matters considerably since decisions after March would need to involve the local authority and Young People's Learning Agency.

Mr Doyle, from View Architects introduced his presentation on the proposal, now termed the 'Refectory Scheme' and tabled (copy in minute book) a hard copy of the main elements of the proposal. He explained that for a planning application to be made the major elements of the proposal (footprint, structure etc) would need to be settled, but that other elements such as colour and decoration could be altered as further consideration and consultation progresses. He summarised the main features of the site 'master plan', and noted that the proposal is both consistent with the master plan and viable as a single development. He commented on the quality of the architecture, particularly the frontage of 'A' Block, but suggested that the proposal avoided an attempt to mimic it. Rather than produce what would be a pastiche of the

existing style, the proposal emphasised a successful contrast. He noted that the development of the site entrance and reception would enhance the impact and visibility of the College and improve access for people with limited mobility. He described the main elements of the proposal on the ground floor and first floor, and described the proposals for heating, which included a new plant room. He described the use of glazed partitions. In response to a question from Miss Bleasby on the potential for students to be distracted by glazed areas giving visual access to activities elsewhere in the building, he noted that final decisions on the internal glazing were not required at this stage, although experience elsewhere suggests that students become used to 'open view' environments and are generally not distracted from their studies. In response to a question from Mrs Bass about the relationship of the proposals to the school buildings being established locally under the 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) Programme, Mr Clark commented that the flexibility underpinning the classrooms and independent learning spaces were also in use in BSF developments, and students coming from 'BSF' schools would increasingly expect similar facilities at New College. Miss Almond confirmed that flexibility was an important feature of BSF developments locally and the buildings were often characterised by a mixture of larger and smaller teaching and learning spaces providing for both classrooms and 'breakout' areas.

Turning to the proposed site entrance, Mr Doyle emphasised its intention to offer a legible access point for both foot and road visitors and serve to identify the institution as young and vibrant. Some members expressed reservations about its stark nature, and Mr Doyle commented that it could be used for both temporary and permanent displays.

In debate, Mr Dean while noting his support for the improved teaching spaces, expressed some concern that in the proposals detail was lacking on some of the refurbishment to be undertaken. Mr Clark commented that no firm decisions had yet been taken on the use or modification of the existing dining hall, but it would add a considerable flexible space to the college's accommodation. He acknowledged that under the proposals dedicated sports space would be more constricted, but pointed out that the overall quality of spaces would be much improved, and that the changes were focussed on some of the least used areas in the college. He confirmed that he felt it would be unrealistic at present to propose the construction of a new sports hall, but that he was conscious of the existence of sports halls nearby and would anticipate making imaginative use of these outside facilities.

Mr Crowson announced that regretfully he would have to leave the meeting for a prior engagement, but wished to record his strong support for the scheme as proposed. He considered that the College could not afford to miss the opportunity of undertaking the developments proposed.

Mr Dwane prefaced his comments by noting that he had consistently opposed previous co-location proposals and had been a strong advocate for developing the King Street site. However he wished to comment from a PE

perspective. He felt that the current proposals disadvantage both sports and dance provision. He believed it would be very difficult to use the proposed dance studio and sports space successfully and attempting to 'squeeze' the activities into a smaller space would severely inhibit their development. He wished to present a positive approach, and outlined alternative proposals for development of a Sports Hall and Science Block. He had sought advice and believed that his broad costings were robust, and that his proposals could be afforded with the finance required for the refectory scheme. Commenting on Mr Dwane's proposals, Mr Doyle suggested that Mr Dwane's costings appeared optimistic, but noted that they would leave unchanged many elements of the College accommodation which did not meet the requirements for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and which are addressed by the refectory proposal.

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

Mr Clark commented that he would respond to some of Mr Dwane's concerns from the perspective of timetables. He felt that although the space for sports and dance was not as great as would be wished, successful use of the available space could be achieved by imaginative use of the timetable.

Clerk's Note: at this point in proceedings, Miss Almond left the meeting.

Mr Walton re-iterated a concern voiced at previous meetings that the proposal should be one that addresses the College's most pressing needs. Mrs Tyley responded that she could confirm that in the view of the Principal and Vice Principal the proposal met the 'most pressing need' criterion. She commented that she understood Mr Dwane's concerns about space for PE, but suggested that nevertheless, the refectory proposal offered the best option for the College's development in the immediate future.

Miss Bleasby raised a question about the capacity of the new refectory and whether it would be sufficient for the student body. In response Mrs Tyley noted that it would provide a more spacious environment for students, with a seating capacity of 200 as opposed to the current 140. Mrs Bass asked about the potential for student congestion around the refectory in the light of increased flows in and out of the refectory. In response, Mr Doyle noted that increased foot traffic flows had been recognised in the plans and that the adjacent corridors would be sufficiently wide to cope with anticipated flows.

Referring to the section of the report on the financial appraisal of the proposal Mrs Tyley summarised the major elements involved. She noted the consideration of marginal costs and benefits and the identification of the anticipated payback period. She noted further that the college had considered the affordability of the proposals by forecasting the likely impact on annual budgets, cashflow and College reserves by updating the current three year financial plan in the light of direct costs and benefits and other relevant information. She referred to the project cost estimates set out in the report, noting that the total cost (including major fixtures and fittings, VAT and a

suitable contingency) is £2.6 million, giving a project cost of £1,603 per square metre, a figure within LSC cost norms. She noted that the cost estimates would be subject to further change in the period February to July 2010 depending on final client requirements and tender outcomes. Mrs Tyley outlined the capital appraisal assumptions set out in the report, noting that a 12 year payback period was assumed and that the multiple sensitivity analysis had indicated the scheme's viability over 20 years. She noted that the revised three year financial plan contained sums to address the revised Property Maintenance Plan on a phased basis over a number of years. She noted that the report on financial appraisal concluded that notwithstanding the period of financial uncertainty that lay ahead, the capital investment appraisal indicated that a project of £2.6m can be supported and offered a reasonable return.

Mr Hopkins, Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, reported on the Committee's consideration of the proposal at its meeting of 19 January 2010. He reported that the Committee had considered the merits of proceeding with a proposal in terms of the future of the institution, and that it had concluded that the dangers of inaction outweighed the uncertainties of proceeding. The Committee concluded that a proposal of the scope of that proposed was necessary to raise the profile of the College and ensure the College retained its status as the number one choice for 16-19 year olds in the area. He noted that at the time of the Committee's consideration of the matter further consultations with staff and students were outstanding on the detail of the proposal. He also commented that the Committee had not had before it the full financial appraisal made available now to the Corporation. Given the financial appraisal now available he concluded that he was confident in offering the Committee's recommendation to proceed with the proposal.

After further comments on matters of detail from Mrs Bass and others, the Chairman drew the debate to a conclusion and from the Chair proposed that the Corporation should resolve to approve the refectory scheme as set out in the reports at an overall cost of £2.6 million.

Support for the proposal was indicated by Dr Ali, Mrs Bass, Miss Bleasby, Mr Clark, Mr Dean, Mr Hopkins, Dr Hargreaves, Mr Pickerin, Mr Shaw and Mr Walton. Opposition to the proposal was indicated by Mr Dwane. There were no abstentions.

The Corporation thus resolved:

To approve the refectory scheme at an overall cost of £2.6 million.

The Corporation further resolved to:

- 1 Request the Principal to continue consultations with students, staff and the local community on the proposed refectory scheme

- 2 Note that this option has been recommended in the context of outline proposals for more substantial longer term investment on the college estate. Further investment is as yet unfunded.
- 3 Approve the plans presented by View Architects at the meeting, subject to minor design and/or technical changes, as the basis for submission to the local planning authority in March 2010
- 4 Agree that the papers and plans presented to this meeting should form the basis for submitting an early application for LSC approval in February/March 2010
- 5 Agree that the Finance and General Purposes Committee should consider the project management and legal arrangements, including identification of the preferred procurement route at its meeting on 23 February 2010
- 6 Request the Finance and General Purposes Committee to oversee the financial monitoring of the project, including a more detailed review of the scheme costs, cashflow forecasts and processes for securing the most cost effective financing arrangements
- 7 Request a report on progress to its next meeting on 9 March 2010.

5 Dates of Next Meetings

The dates for further meetings were noted.