

A New Academy for Leeds: Prospectus

LEEDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GROUP

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A New Academy for Leeds

Summary

“The Academy will not only provide more school places but also deliver ‘excellent’ education”.

This prospectus, prepared by the Leeds Sustainable Development Group and the Gorse Academies Trust, aims to stimulate discussion and develop a consensus around the potential for a new Leeds Academy in the city centre. Initially the Academy would deliver educational excellence to secondary students between the ages of 11 and 19 (including special educational needs). In the medium term it would provide a through school from the ages of 0 to 19.

Leeds has a shortage of school places in outstanding and highly effective schools. The City also needs approximately six new secondary schools to accommodate its growing population and specifically for the children currently within primary school education. Unless this shortfall is met by, 6,500 children will not have secondary school places.

The Academy will not only provide more school places but also deliver ‘excellent’ education based on the key themes of improving aspiration and achievement. In addition, the Academy will be a catalyst for significant regeneration of what is currently a deprived community with great potential for transformation.

The southern half of Leeds city centre between the River Aire and the motorways (City Centre South) has significant development potential. There are some 210 acres (85 hectares) of vacant or under-utilised sites and premises which could accommodate some 8-12,000 residential units on brownfield land.

A transition has already started:

- Commercial development along the riverside and in Holbeck.
- Leeds City College at The Printworks on Hunslet Road.
- Plans for an Art Space and City Park on the site of Tetley’s Brewery.
- New Data Centre to support a digital cluster on Black Bull Street.
- Regeneration plans for New Dock.
- New Generation Transport.
- New residential accommodation has been developed along the riverside, in Holbeck and in Hunslet (to date this has focused on the small apartment market).

Significant investment in social infrastructure such as schools, health centres and community facilities is now required if all these new developments are to form part of a truly sustainable community. By providing a key part of this infrastructure, the Academy will encourage city living generations to remain within the urban core, and entice new long-term residents with families into this area.

Vision

“...there is a shortage of excellent primary school places for students in this area and the City as a whole needs six new secondary schools”.

The Academy will provide nursery, primary and secondary education for students between the ages of 0 and 19, in City Centre South. At present, there is a shortage of excellent primary school places for students in this area and the City as a whole needs six new secondary schools. The Academy will address part of this shortfall.

The Academy will deliver educational excellence providing high quality education for all pupils and improve the skills base for the city. Improving “aspiration, opportunity, and achievement” are core elements that will underpin the ambitions of the school and this ethos will transfer to the students. The Academy will be renowned for its moral purpose and its belief that all can succeed whatever the students’ circumstances or background.

The Academy will be committed to supporting the development of world citizens, at ease with themselves and each other, with the knowledge and skills to thrive in the midst of global change. The secret of the Academy’s longevity and continued growth will be the wider adaptability of its people, their passion and ability to work in partnership and ‘spark-off’ each other to be creative and innovative. The Academy will be a teaching school, attracting professionals from across the country to learn their skills, as Leeds General Infirmary is a teaching hospital. In turn, the Academy will be strengthened by the turnover of highly motivated professionals who recognise the organisation’s leading role in championing and accrediting the leading and most sophisticated educational practitioners.

We are determined to ensure that the Academy will be the first high performing inner-city school in Leeds. This development will be essential in halting the drift of students away from the city centre in their search for educational provision, as well as acting as a catalyst for the improvement of other neighbouring schools. A key feature of that quality will be our intention to establish a post-16 centre of excellence in Mathematics in partnership with a local university which will have a national and international reputation.

Leeds City Centre South is an excellent location for the Academy. It is currently under-developed, with high levels of vacancy offering great potential in the short, medium and long term. It is close to the city centre, with good links to the wider South Leeds area.

In today’s challenging financial climate, co-location and sharing of physical assets is a key way for local authorities and their partners to deliver essential services. The objective is to take a holistic view of infrastructure within the community, ensuring that all public, private and third sector investment is used in a cost-effective way. It is thus appropriate to take a strategic view of the assets available around any potential Academy site, looking at how the school could deliver complementary community services, such as sport, healthy living, social support and out-of-hours education opportunities. A successful, high achieving school is a fundamental part of the social infrastructure for a 21st century city. The Academy will encourage city living generations to remain within the urban core and entice new long-term residents with families into this highly accessible area. It will also provide greater access to opportunity in an area in need of regeneration. Supporting the growth of skills for residents is the key to the long term success of the Leeds economy and to tackling the barriers to opportunity associated with deprivation.

Defining the need

“...promoting a range of opportunities in South Leeds to capitalise on its latent potential, linking communities and opportunities within its neighbourhoods”.

The city needs approximately six new secondary schools to meet the needs of its growing population, specifically to accommodate the children currently beginning their primary school education. This amounts to an education ‘time-bomb’ in the city. Unless this shortfall is met, secondary school places will not be available for thousands of children by September 2018 /19.

At present, there are several regeneration projects under way in the wider South Leeds area which will lead to further demand for schooling in this area as the population grows:

Holbeck Urban Village: this physical regeneration project aims to encourage the development of an industry cluster by providing the accommodation for creative and digital industries. This area (including land to the south of Sweet Street) has the potential for over 5,600 homes (mainly apartments) and around 2 million sq.ft of office space.

Aire Valley Eco-Settlement: Leeds City Council is promoting an urban-eco settlement of between 6,500 and 9,000 homes in the Aire Valley, as well as industrial and commercial development to provide 7,000 jobs (including an Enterprise zone).

South Leeds Investment Partnership: this is promoting a range of opportunities in South Leeds to capitalise on its latent potential, linking communities and opportunities within its neighbourhoods.

Developed under the 2010 Academies Act, the Academy will not only provide more school places but also deliver ‘excellent’ education. It will provide 25% of the places required, assisting Leeds City Council in meeting its statutory educational provision.

A new academy in City Centre South will provide walking distance opportunities for children living in the area now and for those who may be encouraged to move here by future housing developments. Through offering out-of-office activities (sport, social, and educational), it will also play a key role in establishing a sustainable community.

Development and Regeneration

“Young families can be attracted to inner urban areas through the availability of good schools, design and appropriate housing”.

The regeneration of inner city areas that already have high vacancy levels can be assisted by attracting new residents and businesses into areas, which will often be within walking distance of the city's retail / commercial / entertainment core and national / international transport opportunities. Leeds City Centre South has witnessed several successful regeneration projects including the Round Foundry, Marshall's Mill, Tower Works, Brewery Wharf and others (which now require further development) such as New Dock and Hunslet Riverside.

Whilst new forms of employment have been created and physical aspects of the area are being improved, without adequate schools, the likelihood of families being retained or moving in remains low. Where families choose to live is directly influenced by the quality of schools available. By providing an academy of educational excellence, a mixed and sustainable community can be created. This will add to the area's locational benefits and help capitalise on committed investments.

The Academy would therefore act as a catalyst in regeneration terms, building upon the benefits of recent and future projects. Research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that young families can be attracted to inner urban areas through the availability of good schools, design and appropriate housing. This view is also shared by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

There is great potential for a school to act as a focus for regeneration. The Academy would work closely with Leeds City College and the Universities to maximise opportunities for pupils and staff.

The Academy is likely to drive up residential values within the catchment, making stalled schemes more viable. In its 'Good Schools' research, estate agent Savills found that property prices around secondary schools occupying the top 25% of the national GCSE performance tables (dominated by independent schools) are, on average, 16% above the average price for their county, and the gap is widening. The reputations of schools are increasingly having an impact on property prices in areas outside London in recent years education has risen through the ranks of criteria for families' decision-making, particularly since the economic downturn.

Making Leeds City Centre South attractive to new residents is the key to improving property prices, and creating economic and social vibrancy. The Leeds Academy aims to breathe life into this area, improving educational opportunity, and encouraging the development of sustainable communities. This will complement the regeneration objectives for the wider South Leeds area established by Leeds City Council and its many partners.

Establishing a site

“Part of the Academy’s business plan is the catalytic effect it would have on regeneration in the immediate area”.

A fundamental part of the Academy’s business plan is the catalytic effect it would have on regeneration in the immediate area. The latent potential of City Centre South makes this a prime choice for the development of the Academy.

The choice of a specific site in City Centre South will be determined by various elements affecting the physical delivery of the project these elements include:

Economic - the most economically advantageous site would be the refurbishment of existing premises (potentially more sustainable). The project will be subject to a rigorous option appraisal to assess the gross and net cost, taking into account factors such as utilities provision, demolition and adaptation costs.

Social - the admissions policy will be set to strike a balance between encouraging aspiration from the surrounding deprived communities and delivering excellence for the new/mixed community. The catchment will include new homes to be developed in the area.

Environmental - the location will be environmentally sustainable in the centre of Leeds. The site will need to be accessible by cycle and on foot and also enable pupils to travel easily by public transport – vehicular access should not add to current congestion. The building will incorporate the latest technology and best practice in environmental standards, allowing pupils to work and learn without undue disruption from neighbouring businesses or infrastructure.

Availability - the current owners of any site will need to demonstrate a willingness to work with the Academy to deliver the project, which includes agreeing a satisfactory delivery mechanism.

Outdoor Play - the site will need to have access to on-site external play spaces and reasonable access to new / existing playing fields (e.g. potentially at South Leeds Sports Centre).

The proposal

“Extensive provision will be made for young people with profound physical and learning disabilities”.

The aspiration is for a school with exemplar design features which could either involve the revitalisation/extension of an existing building or the construction of a new building on a cleared site. The key is to deliver a ‘value for money’ school which will provide the best possible environment for pupils and staff, enabling them to meet their educational aspirations. The design of the school will be in accordance with current best practice. There is potential to phase the development.

A key feature of the Academy is that, as well as being an all-through 0 to 19 academy, extensive provision will be made for young people with profound physical and learning disabilities. Such an inclusive approach is at the core of the project vision.

In a subsequent phase it is anticipated that primary provision will facilitate a two form entry school. It is expected that secondary provision will cater for approximately 1,500 students on an eight form entry basis with 200 students in each year group from years 7-11 and with 250 students in Post-16.

In order to maximise the value of the investment in the academy buildings, it is important to ensure these are well used after hours and in the holidays.

There is much evidence that sport can contribute to the development of strong, sustainable and cohesive communities. Regular involvement, participation and engagement in sport can have a major impact on shaping people and places but public sports facilities easily accessible to residents of Leeds city centre are very limited. If designed from the outset, out-of-hours use of the Academy sports hall, any fitness facilities and/or outdoor play spaces would both deliver enhanced participation opportunities and additional revenue.

Some schools have played a significant role in delivering culture to local communities and the provision of classrooms and performance spaces can be an opportunity to offer these facilities to a wider range of artists and audiences. Computer suites and libraries could also be used by the wider community. This would be a commitment of the Leeds Academy.

Through a holistic approach to providing educational and associated community facilities, it is possible to ensure the best value and most effective mechanisms for the delivery of all these outcomes.

Funding and Delivery

“Developments will deliver funds which can then be used by the Local Authority to cover infrastructure costs, including schools”.

The proposal is to establish the Academy as a ‘free school’ to be operated by The Gorse Academies Trust. The Trust (named in the posthumous honour of Ruth Gorse) will be made up of three individual academies with over 3,800 students in South and West Leeds. Students will move freely across the Trust at post-16, focusing upon an extensive range of Level 1 to Level 4 study.

Each academy will have its own Principal and Governing Body, which would be accountable and responsible to the Executive Principal and the Board of The Gorse Academies Trust.

The Gorse Academies Trust will also be an independent teaching and research institute. It will have extensive reach into government and business wherever it operates and will have established mechanisms for policy development and influencing educational spending.

Capital funding for the project may need to be drawn from a number of sources; however an application for funding is to be submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) Funding: Schools may be funded through the DfE. The Leeds Academy will require substantial up-front capital outlay and we will work with the DfE to ensure that there is a strong ‘value for money’ case to support the investment.

Other Potential Forms of Funding: A number of Free Schools which have opened have received start-up funding in addition to their per-pupil funding. The funding is designed to enable schools to cover essential initial costs (such as buying books and equipment) and to meet extra costs arising while the school builds up its pupil numbers (they could not otherwise afford a head-teacher and other senior staff from the per pupil funding initially received). This funding is essential to meet the additional costs associated with starting a brand new school.

Local Funding: As noted above, LCC has to provide up to six new secondary schools to accommodate children already in primary education by 2018/19.

There is also a potential to ring-fence funding from two sources:

New Homes Bonus: this is an incentive for local growth whereby national government provides local authorities with a bonus grant equivalent to the additional council tax raised from new homes for the first 6 years. This ensures that growing areas have the resources to meet the needs of the new and existing residents, e.g. providing schools

Community Infrastructure Levy: CIL is a new infrastructure fund set to be implemented across the country by 2014. This ‘non-negotiable’ charge on new developments will deliver funds which can then be used by the Local Authority to cover infrastructure costs, including schools.

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