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Dear Helen

Cirencester College response to CDC regarding apprenticeship and 6th form provision arising from the Chesterton Development

I write in reference to my letter of the 25th of September 2017 and our follow-up meeting at Cirencester College on the 26th of October, with Gloucestershire County Council.

At that meeting we discussed the outcomes from the October 2016 Chesterton infrastructure workshop on education and community infrastructure, which we attended. At that workshop we explained how Cirencester College hopes to increase the number of apprenticeships and foundation courses linked to universities. We also pointed out that there would be growth in the numbers of 6th formers which had not been covered by current proposals. When we met in October officers explained why Gloucestershire County Council and Cotswold District Council consider that education related mitigation for the proposed Chesterton development should include a financial contribution of £400,000 (in phased payments) towards the development of apprenticeships. Officers also explained how Cotswold District Council aims to ensure that investment of that contribution is directly related to the proposed Chesterton development. We also discussed how Cirencester Town Council is keen to ensure that investment in apprenticeships also supports, where possible, conservation and enhancement of Cirencester's heritage assets (e.g. at the Amphitheatre).

Following our October meeting we agreed to set out more detail on how Cirencester College's plans for expansion could assist with the above.

Context

Cirencester College currently offers a range of high quality apprenticeships and the vocational qualifications which are currently the main route into apprenticeships. The most numerous apprenticeships are in financial services, digital media/publishing/marketing, business administration and Accountancy. Our employer engagement team work with employers across the area but particularly concentrated in the Cotswold District. Amongst the major employers we work with are St James's Place, Hardware Group, Bathurst Estate and Corin Group. We also have a growing focus on SMEs, including the new 'start-ups' in the Cotswolds. Many of these have never taken on apprentices and we work with them to help them see where an apprentice could help grow their business.

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The College also delivers Foundation Degrees and HNDs to serve the local market and local students. These include Conservation and Heritage and Business qualifications which we have jointly developed and run with the Royal Agricultural University. We are currently working on a further suite of qualifications including Animal Science which we will start in 2018. Other developments are likely to include further bioscience qualifications. These qualifications fit well with the 3 key priorities the College has adopted from Gloucestershire LEP's analysis of business needs: bio-medical and health, digital and media and agri-tech.

In addition to the widest range of A Levels in Gloucestershire, the College also offers a broad portfolio of general vocational qualifications. These include engineering, business, health and social care, applied science, media, sport and land-based programmes at level 3 (A Level equivalent- eg BTEC). Apprenticeships and Foundation Degrees are key progression routes from these courses. Students travel from every part of Cotswold District and beyond to access these courses.

Our plans include significantly expanding our apprenticeship provision including moving into new areas of employment. We also intend to grow our HE provision, particularly in partnership with the RAU. Below these, most of our vocational provision will convert into the new employment-focused T Levels which the Government is introducing in waves from 2019-20. These courses are being designed with employers and essentially students graduating from them should have a 'licence to practice'. As a result it is important for students to have trained with 'industry-standard' equipment.

The way education is funded at tertiary level is quite complex but important to understand:

- The teaching of A Levels, Vocational Qualifications and the new T Levels are funded directly by the Government via the ESFA. The College receives a fixed amount per student. This amount is significantly less than the amount per school pupil. The College receives payment a year in arrears for rising numbers.
- Apprenticeships for levy-paying employers are funded from the employer levy with the amount paid for teaching and support of apprentices negotiated at local level. Apprenticeships for non-levy paying employers (most SMEs) are largely funded by the Government (ESFA) but with a small employer contribution. The Government strictly rations the amount available to provide apprenticeships for SMEs.
- All the funding for these qualifications is revenue funding. E.g it is to provide teachers, coaches, pastoral and support staff, disposable materials etc. It does not, nor is it intended to cover capital costs. Capital is needed to provide new teaching accommodation, upgrade or maintain existing accommodation or to provide equipment costing over £1000. For example high spec computers or 3D printers. In addition capital is used to make access improvements including providing lifts to ensure students with physical disabilities can access all provision.
- The only capital fund available to sixth form colleges is the ESFA Condition Improvement Fund. This is aimed largely at replacing the most dilapidated buildings. The lion's share of this goes to schools. Currently it is rare for colleges rarely get funding from this. It is possible to borrow from the banks but that requires sufficient surplus to be able to repay the interest. Given how tight our budget is and the huge subsidy the College provides to enable students from the Cotswolds to get to College this is not a realistic source for us.

What the College is currently doing to address the growth issue

We are currently drawing up an accommodation plan for the next 5-10 years. This will include what we would hope to provide to accommodate an increase in student numbers on-site up to 2500 and an increase in apprenticeships. The on-site numbers will be largely level 3 (A Levels and T Levels) and will include an increased number of students with physical disabilities or significant health problems who wish to and can study at level 3. Any increase in capacity is contingent on securing capital funds.

Increased student numbers are neither predictable in detail nor precisely in terms of the speed of increase. There are many demand side factors at work including local competition, population change, new housing, transport and employer needs. However, our experience of growth over the last 25 years suggests that broadly speaking, growth in students choosing particular subjects is likely to be in roughly the same proportions to current choices albeit with a trend towards STEM based subjects.

While accommodation determines the limits to the number of students which can join the College it is not as simple as dividing the number of rooms into the number of students. Older standard class rooms were constructed for 16+ students, newer rooms for up to 25 but specialist rooms tend to be limited to 20 because of the extra equipment needed and the space required to operate safely. There are some courses where there is room for growth- eg German, but they are the exception. There is also some flexibility to move classes between smaller and larger rooms but this is not possible where a large amount of specialist material is required.

Where courses involving specialist equipment are involved there are bottlenecks particularly related to the size of room and amount of equipment. In some cases specialist areas have been designed to be much larger than other rooms in order to flex group sizes. The best examples are our Bio-chemistry labs which can take up to 2 or 3 classes thus making much more effective use of technicians and equipment. This is also far more efficient in terms of replacing equipment and ensuring that expensive kit is intensively used (The 'Eddie Stobart model') We have begun to develop a similar model for our Media courses although only part of the provision is included.

While there are a small number of rooms where we could remove walls to increase space we are up against the limits of what is possible. In general, every time 2 rooms are combined we lose a classroom.

As a result there are a range of courses requiring specialist equipment where we cannot expand further without more room. Most of these are the vocational provision which will be needed for T levels and in some cases apprenticeship training and HE. These bottlenecks include

- Digital Media
- IT Networks and Cyber security
- Graphic Design
- Web-based design, publishing and marketing
- 3D design
- Engineering (We focus upon maths and IT based pathways)
- Animal Science
- Electronics
- Photography
- Applied Art
- Physics
- Computing (including games-development)
- Geology and environmental sciences
- Music technology

Our strategy for addressing the growth bottlenecks.

In essence we need to build some larger units than typical classrooms. The format would be open-plan office/ large workshop/ teaching lab style. In most cases these spaces would be far closer to working environments than traditional classrooms. They would enable us to concentrate expensive equipment and technician support and enable us to flex class size from 20 to 30 where required in order to accommodate additional numbers. A single large building would cost between £1-2M depending on size.

Such spaces would for the most part be relatively cheap buildings as in almost every case the primary requirements are large spaces, good power supplies, connectivity and in a few cases water supply. Exceptions include Animal Science where temperature and humidity controls are required and 3D Design and Engineering where extraction is needed.

The cheapest and ideal solution would be to build one large vocational block accommodating many of these specialisms in one building. This would reduce building costs and the amount of land required as well enabling more efficient operation and synergies between related subjects. The cheapest buildings we have looked at cost from around £400k for a single large space.

The second solution would be to build units piecemeal as funds become available. This is more expensive in terms of land and buildings as well as operation but may be the only option if capital is limited.

Not every one of the specialist areas would require a new build. Vacating existing rooms offers the opportunity of reallocating existing space and in some cases will enable us to create new specialist accommodation. One ambition is to locate most of the art provision in the top floor of the main block (a 1960's Comprehensive legacy) where opening up an 'Art Loft' by installing a lift, removing walls and relocating existing classes would provide an ideal, naturally lit, space for art, textiles and fashion.

How we would use capital from the Chesterton Development.

This would depend on the amount and the timing of release.

- Small amounts would be used to fund equipment or contribute to minor alterations to provide specialist spaces.
- A single large payment would be used to contribute to a single building project. This would be the best solution if a visible legacy is wanted. We would then seek matched funding through the Condition Improvement Fund or additional bids in order to fund the building.
- With a phased but guaranteed series of payments we would also consider borrowing against future capital income in order to match funding if alternate funds became available.

What are the benefits to Cirencester and specifically to the Chesterton Development?

Over time the Chesterton development will generate between 30-40 additional sixth formers per year. This figure is based on our stable conversion rate over time from the two local secondary schools in the town which these students are projected to have attended. We hope to be able to provide 6th form for education for all or most of these students regardless of whether their chosen path is A Levels, T Levels or apprenticeships.

The Chesterton Development will incorporate a business park, primary school, shop and doctor's surgery. Many of these businesses will require apprentices. Based on Cirencester's existing business parks the most common apprenticeships are likely to be generic business support and customer care roles including the following:

- Customer care
- Business Administration
- Accounting
- Marketing and Digital Media

Cirencester College currently or intends to offer all of these.

In addition, Higher Apprenticeships may be required by some of these businesses either for new recruits or to develop existing staff. The College has already started to deliver the Business Administration Higher Apprenticeship.

The College is currently involved in a county wide ESF funded project which focuses on developing longer-term work experience placements for our students within SME organisations. The initial stages of this project involved gathering feedback from our local market and analysing responses in relation to recruiting, training and retaining staff. This project has increased the range of small employers engaging with the college and is a model we hope to extend to support the introduction of the T Levels and increase local apprenticeships. The links developed from this project are also being used to increase industry awareness and employability skills within our full time courses. The intention is to use representatives from our local companies to enhance teaching programmes with a higher level of engagement through the teaching year. We would see the Chesterton Economic development as fitting into this pattern.

Finally there is the HE provision which Cirencester College is developing including a suite of Foundation Degrees and Degrees with the RAU. Heritage Assets are already addressed with the Environmental Management and Heritage with several graduates of this programme already working in the area. We also have a business route which is likely to expand to a suite to offer event management and rural innovation, both of which are relevant locally. Future provision will include Animal Science with a probably Bio-veterinary top-up and a Biosciences Foundation degree. These will provide STEM education for local people and help service the growing number of small business in these areas. These would use some of the proposed facilities described above.

Yours sincerely

Jim Grant
Principal