

BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE IN NOTTINGHAM

News of Nottingham's largest social regeneration project in over a century is breaking today, as details of a £135m spending bonanza designed to transform secondary education in Nottingham are shared with parents across the city.

'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) is the Government's £2.2bn investment in school buildings for the 21st century. The City Council learned that its bid for BSF funding had been approved last November. Education chiefs who have been looking at how to spend Nottingham's share of the cash are now outlining their ideas to schools and parents, and expect to make final decisions later this year.

The Council's wish list includes almost 20 proposals, headed by the creation of a brand new Special School neighbouring Hadden Park High School in Bilborough; completely new buildings for Haywood Comprehensive (or, alternatively, a merger between Haywood and Big Wood Comprehensive in Top Valley, and the establishment of a new city academy on the site of William Sharp Comprehensive. A second academy could be built on the site of Elliott Durham Comprehensive in Mapperley.

Details of the release of funding have yet to be announced, but the Council expects to start by ticking off up to 11 of its proposals, with six further refurbishment plans to follow in a second spending round. The first 'new' schools should come into existence from 2009.

Under the provisional plans, Bulwell's two secondary schools (River Leen and Henry Mellish) could merge to form a single new comprehensive, the viability of Manning Secondary School would be considered and secondary education in Clifton would be brought together on the Farnborough School and Technology College site.

"These are exciting times for our schools," says Graham Chapman, City education spokesman. "Some of our school buildings are almost half a century old and every one of them needs money spent to bring them up to the standards we want for our children today.

"We fought hard to get this money, knowing that it offers us a once in a lifetime chance to reinvigorate our schools and, more than that, spearhead the regeneration of our communities. This could be the biggest social regeneration project for Nottingham since Victorian times."

"With this vote of confidence in city education we aim to attract children back across the city border into our secondary schools and offer a convincing choice to pupils living in the suburbs of Nottingham. Building Schools for the Future gives us a magnificent opportunity to make bold decisions that will provide teachers and pupils with better schools and provide a shot in the arm for the local economy. At the same time we have to recognise that we must restructure and adapt to meet the challenge of a falling birthrate."

Headteachers and governors will be asked for their views over the next few weeks, while parents and carers' opinions will be sought in a formal consultation period starting in April.

"Our first thoughts on the shape of things to come are now with headteachers," says Robin Aldridge, Acting Corporate Director of Education. "We look forward to a fruitful debate with them over the issues and the suggestions that we are putting forward today."

