

**Press Release: 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

**Proposed site announced for new Elmbridge Free School (Heathside, Walton-on-Thames)**

The ElmWey Learning Trust is delighted to announce the proposed location for their new secondary free school which it plans to open in Elmbridge.

Subject to planning permission being granted, the school will be built between Walton-on-Thames and Molesey. The site is at the junction of Terrace Road and Waterside Drive and the land earmarked for the school is just to the north of the roundabout where these two roads meet.

Heathside Walton-on-Thames, as the school will be known, will occupy brand new purpose-built buildings. Its prime focus will be to provide an excellent education, environment and ethos for all its students and so meet a clear need in the area.

ElmWey's bid was submitted in the spring of 2016 and David Cameron announced the approval of the free school application just before he left office that summer. Since then the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) which is an agency of the Department for Education (DfE) has been working hard to identify an appropriate site which would be able to accommodate a new school and would be close to the area of need for pupil places. In their original bid to the DfE, ElmWey identified the area to the north east of Walton-on-Thames as having the greatest need for secondary school places in Elmbridge. For the development of Free Schools, it is the ESFA that takes the lead in finding the site and developing the necessary buildings. In recent months the ESFA has carried out extensive work to identify a viable site for the school, culminating in this announcement.

ElmWey's Executive Principal, Mrs Anne Cullum, who leads Heathside School Weybridge and will oversee the new school, said "We are delighted with this news. This is a clear sign of the project moving forward and reflects both the commitment of the Department for Education to the school and the significant amount of work carried out by the ESFA in sourcing the site. This is good news for the Borough of Elmbridge and excellent news for the local community, in particular parents and children. We know there is both a pressing need and desire for high quality secondary school places in the locality and our new school, Heathside Walton-on-Thames, will strive to meet this need."

The growing demand for secondary school places in Elmbridge is very well documented and was a key reason behind ElmWey's bid to open the new school. Existing schools in the Borough do not have the capacity to meet this increasing need for secondary school places. Surrey County Council's Schools Commissioning Department is supportive of the new school as a route to meeting the basic need for school places.

Now that a proposed site has been identified, ElmWey will work closely with the ESFA to turn plans for the school into reality. This will include discussions with Elmbridge Borough Council and the local community in advance of any planning application being submitted. These discussions will be part of a wider ongoing consultation with all concerned which will take place as the project moves forward.

## **Notes for Editors/FAQs**

### **What will the school be like?**

Non-selective, non-faith based mixed Secondary School for children aged 11-16. The new school will be called Heathside Walton-on-Thames and will be a state funded Free School. It will grow year-on-year, opening its doors initially to year 7 students.

### **What is a Free School?**

Free Schools are new State funded academies. The first opened in 2011 and there are now 345 open. They are not under the control of the Local Authority and are funded directly by the Department for Education. Surrey Local Authority's Schools Commissioning Department is supportive of this new school.

### **Who is opening the school? What is the ElmWey Learning Trust?**

The school will be part of the ElmWey Learning Trust, which operates Heathside School Weybridge. Heathside Weybridge is a very successful secondary school, highly ranked in terms of student progress and attainment and is always oversubscribed. For the ElmWey Trust, the most important feature of Heathside Walton-on-Thames is that it replicates the ethos and standards already achieved at Heathside Weybridge.

### **Why is the school being opened?**

To provide an excellent standard of education for the growing number of secondary school students in the Borough, a need that cannot be met by existing schools even with other planned expansions.

### **What is the ESFA (Education & Skills Funding Agency)?**

The ESFA is an agency of the Department for Education. When new Free Schools are given permission to be developed, the ESFA leads on site and premises provision.

### **Contacts/more information:**

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