Title: IES Breckland
Author: Department for Education (DfE)

Impact Assessment – Section 9 Academies Act Duty

Summary

1. Breckland Free School is a 500-place non-faith 11-16 school located in Brandon, Suffolk and due to open in September 2012. It is proposed to locate the school on the site of Breckland Middle School which is closing under Suffolk's reorganisation from 3-tier to 2-tier provision. Located on the border between Norfolk and Suffolk, the two nearest schools are in Norfolk but there is almost no history of cross-border transfer between the two LAs because of the different ages of transfer.

2. We have assessed the impact on the three schools within a 10-mile radius of the school as well as the nearest faith schools which are over 13 miles away. We have also considered the impact on both primary schools and FE colleges.

3. Taking into account the small capacity of the Free School (500 places) we have concluded that no schools will become unviable as a result of the increased provision. While in the short term Mildenhall College of Technology (the nearest school in Suffolk) will bear the brunt of the impact (see para 13 below) the large size of the school means it is likely to be resilient enough to withstand this impact although the breadth of its 11-16 provision may be slightly narrowed. However, we do expect the number of pupils applying from Norfolk to increase if the school is established successfully.

4. Therefore, it is our conclusion that the long-term impact of the increased provision will not be significant at individual school level because the impact will be dispersed across a relatively wide area and those schools that will be affected are large enough to absorb any losses without significantly compromising their provision. The analysis on each school below supports this assessment.

Catchment Area and Admissions

5. Breckland Free School's admissions policy is fully compliant with the admissions code. If the school is over-subscribed, priority (after first accepting children with statements of SEN on which BFS has been named) will be given in the following order:

A. Looked after children;
B. Children who have an older sibling attending BFS at the time of transfer;
C. Proximity to the School using straight line measurement from the main entrance of BFS to the main entrance to the child's home.

6. Based on the expressions of interest received so far, BFS has quite a

wide catchment area. This is in line with officials' and applicants' original expectations given the school will be located in a semi-rural area. Expressions of interest were received from children as far south as Red Lodge; as far east as Thetford, Norfolk; as far north as Methwold, Norfolk; and as far west as Lakenheath. However, the majority of expressions of interest come from parents with children living in the IP27 postal area.

7. The secondary school population in the Forest Heath district (in which the Free School will be located) is projected to grow by 8.6% over the next five years. Therefore, any potential negative impact on local schools could be mitigated by the growing population. However, there are already surplus places in the district and the secondary population in the neighbouring Breckland district (Norfolk) is predicted to shrink by 4% over the same period. That said, we expect the majority of pupils to come from the Forest Heath district even when the Free School is well established and it is more common for children to cross the LA border to go to school.

8. The permanent site for the proposed BFS site is the existing Breckland Middle School, Crown Street, Brandon, Suffolk, IP27 0NJ. The average distance travelled to secondary school in Suffolk is 2.3 miles. However, there are no secondary schools within this radius of the site, or even within a five mile radius. Therefore, we have gathered information about the 3 state secondary/upper schools situated within 10 miles of Breckland Free School, as displayed in Table 1.

9. The key characteristics of BFS's catchment area for September 2011 are that parents are willing to travel from quite far away to attend the school, the majority of pupils live within 4 miles and pupils will be drawn from all over north Suffolk. However, the biggest single source of pupils is the Forest Community Primary School and The Glade Community Primary School catchment areas which would normally feed into the upper school in Mildenhall. There are noticeably fewer expressions of interest from children from Norfolk (north of the school) and this can be put down to the lack of historical cross-border transfers because of the different tiers of provision. Should BFS be established and successful we would expect to see the number of applicants from Norfolk increase.

10. It is likely, therefore, that should BFS become a successful school, applications for future years will be driven by proximity to the school with the impact being felt most acutely in Mildenhall but there will be some impact on schools in Methwold and Thetford.

Nearby Schools

11. Table 1 shows that, of the 3 schools within a 10 mile radius, all have surplus places and that one of the schools is rated good, one is rated unsatisfactory and the third is yet to be inspected by Ofsted. All three schools were below the national average for KS4 attainment last year and the desire to improve standards in the area is one of the motivations behind the Free School application.

Table 1. Maintained Secondary Schools within a 10-mile radius of the site of Breckland Free School

School Name	2012 Capacity	% Surplus	Distance (m)	Ofsted Rating
Hockwold and Methwold Community School (Norfolk)	808	5.5%	6.35	4
Thetford Academy (Norfolk)	2,050	25% (Y7)	6.4	N/A
Mildenhall College of Technology (Suffolk)	1,550	16%	7.53	2

12. Given the level of underperformance locally and the fact that the schools are operating with surplus capacity it is likely that the long-term impact of a successful Free School will be felt across all these schools. Officials have analysed the potential impact of BFS on these schools in more detail below.

SCHOOLS AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSAL

Mildenhall, Suffolk – Impact – Moderate

13. Mildenhall College of Technology – 7.53 miles south west of Brandon. Currently 955 pupils aged 13-18 and 16% surplus capacity – due to expand to 1,350 11-16 places under Suffolk's reorganisation proposals from September 2012. Performance data for 2008-11 shows 5+ A*-C including English and maths: 32%/36%/48%/46%. The percentage of students eligible for and claiming free school meals is 10.1% which is below the national average. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are slightly higher than the national average and broadly the same percentage of pupils with statements as nationally. The school was recently inspected by Ofsted in September 2010 and received grade 2 – good.

14. The pupils at the existing Breckland Middle School are expected to transfer to Mildenhall for September 2012. The school already has high surplus capacity and its KS4 performances have been below national and local averages for the last three years. Therefore, if the Free School opens, we expect the biggest loss to be felt by Mildenhall. Mildenhall will have a PAN of 270 places per year, so even if the Free School recruited to capacity entirely at the expense of Mildenhall (unlikely) and taking into account the current level of surplus, the school could still expect to recruit between 125 and 150 pupils per year. This could be further offset by the predicted increase in the Forest Heath school population. While this would mean that the viability of the school is unlikely to be threatened, the ability to deliver the range of subjects currently offered could be compromised. Given BFS' focus on depth not breadth, this could be seen as a loss of choice for parents.

15. The large size of Mildenhall provides it with a degree of resilience in the face of losing pupils. Combined with the small capacity of the Free School (500 places) and the potential for the number of pupils travelling from Norfolk to increase if the Free School is established successfully, officials consider it unlikely that the impact of BFS will be significant enough to threaten the future

viability of Mildenhall College of Technology but it is likely that the curriculum offer will be narrowed.

16. Overall, we believe the impact of establishing BFS on MCT to be moderate.

Methwold, Norfolk – Impact – Moderate

17. Hockwold and Methwold Community School – 6.35 miles north of Brandon. Currently 784 pupils with 5.5% surplus capacity. Performance data for 2008-11 shows 5+ A*-C including English and maths: 45%/54%/50%/54%. The College has a wide catchment area in rural Norfolk. The percentage of pupils eligible for and claiming free school meals is 12.2% and the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. The school was recently inspected by Ofsted in January 2012 and received grade 4 – Unsatisfactory and consequently the school was placed in Special Measures.

18. Hockwold and Methwold is the closest school to BFS but it is located in Norfolk and there is little history of cross-border school transfers. Therefore, we do not expect the impact of the Free School to be high in the short term. This is reflected in the small number of EOIs received from Norfolk pupils. It is true that once the two-tier system is established in Suffolk, the flow of pupils from Norfolk to Suffolk may become more common resulting in a greater impact on the school. However, it is also true that more Suffolk pupils may apply to Norfolk schools.

19. Hockwold and Methwold has a large rural catchment area which at its extremities is a long distance from the site of the proposed Free School. Additionally, the school has strong links with its local primary school cluster and has even formed a management partnership with Hockwold Primary School, with a shared Headteacher. Of the three schools closest to the site of the Free School, it has the highest and most consistent results for attainment at KS4 (although this is still below the national average) although it has recently been placed in Special Measures by Ofsted. This is likely to make parents more willing to look at alternatives.

20. Although the Hockwold and Methwold is the closest school to the proposed Free School, the historical lack of transfer between Norfolk and Suffolk schools means that the impact is likely to be low in the short-term despite the school's poor Ofsted. As cross-border transfer becomes more common it is likely that the number of pupils from this catchment applying to the Free School will increase. However, the small size of the Free School and its wide catchment area lead us to believe that Hockwold and Methwold Community School will not lose enough pupils to threaten its viability.

21. Overall, while in the short-term the impact is likely to be low the long-term impact of establishing the Free School on Hockwold and Methwold Community College is expected to be moderate.

Thetford, Norfolk – Impact – Minimal

22. Thetford Academy is 6.4 miles east of Brandon. Thetford is a secondary Sponsored Academy with a sixth form which opened in September 2010. The school has capacity for 2,050 pupils (around 310 places per year group). There is a large surplus in the school at the moment. However the school opened in September 2010 and is still filling up. The school did not manage to fill all of its places for entry into year seven in 2010/11 with a shortfall of around 25%. The School has only recorded two set of GCSE results, with 27% of pupils achieving 5+A* to C including English and maths in 2010, rising to 32% in 2011. The school has not yet been inspected by Ofsted.

23. As the second closest secondary school to the Free School and with no track record, Thetford would be expected to lose pupils to the new school. It had significantly below average attainment results in 2011 so parents may be attracted to an alternative although the Free School will have no proven track record either.

24. Thetford was previously served by two secondary schools, one in the north of the town and one in the south. These schools were closed and Thetford Academy was opened to replace them. The academy sponsors are Wymondham College (lead sponsor), Norfolk County Council, Easton College and West Suffolk College. The school is currently being rebuilt and will be completed in September 2013. This may increase its attractiveness to parents and pupils. As only one year's worth of attainment data is available, it is not possible to determine yet whether the school is improving. Additionally an Ofsted inspection has not yet been carried out. The introduction of the new Free School may hamper the ability for the school to fill its capacity if it takes away pupils who would have potentially gone to this school.

25. As a school with no track record and one set of unsatisfactory results the academy is in a vulnerable position. However, as stated previously we believe the first wave of pupils will come from those pupils that would have transferred to Mildenhall and therefore the academy will have some time to build its reputation. This would be enhanced by a positive Ofsted report. With a PAN of 310 places per year, the establishment of the Free School is not sufficient to make the school unviable, although if the academy's results do not improve we could expect it to lose pupils to BFS. Overall, we expect the impact to be minimal.

Other Schools

26. In addition to the schools within a ten-mile radius, we also know that a small number of pupils from the BFS catchment area travel to secondary schools in Bury St Edmunds, which is also the location of the nearest faith schools. Officials have therefore considered the possibility of children being drawn away from these schools below.

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk – Impact – Minimal

27. Bury St Edmunds County Upper School is 13.4 miles south of Brandon. It caters for 941 pupils aged 13-18 and currently has 6.5% surplus capacity. Performance data for the last 3 years shows 5+ A*-C including English and maths: 61%/55%/62%. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is above what is found nationally, although a smaller than average proportion has a statement of special educational need. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The School was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2008 and received a grade 1 – outstanding.

28. King Edward VI CofE Upper School is 13.8 miles south of Brandon. It caters for 1383 pupils aged 13-18 and currently has 3% surplus capacity. Performance data for the last 3 years shows 5+ A*-C including English and maths: 56%/58%/60%. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average and the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average. The School was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2009 and received a grade 2 – good.

29. St Benedict's Catholic School is 13.3 miles north of Brandon. It caters for 582 pupils aged 13-18 and currently has 5% surplus capacity. Performance data for the last 3 years shows 5+ A*-C including English and maths: 66%/68%/69%. Standards on entry are high and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals or identified as having learning difficulties is low. The School was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2008 and received a grade 1 – outstanding.

30. Although the closest secondary school to BFS in Bury St Edmunds is 13 miles away a small proportion of the existing Breckland Middle School catchment area pupils attend secondary schools in Bury St Edmunds. It is therefore possible that some pupils may be drawn away from the secondary schools above. However, the nearest Church of England and Catholic Upper schools are in Bury St Edmunds and officials consider it likely that those parents that want a faith-based education for their children will continue to send their children to there. Furthermore, when the high academic standards achieved by the schools in Bury St Edmunds is combined with the relatively small capacity of BFS officials conclude that it is very unlikely that the establishment of BFS will have a significant negative impact on these schools. We therefore assess the impact to be minimal.

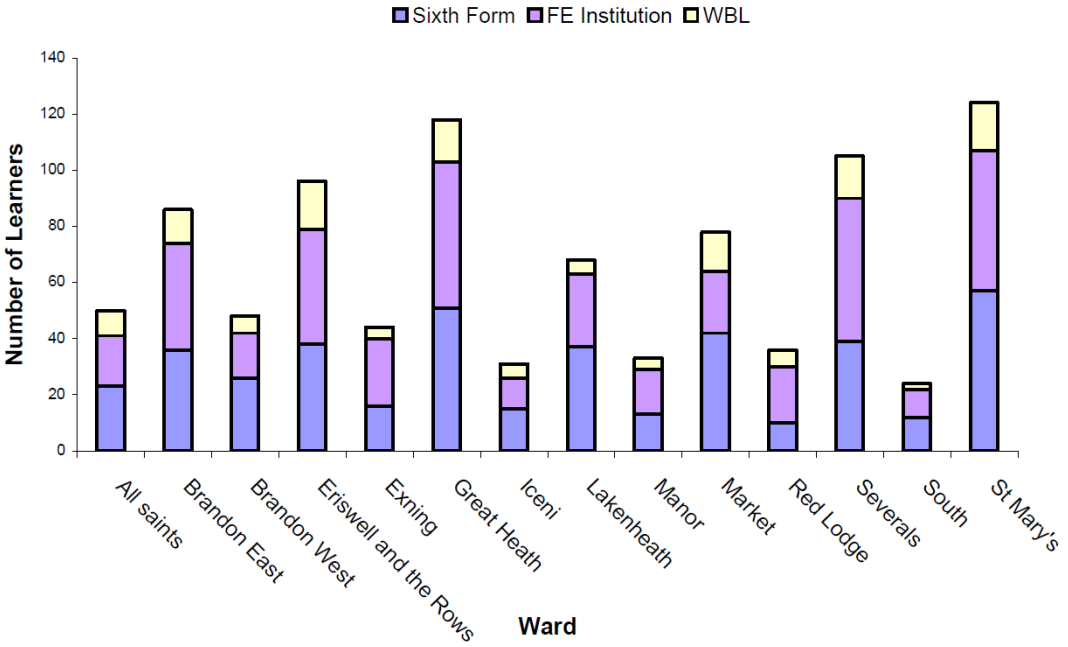
Sixth Form and FE Provision

31. All three secondary schools within the 10-mile radius of the Breckland site have sixth forms. However, there is almost no cross border travel from the Forest Heath District to the sixth forms at Methwold High School. Thetford Academy is too new to draw a conclusion. As can be seen from the map on page 12 (Annex A) there are no Further Education Colleges in Forest Heath, the nearest being West Suffolk College, Cambridge Regional College and College of West Anglia. In addition to Mildenhall, there is a school sixth form

in Newmarket and there are two sixth form colleges in Cambridgeshire within reasonable travelling distance of Forest Heath. There are also two Private Training providers; British Racing School and West Suffolk Training.

32. The chart below shows the type of provider where learners are studying, according to the learner's ward. The wards that have the highest number of expressions of interest in the Free School are Brandon East, Brandon West and Lakenheath, from where pupils would normally be expected to transfer to Mildenhall. The chart below shows that less than 50% of these pupils go to school sixth forms and pupils are more prepared to travel further to attend FE Colleges or work based learning (WBL).

Chart 1. Profile of post-16 institutions by ward in the Forest Heath District



33. At 231pupils (2010), the number on roll in the 6th form at Mildenhall College of Technology is slightly above the recommended lower limit for size of 6th form (200). As can be seen above, a large number of pupils do prefer to travel to FE providers and the wider range of courses available is a strong pull factor. Mildenhall has therefore developed a relationship with Newmarket College to offer a broader range of choice for sixth form pupils.

34. The raising of the participation age to 18 will give added impetus to develop a coherent curriculum offer post 16, which meets the needs of all students. As BFS is only an 11-16 school, officials can see no reason why its establishment would have a significant impact on post-16 provision in the Forest Heath district.

35. No pupils in the BFS catchment currently transfer to Hockwold and Methwold Community School. However, it is possible that pupils that would have attended this school for 11-16 but instead attend the Free School then

would transfer to a different post-16 provider. However, this would depend on the distance travelled and the specific courses. Furthermore, Hockwold and Methwold is developing links with post-16 providers to broaden its offer. Therefore, we do not feel there will be a significant impact on the ability of this school to provide post-16 education.

36. Officials' overall conclusion, therefore, is that the establishment of BFS will not have a significant adverse effect on post-16 provision in the area.

Impact on Primary Schools

37. Under Suffolk's SOR all of the primary schools in the Brandon and Mildenhall area are extending their age range from 4-8 to 4-11, while Breckland Middle School, College Heath Middle School and Riverside Middle School are due to close. There are 9 primary schools within this area.

38. Breckland Middle School currently has three main feeder primaries that are located in and around Brandon but also receives a small number of pupils from primary schools outside Brandon. The Trust intends to build strong relationships with these schools to help ease the transition.

39. The other two middle schools that are closing are both situated within the vicinity of Mildenhall and draw their pupils from the six other schools in the area. The table below shows the existing feeder primary structure and the numbers of pupils in each year group once the primaries have extended their age range to become YR-Y6 from September 2012. Because Riverside and College Heath are so close to each other, the transfers to middle school can be more fluid.

Table 2. Places in the Middle School Feeder Pyramid

Beccles Middle School Feeder Primaries (2012 PAN)	**College Heath Middle School Feeder Primaries (2012 PAN)**	**Riverside Middle School Feeder Primaries (2012 PAN)**
Forest Community Primary School (45)	Great Heath Primary School (30)	Beck Row Primary School (30)
The Glade Community Primary School (30)	Lakenheath Community Primary School (45)	Tuddenham CEVC Primary School (30)
Elveden CEVA Primary School (10)	St Mary's CEVA Primary School (60)	West Row Community Primary School (30)

40. The Free School's admissions policy does not list feeder primaries and accepts children on the basis of proximity to the school. Therefore, if the Free School were to be established successfully and was seen as the preferred option compared to Mildenhall, those primary schools that are furthest from the Free School, such as Tuddenham or West Row, could potentially lose pupils to the other closer primary schools as parents may move to give themselves a better chance of getting a place at the smaller Free School (please see the map of primary schools at Annex B). Therefore, if the Free School is successful, it could potentially have a high impact on these schools, although with a capacity of 210 places, both schools should be able to

withstand a loss of pupils. On the other hand, those schools closest to the Free School, such as Forest Community, Glade, Lakenheath or Elveden could become more popular if the Free School were to be established successfully.

41. Because the primary schools currently operate only up until Y4 we do not have any KS2 attainment data on which to judge the likelihood of these eventualities. Therefore, the ability of these schools to make a positive early impression and to achieve a good standard of results is crucial to the future success of these schools.

42. The impact on primary schools is therefore dependent on both the success of the Free School and the perception of it locally, in comparison to MCT as well as the ability of each primary school to make a positive early impression following the extension of the age range to encompass the end of KS2.

Impact of IES becoming a provider in Suffolk

43. We have also considered the impact on existing schools in the area of IES running the Free School. IES is a proven provider of education, running 17 schools in Sweden. Such a reputation may help boost admissions numbers for a school which has no track record, although the small capacity should not mean this has a significant impact on any other school.

44. IES has pledged to commit their own resources into running the school and some of its key staff in its Swedish operation, such as the Head of Academics and the Head of ICT and Capital, will devote time to working on the Free School. Through accessing some of its existing expertise and through adding additional resource IES may allow the Free School to offer more minority subjects than would otherwise be the case. This would help to compensate for any narrowing of the curriculum at MCT which will likely occur if the annual intake is reduced as expected.

45. However, as BFS is currently the only school that IES will be working with in the UK it is unlikely that the school will benefit from the efficiencies of centralisation and sharing of resources that are enjoyed by many Academy sponsors. If IES' presence in the UK increases, BFS could experience similar benefits but that cannot be said at this stage.

Suffolk LA

46. We have kept Suffolk County Council (SCC) informed about the proposal to establish a Free School in Brandon. SCC, as well as taking a pragmatic approach to the Free Schools policy generally, has told us that BFS could be a successful school by focusing on its smaller class sizes and strong community roots. SCC also believes the Free School will help with the regeneration of the town that they are trying to encourage.

47. The LA has raised concerns about BFS's ability to provide a wide curriculum because of its smaller size but acknowledge that they have a role

to play in ensuring there is sufficient breadth of offer across the whole system and has committed to working cooperatively with the school and potentially brokering links with other schools. This should ensure that a wider curriculum is available to children at the proposed school.

48. In response to our request for views on the Free School the Director of Children Services, confirmed that even if all the pupils living in Brandon attended the Free School, MCT would still have viable year groups. The table below, provided by Suffolk County Council, demonstrates that even if BFS recruits to 100% capacity entirely at the expense of MCT, the smallest year group at MCT would be 125 pupils. However, this figure does not take into account either the likelihood that BFS will attract pupils from Norfolk or the LA's estimation that a new housing development will add approximately 90 pupils per year across the local area. Therefore, we could expect these numbers to be higher.

Table 3. Breckland Free School impact on MCT by 2014-15

Scenario	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11
MCT numbers with no BFS	225	235	236	239	246
MCT numbers with BFS at 100% capacity	125	135	136	139	146
MCT numbers with BFS at 50% capacity	175	185	186	189	196

Representations

49. We have received objections to the proposal from Mildenhall College of Technology; in addition to representations from some of the local primary schools and one local middle school. The objections cite the following:

a. An additional school would be an inefficient use of resources and threaten the ability of Mildenhall to offer a broad curriculum

b. The proposed educational offer at Breckland Free School is narrow and denies children choice

c. The proposal for a secondary school at Brandon was consulted upon as part of the Suffolk County Council's school reorganisation scheme and the decision was made against such a proposal.

50. Taking these objections in turn:

a. While BFS would create further surplus places within Suffolk we do not believe this would be an inefficient use of resources if it were to act as a driver to raise standards. The standards of the schools in the area are below the national average and parents in the town feel they have no choice. SCC has made clear to officials that it wants to continue to drive up standards in Suffolk and that Free Schools could be one way of achieving this.

b. SABRES made the case in its application for a smaller school, with an intimate ethos with a focus on depth not breadth. As it stands, it is expected that BMS pupils will transfer to Mildenhall, effectively denying pupils opportunity and choice. However, it is doubtful that Mildenhall will be able to maintain its current curriculum offer which includes vocational subjects such as Health & Social Care and Business and Tourism which could be seen to be denying choice to pupils. However, BFS were clear in their application that they would provide on-site vocational courses and would work with external partners to offer off-site programmes.

   We also have no reason to believe that BFS will focus on the upper ability range; children will be admitted to the school without reference to academic ability and the school has committed to working with children in need of extra support. This is a school suitable for all children in the area.

c. As part of the reorganisation process SCC consulted upon the possibility of siting a secondary school in Brandon. This was decided against because the Council concluded that the previous government's desire to establish "17 lines of learning" and the diploma programme would be difficult to provide at Brandon given the smaller size of the school. This factor is no longer relevant because that policy has not been continued by the Government. However, BFS demonstrated in their application their desire to form links with other schools and businesses to broaden it educational offer.

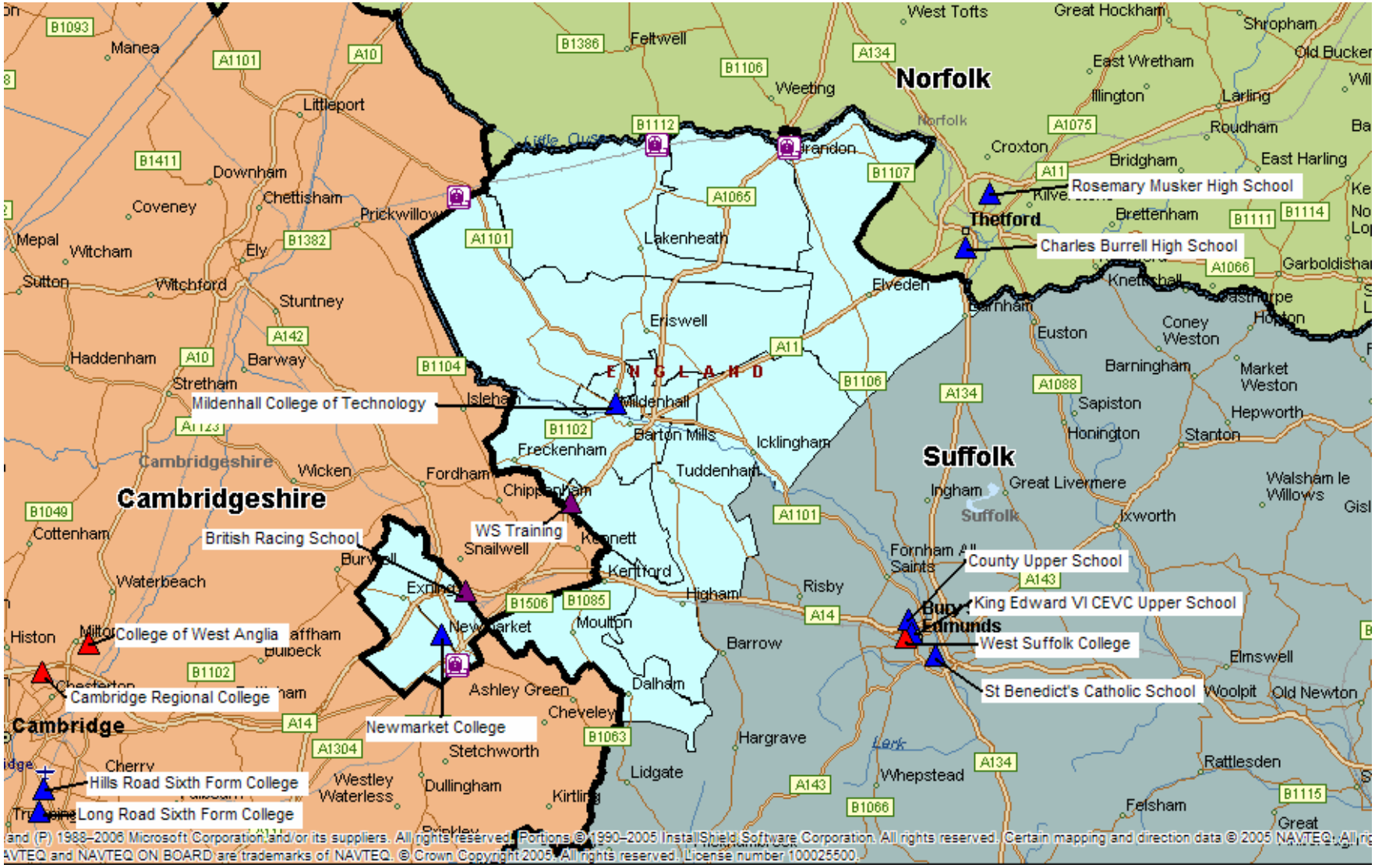
37. Overall, officials believe the nature of the proposed offer reflects the distinctiveness of the proposal compared to existing provision and the desire to reflect the likely intake of the school and the community's aspirations. The intimate ethos of BFS is one of its key selling points and distinguishes it from the larger schools that provide the only option currently. Parents that do not want this type of education for their children would retain the option to send their children to the larger schools in Mildenhall or Norfolk, now the age of transfer is the same.

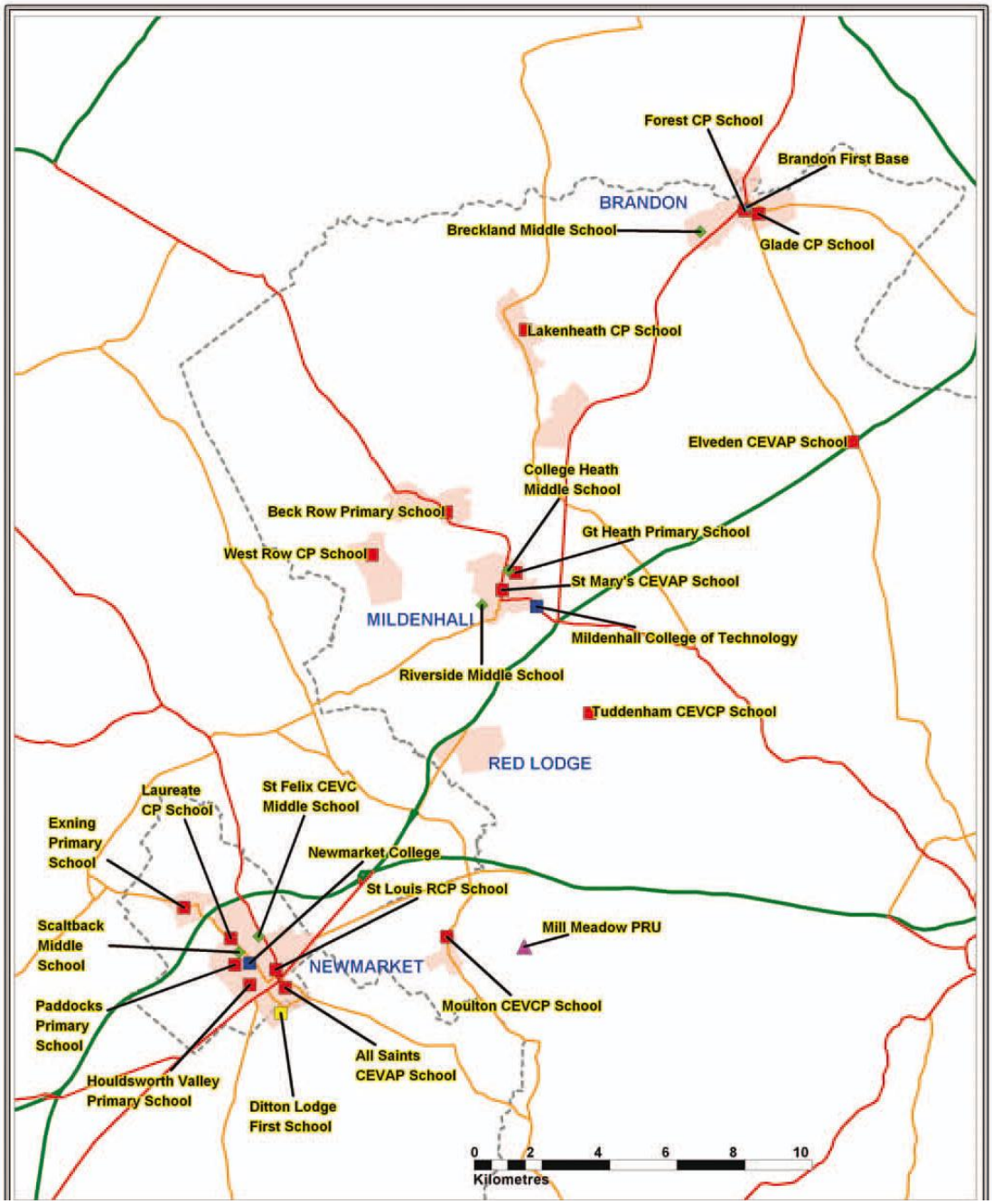
Conclusion

38. To conclude, officials consider the likely impact of establishing the Breckland Free School on maintained schools, Academies and FE institutions in the area the school is proposed in to be marginal. Pupils would be likely to be drawn away from Mildenhall particularly in the first few years but the effect will likely become more evenly spread. The small size of the Free School means that all competing schools should remain viable, and any negative impact on particular institutions is outweighed by the positive impact that BFS will have on parental choice and driving up standards in local schools.

Annex A

Map showing post-16 provision in the Forest Heath District



Annex B

Map of Primary Schools in the Mildenhall Catchment Area