

Government free schools target under threat

As few as five "free" schools – a quarter of the government's target – could open next September, according to sources involved in several of the pioneering schemes, writes *Andrew Hankinson*.

Free schools can be set up by charities, parents, businesses or religious groups. They will be state-funded and free from local authority control. They are also a key part of the government's education policy and it hopes to open 20 of them next year, having set aside £50m this financial year for pilot projects, a figure that may grow substantially in future.

But one source leading a free school scheme has seen a list of 17 potential sites and predicted that only five will be in a position to open in September 2011 owing to time constraints.

The source said: "The list didn't

ONLY A FEW WILL BE PARENT OR TEACHER-LED. PARENTS DON'T HAVE TIME TO DO THIS

FREE SCHOOLS CONSULTANT

seem very convincing. Plenty were not new schools, but independent schools wanting to come into the state system."

This undermines the claims of Michael Gove, the education secretary, who said in June that "all the evidence" showed "lots of parent groups, and in particular lots of teachers" would want to start free schools.

A separate source at a consultant working on several free schools expected a maximum of 10 to open next September because of a lack of time on the part of parents. They said: "I can only see 10 going through, with

only a few parent or teacher-led. The major problem is that parents don't have the time to do this."

It is understood that 30 to 40 groups have applied for free school funding.

One source suggested the government might approach firms on the academies' project management framework to get the schools set up, rather than allowing school groups to recruit their own project managers.

Rachel Wolf, who is running the free schools programme for the government, said "a lot more than 10" had put in "good proposals".

High price for Gladedale rescue

Housebuilder Gladedale incurred costs of almost £30m in the restructuring deal its banks did to save it, according to its end-of-year accounts.

The £28.7m costs, incurred in the deal last September which saw the departure of founder Remo Dipre, helped push the firm to a loss of £171m for 2009, double its 2008 loss of £85m.

The accounts say it spent £9m on professional fees, £1.2m on

redundancy and £2.6m on management and impairment charges.

It also had to pay a £15.9m charge for prematurely ending derivatives contracts.

Meanwhile Gladedale has launched a £1.35m class action suit against the government in a dispute over a tax bill relating to payments under the company's executive bonus scheme in 2004.

Former Crosby chairman latest departure from Lend Lease

The former chairman of housebuilder Crosby Homes has stepped down just weeks after a restructure of UK businesses by its parent company Bovis Lend Lease and its regional chief executive Dan Labbad.

Geoffrey Hutchinson, who chaired the firm while it was owned by Berkeley Group, stood down from his non-executive position earlier this month, having stayed with the

company since the acquisition by Lend Lease in 2005.

Lend Lease refused to say why Hutchinson had left. His departure follows the announcement in June that Bovis chief executive Nick Pollard will step down. Lend Lease said its development MD Richard Cable would remain in charge of the business.

Crosby reported a 77% fall in revenue in its results to June 2009.



Water music

Foster + Partners has revealed its masterplan for the West Kowloon Cultural District of Hong Kong. The development is planned for a harbourfront site to be reclaimed from the seabed. The masterplan includes a 23ha park, an opera house, concert halls and a 15,000-seat arena.

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Fluid dynamics

Austrian architect Soma has unveiled designs for its One Ocean pavilion, which will be built for the 2012 Expo in Yeosu, South Korea. It will house a 20m high performance space, and a "swimming island" stretching into the sea. Construction is due to start in September and finish in February 2012.

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Asian arm of Davis Langdon 'strong enough to go it alone'

Davis Langdon & Seah says it doesn't need Aecom – but sources claim it had been eyeing a deal

By David Matthews

Davis Langdon & Seah, the Asian arm of Davis Langdon, has said it rejected a deal with Aecom because it was financially strong enough to remain independent, but sources claim it was initially keen on a deal.

The partnership, which has 33 offices and employs 3,000 people in 13 countries, including Malaysia, the Philippines and China, also feared that being rebranded could damage its reputation.

Lai Pak Hung, a director of the

quantity surveyor, said: "The most important thing is we think we are strong enough to sustain ourselves – the Asian market is strong enough."

He added that Seah was also concerned about losing the respected DL brand to a group that was "not that known in Asia".

The remainder of the group was bought by Aecom for £204m two weeks ago in a deal that will mean that the 91-year-old consultant is swallowed by the £3.8bn-turnover Californian giant. Several sources have suggested the main DL business

was forced into a deal with Aecom after running up high debt, a claim the consultant denies.

The mystery surrounding the deal deepened this week after two sources familiar with the situation said Seah had pulled out of doing a deal with Aecom in recent weeks after agreeing to it.

The reasons behind the change are thought to include how much the 15 partners would receive. "It was a big issue," said one source.

They added: "Seah was initially keener than the other parts of the business. But then it fell through

at the last minute."

Another source said Seah was "ready for a deal" with Aecom before backtracking.

Meanwhile a senior source at DL denied reports that the Aecom deal had resulted in big payouts for partners. He said: "No partner in Europe and the Middle East received more than a million pounds to my knowledge."

Aecom and DL declined to comment on the talks held with Davis Langdon & Seah.

Hansom P21

EDF retenders Hinkley nuclear work for second time

French utility EDF has asked bidders to tender for the third time for the same £180m earthworks and preliminary works package at the Hinkley nuclear power station in Somerset.

EDF initially tendered the job, then worth about £100m, in March, before expanding and re-tendering it in May. A source said in the latest round EDF had asked all bidders to bid against ideas generated in the previous tenders.

Despite the changes, at least three consortiums – Balfour Beatty and Vinci; Costain and Sir Robert McAlpine; and Kier, URS and Bam Nuttall – are thought to still be in the running.

Contracting consortiums are concerned there is no prospect of regaining potentially millions in bid costs. The source said: "If this is the level of change on the preliminary contract, what on earth is the main contract going to be like?"

EDF has just separately tendered a contract for almost 9km of giant tunnels at the plant. Morgan Est is to join Balfour Beatty and Vinci to bid for the work, with Kier and Bam Nuttall joining with Wayss & Freytag. The Costain and Sir Robert McAlpine consortium will also bid.

Kier and Bam Nuttall have won the first contract for the plant, thought to be worth about £3m, to build fencing and secure the site.