



## BSF was not just about schools.

The axing of 735 projects has wreaked havoc on 735 communities, 26 in one city alone. That city is Liverpool, which stands to be £410m poorer as a result of the cancellation. **So where does that leave deprived areas such as Croxteth?**

Joey Gardiner reports

Ask people involved in Liverpool's Building Schools for the Future programme for their reaction to the news that 26 schools in the city have been scrapped and the most common response is "devastated". Followed pretty swiftly by "angry". "Physically sick" was how Liberal Democrat former council leader Warren Bradley summed it up.

These sentiments are echoed by the children of St John Bosco Catholic girls' school, who have spent the past year and a half helping the council, developers and architects work up plans. Jane Corbett, the council's education cabinet member, met the children of the BSF sample school last week. "They said: 'Jane, how can the government destroy young people's dreams just like that?'" she reports. "I didn't know how to answer them."

It's not just the children who are upset, though they would have been the main beneficiaries of the £350m public investment

in the city. Contractors Morgan Sindall and Balfour Beatty, who were both leading bids for the work, are the others who will most obviously lose out. But Liverpool, which could have gained 1,000 jobs through the scheme, also serves as a microcosm of exactly how the cancellation of the £55bn BSF programme – announced last week by education secretary Michael Gove – will hit. It isn't just an education problem or a construction industry problem; it affects whole communities.

### 'So much work has gone in'

Since the shooting of 11-year-old Rhys Jones on the Croxteth Park estate in 2007, that area of Liverpool has been a national byword for deprivation and poverty. Much of the area falls in the top 5% of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country.

Despite this, the story of St John Bosco, one of the schools that serves the area, is not one of failure. According to the Department for Education, it is in the top five schools in the city and has an energetic head who's worked hard to turn it around.

It is, however, made up of a mish-mash of buildings from the fifties and sixties and has many physical problems, including a decaying frontage that had threatened to collapse. In an area that has well above average childhood obesity, it doesn't help that it has cramped and dismal sports facilities. Anne Pontifex, head of the school, says: "This is one of the most deprived areas, and we have gun and knife crime going on. We wanted to build something that was going to be open to the community."

Under wave six of the BSF programme, it was chosen as a sample school to determine the design of all 26 schools in the city – and was promised a £24m new school itself.

The time already invested in this process is frightening, and goes some way to explaining the anger. Pontifex says there have been at least three four-hour meetings each week for the past 18 months, all of them involving three or more members of staff. Initially they also included Partnerships for Schools, council planners and US architect Scott Prisco to develop the sample school, latterly the two bidding consortiums and their designers. This is on top of the council-commissioned planning process, run by Taylor Young, and work to merge the maintenance regime for all the schools.

Both consortiums, having been working since April, were due to submit their bids for the first phase of the scheme last Friday, but hadn't reached the vital preferred bidder stage. Then came Gove's announcement. All that work, it seems, was for nothing. One of

### BSF: THE POLITICAL FALL-OUT

#### Simon Hughes, deputy leader, Liberal Democrat party

"It would be a nonsense to take money that could be used for improving existing schools to create new schools ... The will of the local community is for existing schools to continue."

#### Steve Eling, deputy leader, Sandwell council (Labour)

"There is now going to be a two-tier education system in Sandwell. Pupils at these schools now find themselves attending schools that are not only in desperate need of renovation or rebuilding, but are far behind other schools in the area in terms of quality."

#### Ian Liddell-Grainger, Tory MP for Bridgwater and West Somerset

"When you've spent all this time through the education system and the council and others to build up these schools to what they are, people have a right to come to the prime minister and the Cabinet to say, 'Can we please have a chat?'"

#### Tom Watson, Labour MP for West Bromwich

"He [Gove] is a miserable pipsqueak of a man."

the St John Bosco students, 15-year-old Lynsey Campbell, says: "The whole school was devastated – so much work has gone in. The politicians told us we could have it, and then they took it away for nothing."

### Liverpool's loss

The council's Labour leader, Joe Anderson, estimates the total lost investment to the city is £410.5m. He says: "It is not just our children's education that is being put at risk; there is a huge knock-on effect for the local economy at a time when the construction industry is crying out for contracts."

The council is leading a delegation to London to try and persuade ministers to reconsider, but most think it is unlikely that anything can be done. Former leader Bradley is lobbying his party leader, Nick Clegg, to try and get the policy changed.

Graham Shennan, managing director of Morgan Sindall, says: "Clearly this is devastating news for pupils, teachers, parents and the local Liverpool economy."

Morgan Sindall already employs 108 local people in other education projects in the city, with 80% of those on its sites coming from within the borough of Liverpool. The proposed BSF programme is about six times that size, which gives some idea of the likely impact on local jobs and skills. ©