Press release 02 November 2011, Stadt Oberursel

Planned expansion of Frankfurt International School

‘Oberursel aims to improve its sustainability, and we have therefore set specific limits for building projects via the regional area use plan (Flächennutzungsplan). But sustainability also means that we support our schools and sport clubs. For these reasons, I support Frankfurt International School’s wish to build a new sports complex in the north of Oberursel’, says Bürgermeister Hans-Georg Brum.

This is the Bürgermeister’s response to the emotive discussion regarding FIS’ plans for expansion and the possible impact on the Oberursel forest. He adds: ‘There has been no decision made so far regarding the FIS expansion plans. First everyone has to do their homework. We must do everything possible to prevent an impasse.’

The new sports hall is of great importance for both FIS and for the town. ‘FIS requires excellent sports facilities. It is in the interests of the town that the new sports facilities can also be used outside of school hours for training by Oberursel clubs. There is a lack of appropriate sports halls, particularly in the north section of Oberursel.’

History:

FIS needs to renovate and to expand its school buildings; and planning and construction have been going on over the past few years to bring this about.

In the winter of 2009/2010 FIS held an architects’ competition, with the aim of realizing its plans on the current school footprint. The intention was the renovation and new construction of school buildings, as well as the improvement of the traffic and safety situation by separating pedestrians, cars and buses. During the competition it became clear that this was virtually impossible on the current property, with the result that FIS expressed an interest in adjacent property, including forest land.

The forest around FIS has a protected status. In order for any of this forest to be used for school purposes an application would need to be made to the forestry authority for removal from the status of ‘protected forest’ (Schutzwald). An examination of the existing flora and fauna would also be required, in addition to qualified proof that the planned expansion cannot be realized on the existing school property. In addition, an equivalent area would have to be found and re-forested elsewhere in Oberursel. This would all mean a very expensive solution for FIS.

An investigation into the possible properties in and around FIS is underway, examining technical feasibility, functionality, environmental sustainability, and water economy. This is a lengthy process, and while some interim results have been reached, this is not the case for all the different variations. The town of Oberursel and the forestry authority has also requested further investigation in various points, so that nothing definite can be said at this point.
Bürgermeister Hans-Georg Brum: ‘Only when we have all the results back from the investigation will we have a basis for factual discussion and be able to come to a considered and appropriate decision’.

Status of the proceedings:

‘Accuracy is more important than speed’ is the motto of the town in this regard, and this is also true for the authorities in the Regierungspräsidium and the forestry and environmental agencies.

‘A key decision like this has to be made on the basis of facts’, explains Bürgermeister Hans-Georg Brum, and adds: ‘So far not all of the possible sites have been completely examined. We expect to receive the results at the middle or end of January 2012. It is important to note that a decision is not automatically coupled with the results of the investigation – technical and political considerations will also have to be taken into account.’

‘Cutting down a section of forest would only be considered as a last resort, if there is no other viable solution. This would have to be very well justified’, emphasizes the Bürgermeister, and warns against escalating the discussion. ‘I will be directly involved’, he adds.

Frankfurt International School has always been an important factor for Oberursel. FIS itself aims for sustainability on all levels, and is open to alternative solutions, whether on its own property or outside, as long as these are practical.

‘We are aiming for concrete discussions in the coming months. The first step will be to get all the parties together for a round-table discussion, and the town will extend invitations for this in November. At this time we will explain the next steps, present the data, and decide on how best we can collaborate and cooperate. In January or February, when we have all the necessary facts but before any decisions are made, we will extend invitations to a ‘citizens’ discussion’, in order to take local citizens’ input into account’, says the Bürgermeister.

At later dates it will not be possible to hold discussions with all local residents or action groups, so it will be necessary for speakers to be elected, who can then take part in the regular discussions.

Finally, the Bürgermeister adds: ‘Many different aspects have to be taken into account before a decision can be reached; practicality, environmental friendliness, re-forestation, and improvement of the traffic situation - which would particularly benefit the local residents’.