

Key day for cash cutbacks

School project, court future and sports provision up in the air

by **JOHN BAKER and ANDREW BROOKES**

THE future of education in South Holland will come under the spotlight as the result of tough Government cuts becomes clear tomorrow.

Chancellor George Osborne will set out the Government's four-year public spending plans in a Comprehensive Spending Review, with cuts of between 25 and 40 per cent expected to be announced.

Over the past five months we have featured a number of stories about organisations and services whose future will rely on tomorrow's announcement - including the destiny of both the George Farmer and St Guthlac schools, Lincolnshire South East School Partnership and the potential for tuition fees to rise to a level many heads fear will put off the district's youngsters from going to university.

Spalding Magistrates' Court's future is also hanging in the balance and district council chiefs are hoping their cost-cutting measures will be enough to withstand cuts to their budget.

Projects under threat include:

- Fears of a possible closure of Spalding Magistrates' Court first came in June.

The Government announced that the court is "under review" and, if closed, would leave attendants facing a trip to Grantham using a flimsy public transport system.

A Lincolnshire Free Press investigation revealed that the court

is used more than neighbouring Boston Magistrates' Court, which is not under threat.

A consultation period on the court estate proposals for magistrates and county courts across the country finished on September 15 and a Ministry of Justice spokesman confirmed this week that Lord Chancellor Ken Clarke will settle its fate by the end of the year.

The spokesman said "everything is linked" to the spending review.

- More than 50 headteachers backed a campaign to stop the Lincolnshire South East School Sport Partnership from being axed.

In the past six years the Spalding-based partnership raised more than £500,000 to buy sports and fitness equipment for secondary, primary and special schools, but costs £290,000 a year to fund.

In July, Lee Farrell, the partnership development manager, presented letters from 46 headteachers who want to retain the partnership to MP John Hayes.

- Headteachers also united to hit out at proposed changes to the tuition fees system which could see the current cap on tuition fees scrapped for 2012.

The recommendations outlined in a blueprint for higher education by Lord Browne include removing the £3,290-a-year cap on fees.

Ian Charles (Peel Community College, Long Sutton), Martyn Taylor (Thomas Cowley High School, Donington) and Geoff Cowley (Gleed Boys' School, Spalding) featured on the front page of the Spalding Guardian last Thursday, uniting against the move.



Save our court: Magistrates and legal professionals met with John Hayes MP to press the case for saving Spalding Magistrates Court. Below, George Farmer headteacher Steve Baragwanath is waiting to hear if his academy plans will survive the cull.

It is feared that students in rural areas such as South Holland, where the average pay is £19,600, about £6,000 lower than the national average salary, will feel the pinch.

- George Farmer Technology and Language in Holbeach hopes to be able to transform into an £18million academy.

The money was agreed by the previous Labour government but, along with a host of others across the country, was left in limbo when the new Conservative-Lib Dem coalition decided to put the cash on hold.

The knock-on effect of the academy being built would be that the St Guthlac School in Crowland would

close, a move that has proved unpopular among town residents.

Protestors collected 1,299 signatures which they hope to present to Lincolnshire County Council this month.

They also met with council chiefs and MP John Hayes and hope to hold a public meeting to discuss the concerns in November.

- South Holland District Council has taken steps to slash its back office and top management bills by sharing staff with other authorities.

Back office services have merged with East Lindsey and management has merged with Breckland in a bid to pre-empt funding cuts that will hit local government.

