

PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CONSULTATION

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD AT CAYNHAM CE PRIMARY SCHOOL HELD ON 11 MARCH 2008

COMMUNITY/PARENTS' MEETING HELD AT 6.30pm

Present:

Emma Small (Chair of Governors) Alison Parker-Morgan (Headteacher) Carl Huntbach (Governor) Paul Suthern (Governor) Sue Fleetwood (Parish Councillor) Viv Parry (District and County Councillor) Barbara Ashford (Parish Councillor) Karen Good (Parent) Tamsin Griffiths(Parent) Kim Keyse (Parent) Phil Keyse (Parent) Angela Price (Parent) Gaynor Huntbach (Parent) Debbie Herdsfield (Parent) Nicola Collins (Parent) Emma Dajavs (Parent) M Genner (Local Community) Caroline Prentice (Parent) Julie Wall (Parent/Pre-School Manager)	Officers/Members Mr Ian Budd Cllr Ann Hartley Mr John Baxter Ms Laura Morris (Communications Team) Mrs Helen Woodbridge (Note Taker)
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Emma Small reported that the Ofsted report would be received after Easter. The results were confidential at present but the staff are happy.

Ian Budd opened the meeting and introduced those present. He explained:

- the reasons for the review;
- the review process; and
- possible next steps

Phil Keyse asked if expansion on a current site was realistic.

Ian Budd advised that it would be possible but that there are difficulties with both sites. Both schools currently make the most of what they have got. But both sites and buildings are deficient and have limitations – however, so do many schools across Shropshire. They are only made to work with the use of long term agreements eg for the use of a field. A perfect site would be preferable. However, there is no County Council or Diocesan owned land available in the area. Ian Budd asked for suggestions of land that might be made available. He asked for these as soon as possible so that investigations into suitability could be undertaken. He reported that he had received two suggestions

following the meeting at Ashford Carbonell. He said that over the next six weeks a detailed report would be produced which would include the pros and cons of all sites and would cover items such as water/mains, services, access, planning, flood risk, previous use of land (ie no chemicals). This report would be provided to the governing bodies of both schools before the end of the consultation period.

Ian Budd advised that the Primary Capital Programme funding could be used to buy land but that the Local Authority were keen to spend as much of this money as possible on the school building.

Sue Fleetwood asked about the required area.

Ian Budd advised that 1.5 hectares (3.7 acres) would be required.

Phil Keyse asked if either of the current sites were capable of being expanded.

Ian Budd advised that this was a possibility subject to the availability of adjacent land. Kim Keyse asked what the deficiencies with the schools were.

Ian Budd advised that it was principally about external space.

Kim Keyse said that it had been reported in the press that the deficiencies included the lack of a kitchen.

Ian Budd confirmed that this was not viewed as a deficiency. Wherever possible, an on site kitchen was preferable but off site kitchens were not a major problem.

John Baxter advised that in previous times 54 square metres was a sufficient classroom size. Nowadays, classrooms are 60 – 70 square metres.

Ian Budd said that modern primary schools have more areas for smaller group/individual work, for staff working and for storage.

Kim Keyse reported that she had been disappointed to read in the press that the local feeling was that there should not be a new school. She felt that this was short-sighted and ill-informed. She was open-minded and if the site was right she would like to see a new school. She thought that the press coverage had been negative and very disappointing. She thought that active community debate and decisions were needed. It would be short-sighted just to think of our own children but the community needs to plan for its future children. She asked if minutes of this meeting could be disseminated throughout the community.

Ian Budd confirmed that minutes would be available on the website and that they would be sent to Parish and District Councils. He also confirmed that meetings with parish councillors would be arranged if these would be useful.

Ann Hartley said that she thought that politics should not be allowed to come into school organisation and had therefore purposely not written anything in the papers – the key outcome is a better educational future of the children of Shropshire.

Viv Parry advised that she had always been in favour of the amalgamation of the two schools. However, she said the Parish Council had been told that the governing body had

changed their mind on amalgamation so she had asked for a pamphlet to be sent round. Unfortunately only half of the story was reported in the papers as the press only print what they want to.

Barbara Ashford said that she had not spoken to Viv Parry at the Parish Council meeting.

Viv Parry said that Barbara Ashford had advised her that the governing body had changed their minds.

Barbara Ashford disputed this and went on to register her disapproval at the organisation of this evening's meeting. She said that the extremely short notice (this morning) meant that there was not wider representation.

Emma Small stated that Barbara Ashford had known about the meeting before her husband, as a member of the governing body, had received advice previously.

Ian Budd said that it was important to balance a number of things as there would be continued uncertainty until a decision had been reached. However, sufficient time must be taken to develop a way forward with as much consensus as possible. He stressed the fantastic opportunity of accessing funding through the Primary Capital Programme and for Year 5/6 pupils to get involved – in the past these pupils have been the champions of new builds. He welcomed the chance to arrange any meetings within the community to consult further and emphasised that this is a very early stage of the project.

Ian Budd advised that if a new build was progressed, then all stakeholders would be involved with the design and development of the new school – so far in Shropshire, no two new schools have been alike and it would be good to plan for what would suit the community.

Phil Keyse asked if access to the funding depended on amalgamation.

Ian Budd advised that it would depend on the plan – eg the effect on school standards and unfilled places. The DCSF would make a judgement on an overall plan. So the answer is yes 'ish' but decisions are not yet made.

Barbara Ashford asked if it was not the case that new build is only be considered because of the availability of funding/falling school numbers.

John Baxter advised that this was the case but that we need to take this opportunity to focus on provision that will last for the next one/two generations.

Kim Keyes asked about school numbers. She said that amalgamation with Ashford Carbonell CE Primary School had been considered several times and it makes sense particularly as the pupil numbers at both schools are in decline. She felt that the schools could do better together and that it is important that the doors are opened to all children. Some parents have already moved their children to bigger schools as they felt that there was not enough stimulus. Caynham CE Primary School is a good school but it is constrained by its low numbers. It would be fantastic to have 90 children. She loves Caynham CE Primary School but is prepared to move on.

Ian Budd confirmed that a larger school would enable more flexibility and more curriculum opportunities.

Karen Good appreciated the reasons for the proposed amalgamation but said there are reasons why some parents choose a small school, especially if their children have particular needs.

Ian Budd advised that this amalgamated school would not be a large school.

John Baxter advised that the key problem with declining numbers on roll is that it leads to harsh decisions on staffing. He said that if nothing is done, all schools' funding will drop and that there would be the danger that standards would also fall.

Emma Dajavs asked how the funding worked.

Ian Budd explained about capital and revenue budgets and explained that the Primary Capital Programme funding would mean that half of all primary schools would be refurbished/rebuilt by 2022. In Shropshire, the first phase would bring £8.5 million. The plan for this would have to be submitted in June. With regard to revenue budgets, the experience of school amalgamation is that it leads to flexibility in revenue budgets eg only one set of buildings which are modern and therefore more cost efficient. It can allow more teaching/teaching assistant hours.

John Baxter advised that it worth remembering that revenue budgets are funded direct from the government (from income tax) rather than from council tax.

Ian Budd referred to the amalgamation of staffing and pointed out that there can sometimes be problems when there are two headteachers who want the same job. However, he advised that the Local Authority would ensure that wherever possible, alternative positions at a similar level are found for members of staff.

Angela Price asked if there was to be a new school, how many classes would there be?

Ian Budd advised that it would be reasonable to plan for a three class school which had extra working areas. But a four class school could be considered. In deeply rural areas two/three class schools are necessary and appropriate. A full three class school would be preferable to a four class school with empty places. The school could be built as a three class school but room could be allowed for expansion in the future.

Phil Keyse advised that affordable housing being developed nearby in Knowbury was relevant to the plans.

Tamsin Griffiths asked about the pre-school at both schools.

John Baxter advised that Early Years providers would be involved in the consultation to provide something that would work – a combined facility may be ideal.

Ian Budd advised that in other projects, the Early Years provision had remained more local. He confirmed that there was no history of a Local Authority takeover and that the Local Authority would want to work with the voluntary sector.

M Genner asked if the new school would be a Church school.

Ian Budd confirmed that based on current views, this would be the case. Both schools are currently Church Foundation schools and there are close church links which are valued by both schools.

John Baxter referred to District Council discussions re planning so that future numbers linked to new housing could be taken into account.

Phil Keyse advised that there was land in Caynham which was earmarked for development.

John Baxter advised that there may be a chance of a contribution towards funding from any developers. He advised that extra children from the village would probably just displace children who are coming in from out of the area. There are surplus places in Ludlow and so it is important that the wider view is taken to prevent school organisation having to take place again in the future. John Baxter then went on to talk about the Admissions protocol. He assured parents that the existing pupils of both schools would be guaranteed a place at the new school. Rising 5s would apply to their existing school. The admission number would be 12 but there would be some flexibility to ensure that siblings could attend the school.

Kim Keyse thought that children needing individual attention would be better off in a new school as there would be more staffing and more suitable areas. People would need to be reassured of this.

Phil Keyse asked if it would be possible to see a newly developed school

Ian Budd advised that when undertaking an enterprise such as this it was vital that stakeholders visited other recently completed sites. There would be workshops for parents, children, staff and wider community groups. Bicton CE School is the most recently completed primary school. There were some anxieties going into that project and the involvement of the whole community was very important - and on the other side there very soon was a settled school community. There is more flexible accommodation and a stronger community 'hub'. But we would not want to cut across the viability of the village hall. The whole community will have the chance the register likes and dislikes and have the chance to identify mistakes to be avoided. A new development would add to the facilities of the area and would enable links to be maintained and enhanced. With regard to environmental issues, there would be curriculum opportunities for the children's learning through their involvement with the design and development of the school. Regarding sustainability, there would be a School Travel Plan - at a recent development, a 38% reduction in the carbon footprint has been achieved. Other sustainable features could be ground source heating, solar panels, indicators/gauges to enable pupil monitoring, good insulation to reduce heating bills and rainwater harvesting. Children take a huge pride in these new developments. The whole community should be involved and there are particular opportunities for the children to be involved in the design - for instance at Bicton CE Primary School the children, in conjunction with the Coalport Tile Museum designed and created a tile mural as the main feature of the school entrance. Children also designed the toilet areas and had real pride and ownership when they saw the result of the work they had commissioned. Ian Budd summed up by saying that it is worth taking time of these projects.

Mrs Keyse said that school was not just about SATs and that to some children the toilets were very important. She thought that to say that Caynham CE Primary School was sound (appeared in the press recently) was sad and did not adequately reflect the school.

Ian Budd went on to talk about staffing. He described the protocols that had been agreed with the Trades Unions. He said that the Local Authority would aim to place all employees in suitable contracts of employment unless a voluntary redundancy/early retirement was the preferred option for an employee who had not been 'slotted in'. He advised that to help transition it was best if staff were 'slotted in' to posts. Across Shropshire there is a 10% turnover of staff (15% for headteachers) every year and so there will be vacancies available.

Emma Dajavs asked about the governing body.

Ian Budd referred the meeting to page three of the documentation where there were three bullet pointed possibilities. If the scenario was one of the first two bullet points, then the governing bodies would continue but at some point the membership of the governing body of the continuing school would be changed so as to be fit for purpose and representative. If there was to be a completely new school (third bullet point) then the two governing bodies would continue until the decision was made and then a smaller transitional governing body would be formed with representatives from both governing bodies. This smaller group would focus on the development of the new school – budget, staffing and the building project.

Emma Small asked about staffing issues.

Ian Budd advised that in the interim, uncertainty may lead to a drop in pupil numbers. He assured the meeting that if this was the case, there is provision within the Employment Protection Scheme for protection against a temporary fall.

Phil Keyse thought that this was reasonable as the Local Authority would have caused the problem in the first place.

Viv Parry commented that there were more people at the meeting last night at Ashford Carbonell CE Primary School. She reported that the ex headteacher of Ashford Carbonell CE Primary School had commented that they would like to see a new school. She advised that there was a pot of funding available for village halls.

Ian Budd commented that it is important that assumptions are checked – he stressed the need to continue dialogue with the Parish and District Councils and the community.

M Jenner asked about the land and planning permission.

Ian Budd advised that when any site had been identified as a possibility, issues (including planning) will be highlighted. Another point made was that planning officers would be involved from an early stage. Shropshire County Council is the planning authority for educational sites (but in a separate directorate).

Barbara Ashford asked what would be required to be done if the school was to remain on this site.

Ian Budd advised that the key text on this was the Buildings Bulletin which sets out expectations.

Barbara Ashford asked if the school could acquire the field.

Ian Budd advised that the school would not have to acquire it as long as a long term agreement was in place. An option would be to buy the field and build on it. Ian Budd asked for any more suggestions re sites over the next two weeks to allow time for checks to be made. Then the summary report would be sent to both governing bodies.

Phil Keyse said that the Local Authority must have given the situation some thought.

Ian Budd advised that a work programme could be done with either site despite the challenging difficulties.

M Jenner asked about local landowners selling land.

Ian Budd advised that the Local Authority would want to spend most of the money on buildings not land.

Tamsin Griffiths said that to obtain the land for a 'peppercorn' rent would be ideal.

Viv Parry cited the example of Rocks Green where a farmer had sold some land cheaply to enable affordable housing to be built and said that it would be ideal to have a site like that.

M Jenner asked about compulsory purchase orders.

Ian Budd advised that the process would take too long.

Sue Fleetwood asked if a new site would need to be within the current catchment areas.

Ian Budd advised that it would.

Ian Budd asked people to contact the Local Authority with any questions/comments by 2 May 2008.

John Baxter advised that responses made during the formative consultation process would be carried forward into the statutory process.

Mrs Keyse was concerned that only a minority were represented at this meeting. She asked how others would know how to make their views known. She was worried that if they were not engaged they may continue to press for the school to be kept as it is.

Ian Budd advised that all parents and prospective parents had been sent the paperwork. He said that more meetings could take place with the community and Early Years providers and asked for ideas on how to engage wider representation. He advised that the minutes of the meeting would be posted on the Internet and sent to each school and to the Parish Council.

Phil Keyse asked what the Headteacher's view was.

Alison Parker-Morgan said that the important thing was the long term education of children in the area. She said that the current school was very limiting as it lacked offices, smaller working areas and adequate staff workspace. Also there was a road to be crossed to reach the hall. The school would be able to offer so much more in a new building with more children. She thought that the best of both schools could go towards creating a thriving school for the future.

Phil Keyse said that the Headteacher and her team do a fantastic job.

Ian Budd thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.