

PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CONSULTATION

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD AT LYDBURY NORTH VILLAGE HALL HELD ON 17 MARCH 2008

COMMUNITY/PARENTS' MEETING HELD AT 6.40pm

Ian Budd (Assistant Director, Strategy and Business Support)
Cllr Ann Hartley (Portfolio Holder for Children's Services)
John Baxter (Education Places Manager)
Members of Community
Parents
Local Councillors
Representatives of Hereford Diocesan

Jean Mayle (note taker)

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

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

Questions / Comments were as follows:

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| Polly Peters/Parent & Gov | You are no doubt aware of the headlines in the Shropshire Star this evening claiming that despite no consultation having yet taken place, a letter has been sent by a County Council Officer saying Lydbury would be merged at the Clunbury site. She also referred to a letter sent by the Headteacher of Clunbury School to parents. |
| Ian Budd | To be clear, both sites at Lydbury and Clunbury are deficient by Building Bulletin standards. At this formative consultation stage, no decision has been made and we are able to take any suggestions on alternative sites. These will be evaluated and reported to governors. |
| Cllr Nigel Hartin | This does not answer the question. |
| Ian Budd | The consultation document provides analysis including the pros and cons of existing sites. This is a formative consultation period and people can give ideas.

We have heard about the Clunbury letter from the media. We do not have a copy.

We are having the same consultation meeting tomorrow evening in Clunbury and we will be giving exactly the same information as this evening. |

	No decisions have been made. Councillors cannot pre-determine the outcome. Their decision on the 19 May would not in any case be to reorganise a school, it would be to commission statutory consultation process.
Cllr Hartin	You have not answered. He again referred to letter from Headteacher of 23/1. He said he would be making a formal complaint that officers have pre-determined the outcome. If some schools think that are safe, this is effectively saying parents will not be part of the consultation.
Rev Paul Collins Rural Dean	Many of us challenged the policy. We do not want communities to be set against one another. Word has come back that Clunbury feels safe. There has to be an explanation.
Polly Peters Gov/Parent	Referred to letter from Headteacher of Clunbury and to another letter of 22/1/08 saying Lydbury will be amalgamated with Clunbury. Where are we if nothing has been decided?
Ian Budd	The early stages of the procedure are unchanged. Formative consultation is just that. There are issues with both sites; there are less at Clunbury. There could also be other options and ideas are invited.
Ian Budd	Responding to a question with an answer that there are more issues with one site than the other is not the same as making a decision in favour of one site, the other or alternatives. No decision to reorganise can be made by Councillors or Officers unless a statutory consultation is commissioned and completed.
Heather Kidd Aunt of pupil	In the light of this, the consultation is not fair – you are setting two communities against one another. It puts one community at a grave disadvantage.
Polly Peters Gov/Parent	Why not just say and be honest?
Parent	A question has been asked by 3 or 4 people but you are not answering. Were the officers who sent the letter in the wrong?
Cllr Hartin	Did they or did they not send the letter? If they did, this has fundamentally changed the consultation, you are putting one school at a serious disadvantage.
Ian Budd	As a Councillor, you are aware that this is the formative stage of these discussions. If there are deficiencies in any process, there are ways to put them right during formative consultation. If we receive a letter or complaint it can be addressed through the appropriate complaints process. Tonight is for the public to be able to express their views.
Cllr Hartin	Is Cllr Hartley prepared to comment?
Cllr Hartley	I have not seen the letters. I am here in my capacity as Portfolio

Holder and Cabinet member.

- Parent What about stopping this now?
- Cllr Hartley I am here to listen. I have no decision in mind. I have attended meetings last week and this week. It would not be right if I came with ideas. I appreciate all schools are different. Some schools have been positive, some non-committal and some opposed. When Cabinet meets on 19 May we will not look at all schools together but at each school individually. I can assure you I am here to listen.
- Cllr Hartin Are you not aware of what officers are doing? Are officers in control or you or vice versa?
- Emma
Haston
Ex pupil I am an ex pupil, my siblings and children also attended this school. I have noticed posters all around the village. She then read a letter from her brother, Robert Woodbine Parish, who is a parent (copy attached)
- Ian Budd Councillors will have to make a decision at the end of this process. It is one that will need to focus on the best outcome for children's education in this area. We had a discussion with governors earlier today on a clear vision for the long term for the school and community. This includes working with neighbouring communities.
- Rita Baker
Ex gov/parent All four of my children attended Lydbury North School who have all done well academically and benefited from their start at Lydbury . What is considered to be wrong with the site? This school provides a good education.
- Mrs Baker also referred to the volunteer time which is given to the school, as she herself gives French lessons. If this school is moved from the village, skills will be taken away and they cost nothing.
- Ian Budd In comparison with other areas, there is a high level of voluntary work. The County Council's vision is not based solely on buildings but on high quality staff working alongside committed governors and volunteers. There is not a single template for all schools.
- Ian Terry
Diocesan
Director I would like to pick up sustainability issues. That is what this school has. What you have here are governors, staff and community very committed to drawing out the vision.
- Rachel Hall
Parent Following this period of consultation if two communities want to stay – can this be taken into account?
- Ian Budd Yes, Councillors can decide not to commission statutory consultation. A clear view for the future of this community is required, no school is static. All schools have ideas on future services, buildings and vision.
- Rev Paul You only offer three alternatives. You do not say we can stay as we

- Collins Rural Dean are. What I suspect is that government departments want new and different ideas but why if the existing works well? You seem to know the cost of everything but the value of nothing.
- David Wilkinson Parent In January, DCSF guidelines on Closing a Maintained School says it has a duty to provide a choice and diversity and also duty to listen to parents' wishes. I put it to you that this is limiting choice. This excellent school should remain open. Are you determined to contravene these government guidelines?
- Ian Budd We are not contravening government guidelines. Shropshire's education is judged as outstanding/excellent. It is very rare to have schools in Ofsted's concern categories. We have only one at the moment but this is rare for us. The County-wide assessment is very much based on the majority of schools being good. After any proposed reorganisation programme there will be sufficient unfilled places for parental preference to work.
- Parent Surely a large proportion of that is because we have a lot of small schools.
- Ian Budd Performance is similar in small and large schools.
- John Murphy Parent My question is in the consultation document under the heading "Why are we making proposals...". What is this amalgamation addressing?
- Ian Budd The vision and policy is focused on a sustainable high quality network of primary schools. Although numbers have stabilised in this area, we have the lowest number of pupils in the primary sector for years, with consequences for the funding of all schools.
- John Murphy Parent Is it to do with finance then?
- Ian Budd National funding is allocated to local authorities based on pupil numbers. There are less resources when pupil numbers are falling than if numbers are more stable.
- If you looked at an urban model, if a school is causing concern, parents would move their children to another school. This would not work as a reorganisation principle in rural Shropshire. Any reorganisation is likely to involve good schools.
- John Murphy Parent What is the definition of failing? Is Clunbury failing?
- Ian Budd There are a number of ways to define failing including education standards. No, Clunbury is not failing.
- Sally Jones Parent If you say that both schools are sustainable, should you be looking at other parts of the County? Both schools serve a community – should

you not be directing this to other schools where buildings are not good and Ofsted report is not good?

- Ian Budd Each school will be considered individually. Some other areas have requested meetings on primary school organisation proposals. It is important that the outcome is sustainable for the long term in each community.
- Judith Bowen Parish Cllr From your reply, proposed amalgamation is not to do with educational standards – only economics.
- Parent How much will you save? What will you save over 4/5 years?
- Ian Budd We have to know that a change is in the interest of educational standards. A combined school would have lower costs than two schools, eg through having one site to maintain. Some aspects of staffing would not be needed or shared.
- John Baxter Our forecasts are usually accurate. We have good information from the PCT in the form of known children data. Over the next two years there will be 2000 surplus places in the County.
- Sally Jones Parent If there is less money from central Government, it is your problem, why are you penalising our schools?
- John Baxter Those schools which have static numbers will see their funding drop.
- Cllr Hartley We have lobbied and will continue to lobby Ministers for more funding. Members and officers have met with the Schools Minister, Jim Knight.
- John Baxter Said he understood the needs of rural villages and the community and that every community is different.
- Roger Plowden Chair PC We are fortunate to have a School, Church, Post Office/Shop and public house in Lydbury North. Losing the school would take a brick out of the wall and would lead to losing other services.
- Ian Budd Studies elsewhere have proved there is not a simple template as to what makes up a community. Experience locally does not show a causal fall in local service provision. People are still committed to their communities.
- Shirley Kidd Parent The core of pupils, over 50% walk to school. How would you safeguard these children travelling to Clunbury?
Figures given on children walking to Lydbury are not correct.
- John Baxter Confirmed he had received amendments to this figure and confirmed this will be updated.
- Ian Budd Stressed there is opportunity during formative consultation to

	update/analyse any data. It is important that information is accurate.
Cllr Phillips	Expressed concern that people were waiting to ask questions.
Roger Plowden Chair PC	Can I ask Cllr Hartley why, if the closure policy is deferred, why are you persisting with the closure of Lydbury North?
Cllr Hartley	I am not persisting on any closure. This is formative consultation and I refer to the three options contained in the paper. She confirmed she had made a note of comments on status quo and federation. She said she would welcome helpful suggestions and ideas.
Cllr Hartin	You are not answering the question. You have a policy in place. We are putting a policy commission in place. This proceeds down the line of failed policy.
Cllr Hartley	Replied that Scrutiny called in the decision but voted to continue to this formative consultation stage for the 16 schools.
Parent	Can you define amalgamation please?
Ian Budd	Legal definitions are as in the three options (bullet points) in the consultation document. What we are doing this evening is listening to people's views as part of formative consultation.
Parent	Keep the school open – that would help.
Ian Budd	Referred to earlier discussion with governors on status quo and federation.
Heather Kidd Aunt of pupil	We have never had an answer as to why you have gone back on closures. How is Lydbury/Clunbury different?
Ian Budd	A lengthy discussion was held at Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel. Members voted 7-4 to lift the call-in of amalgamations.
Rita Baker Parent	Regarding the issue of spare places. If it costs more per capita, it is for central Government. What is the cost of social services etc. We are not looking at what is not in the questions.
Ian Budd	This has been debated in Schools Forum. It is important that children have an equivalent entitlement wherever they are. Different social needs in different areas are recognised.
Nikki Pugh Parent/Gov	Since we have had the decision to go ahead with amalgamation, we have heard about the policy commission and a revised set of figures from Steve Barras. Why not wait ?
Ian Budd	In terms of figures for Schools Forum and others, these are updated regularly for new information once it is formally confirmed.

Parent Figures were available in November but these have not been updated.

Ian Budd There is a demographic problem. How best might those challenges be addressed. The current work seeks people's views on how best it might be addressed.

David Wilkinson
Parent How come Ofsted have said we are very good value for money?

Cllr Phillips People have made their views known in the hall. Also, prior to December, 97% were against. This consultation has been ignored.

He made a suggestion that taking out Lydbury would show that Members had been listening.

Ian Budd There is an opportunity to get all points across over the coming weeks. Notes on the meetings will be shared with the governing body. All submissions will be fed back to Members.

Parent Is there any reason why we have to continue to be locked into amalgamation. If some communities want consultation – can you not take it elsewhere?

Ian Budd thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions

Cllr Hartin A formal complaint has been made and will be fed back.

Nick Howells Reminded audience that questions can still be sent in. Letters/comments can be left at the school or the Post Office for my collection, which I will forward. The consultation period goes on until 2 May 2008.

Meeting closed at 8.15pm.