



Minute of St Johns/Claremont Parent Council of 22nd February, 2011

Lisa Simpson welcomed attendees and introduced Lesley Robertson who gave a detailed powerpoint presentation in which she talked through the current position of St. Johns and Claremont Primary Schools and the proposed four options for merging the schools. Additional information was given in reference to questions asked at the Public Meeting held on 10 February 2010.

The meeting was then opened for questions and comments.

QUESTIONS RAISED / AREAS OF CONCERN:

1. **My preferred Option would be Option 4, but do have concerns in the size of the new school with a pupil count of 420. The projected population figures published in February state that there is an estimated 24% increase in the population by 2033, and children aged 0-15 a raise of 16.7%. I don't feel that we are planning for such an increase, and may have to resort to portacabins to accommodate such.**

Neil Wilson, Parent – Claremont

Lesley Roberston

The figures you refer to are Clackmannanshire wide, whilst there is growth in Clackmannanshire, its not looking that the bulk of house building will affect Alloa West. Based on the figures we have, the school should be big enough.

2. **In the Local Plan there are currently 4 sites in the catchment area. I think that you should consider the type of housing within the catchment, for example there is a lot of flats proposed which tend to attract younger families.**

Neil Wilson, Parent – Claremont

Stephen Crawford

I will go through the proposed development sites within the catchment area and apply the current formula for estimating the average amount of children per household to see the affect this may have.

3. **Have you considered the amount of placements you may get in a brand new school, it may attract disabled children if it has better facilities.**

Kate Paterson, Teacher – St Johns

Lesley Roberston

As you know, people can request a place in any school but if the school is full there are no placements for people outwith the catchment.

4. **Will the school be operating at capacity when it is built?**

Neil Wilson, Parent – Claremont

Lesley Robertson

It will be sized-up so that it will be efficient, but whether it is full is hard to predict at the moment.

5. **It would be helpful to understand what scope of flexibility is there in the size of the school. For example is it at 90% capacity?**

Neil Wilson, Parent – Claremont

Eileen Turnbull

420 pupils is the optimum, which lies between 85%–95% capacity, checked against the 2008 published figures.

6. **I am somewhat confused, in reading the papers it seemed that the primary driver for the consultation was St Johns but throughout the meetings it seems to be the broader idea of St Johns and Claremont, which changes the dynamic. Is St Johns still the catalyst for this consultation?**

Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

We have been awarded £4.5million to assist in the construction of a new school, which was awarded as St Johns was in such a poor condition. The Scottish Futures Trust is awarding the funds but we have come forward with the proposal to combine the two schools which will share the same facilities. For a capital construction, it will benefit a larger amount of pupils.

7. **The reason we have been awarded the money is to build a new St Johns. It seems peculiar that you have chosen to merge the schools which is not an optimal benefit for St Johns.**

Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

Merging the schools is optimal to benefit the most amount of pupils in Alloa West.

- 8. So the primary driver is for St Johns and Claremont, not just St Johns?**

Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

It is not the primary driver. Claremont suitability is currently a 'C' rating, St Johns is a 'D' rating. There is an opportunity to let as many young people as possible have the use of brand new facilities, but the reason the process was started was the condition of St Johns. If you would like to put your preferred option and comments onto the feedback form, comment on any of the options that you feel may not have been explored.

- 9. My understanding is that you are only consulting on the four options, isn't that correct? Where is the opportunity to formally consult on the other options?**

Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

We are formally consulting on the four options. However, if feedback strongly suggests another option, this will be reported back to Elected Members and debated.

- 10. You have already constrained people to four options.**

Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

We have chosen these four options as they seem most achievable, viable, affordable and has the best benefit for the most amount of children.

- 12. In regards to the size of the school, I have concerns. But I feel it is very much the staff of the school that make the standard. If a merge occurred, what would be the management of the school?**

Jacqui Monk, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

There is no evidence in Scotland to suggest that the size of the school affects attainment. It is paramount that we have the best possible staff to deliver the best teaching and learning for the children. The actual size of the school at 420 pupils is not huge, for example Abercromby Primary has a current role of around 420 and is achieving very well; Tillicoultry Primary also had over 500 pupils and is highly regarded. In relation to the management of the school, I state from the minute of the Public Consultation "...education standard is no different to that of St Johns. It is about the quality of teaching staff, not the size of the school ... Head Teacher appointment is concerned a competitive Scotland-wide interview would take place to ensure the correct candidate is selected."

- 13. If St Johns has been able to deteriorate and you have been awarded funding to rectify it, at what point do you decide that the best educational benefit would be to double the size of the school?**

Andrew Yate, Parent – St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

As St Johns is a listed building, there are some difficulties in keeping the building maintained. The condition and suitability of St Johns is a level 'D'; Claremont suitability is a level 'C' and the original business case sought to maximise the benefits for people in Alloa West.

- 14. I think you have made your decision based on the fact that the Council cannot afford the upkeep of two schools and in combining two, it will be less of a cost. Any of the options have an equal amount of educational benefit. My concern is the claim you make that educational benefit is at the core of the consultation, as it seems to be financial.**

Andrew Yate, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

I disagree with the comment that the options have the same educational benefit. There are advantages and disadvantages for all the options.

- 15. I hope that when this is voted on the educational benefit is at the core of the decision, not that the Council has some funding and would like to spread it as thinly as they possibly can to cover any gaps they have in their Estate.**

Andrew Yate, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

There are two Elected Members present tonight, who will have noted the comment. As Tax Payers you would expect Officers of the Council to be as prudent as they can with the funding awarded to deliver the best education service.

- 16. Can you quantify the educational benefit that will be lost in building a new merged school than a new St Johns School?**

William Yeomans, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

The benefits of a new build single school and a new build merged school are broadly the same. A merged school will allow other children to access the facilities. There are benefits for staff coming together and young people having better social skills in mixing up groups.

17. I was in a new rural school building in Lanarkshire where the total role was 13. Clackmannanshire Council seems to have a different attitude because of their financial position. I am not persuaded that creating a giant 'factory-like' school the children are not used to is the best option.
William Yeomans, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

In Scottish terms the proposed merged school is a large middle-sized school, it is not huge.

18. What about in terms of Alloa West?
Andrew Yate, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

In Clackmannanshire terms, it would be one of the biggest primary schools in the county. But it would not be the biggest school; Alva and Tillicoultry are bigger and Abercromby is currently at that size and is projected to become larger.

19. There have been a number of International studies that show that as a school becomes larger boys tend to attain less well. The money that has been allocated to this project is because of St Johns, if Claremont requires funding then it should be looked at as well. We should be looking at what is best educationally for the children.
Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

I agree that the best option should be chosen for the education of the children. If the decision is to have a single build St Johns, Claremont would continue to be maintained under the rolling programme of maintenance the Council hold. In relation to attainment in boys, current research in the McKenzie report has looked at high performing schools and it is the quality of teaching that makes the difference, not the size of the school.

20. We were previously given attainment levels in each subject from Tillicoultry, Abercromby, St Johns and Claremont. The attainment levels in the two larger schools were far above St Johns and Claremont, so the argument that a larger school has less attainment does not agree with the evidence shown. We seem to be hearing that 200 Claremont pupils should not get the best facilities that can be available at the moment.
Neil Wilson, Parent – Claremont Primary

21. All the children should get the best, but the primary drive for funding and this consultation was St Johns but now it seems to be for the Alloa West Community. But I quite agree that all children should get the best opportunities to move forward.
Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

The primary driver was stimulated by St Johns, Eileen can go further into the original Business Case.

Eileen Turnbull

The basic Business Case from last years consultation was a combination of both St Johns and Claremont.

22. Comments were made in relation to attainment levels, this was taken from one year group and I feel that if you look at previous year groups and levels since, the attainment will be very different. Can I also add from a personal point of view, I don't feel that we can properly review the best option when the feedback you have presented shows one school moving to a new build, not two schools merging to a new build. We should have sufficient evidence and would value this as a teacher in one of the affected schools.
Kate Paterson, Teacher – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

We have noted your comment but there will be an opportunity for Teachers to consult.

23. On the technical report it states that there are current maintenance problems in Claremont, which might not have a direct impact on St Johns but I think that the ongoing maintenance costs would come out of the general education finances.
Catherine Lambert, Claremont

24. A few points that I raised at the Public Meeting, which I am still not clear about, in regards to class sizes. The potential size of the school [in housing development terms] if it is become bigger, would it still be the case that you can build additional extensions instead of using porta cabins?
Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

When you build a school which is intended for 400-420 children, you do not normally design the building with the intention to extend in the future. Schools are built in streams i.e. a one stream school, or two stream school.

25. This worries me as last year there was a potential to build extension. In the original proposal there was 23 classrooms and 4 other rooms now there is 16 classrooms and 4 other rooms. The class sizes last year were stated to have P1-P3 classes no larger than 18 pupils, yet the proposed figure for 2012 state P1 would be no larger than 18 and P2-P3 would be 24 pupils. So again last year and this year the figures are different. I understand the Government guidelines are to be no larger than 18 but the legality is that they are no larger than 26.
Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

The figures for P1 is 25 pupils, P2 and P3 is 30 pupils.

26. **But you say that the Council are trying to adhere to a class size of 18, this is not getting honoured in August 2012 based on this information.**

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

Apologies if this was not clear in your previous answer, the indicative 3500m² that were allocated to the school are based on 15 classrooms of 60m² and 3 smaller classrooms of 40m², in terms of the costed proposals in the technical options, these are not fixed number of classrooms. This is purely for costing purposes, there is no intention of cutting the classrooms.

27. **What happens if we do have a potential housing developments which could increase the Alloa West population? This worries me if we increase the class sizes in conjunction with the educational benefit.**

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

The figures that were shown were indicative for costing purposes. The Government policy on class sizes that cap P1 at a maximum 25 pupils will be legislated from August 2011. We will continue to keep the pupil teacher ratio to 1:18 as far as possible. For example, if the catchment area for a year group is 19, you suggest you take one child and place them in a composite class – being rigid on class numbers can be a disadvantage. It's the quality of the educational experience rather than class sizes that make the difference.

28. **The Government are taking these steps as it has shown it is beneficial to make the class sizes smaller. A smaller group is better than a large group.**

Jacqui Monk, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

You can take 25 children with an excellent teacher and 18 with a good teacher, it is the quality of teaching that makes the difference.

Stephen Crawford

We have a unique opportunity to build a school, we will design to accommodate class sizes of 18 pupils.

29. **I don't see where there is a benefit with teachers coming together, as far as I understand teachers should be at the same level.**

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

A greater mix of staff can create a broader mix of skills and interests which can encourage children. There is a richer blend of opportunities, for example music and drama.

30. **How do you expect to filter that specific skill through 400 children?**

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

You can afford that as an after school opportunity and can encourage staff to develop and deliver different skills.

31. **You need a figurehead in any organisation or school, the quality of education ultimately comes from the Head Teacher. You stated at the last meeting that the interview would be Scotland-wide, but in the papers it states that "the proposal would mean that one Head Teacher post would become redundant, if both of the current post holders expressed an interest in the post of a Head Teacher in a merged school appointment would be made by competitive interview". In my understanding that implies that only the current Head Teachers could be selected, not a Scotland-wide interview as you last stated.**

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

I have stated the Chief Executive answer from the minute of the previous public consultation.

32. **So this overrides the proposal?**

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

As far as I am concerned it does, yes.

33. **I do not see why you have it in the proposal in the first place, not everyone knows where to find the minute, they are going to assume the proposal is correct.**

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

I think it is open to your interpretation of a competitive interview.

34. **The Head Teacher and the staffing of a school is of great importance to the educational benefit of my three children when this proposal is concluded.**

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

I don't disagree that leadership is very important. Currently parents are heavily involved in the engagement of a new Head Teacher and I do not see why this would change.

Lisa Simpson

It would be very helpful if you could articulate your comments and questions on the consultation feedback.

35. **There was a few comments you have made in regards to the coming together of teachers and how they would be managed. It sounds like a secondary school structure, why are you phasing this at primary school level?**

Jacqui Monk, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

The proposals are not chasing a secondary school structure.

36. If a larger school is more beneficial why are they not making all the schools larger?

Jacqui Monk, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

Creative examples were used to illustrate some benefits. Additionally it would allow enhanced planning and assessment techniques to come together. This is not a secondary school model. We had presentation from a pupil group today where children were in a mixed age group, and the children's feedback from this project was very positive – this is an opportunity to think differently about how children learn.

37. I don't see how this would be more manageable or easier in a larger school. Surely this would be easier in a smaller school?

Jacqui Monk, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

It can enhance the learning of the children as there is a broader scope of skills that can be pulled together to give the children better opportunities.

38. The current staff at St Johns do all of this, it's the current state of the building that is holding them back from developing.

Katherine Yeomans, Parent – St Johns

39. I have an issue with the consultation form. Option 2 and 4 is to build a new St Johns on a different site, or to build a new school for pupils of both schools on a new site. This is not actually what is on the proposal document – it is specifically the Redwell site. You are going to get votes for a new school on a new site which bears no relevance to the Redwell site. I have already submitted this on the consultation form.

Neil McLaren, Parent – Claremont

40. I picked up a consultation form from ABC Nursery today and it only states Options 1-4 with no detail and states it is to be returned by the 25 February.

Name Undeclared (A)

Lesley Robertson

Thank you for drawing that to our attention, we will ensure the up to date form is in the Nursery.

41. Option 2 and 4 is either very well marketed, finance seems to be the driver for this proposal. A merged school will give the Council a bigger benefit. I think that the best option would be to build at the old Alloa Academy site.

Neil McLaren, Parent – Claremont

Lisa Simpson

If you have comments on the site, please put this on the consultation form.

43. There is no doubt St Johns need a new primary school, but I see the consultation as a Council benefit rather than an educational benefit.

Neil McLaren, Parent – Claremont

Stephen Crawford

We are looking to use the funding and a significant amount of our own investment to cover the maximum amount of children. In the recent winter, St Johns found it very difficult and a significant amount of the Head Teacher's time could have been better spent looking after the children, rather than the building.

44. The price of building a new St Johns and combined school does not seem to be a great deal in difference. But when you look at the value of Claremont being at £750,000, I think if you can clear this off your bill already that's a benefit to the Council.

Neil McLaren, Parent – Claremont

Stephen Crawford

It is cheaper to build a merged school.

45. Is the funding of £4.5million only available for a merged school?

Neil McLaren, Parent – Claremont

Eileen Turnbull

We may not have the same level of funding, the Scottish Futures Trust would have to clarify the level of funding.

46. Do you have a commitment that there will be funding whatever option is selected?

Neil McLaren, Parent – Claremont

Eileen Turnbull

The option of refurbishment would not qualify for funding from the Scottish Government, there will only be funding for a new build.

47. Why did you ask them for funding for both, not each of them? It seems that you have made the decision already.

Neil McLaren, Parent – Claremont

Eileen Turnbull

At the time it was deemed important for Alloa West due to the condition of St Johns and Claremont.

48. It seems that you are going to put a proposal to the Councillors that gives them the opportunity to have quite a substantial amount of funding or maybe get funding for another project. If you don't have funding secured for any other option, it doesn't seem that you are consulting.

49. In the technical appraisal there is not an option for a new build for St Johns only at a new site. The four options we are consulting on at the moment: Option 2 is a new build for St Johns on a different site, meaning Redwell.

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

Option 'f' covers option 2 and 4, which is a new build school on the Redwell site.

50. But this is a larger school and a combined catchment area. What you are saying is that the Scottish Funding would be less, so you can't get the true implications of building a new St Johns on the new site. Option 'f' includes the £4.5million you would get for both schools.

Gavin Maxwell, Parent – St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

Option 'f' covers the new build: option 2 or option 4.

51. So you don't know what potential funding you would receive for a single school?

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

420 pupils is the figure given for a costed analysis from the Scottish Futures Trust for both proposals.

52. For a new school for St Johns only on the Redwell site, you do not know exactly what the funding is? The consultation is incomplete, as you do not know what the costings are.

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

The decision taken was to build a 420 pupil school in both options.

53. So you would have St Johns with 420 pupils?

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

If we were building a new school it would be for 420 children. The Scottish Futures Trust funding is based on a per pupil ratio: the costing ratio for a school up to 230 pupils is an 8.5m² per pupil at £2,350: over that 7.5m² per pupil at £2,350.

54. The point is, for a new school for St Johns for 200 pupils you do not have accurate costings at the moment. Is that true or false.

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

In terms of costings that is true.

Lisa Simpson

If the proposal put to the Government was for a school for 420 pupils and the outcome of this consultation is the option just for a new St Johns, is the expectation for the Council to build a new school at this size only populated by St Johns? Or would you review the size of the school and re-apply for funding?

Eileen Turnbull

We would be looking for revised figures if we were reducing the size of the school. The technical options were appraised to accommodate not only St Johns.

Lisa Simpson

If the funding is determined by size of school could we get a figure for that?

Eileen Turnbull

Yes.

55. From the beginning of the consultation process?

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

Lisa Simpson

The principle is there, the funding issue is for the council to manage, you are to decide your preferred options.

Stephen Crawford

What you asked was if we had funding for a single St Johns, we can go to the Scottish Futures Trust and specifically ask for the level of funding that can be received.

56. You are now not comparing like for like, with not having this at the start you have allowed people to develop their ideas on the understanding that funding is available. You have given people the idea that St Johns will receive £4.5million in funding and if Claremont continues to deteriorate then they will receive the same level of funding.

Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

57. If the consultation was for a St Johns only, we would not be looking at the financial aspects of the financial report as you wouldn't build a school for 420 pupils for St Johns.

Gavin Maxwell, Parent - St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

We will get the figures from the Scottish Futures Trust.

58. Changing the figures half way through a consultation process is not normal.

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

59. People looking at the website tonight for example will be seeing the figures published in this technical report.

Gavin Maxwell, Parent - St Johns

Lisa Simpson

It is a valid point that is being made. We will get the information and you can make a decision on how the consultation goes forward. We will make it clear on the papers what you are being asked to make a decision on. Does that give you some reassurance at the moment?

60. I would like to see like for like costings across the board.

Paul Dale, Parent – St Johns

Lisa Simpson

That is all we can do on this particular issue at the moment.

61. Looking at the value of the properties at St Johns and Claremont that can become available for sale, how have you come to this figure?

Alex Monk, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

The district valuer came to this figure.

62. What is the plan for the St Johns building with that value?

Alex Monk, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

There are no current plans for the building.

63. Would that be for sale, if so would that be for sale to anybody?

Alex Monk, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

It would go on the open market.

64. So you could potentially get a lot more than what is stated?

Alex Monk, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

That value is from four years ago, and the current climate it may differ.

65. Is there anything to stop someone from doing nothing with the building?

Alex Monk, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

It is a 'B' listed building, they would have an obligation to keep it maintained.

66. My concern is that if no one buys it, it will be left unsecured.

Alex Monk, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

If the building does not sell, the Council have a responsibility to secure it.

67. Are there any limitations on what the building can be used for?

Alex Monk, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

To my knowledge there are no limitations. If it is a change of use from a school it would be subject to planning permission.

Lisa Simpson

There may be some impact from the interior of the building being a listed 'B' building.

68. Why is the only alternative other than a rebuild of St Johns or a new build on Claremont, the Redwell site? Did the Council not look at other potential sites, for example West End Park?

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

If you would like other sites to be considered, please include this on the consultation form. We also must look at the change of use for areas.

69. I see this as a two stage process being 1: should you merge St Johns and Claremont and 2: where do you put any future school. It does not seem to be a great scope as you have selected the sites at Claremont or Redwell.

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

70. Is there any reason why it can't go at the old Alloa Health Centre, is it because of the catchment that you are keeping to this specific area?

Gavin Maxwell, Parent - St Johns

Lesley Robertson

As far as I understand, the Council does not own the Health Centre land.

Donald Forbes

This is correct. The Health Centre site and most of the car park area is owned by the NHS. There may be an issue with the West End Park as a burden in the title states it must be used for public open space. As part of the technical options appraisal the Pavillions was looked at, the costs were quite favourable, but other issues such as the change in use, ownership and proximity to other buildings made it unviable.

71. What happens next?

Andrew Yate, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

We will post as much information as we can find on the website. If you have access issues if you let us know and we can assist. Consultations with staff and the young people are still to be carried out. Following that, the HMIE will visit both establishments to carry out an evaluation and independent consultation. At the end of the process all materials will be gathered and be put to the Council and dependent on the decision, the Scottish Government. We are willing to consider having an additional consultation with the Parent Teacher Council if you feel there are more questions that need to be answered.

72. Can you confirm the dates of these meetings?

Name Undeclared B

Lesley Robertson

They are not arranged as yet, but they will be held before 25 March.

73. I tried to access the minutes on the website and they would not work.

Name Undeclared C

Lesley Robertson

That was a technical hitch, it was working internally but interfaces were preventing the document from working outwith the network. It has now been rectified.

74. That is another glitch in the consultation process, we can't view documentation that has been provided.

Jacqui Monk, Parent – St Johns

Stephen Crawford

There has been a lot of questions and requests for additional information, we will review whether the consultation period requires an extension for you to fully consider any options.

75. I think you have to go back to the fundamental basics and review the consultation process and whether you have followed the guidelines.

Paul Dale, Parent - St Johns

Lesley Robertson

We will take advice on that point.

Councillor Holden expressed his concerns in regards to the question of whether or not the lack of information on unsecured finances on one of the options deems the consultation invalid, and requested a quick response. He expressed his thanks to the Parent Council for their questions and comments.

Councillor English articulated concerns in regards to the lack of information provided and rounded up the comments made. He reiterated that communication is vital in the consultation process, and insisted that Officers continue to ensure that information is conveyed appropriately.

Lisa Simpson closed the meeting on behalf of the panel, everyone was thanked for their attendance, views and opinions.

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