

APPENDIX F
Minutes of public meeting 10th 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, which were:

Option 1 – To refurbish St John's Primary School on the existing site.

Option 2 – To build a new school for St John's on a different site.

Option 3 – To refurbish and extend Claremont Primary School to accommodate all of St John's pupils.

Option 4 – To build a new school for pupils of both schools on a new site.

The meeting was then opened for questions and comments.

QUESTIONS RAISED / AREAS OF CONCERN:

1. Can you outline the difference in benefits of a single build St Johns to a merged St Johns and Claremont Primary?

Name Undeclared

Lesley Roberston

A merged school would benefit from a larger staff group with more flexible groupings with children. Keeping to class sizes, there would be opportunity for fewer composite classes with a merged school. In a recent survey carried out in Clackmannanshire 75% of respondents agreed that savings could be made with fewer buildings; with more resources spent on Education, therefore a merged school would make a reduction in building costs and an increase in Education spending.

2. What will be the difference in the Facilities of the Schools?

Name Undeclared

Lesley Robertson

The basic facilities for both e.g. a gym, external playing areas and dining halls would be the provided, whether they are a renovation or new build. There is not a great difference.

3. If a combined, both schools would benefit given the information presented. Claremont may not benefit with the fact that the problems identified in St Johns are greater. I see it a combined school will benefit the most amount of pupils.

L. Laidlaw, Chair –Claremont Parent Teacher Council

4. I disagree that any school should be built on the Redwell playing fields, it has twice been drained in the past few years with a slope going down to the school it would make it worse. I feel that the railway beside the site would reduce the amount of outdoor activities for pupils, Claremont would be a better suited environment.

Wilma Thomson, Resident

Donald Forbes,

Looking at a similar site to Redwell e.g. Wallace High – Stirling, you can see that a slope is present I would anticipate the same drainage and pump system. The drainage issues at the Redwell site have been investigated and testing done. I would envisage a cost to such drainage however, a renovation would be harder to manage than that of a new school.

Eileen Turnbull

Alva Academy had similar concerns. The site elevations were built on a helix foundation which has allowed a building to be constructed on problematic ground. We do have a report from CRA 2009, who looked at the problems with surface flooding and they concluded that such problems can be prevented from proper drainage techniques.

5. Why was the Redwell site not used for Alloa Academy?

Gary Batchelor, Parent

Eileen Turnbull

In terms of the curtilage needed for a secondary school, current site of the academy is slightly larger than the Redwell site.

6. You are saying the site is larger, but my understanding is that the current site is not large enough. If Redwell was not suitable for the secondary school how is it feasible for a primary school to be built there?

Gary Batchelor, Parent

Donald Forbes

The School Premises Regulations 1967 show that this site is within the guidelines for a primary school.

7. Do you know the regulated area per pupil?

Gary Batchelor, Parent

Donald Forbes

The Regulations do detail this, and such information will be provided on the consultation website.

8. At previous consultation meetings Claremont was detailed as a category 'C' school, however this evening you have listed as a Category 'B', could you detail what this is?

Karen Young, Parent – St Johns

Donald Forbes

The Category 'C' rating is for suitability and Category 'B' rating is for condition.

9. What is the intended selection process for a Head Teacher in a merged school?

Anthony Cassidy, St Johns

Angela Leitch

When choosing the Head Teachers for the new secondary schools, parents were pivotal in the process. Bearing in mind that funding will not be available until around 2013, trends and teacher training will have changed by this time. We would be looking at the skills and leadership qualities required for the post.

10. The choice of the Redwell site seems lousy and unviable. There is an issue of a busy arterial route on one side of the school and a railway on the other. I would be worried about vibration, fumes and coal dust. Evidence must be put forward that this process is to benefit the pupils and not solely for the Council, it appears to be a commercial decision as the Claremont site can be sold for prime housing.

Scott Weiler, Parent

Angela Leitch

The final decision will be made in order to give the maximum benefit to the maximum amount of people.

12. Will the old academy site not be sold off until this consultation process is complete?

Scott Weiler, Parent

Angela Leitch

This cannot be guaranteed as the Council decision to sell assets had been agreed previously. The Council are currently marketing all surplus land to offset capital receipts.

13. I have a photo in my hand a picture of a train carrying coal in excess of a thousand tonnes, where you intend to place my child in a school. Have we looked into the railway safety?

Tom Douglas, Parent

Angela Leitch

Safety of the pupils is of paramount importance. This has been looked into previously and a report will be made available.

14. Why can't we build a new school at Claremont? This land is shown for sale.

Tom Douglas, Parent

Angela Leitch

The land cannot be taken off the market until it is put to the Elected members, which was previously agreed to be sold to offset the cost for the new secondary schools. Due to the current economic position, I cannot see the land being sold within this consultation process.

15. Now that the demolition of the old academy is complete on the Claremont site, can you take the fencing down at the playing fields?

Tom Douglas, Parent

Angela Leitch

I do not have the details for this, but will investigate.

16. I believe the Claremont site is under offer.

Jim Laird, Resident

Angela Leitch

There will be a decision made by Elected members, however it will not take place during the consultation process.

17. What are the benefits of a larger merged school other than the size?

Brian Robinson, Parent – St Johns

Lesley Robertson

The size of a new school is not huge by any standards. Research is available where evidence shows that it is not the size of the school that matters, more the quality of teaching. I would contend that the educational experience both inside and out of the school is what is most important to the youngsters.

18. Is the Redwell site still up for sale?

Gary Batchelor, Parent

Angela Leitch

There are designated sites that Elected members have put up for sale. However, I do not know the details of these areas at present and will get back to you on that.

19. Would it be possible to show the outcomes of a merged school that has been built in Scotland? Also, what does the Council propose to do with the current St Johns building?

Name Undeclared

Lesley Robertson

We will find examples of the outcomes of merged schools.

Eileen Turnbull

Some examples of merged school outcomes can be shown in the case studies. The intention and wish of Historic Scotland is to maintain and re-use the current St Johns building.

20. If the building is empty how does the Council and Historic Scotland propose to preserve it?

Name Undeclared

Eileen Turnbull

There are no detailed proposals as yet to show what options are available.

21. Will it be left to rot?

Name Undeclared

Angela Leitch

It is the intention to re-use the building to harvest some income for example sheltered housing, or to dispose of it.

22. I feel that St Johns is unsuitable for sheltered housing. I am concerned about the security and safety of the building and its deterioration. On the website there is an option of the Pavillions to be used, which seemed to be less costly and safer than the Redwell site, why is this no longer an option?

Elizabeth Ramsay, Resident

Donald Forbes

All options were looked at thoroughly and the site you are referring to is in an industrial location, it is an option in terms of land that can be made available.

Eileen Turnbull

In regards to the St Johns building, all efforts will be made to ensure the security of Council buildings. Historic Scotland supports plans for its retention and re-use. There is a limited market for this type of building but there is still an option of disposal.

23. How is the decision made to 'zone' areas?

Tom Douglas, Parent

Donald Forbes

It is down to the Planning Policy, which is currently under review.

24. Is the Pavillions still a potential option?

Tom Douglas, Parent

Donald Forbes

Some sites are obviously more practical; the options chosen have been selected under a principle outlined to seek the most viable site.

25. Is it possible for parents to vote on all eight options rather than the four you have presented?

Gillian Fraser, Parent - Claremont

Lesley Robertson

The formal consultation is for these four options. However, if you wish to express a view on the other options there is an opportunity to do so on the consultation form. My understanding of the legislation is that the options must be passed by Council, which are those contained in the consultation document.

Angela Leitch

We have looked at all eight options but if you feel we have possibly overlooked some viable points, please express them and we will take them on board.

26. Will any savings made from this consultation be put back into the school or into general use for the Council?

Nicola Green, Parent - Claremont

Angela Leitch

It will be more cost effective to run one school. If there is less of the budget spent on fabrication of the buildings the savings will be put into Education.

27. Will the savings be ring fenced to St Johns and Claremont?

Nicola Green, Parent - Claremont

Angela Leitch

I cannot confirm that any savings would be ring fenced to those two schools. The amount of rates and energy costs could be better spent on front line services i.e. education and elderly people.

28. As part of the consultation process can paper copies be sent to the residents for comment?

Name Undeclared

Lesley Robertson

The proposal documents are available at the schools, library and Council offices. Information has been published in the local press and details are available on the website on how to obtain paper copies.

29. I appreciate the cost would be great for delivering the papers, however some of my neighbours are unaware that this process is underway, I feel they should have the papers delivered.

Name Undeclared

Lesley Robertson

The Community Council has a role in informing the residents. I will get back to you on whether documents can be delivered.

30. I think this would be a good idea, as there are a lot of people who will be affected may not necessarily have the information. Have the nurseries been informed?

Elizabeth Ramsay, Resident

Lesley Robertson

It is our intention to consult with as many people as possible that will be affected.

31. Going back to the Redwell site, can you commit to carrying out a Risk Assessment in regards to the railway?

Scott Weiler, Parent

Angela Leitch

Pupil safety is of paramount importance in any of the proposals. We will make reports of such road and rail safety matters available.

Donald Forbes

There is general information available on railway safety and we will pull the information to reassure parents that all safety issues are covered.

32. The point of the Alloa railway line was that if the rail bridge at Queensferry would be unavailable it could be used as an alternative route to the East Coast. If this happens, we are potentially looking at a far greater amount of trains passing by a school.

Scott Weiler, Parent

Donald Forbes

Railway safety is heavily legislated, and we will ensure it becomes part of the consultation.

33. I think option three is a bit of a 'red herring', in my understanding Claremont did not have any playing fields and was already sold before the consultation. I think that we should not lose sight of what the money is to be used for.

L. Laidlaw, Chair – Claremont Parent Teacher Council

34. If the new school is built on the Claremont site, would the existing catchment areas remain? Would that mean that children currently in the St Johns catchment area would qualify for free school transport?

Elizabeth Ramsay, Resident

Lesley Robertson

From the calculations, children from St Johns would still be within the one mile zone.

35. Given the location of the school is an issue, focus should be on the education of the children. I moved to St Johns with the knowledge that the education in the school was a high standard, which you have at a rate 'C'. How much further can you better the education of the children in a larger school with better facilities? Primary 1/2 class sizes in the last report detailed that they would not exceed 16, but looking now you project 2012 classes being larger. What is the regulation for class sizes?

Gavin Maxwell, Parent - St Johns

Lesley Robertson

The condition and suitability ratings are for the building only, not for the quality of education. Using HMIE terms, education in St John's is good and the Council strive to continue to improve the education of the children. The pupil:teacher ratio agreed by Council for Primary 1-3 is 1:18, and we will do our best to honour that. The actual class size regulations for a Primary 1 class is 25, Primary 2 is 30, Primary 3 is 30 and Primary 4 is 33.

36. In the previous report there were to be 22 classes, and in the latest report it states 16. Is the goal to still maintain a class number under 18? Where you propose to have 25 pupils, does this mean there will be two teachers?

Gavin Maxwell, Parent - St Johns

Lesley Robertson

That is the commitment the Council has entered for this year with the Government. We will continue to work to achieving class sizes within the ratio agreed as part of the Government settlement.

37. Why can't extra classrooms be built in a new school?

Gavin Maxwell, Parent - St Johns

Eileen Turnbull

In the technical report there are 15 very large classrooms of 60m² and additional 3 classrooms of 40m², but these are just indicative figures for costing purposes. The facilities and design are flexible. The emphasis on good ethos, good working practice and relationships is huge factor in the education of our youngsters, of which the environment plays a part.

38. My child is being excellently educated at St Johns at the moment, but I would not wish the education to deter after the transition to a combined school. Going back to the point of Head Teacher selection, is it the case that as St Johns Head Teacher is soon retiring, that Claremont Head Teacher naturally steps in?

Gavin Maxwell, Parent - St Johns

Angela Leitch

Excellence is strived for in all of Clackmannanshire's schools, Claremont education standard is no different to that of St Johns. It is about the quality of teaching staff, not the size of the school and we will try to minimise the transition period for our younger people during a merge. As far as the Head Teacher appointment is concerned a competitive Scotland-wide interview would take place to ensure the correct candidate is selected.

39. Claremont Primary has an excellent HMIE rating. If you review the ethos and values of both Claremont and St Johns you will find they are the same.

L. Laidlaw, Chair – Claremont Parent Teacher Council

Councillor English welcomed the opportunity for him to attend and hear the views expressed in the consultation. He felt the views that were expressed will be taken seriously and with great consideration and encouraged the Parent Councils' involvement.

Lisa Simpson closed the meeting and urged attendees to complete the consultation forms and invited them to take forms for neighbours. On behalf of the panel, everyone was thanked for their attendance, views and opinions. Lisa informed that there a meeting with Officers and Parent Councils would take place on the 22 February 2011, with the consultation exercise going on for a further month after that.