



## **FUTURE PLANS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLING IN THE ALLOA WEST AREA**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 On 27 January 2011 Clackmannanshire Council approved consultation on the future of primary schooling in the Alloa West area.
- 1.2 The consultation was carried out according to the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The Act requires a consultation process that is robust, open, transparent and fair.
- 1.3 The process requires authorities to actively involve and consult children and young people, staff, parents/carers, parent councils and other school users. The authority must also include an educational benefits statement stating its assessment of the effects of the proposal on children and young people. There is a minimum six week, term time, (ie 30 school days) consultation period.
- 1.3 As part of the consultation process, the Education Service undertook the following activities:
  - Consultation papers were distributed to a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties
  - A notice to advise the public of the consultation arrangements was placed in the local press
  - A dedicated Clackmannanshire Council web page was established for all information on the consultation, corrections and any update and minutes of meetings
  - The initial consultation period ran from 31st January 2011 to 21st March 2011 inclusive, a total of 31 school days
  - The consultation was extended by a further two weeks until 5th April 2011 to allow all those consulted an opportunity to consider revised and additional information required following the public and parents' meetings held in February 2011.
  - The public meeting was held on 10th February 2011. The meeting was held in Alloa Town Hall and was chaired by Lisa Simpson Governance Manager. Approximately 45 people attended this meeting. The questions and issues raised at this meeting are contained in appendix F

- The meeting for parents was held on 22nd February 2011
- A joint meeting with staff from St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School was held on 8th March 2011
- The views of pupils from St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School were heard as part of the consultation.

## **2.0 Response to the consultation**

- 2.1 A total of 148 responses to this proposal were received.
- 2.2 One of the 148 responses was on behalf of Alloa Central Community Council
- 2.3 One of the 148 responses was a formal response from St John's Parents' Council
- 2.4 A petition of 114 signatures was received from Claremont parents and residents. The signatories to the petition were all against building on the Redwell site. The reason given for this is that the land has been subject to flooding and that there might be problems with traffic management.
- 2.5 The breakdown of responses by respondent category is detailed in appendix A
- 2.6 The number of respondents to the consultation document is detailed in appendix B
- 2.7 The majority of the responses were in favour of Option 4. Option 4 is to build a new school to serve the combined catchment areas of St John's and Claremont primary schools. A breakdown of numbers selecting each option is detailed in appendix C
- 2.8 The consultation undertaken with pupils in both schools used guidance issued by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. The outcome of the pupils' consultation is attached as appendix G for St John's Primary School and appendix H for Claremont Primary School.

## **3.0 Main Issues**

- 3.1 The education provided by both St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School is highly valued by parents/carers
- 3.2 The responses to the consultation and the public meeting highlighted several areas of concern:
  - A larger school will have a detrimental effect on children's schooling
  - The safety of the Redwell site in relation to road and rail
  - What will happen to the St John's site

- Management of the school
  - Distance pupils will be required to travel
  - Why the new school cannot be built on the old Alloa Academy site
- 3.3 Throughout the consultation, the size of the proposed new school has been an issue for a significant number of parents. Research citing the detrimental effect of large primary schools was given as a reason for this. The research is American and is mainly concerned with high school size. However, there is little robust research applicable to the Scottish primary context to back up the American findings.
- 3.4 A systematic review of the effects of small schools in 2004 was carried out by the University of London's Evidence of Policy and Practice Information (EPPI). The research extended to empirical studies of small schools but included only 9 studies from the whole of the UK. The findings suggested that the relationship between school size and educational outcomes is complex and it recommended that further research should be carried out. The report also stated that "schools within schools may have the potential to offer the benefits of both small and large schools".
- 3.5 It is the view of officers that it is the quality of learning and teaching in classrooms which has the biggest impact on pupils. It is possible to find very good HMIE reports of schools which are larger than the proposed new school. It is also possible to find reports of smaller schools where pupils' education is not as good as it should be. The opposite is also true. This leads officers to conclude that size does not matter nearly as much as the quality of the service provided. Within the authority, Alva, Tillicoultry and Abercromby Primary Schools have all had rolls of 400 or more pupils. Each school has received a positive inspection report. The authority has a statutory duty to ensure the quality of its school provision. Along with the headteacher, the Quality Improvement Team would have a clear role to play in supporting and challenging in any new school and its organisational structure to ensure that there was no detrimental effect on pupils.
- 3.6 A senior officer of the police attended the public meeting to discuss road safety issues. The Council's officer with responsibility for safe routes to school was also present. No issues were raised at the public meeting, nor were any questions asked relating to road safety, although a number had been raised previously.
- 3.7 The road between the junction of Alexandra Drive with the A907 and the proposed entrance to the school would be the subject of engineering to slow traffic down. Separate entrances to keep pedestrians and vehicles apart would be built into the design of a new school. Parents would be consulted about the overall design and especially with regard to road safety. Many schools operate a Junior Road Safety Scheme and the headteacher of the school would be expected to participate fully in ensuring pupil education about and engagement with road safety was as effective as possible.

- 3.8 The issue of railway safety was not raised at either the public meeting or the parents meeting although it also had been raised in the past. As part of the presentation to parents, evidence in the form of a quote from the Director of Education in West Dunbartonshire was offered in an attempt to reassure parents that schools beside railway lines did not place pupils safety at risk. Suitable fencing would be provided along the south side of the site to ensure pupils could not access the railway. As with road safety, educational programmes on railway safety would be reviewed and implemented. Some pupils who attend St Johns Primary School currently use the railway footbridge to cross to the school from the north side of the A907. Whilst there would be more children making use of the footbridge, there have been no concerns reported to the authority through the duration of its current use.
- 3.9 A concern regarding the issue of the impact of coal dust from the coal trains on pupils' health was raised at the public meeting. When the application for the railway was considered it was agreed that coal dust would not be an issue. The freight operating companies take all reasonable steps to reduce any trainborne commodity dust. Coal trains travelled some distance, from for example, the deep water terminal at Hunterston, so any loose dust will have been blown off well before the train gets to Alloa. The stock is carried in covered wagons and so there is unlikely to be any impact on air quality. In addition, the guidance on air quality would normally consider the levels of train activity as insignificant based on the pollution from the train's diesel engines. The class 66 locomotives normally used to haul the coal trains conform to the EC Directives on exhaust gas and noise emissions so they are the best currently on the market in Europe.
- 3.10 The HMIE report raised the issue of general pollution at the Redwell site. The Council's Environmental Health officers have stated that locally, all pollutants have been discounted due to their low levels. The exceptions are NO<sub>2</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>s. In the lack of any industry sources, these pollutants are mostly caused by road traffic. The view of Environmental Health is that any increase is unlikely to have a significant impact on air quality because it would be in short bursts which would occur around the opening and closing time of the school to pupils. Environmental Health also consider 'canyon effects'. These are any sites where pollutants may linger. The judgement of the proposed site is that it is fairly open and pollutants will be assisted to disperse making them less likely to linger.
- 3.11 The petition against building on the Redwell site was concerned with flooding and road safety. A ground investigation was undertaken in 2009 by CRA Structural Engineers which concluded that, from the geotechnical and geochemical aspects, there are no particular issues with regard to development in the area identified. It was also confirmed that mineral stability was cleared under previous investigations undertaken in August 2003. CRA anticipated that a combination of ground drainage, outfall improvements and site elevation would be required. Trial pits indicated that any artesian water issues were not likely to present major issues in shallow excavations to depths of 1m to 2m.

- 3.12 The disposal of the St John's site was raised by a resident at the public meeting and by some parents at the meeting for parents / carers from both schools. The building would be the subject of an asset review. If declared surplus, it would be disposed of appropriately. The building would be protected by security personnel until such time as a Council decision was made about its future.
- 3.13 The management of the school is dealt with in section 7 which deals with HR issues.
- 3.14 The site of the new school is 0.15 miles from the current St John's site and is 0.28 miles from Claremont Primary School. Pupils most affected by the move would be those who live in the Claremont catchment area close to Lornshill Academy. However, the catchment areas would still come within the acceptable statutory walking distance for primary pupils.
- 3.15 The question of the Alloa Academy site has been raised by many of the interested parties. At the time of the consultation, the Alloa Academy site was under offer by a purchaser and, as a result, it could not be considered as an option. The current status of the site is that it is still under offer and negotiations are ongoing.
- 3.16 The pupil consultation for Claremont Primary School and St John's Primary School was carried out on the 16th and 17th March 2011. All children in the school were given the opportunity to take part in the consultation if they wished. The nursery staff in both classes facilitated the discussions with their own pupils. In both schools pupils in P1 - P4 had the chance to participate in a small group consultation discussion. Pupils in P4 - P7 completed a questionnaire. A "Thought Box" was also used to allow the children to add any other questions, issues or concerns that they had. The results of the pupil consultation will be fed back to the pupil council at both schools.
- 3.17 Pupils in both schools had a range of views. Most were broadly in favour of a new merged school but some echoed concerns raised by parents about safety of the proposed location. Others asked questions about the identity of the new school and what the uniform would be like. Clearly, there would be a need to consult pupils and parents about identity and uniform if the Council decides to proceed with any new, merged school for Alloa West.
- 3.18 The staff of both schools were supportive of the proposal for the new, merged, purpose-built school. Staff felt the new school would allow for the very effective implementation of Curriculum for Excellence by making use of flexible learning areas, indoors and out, and promoting interdisciplinary learning across stages and areas of the school. Staff at Claremont also thought that the building would be better equipped for disabled users than the current Claremont building.

## **4.0 HMIE Report**

- 4.1 The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) to be involved in the formal consultation process. As a result, HMIE undertook a number of activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal.
- 4.2 The HMIE report is attached as appendix D but the following are key extracts from the report:
- 4.3 The implementation of the consultation proposal for the merged new school would improve the facilities for children and staff from both St John's Primary School and from Claremont Primary School and provide better opportunities for staff to meet learners' needs. Access for disabled users would be improved.
- 4.4 Clackmannanshire Council has conducted a consultation process which has allowed children, young people, parents, staff and other stakeholders to express and have their views considered. Overall, the proposal takes good account of the condition and suitability of the current two primary school buildings and facilities concerned and the cost of delivery of education across the authority for the greatest number of pupils.
- 4.5 The proposal to build a new merged school will help to ensure that the council is meeting its statutory duties, including those relating to provision of adequate and sufficient school places whilst securing best value in the efficient and effective use of its resources.
- 4.6 As well as stating that the proposal to build a merged school for the pupils of St Johns and Claremont Primary Schools would secure best value and effective use of resources, HMIE said that the council should consider what further reassurance it can provide in response to stakeholders' concerns about the educational benefits, the size of the proposed merged school, and potential safety factors due to the proximity of the new school site to road and rail traffic. The issues of size and safety have been dealt with elsewhere in the report.
- 4.7 In addition to the educational benefits already stated, reassurance about further educational benefits to be gained from a new school might be best provided through visiting newly built and merged schools where first hand, neutral advice and evidence can be gained. Suitable examples have been identified and offers of visits, with transport provided, were made to staff and parents of both schools during the consultation period. These were politely declined at the time of offer. The offer to arrange visits stands and will be made again if the Council decision is to approve the proposal. This would be the best way to further reassure parents of the educational benefits for their children.
- 4.8 The consultation period was extended by 2 weeks more than was originally planned. This was because of issues raised at the parents' meeting about the size and costs for a new build for St John's only on the Redwell site. (See appendix 1 for details.)

## **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The council may not decide to implement the proposal until the expiry of three weeks starting from the day on which the consultation report is published in both electronic and printed form.
- 5.2 If a final decision is taken to build a new merged school on the Redwell site at the Council meeting of 30 June 2011, the Council must then notify Scottish Ministers of any decision on closure within a period of six working days. Ministers have the power to issue a call-in notice regarding a closure decision, but only where it appears to the Ministers that the council has failed in a significant regard to comply with the requirements of the act, or to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to its decision to implement the proposal. Ministers have six weeks to decide whether or not to issue a call-in notice. During the first three weeks of the six week period, any person or group is able to make representation to the Scottish Ministers on whether a decision would be called-in. Any relevant representations must be taken into account by the Scottish Ministers when deciding whether or not to issue a call-in.
- 5.3 The council carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (appendix E). This did not identify that any young person would be treated less favourably on the basis of, for example, gender or race if the proposal to build a single merged school were to be implemented. The assessment identified a positive benefit for pupils with disabilities.

## **6.0 Financial Implications**

- 6.1 The council's preferred option of Option 4 will cost £ 8,736,374 in total. The net capital costs of works is estimated at £4 682 624 assuming a Scottish Futures trust grant of £4 053 750.
- 6.2 Based on estimated running costs of a new school, the net saving over 30 years is £1 553 363.

## **7.0 HR Implications**

- 7.1 The merger of the two schools will allow the deletion of the post of one Headteacher. At the public meeting on 10 February 2011, the Chief Executive gave an assurance to parents that the headteacher of any new, merged school would be recruited through national advertisement.
- 7.2 Staffing levels in schools are determined by a formula based on pupil roll. Unpromoted teaching staff and non teaching staff are appointed to the authority. Staffing levels in all schools are reviewed on an annual basis. At the point of any merger, the staffing levels of the school would be consistent with authority policy. Additional staff required would be recruited according to Council procedures. In the event that any staff become surplus to requirements as the result of merger, the relevant Council procedures for dealing with this would be applied.

7.3 There would be no compulsory redundancies as a consequence of the proposal and, if the proposal is approved, discussion with staff and unions would commence at the earliest opportunity.

## **8.0 Recommendations from the Consultation**

8.1 The views of all respondents and the findings contained within the HMIE report have been reviewed. A range of views exists about the best option. Nothing raised in the course of the consultation has materially altered the technical elements of the options presented. The potential educational benefits, for all of the pupils in Alloa West, outweighs perceptions about the impact on pupils of the size of the school.

8.2 It is recommended that the Council approves the proposal to build a new school for Alloa West on the Redwell site. A new merged school to accommodate St John's and Claremont primary schools would result in the closure of both of these schools on completion of the new building.

## **9.0 Appendices.**

- A Number of responses to proposal by category
- B Number of respondents to consultation document
- C Breakdown of numbers selecting each option
- D HMIE Report
- E Equalities Impact Assessment
- F Notes of public meeting
- G Child consultation notes - St John's Primary School
- H Child consultation notes - Claremont Primary School
- I Extension of consultation period paper.