

# Hertfordshire Primary School Public Consultation

## Report

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) undertook a public consultation on the need to reduce the number of primary schools places in Potters Bar and Hoddesdon and Wormley.

The County Council wished to consult with stakeholders about the proposal and part of this consultation was a series of fifteen public meetings held in May and June 2006, all of which were facilitated by Accent.

Prior to the meetings the Council had issued an information booklet providing details of the proposals, inviting comments and a list of the schedule of meetings inviting interested parties to call the Council to register a place if they wished to attend.

## 1.2 Accent's Role

In order to provide an independent moderator for the public consultation meetings the County Council commissioned Accent to facilitate the meetings and provide a summary report of the issues raised. Accent was not involved in the design of the consultation booklet or any other part of the consultation process. Accent's role, therefore, was purely facilitating at the meetings and preparing this summary report.

On Monday 24<sup>th</sup> July Accent received two folders of material from the Westfield Action Group regarding Westfield Community Primary School. This material has not been incorporated here as it did not form part of Accent's role in the consultation meetings. However, a copy of this material was also delivered on the same day to Hertfordshire County Council and will be included in their analysis of material submitted as part of the whole consultation process.

## 2. PUBLIC MEETINGS

### 2.1 Introduction

A series of 12 public meetings were originally scheduled to be facilitated by Accent. This was increased to 15 public meetings with an additional three meetings scheduled in Hoddesdon and Wormley to accommodate the demand for attendance.

In order to provide the best opportunity for as many people as possible in the audience to speak the audience numbers for each meeting was set at a maximum of 70 attendees. The County Council provided a telephone booking service for those wishing to register to attend and attendance at each meeting ranged from 18 to 70 people. At each meeting limited crèche facilities were also provided for children aged between 2 and 11 years of age.

Each meeting was scheduled to start at 7pm and to last for two hours. The schedule for the public meetings was as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Schedule of Public Meetings**

	<b>Date</b>	<b>School</b>
	<b>Potters Bar</b>	
1	Monday 22 May	Sunny Bank School, Potters Bar
2	Tuesday 23 May	Sunny Bank School, Potters Bar
3	Wednesday 24 May	Oakmere School, Potters Bar
4	Monday 5 June	Cranborne School, Potters Bar
5	Wednesday 7 June	Oakmere School, Potters Bar
	<b>Hoddesdon and Wormley</b>	
6	Monday 12 June	St Catherine's Church of England Primary, Hoddesdon
7	Tuesday 13 June	Ryelands Primary, Hoddesdon
8	Wednesday 14 June	Ryelands Primary, Hoddesdon
9	Monday 19 June	Sheredes Primary, Hoddesdon
10	Wednesday 21 June	Westfield Primary, Hoddesdon
11	Thursday 22 June	Westfield Primary, Hoddesdon
12	Monday 26 June	Ley Park Primary, Hoddesdon
13	Tuesday 27 June	Wormley Church of England Primary, Hoddesdon
14	Wednesday 28 June	Ley Park Primary, Hoddesdon
15	Thursday 29 June	Forres Primary, Hoddesdon

It was stressed at the meetings that with the number of attendees it would not necessarily be possible for everyone to speak. The audience was also invited to feed back any further comments on a feedback form provided at the meeting, which was designed by Accent. These forms were either collected by Accent on the night or were posted back to Accent's London address which was supplied on the bottom of the form. This form was provided so that any additional issues not raised in the meetings could be included in the reporting process. The meetings were all tape recorded by Hertfordshire County Council and the transcripts have been posted on their website.

Further comments e-mailed to the Council or material submitted to Hertfordshire County Council do not fall within Accent's remit so are not included in this summary.

## 2.2 Facilitation

At each meeting a council officer made a brief presentation of the proposals lasting about 15 minutes and up to four council officers were also in attendance to answer technical questions. Details of panel members who attended each meeting are included in the transcripts. A member of the Accent team led the meetings and was responsible for ensuring that as many members of the audience as possible had an opportunity to speak and that the meeting was kept on the subject. Three members of the Accent team facilitated the series of meetings: Jane Wilton, Beryl Wall and Teresa McGarry.

### 3. KEY ISSUES ARISING FROM THE POTTERS BAR CONSULTATION

#### 3.1 Introduction

This report provides a summary of the issues raised at the public meetings for consideration by the County Council as part of the consultation process.

At all meetings there was a mix of parents, teachers and school governors.

A range of topics was discussed and many of the same issues were raised at each of the meetings. Here we summarise the issues raised and the reader is referred to the transcripts provided by Hertfordshire County Council for the full verbatim questions, statements and responses.

Comments made on the feedback forms predominantly reinforced the issues raised in the meetings but any additional issues not covered in the meetings are incorporated also in this summary.

A summary of the issues raised, grouped according to theme, is provided in the following section. It does not include discussion of the circumstances relating to individual pupils or families, as there are other more appropriate channels for this.

#### 3.2 Predicting Primary School Places

At each of the meetings concern was voiced as to Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) ability to accurately predict the required future number of primary school places. The queries concerned how HCC currently predict the figures and whether, for example, new housing developments were included in these prediction estimates.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Why weren't changes to spaces in Potters Bar considered when Ladbrooke School was opened?
- Are there any figures about the projected number of children that are going to be in the county/this area in the future?
- How far ahead are the forecasts? What happens in five or six years time if there is an increase in population in Potters Bar? Will Council have to build more schools?
- The East of England Regional Authority is proposing to build half a million homes in the coming years by 2011 or 2021. There are a lot of new homes being built in the area (an estimate of 1,000 in Hertsmere Borough in four years). This volume of housing would support a new primary school.

The panel responded to these queries with:

- Forecasting is done from GP data. This is used as a baseline and information from children in schools. Also taken into account are housing data plans for the area.

There are little new build proposals. Nationally birth rates are on the decline. By 2020 it will come back up.

- The Council's predictions are quite accurate across the county. They leave in a margin of error, in case the figures are not right and also to make sure that there is some flexibility within the area and to allow some parental choice.
- The Council are aware of the regional social strategy, although it is for the whole of the east of England. New houses will be built in Hertfordshire though not necessarily in Potters Bar. At the same time that new houses are being built, the birth rate is going down. The national birth rate is about 1.8, somewhere around the EU average. If there are no new houses, the numbers of 0-nine year olds would go down more quickly than it is going down anyway.

Several audience members also noted that the take-up of free nursery places for pre-school children had increased, potentially indicating a greater number of young children about to come into the school system.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Has Council looked at the under 5's register and playgroups?
- The Daily Mail reported about two weeks ago that actually the birth rate is, year on year, increasing rapidly. Do the Council look at the under fives register? It's all very well looking at how many children are born in this area, has Council looked at the under fives register and also the play groups locally which are now full which they haven't been for a long time?

The panel members responded:

- Don't use the under 5's register as a forecast. Consider those under 5's living in the area. If playgroups are full that is a separate point.
- Don't take into account the number of children in an under five setting as a forecast, because the number of parents that will send their children to an under five setting will vary. What is done is take into account the number of children who are actually living in the area. And it is noticeable that this area has got increasingly full and is probably reaching capacity about now. Need to look at that. But that's a separate point. That's not because there are more children in the system, it's because more parents are deciding to send their children to pre-school settings.

### 3.3 Nursery and Pre-School Provision

There was some concern voiced over the closing of Sunny Bank Primary School in terms of the closing of the nursery, thereby reducing the number of nursery and playgroup places available locally. It was felt that the closing of nurseries attached to schools such as Sunny Bank and Oakmere would create difficulties for parents trying to get children of different ages to school and home again.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- There are a great number of people living close to Oakmere School, who walk to school with their children in buggies. It would be physically impossible for them to get to a nursery school at Cranborne and to return home within the two and three quarter hours.
- Closing Sunny Bank would reduce the number of nursery places within the town and some of the local schools do not have nursery facilities Therefore, school nursery places will be limited and parents' preferential choices will be affected.
- A lot of parents in Sunny Bank came to Sunny Bank for the simple reason that their children start there at a very young age and work their way right through the school. Consequently a lot of parents would bring their youngsters there to play group, then go into the infants and then take them down to the juniors.

The panel responded:

- If the option that is eventually implemented has an impact on nursery places and playgroups the Council will make sure there is alternative provision to make sure the playgroups continue.
- There are a significant number of nursery places across the town. If Sunny Bank were to close, that would take 60 places out, and not only the playgroup there, but also nursery places or pre-school, but there isn't a big take-up, even today for the nursery places. There are many nursery places that are vacant today in our schools across Potters Bar.
- Yes, Council is aware of the pre-school here in Sunny Bank and certainly would want to work with the pre-school to see how the Council could help in any relocation, if that is what is defined at this review... Would expect that nursery provision would be as good as it is at the moment.

### 3.4 Parental Perception on Schools

Audience members commented on the high educational standard of the schools earmarked for closure and wanted assurances that these good practices would be maintained wherever the children went. Also audience members commented that Sunny Bank Primary School and Oakmere Primary School had both recently received a good Ofsted report whilst Cranborne had received a 'satisfactory' report.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Given Ofsted and more recently Hertfordshire Council in the LEA noted the specific strengths of Sunny Bank, and given that options one and three propose the closure of Sunny Bank rather than amalgamating with Cranborne, not sure how Council can ensure the strengths and more importantly the staff who achieved this, are retained if children have to move to Cranborne.
- Sunny Bank and Oakmere have both satisfied Ofsted as good schools yet the school the Council want to move children to is only satisfactory and another school which has been ignored in the proposals but only counts as satisfactory. Do Council want to move a good school to a satisfactory school?

The panel responded:

- It's very important to understand here, the Council are not intervening because the standards at Sunny Bank or anywhere else are so low Council need to intervene. If that was the case, Council would do that, and have done elsewhere. It's even more difficult with this intervention. So whichever school closes, or reduces its size, there will be a point where this is good practice going on, which will then not be there, unless it was transferred to the new schools
- The underlying issue about which school is closing and why children are being moved, is that of minimum disruption to the number of pupils, and the investment that the Council can then make in the interests of those pupils in the new school and retaining as much good practice as possible, once those specific proposals are in place. So the ambition for any school in Potters Bar, is to make all good schools, or outstanding schools, as will be the ambition of the head teachers. And whatever the outcome of whatever proposal goes through, the Council will be trying to make that happen in those particular schools.

### 3.5 Queries Over Why Ladbrooke Was Built

There were many queries voiced as to why Ladbrooke was built and why these proposals did not include closing Ladbrooke. The question was also posed as to whether the building of Ladbrooke had meant that Sunny Bank and Oakmere were now being considered for closure.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- If the birth rate has dropped so dramatically why was Ladbrooke built eight years ago?
- One of the things about closing Sunny Bank, wasn't it always the intention to close as soon as Ladbrooke was built?
- Why was Ladbrooke never in the equation to close down? Has it to do with building houses on the land?
- When Ladbrooke was rebuilt there were places vacant in schools and in Oakmere to accommodate all of Ladbrooke, so there wouldn't have been any need for temporary accommodation. Those children could have been absorbed into the schools now as then, so the Council wouldn't have to be put in the situation it is in now. Secondly, it's a really cheap trick that the Council are trying to make people choose between their children having temporary accommodation and poor facilities, or staying together.

The panel answered:

- There was a peak in the primary numbers at about the time when Ladbrooke was rebuilt. The birth rate has only dropped since then. The numbers have been on a continual downward slide, until they start going up again for about 2020.

- Council looked at a number of issues and considered alternative uses for the land eg libraries might have an interest in the land but could not come up with a good alternative use of the land.

### 3.6 Parental Choice

Those in attendance at the meetings voiced their concern about how the proposed closures would inevitably reduce their parental ability to choose a primary school for their children.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included

- Council stipulate parental choice. Will choice be given of which school in Potters Bar to attend?
- If one schools closes for years 4, 5 and 6 would all pupils be guaranteed a place in Potters Bar?
- If parents want to choose that their child go to another school, what if they go to that school and they find that school is full up? Will the Council start farming children off across the county?
- So Council are guaranteeing every child a place in the school of their choice if they want it?
- Oakmere, which is going to be reduced to one form of entry under option one, have got more than 30 children, and the combination of Cranborne plus Sunny Bank is over 60. Need to understand where there's any parental choice whatsoever for that year, and secondly, what happens in the scenario where Cranborne has a small number less than 60.

The panel responded:

- If Sunny Bank closes the normal admission rules will apply if there are spare places.
- There is still a surplus [of places] in Potters Bar.
- There will be an impact on parental choice. One of the advantages of parental choice is that there is a surplus, which is good for parental choice. That is a consequence of what the Council are doing.
- What would happen is the normal admission rules will apply. So basically each school has admission rules and that's largely based on distance. And so, if a school becomes full then parents won't be able to send their children there, clearly.
- Unfortunately, people can express a preference, but no parent anywhere in Hertfordshire can be guaranteed a place in a school. What parents can do, at the admissions arrangement is express a preference. That's not the same as being guaranteed a place in the school of your choice.

### 3.7 Class Sizes

There was a concern that if the parents of all children from Sunny Bank school decided to go to Cranborne then the class sizes would be higher than 30. The audience were concerned to ensure that class sizes would not increase above 30 and that sufficient teachers would be provided to cope with the extra children.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Option 2 means that years 4, 5 and 6 will be affected with up to 10 pupils extra?
- Concerned that ‘bulge’ years 4, 5 and 6 might have some large classes eg 32, 34 or more children?
- Will there be additional staff to cope with the extra numbers of children?
- How much extra money will Cranborne get for the bulge years and will this include staff?
- How would Council structure the ‘bulge years’ – with mixed age classes?

The panel members pointed out that:

- There would be additional funding for those transitional years. What Council is saying is that, in a public meeting, it can’t take decisions that the head and the chair of governors would want to make. There would be additional funding to take those bulge years through.
- If all parents of Sunny Bank pupils go to Cranborne then it will happen that there will be more than 60 pupils eg the projected numbers are year 4: 67 pupils; year 5: 69 pupils and year 6: 67 pupils.
- Can’t set figures for this. Funding will be over and above the funding requirement.
- Can’t give guarantee about class sizes. It was only an example of what currently happens that head teachers take decision at certain times during the week to create class sizes relating to ability of pupils.

### 3.8 School Capacity and Spatial Requirements

Many concerns were raised about Cranborne’s physical ability to accommodate 3 FE’s. Those attending asked whether there were guidelines regarding the spatial provision for schools and whether or not these guidelines could be made publicly available. Many of those attending felt that Cranborne could not accommodate the influx of children should the Sunny Bank and Oakmere children decide to go there.

The audience said:

- Cranborne’s net capacity published by county is 330 children. Now if Council have Cranborne’s 300 children, and even if only 75% of Sunny Bank’s community join in

September 2007, that's still about 170 children. That's going to be well over 470 children coming here with a net capacity of 330.

- Are there government guidelines on the health and safety of how much metre square floor space should be allowed per child within the school and within the playground, because officers did comment on that in their previous report that Cranborne's playground was already cramped without an influx of 170 pupils.
- Last year spent a lot of the year teaching 30 children in a small space. It's very difficult to teach. Having said that, can you imagine how difficult it is to learn in that confined space?
- Can access be given to guidelines on space for children in playgrounds and school?
- Council won't be able to transfer the whole of Sunny Bank School to Cranborne. There will be around 500 children in the school that can only hold a maximum of 330 by the county's own assessments. Cranborne is not a two-form entry school. Our school simply won't fit. Council also haven't included playgroups or nursery children in the statistics, which makes the school even bigger.

The panel responded:

- The net capacity figure is a calculation made by the DfES. There's a formula and it is influenced very largely by the number of pupils there are in the school at the time. So it's not an accurate measurement of the space that is in the school.
- There are DfES guidelines on this. They give a minimum and a maximum in terms of floor area in particular spaces, but do actually allow some flexibility within that. The average for a classroom that is suggested is between 57 and 63 square metres, so that would be the average for a classroom. A playground space also has a standard. The Council haven't measured the playground space here but it is not far short, if it is short at all. The Council will be measuring that and making sure that it is not short should this proposal be put forward.
- Although this school was built as a three-form entry school, the accommodation that is here has been looked at and if the Council try and put 660 children or whatever, plus nursery here that would be extremely difficult. But the other factor is in terms of geographical location and the spread of schools that Hertfordshire would be left with. A school that is in the centre or somewhere where it is surrounded by housing, can attract from every direction.

However, other concerns mentioned related not just to the lack of physical space but also to a perceived lack of required facilities at Cranborne currently that would need to be addressed.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Clearly Cranborne is inadequate for purpose. If all the children from Sunny Bank are stuffed into Cranborne, there isn't enough proper toilet facilities, library facilities, IT suite, dining facilities etc. The school won't be big enough to hold school events, the playground space will be lessened by the temporary classrooms and they got a bad Ofsted report because of the dangerous playground.

- Cranborne is a very small school, which was too small when it was first built. It had to have a garage built on, for storage, and since it's had an extension put on it because it wasn't big enough. Where will an extension be built on that school? There is a field that floods which can't be used during the winter for football. There is a pond to take the excess water from the fields.
- Do other schools have any disabled facilities?
- Council said that Cranborne was designed for the number of children that it can currently take but it actually had to be extended. It had to go from a one-form entry to one-and-a-half forms at one point. ...And were the extra classrooms added because of the inaccuracy of the predictions at that time? Was it extended because when it was initially built the predictions for the children of that age were inaccurate?

The panel responded:

- Council wouldn't come with a blank cheque. But as a starting point the bare minimum, at least at the starting point, the Council would make sure the school had all the requirements set out with the DfES and those requirements do stipulate things like IT facilities, libraries, floor space, all those kinds of things
- If the Council were filling the school so that it was a full two form entry school it would make sure that the accommodation meets the parent requirements for accommodation of a two-entry school according to the DfES guidelines.
- No school is easy to extend. Talk about extending between the two buildings again, on a fairly significant sloping piece of ground. Cranborne is on a fairly level piece of ground. It is built in a particular style that can be extended. It's already been extended in one direction, it could be extended further and the architects, being the architects that will be used, if this proposal needs to be taken forward, will design a building that will be fit for current and future children.
- Council is actually embarked on a series of works that are being done in schools across the county, to make sure that there are the disabled facilities that are required. And particularly if there's a child joining a school, then those facilities would be prepared ready for the child to be there. But the Council are doing that across the county.
- The size of classrooms are important and a long discussion would be had about the size and shape of classrooms and natural light and all that, to make sure that any provision is provision were the classrooms are not so small that teachers can't teach well. For Cranborne that would be looked at.
- The Council has looked at Cranborne, and would be looking at and comparing that with the DfES recommendations for the sizes of schools, and making sure that that school is appropriate for the number of children. ...The Council will be making sure that the accommodation meets the DfES requirements for the appropriate number of children that would be in the school. Have not said Council would be doing a full health and safety audit.

There were also concerns raised about Cranborne in terms of safety and the use of the playing fields as they are liable to flooding. The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Sunny Bank Primary School has run a football tournament here for the last three years running. That's for all the primary schools in Potters Bar. Reason one, Cranborne School is built on old marshland. Their football pitch, their playing fields, are unsuitable 90% of the year for football tournaments, or any other aspect of sport. Sport is an important part of the curriculum.
- Have got to ensure that children are safe coming to and from the school. Got to make sure that children are safe in school. As pointed out and highlighted in the Ofsted report there is a danger of overcrowding in the hall and danger of overcrowding with junior children playing with infant children in playgrounds. If this school closes and these children go down there, children will be absolutely swamped out, cramped in the hall, cramped in the dining areas and cramped at playtime. That's without the fact that the school can't use their playing field for sport half the months of the year. That is not being sensible with regards to health and safety with all the children.

The panel responded:

- Any changes made on that site will conform to all the health and safety regulations and brought up to those standards. Council would not be creating a school that didn't meet national health and safety requirements.

### 3.9 Use of Temporary Buildings

There were concerns expressed regarding moving children from a school where there was permanent accommodation to a site where temporary accommodation was needed for a period of time. Concerns raised included whether the temporary accommodation would be ready in time. There were concerns also about where the portacabins would be located.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Will temporary accommodation be ready for 2007?
- How long is 'temporary' for temporary buildings?
- Worried about the siting of temporary classrooms.
- Proposals fly in the face of 'Every Child Matters' eg use of temporary accommodation. Also where the temporary accommodation should go is not known and yet this is the preferred option..
- Council have just said that it wasn't acceptable to built temporary accommodation for the children at Ladbroke and that was why Ladbroke was rebuilt. Why then is it acceptable for Sunny Bank children to be housed in temporary accommodation at Cranborne?

Responses from the panel included:

- If option one goes through and all the children are kept together, then the downside of that will be some temporary accommodation for a few years.
- It would be a maximum of 3 years that the school would be overfull if option one and all Sunny Bank children come here.
- Every Child Matters is at the centre of the proposals. Getting children's future secure in schools is a priority. Need temporary accommodation for when children arrive and this needs to be ready for 2007. No point deciding on temporary accommodation until the decision has been made then Council will look at the site as a whole.
- The portacabin would be on the school site, close to the existing buildings. That's where Council would put a portacabin, if it had to. But that would be for a short period of time.
- Staff views on portacabins vary quite a bit. The 300 portacabins that Council have, approximately, around Hertfordshire, many of them are very popular. There are examples of teachers and staff who like teaching in their portacabins.

### 3.10 Proposed Plans For School Buildings

There were some queries regarding what the land would be used for should Sunny Bank and Oakmere be closed down. Those attending the meetings wished to understand whether the land would be used for new housing and if so, how many new properties this would generate.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- What's the land going to be used for?

The panel responded:

- Hertsmere Borough Council and their planning rules are asking for no fewer than 30 units per hectare of new build. There are 1.7 hectares that could be built upon. That would create 46 units. However, because of the density, that is quite a high density and therefore, a number of those units are likely to be flats but Herts Council are not the builder. If you take it as a very rough rule of thumb, it takes a thousand houses to support a one-form entry primary school ie you get 210 children of between the ages of five and 11 from a thousand houses. That is the general rule.

There were queries raised as to how much the land would sell for and how the money raised would be spent eg would it be spent on education and would it be spent in the Potters Bar area or throughout the county.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included::

- The options look to be financially driven.

- Hertfordshire Council have obviously had valuations done for the land in Oakmere and Sunny Bank. What would they be if they were sold off ... And secondly, with that money that Hertfordshire Council raise, will it be ploughed back into the Potters Bar area and not lost.

The panel responded:

- They are not financially driven. What the buildings can be used for have been considered.
- There are 2 bits of funding. If the school closes it will save on running costs. This is a protected pot and cannot be used for other things. The Council has deliberately not valued the properties, as this would be the wrong starting point. When the property becomes available the rest of the council is offered to bid for that site and all reviews tend to cost more for adaptation of buildings. However, the money will be used for education.
- Any funds the council gets from sales of sites .. go into a corporate capital pot, so there is a sum of money which is a corporate resource, capital, and money for the county council services. And if there was a need for capital expenditure in the Potters Bar area ... the Council would bid to that fund for the necessary funds to do it, and it would come out of that pot.
- This isn't a money saving exercise and when the Council have reviews like this it tends to actually put more money into the area than is generated by releasing a site, so it's not a money saving exercise in that case. And the revenue cost of the school which would be saved doesn't go back to county, it goes back into the school budgets, so in that sense it's not a cost saving exercise.

### 3.11 Interim Procedures

Some concerns were raised about how the interim process would be handled to ensure that there was minimum disruption to the children.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Have concerns over the interim process. If Sunny Bank children decide to move children before Sunny Bank closes what about the admission policy? Have some space but in the interim there is not the teachers. Is there any provision for this to happen? Need to ease children into the process. Could Council provide another teacher?

The panel responded:

- There will be some disruption but Council will try to keep this to a minimum. For any option Council would immediately set up an 'action group'. Can't change the admission process but could put an extra level or loop in place to manage the movement of children. Council will aim to manage the influx in 2007 in an orderly way.

### 3.12 Other Proposals

Some members of the audience were sceptical about the proposals and whether a decision had already been taken.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Looks like decision has already been taken
- Why won't the council even consider the option for one form of entry for all Potters Bar schools? The spare buildings could be rented out to a number of community and council projects, so they would not be going to waste and would be earning the council revenue that would cover the energy and maintenance costs mentioned in your readings for discounting the option.

The panel responded:

- If there is a group of people here that come together and have firmed up proposals, then send them to the Council to be looked at and apply the criteria again. So if people have got some firm proposals, which weren't necessarily developed in the first stage, there are still several weeks to look at them. The Council will look at that and get back to people. Whatever proposals are looked at, the Council do need to meet those four criteria and that's the bottom line.
- The Council has a lot of experience in Hertfordshire of one-form entry schools. There will be some areas of Hertfordshire where one form of entry schools, and even smaller, can't be avoided but Council are looking to avoid them wherever possible, especially in an area where the number of children who go to those schools is falling, because it makes those schools vulnerable.

### 3.13 Congestion, Safety and Traffic Management

In each of the meetings there were concerns raised about the impact of congestion, getting children to school safely and how the Council proposed to effectively manage the transport.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included::

- Congestion is a nightmare. How will the Council cope?
- Concern over the congestion here. There is limited road space and at nine in the morning or three thirty, it is a nightmare. People park on the corners, across people's driveways. If this is with the school only being one-and-a-half-form entry, how will the people park or get the children into school? And also there used to be a lollipop man here to help the children cross the road with all the congestion, there's nobody here now. What's going on?
- Children come down from the main route and they walk in safety. The Council are asking to close Sunny Bank and send the children to Cranborne. Note the state at the moment of the road down there during rush hour, when parents are taking their

children down there? What's it going to be like if Council close Sunny Bank and send all children there?

- All of Hertfordshire should be looking to the future and the impact on the environment, not just for these young children in the following three years, but also for the future of Potters Bar and of its residents.
- The 20 children who go from here to the Cranborne area will be going almost certainly by car, whereas the 30 who come here, may not. If this is allegedly a deprived area or a disadvantaged area or perhaps an area for those who do not have transport of their own, those people will be most disadvantaged if you close any of the schools, let alone all of it and move them to walk across Potters Bar to Cranborne. It's physically impossible to do it. With a small child and another child in tow it couldn't be done.
- The children from this area going down to Cranborne would have to cross at least two main roads. It's horrendous. At Cranborne there are no parking facilities.
- By the Council's own admission this school is in an area of deprivation, which means a lot of our families don't have two cars. They would have to walk to Cranborne if they closed our school. That would be a hazardous journey, let alone all the extra number of cars, people who do have cars and are able to drive. In a time when so many children have asthma, walking along the main road, that can't be good for them. Also, a number of children walk to school on their own from a very young age. How dangerous would that be for those children to have to walk to Cranborne?

The panel responded:

- The Council have traffic expert colleagues and if the Council have to look at things like crossings and lollipop ladies and men, then that's something that would be looked at. And if it's going to be busier out there the Council will do everything it can to minimise that.
- Cranborne was built to take those numbers of children and at one point when it was full, it did cope with those issues. In terms of the children going through the gates and the cars stopping there, it coped with that. This is a countywide issue. Outside most of Hertfordshire's schools, there's a lot of congestion and it's worrying. If Cranborne is increased in size, then the Council will look at that in terms of crossings and traffic management. But it was designed for that number of children. It has got two entrances to the site, not one, which is helpful.

### 3.14 Summary and Conclusions

As part of the consultation process Hertfordshire County Council arranged a series of public consultation meetings. These meetings were facilitated by Accent, an independent market research company.

The main issues that were raised at the meetings were concerns over:

- HCC's ability to accurately predict future primary school requirements
- the potential reduction in nursery and pre-school places should Sunny Bank and Oakmere close
- reduced parental choice regarding primary schools
- increased class sizes
- Cranborne's perceived inability to accommodate the required number of children in terms of space and facilities
- placing children in temporary accommodation
- what the school buildings and land would be used for
- interim procedures to be put in place to ensure minimum disruption to children
- congestion, safety and traffic management.

These issues together with those raised through other parts of the consultation process should be taken into account by Hertfordshire County Council in making their decision.

## 4. KEY ISSUES ARISING IN THE HODDESDON AND WORMLEY CONSULTATION

### 4.1 Introduction

This report provides a summary of the issues raised at the public meetings for consideration by the County Council as part of the consultation process.

At all meetings there was a mix of parents, teachers and school governors.

A range of topics was discussed and many of the same issues were raised at each of the meetings. Here we summarise the issues raised and the reader is referred to the transcripts provided by Hertfordshire County Council for the full verbatim questions, statements and responses.

Comments made on the feedback forms predominantly reinforced the issues raised in the meetings but any additional issues not covered in the meetings are incorporated also.

A summary of the issues raised, grouped according to theme, is provided in the following section. It does not include discussion of the circumstances relating to individual pupils or families, as there are other more appropriate channels for this.

### 4.2 Predicting Primary School Places

Over many of the sessions there were concerns raised about the Council's ability to accurately predict the future number of primary school places required. Those attending the sessions were keen to understand how the primary school numbers were currently predicted and whether factors such as proposed housing developments, migration and nursery place take-up were included in the forecasts. One of the main concerns related to what would happen should a large housing development be put in place.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Regarding the surplus school places, how accurate can Hertfordshire Council's forecasts be?
- Can't always forecast booms in birth rates eg boom after the 1966 World Cup was unpredictable.
- Do forecasts include all new builds?
- If there is a new housing estate where are all the children going to go?
- How can the Council predict falling rolls with the increase in house building?
- Have Council taken account of people migrating to the area?
- The forecast is for the area. If running a business you would look at the forecast for individual schools in 2011.

- Percentages are a total fiction. Council has no idea what with immigrants and building. The Council can't say what is going to happen. The Council want the site for residential building.
- Building work could start as early as 2008 for the development of the 5000 homes, Broxbourne are reviewing their green belt space and East Herts. District Council are building 20,000 new homes, which will put pressure on this area.
- Go back to secondary closures some years ago – now children are travelling out of the county to schools. The Council were wrong with the forecasts. Worried that the same thing is happening here.

The panel responded to these queries:

- Part of forecast includes unit number from Council and the Council calculate the number of children from this. The only gap would be new builds the Council is not aware of.
- Can't predict which individual schools pupils will go to and so can't do a formal forecast but can look at other factors e.g. number of first preferences, number of pupils in year groups etc.
- Council use live birth data and District council planning applications. Data is available about children moving in and out of the area. This shows that Hertfordshire has a decline in some places, a steady state in some and an increase in a small area. Government Office for National Statistics forecast is until 2021. Department of Education and Skills recently published data that shows a big dip from 2004 and then a rise again by 2021 but still not as high as 2004.
- Council only forecast 5 years ahead. Housing developments tend to come 300 houses at a time. If greater than this the developers need to contribute to the infrastructure. Don't want to keep open elderly schools if in future we can get a new school built in the places where houses are.
- Council not anticipating more cuts in primary schools. Want to provide a robust pattern of schools. This school will be a viable and buoyant 1FE.

### 4.3 Capacity And Funding For Schools To Hold Extra Pupils

There were some concerns raised that those schools marked for expansion or those schools marked as receiving pupils from other schools might not be capable of holding the influx of new pupils. A further concern related to whether the classroom sizes or classroom space met the DfES requirements. Some attendees also queried whether funding would follow the pupils.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Please confirm if there are portacabins at St Catherine's will there be enough room for all children other than reception children.

- If option 1 the school roll will increase by  $\frac{1}{3}$ . Given the demand for the school it is not unreasonable to think of 90 children joining. Is there sufficient funding for 3 extra classrooms? New children will require extra attention. Would funding be targeted to have extra staff available during this period? How quickly will children join?
- School is oversubscribed. There are over 50 in the nursery. It is a golden opportunity to expand.
- How many surplus places in Wormley at the present? How many surplus places in Ley Park at present? Have lived next door to school and there is a current problem with parking and some people have incurred cost by putting driveways in. Why will Wormley with a smaller intake remain open and Ley Park with a larger intake not? Why is Council keeping a school that is not large enough with difficult entry?
- How many total children are there at Wormley at the moment? Then when it is combined with Ley Park, presumably it will increase?
- Does all the space at Wormley meet the DfES requirements for space per child?
- How can Council accommodate all the children at St Catherine's?
- The Wormley site causes least disruption according to you, but this site is a hectare smaller than Ley Park. How can Wormley cope with 2FE – possibly even more over a few years?
- Council are not putting the safety of children first. It is not a safe area. Trying to squeeze 2FE into 1.6FE. Why can't Council put forward another proposal?
- As a concerned parent, will the children be fully integrated into Wormley not put into a mobile?

To these queries the panel responded:

- School organised as an infant school and a junior school with 60 children in each year group. Therefore it may not be necessary to build 3 extra classrooms but probably 2. Some reorganisation within existing building will be required to accommodate children. The school population will increase by 105 if each year group is filled
- Ley Park is notionally a 2FE school. However, Wormley has double the number of children and so it is less disruptive to children and also Council are responding to parental choice. Good point about congestion, traffic and entrance to the school. It is not as good as Ley Park. Council will need to look carefully at the entrance and access to the school. Also Council may not get the planning permission to develop this school (please see p4 of the consultation document re the caveat). This is the Council's preferred option but if we are physically unable to achieve it we would consider the Ley Park site instead.
- If all children are included ie nursery plus school, there are currently 342 children at Wormley and 200 at Ley Park ie 542 including all nursery children at this site at the

moment but numbers are changing and declining. The forecast is 468 and nursery children.

- There will be more pressure on space during the building works and with the portacabins but there will be the opportunity to use the field on the other side of the river.
- With Option 2 Council would like to offer children the chance to go to one school and in that case it would offer them Forres. This would be a short-term increase because, in a few years, it would drop to a 1FE. However there are places at St Catherine's and a number of parents will choose other schools. If everyone did come here we would provide mobile accommodation.
- Council are offering places to all the children at Ryelands and Westfield. They may not choose to take up the places. During the transition period the Council will provide good quality accommodation for all the children.

There were also concerns raised about the potential new class sizes when the schools close down. Some were concerned that the class sizes would be greater than 30 and whether staffing levels would be increased to reflect these larger class sizes.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- If 468 children plus nursery (combined Ley Park and Wormley) that means an average of over 66 children per year. This means more than a 2FE without the flexibility of new housing. So new parents in the area have no chance of getting into the school. Also why has a lot of money been spent on surveying the area already?
- Concern about figures quoted for option 1. If all children go to St Catherine' which is a 1.5FE – if 15 from Westfield and 15 from here surely that makes it a 2.5FE. Some parents moved children already and so budget reducing. What will happen to children here at the end?
- How many children will there be in each year at Wormley?

The panel responded:

- Initially yes it will be a 2.5FE so that peers can be together. Also there are places at Sheredes also. Council expect it would be more than a 2FE initially. None of this means larger classes over 30. There would be sufficient teachers for normal class sizes.
- Some schools have mixed age groups. This is a decision for the school and governors. There would be a bulge and it would work its way through. There would be funds for temporary measures.

#### 4.4 Parental Choice

There were many concerns raised about parental choice and how difficult it was to access the popular schools. Several of the parents whose children attended Ryelands

mentioned that they had not been offered places at any other school. The feeling prevailed that the proposals further limited parental choice.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Concerned about parental choice and not happy about the choice offered to parents on this estate. Council are saying to parents go to St Catherine's but it is a faith school and that may not be a choice for all. Against a 1.5FE. Why not exclude Forres or Sheredes? Need to offer real choice to parents
- Forres is being used as a 'buffer' ie a school for growth but here Wormley is full as is Longlands. Also Broxbourne CE the other local school has criteria for entry that may alienate some. Where will children go? There is no other choice. Council could leave Ley Park to take any increases. Wormley can't take growth. It will change the nature of the school.
- What about parental choice. Wormley is a church school.
- School income is dependent on the number of children. Why close a school where numbers are rising, lots of parents are opting for this school, and send children to a school with falling roles?
- Chose Westfield as it is a 1FE non-religious school. There is no evidence that 2FE is better. How do people go about home learning? Will you pay?
- This is a safe school. It has a pre-school and all sorts of things are going on. Why not move the school here and call it Wormley. After all it's just a reputation and the schools only as good as it's head teacher.
- If Forres becomes a 1FE then some children are not going to be able to come here.
- Council are limiting parental choice with only offering a faith schools.

The panel responded by saying:

- All options lead to less choice. Need to balance parental choice with the right to express a preference. There is a price to be paid. Other options considered are in the back of the consultation document. The option to expand Sheredes is in option 1 already.
- If parents feel that an increase in Wormley would change the nature of the school they need to say that. Forres will reduce from a 1.5FE to a 1FE - its natural size – temporary building will permit expansion to a 1.5FE. Reduced places do mean a reduction in parental choice. Match of pupils and places means no choice but is cost-effective. Audit Commission says have 5-10% surplus spaces so as to permit parental choice. Too many extra spaces are very expensive. Aim is to allow sufficient spaces to enable choice without wasting money.
- A number of organisations support home learning. Didn't say Council would pay.
- Schools do go up and down but at the moment Wormley is the school of choice.

- There is no doubt that when Council reduce places we reduce parental choice.
- Council would make Forres available to all the children in this area.

#### 4.5 Minimising The Disruption Caused By Closing Schools

A number of parents from the Ryelands Primary School stated that as this primary school is featured in each of the proposals the closure of this primary school is a likely outcome of the consultation. There were also worries about the disruption that the potential closures would bring to pupils and that the pupils should be supported during and after the move with the appropriate numbers of teachers allocated to this task. There were also concerns that the receiving schools should be supportive of the arrival of children from the schools, which were closing down.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- It is powerful when the whole school and community support the base unit. Justin Donovan said whichever schools closes but Ryelands is mentioned in all three proposals. Justin also said that the Council cannot leave the situation with significant numbers of places. Is the Council saying no to leaving the status quo? Will members/decision makers visit all of the schools? This is a very good school. Members need to visit all schools.
- There will be extensive building works to accommodate children. Also a need to move children twice. Children will be frightened of moving. It will provide a big 'us' and 'them' divide. This will affect children.
- How is the Council planning to integrate the children?
- Council don't care about the disruption, only the money.
- Concern about the transition period for the older children who will be taking SATs at that time. It will be very disruptive.
- Concern about what will happen to the school during the transition period. Parents taking children out before the school closes. Will the budget be protected?

The panel responded to these comments by saying:

- True that all 3 options include closing Ryelands, which is a likely outcome but it is not beyond the realms of possibility that all 3 options will be rejected. In this school the numbers are falling. There are the least children and the lowest parental choice. Council cannot maintain the status quo. The surplus is not evenly spread across the county and empty schools are vulnerable. Don't know if elected members have visited schools or not.
- Council has nearly two years and will have detailed arrangements well before the transfer. Lots of support and sharing of the curriculum. Council will make sure that it will see it through very carefully. Have a good track record.

- Wormley is the more popular school. Understand the access and site issues and will be working to find a way through that. Propose to retain the entrance and increase parking at Wormley by using the hard play area. Less disruptive to move the smaller number of children from Ley Park to Wormley.

#### 4.6 Nursery and Pre-School Provision

To a lesser extent than in the Potters Bar consultation, the audience members mentioned the nursery or pre-school provision. However, there was some concern that by closing schools with a nursery provision this would take already limited places out of the system.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Can you guarantee the possible re-location of the pre-school nursery?
- What is going to happen to pre-school provision?
- Talk about the birth rate dropping but in the three local nursery schools there are 90 two year olds.
- Council has given vague answers about pre-school. Also there will be new dwellings on this site. Can you confirm that the Council is closing this site only because of numbers?

To the points listed above the panel responded:

- Would make sure that there is no reduction of pre-school places in the area.
- In terms of pre-school there is a growing pressure on numbers. More parents are choosing to send their children to pre-school.
- Council will be involved in the pre-school provision but it is not the Council's responsibility. It is often voluntary or private provision – it is not a statutory requirement but it is good practice. If there are new dwellings on this site it won't be very many and that has been taken into account. If we leave things as they the schools will be half empty. Obviously Council will look at this school first.

#### 4.7 Children With Special Needs

Many of those attending the consultations at the Ryelands Primary School stated that the base unit was a very important and integral part of their school. However, there was some concern that the base unit may not be welcomed at other schools. Some of the base unit teachers at Ryelands felt they should have been consulted on the proposals. There was also concern that other children in the school needed 1 to 1 support and whether this would be provided in the new school.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- All schools provide something different. Now choice is removed. Left with St Catherine's. No choice of anywhere else. Child was on the point of being excluded. The school couldn't provide support. Dreaded Ryelands, as had a mistaken impression of Ryelands. It is a wonderful school. Son has the support of the unit and the school. The knowledge from this unit will be lost.
- Council said schools are willing to take the base. Head Teachers are but not schools. There are lots of successful bases around the county but Ryelands gives them a welcome and that is why the school is successful. Others are looking at the way this school is working. Yes the base will move and the staff will go but the whole school will need to be committed to take it on.
- Staff weren't consulted about these plans only about our jobs. Would question your research as the school and the base are symbiotic. The base has worked here. Was surprised to discover that SEN officers were not consulted about the closure and did not receive consultation documents.
- Have worked in schools for 27 years and no school is like Ryelands. Base children are made welcome and Head Teacher is supportive to us. All are sympathetic to the children. All base staff feel the same.
- A lot of children need 1 to 1 support. Will Council guarantee that they will get the same support as here? Council are increasing 2 schools and so paying to increase buildings. Why not just shut 1 school down?
- Some pupils have speech, health and learning difficulties. How will the new school handle the bullying that may or may not go on, because the classes will be bigger and they won't have time?

The panel responded to these issues by stating:

- Schools that are not full are vulnerable but the advantage is that it gives parents choice. Reduce schools and you reduce parental choice. Hertfordshire needs secure schools. Regarding special needs, Council will talk to families individually when options are put in place. No disputing that teachers at Ryelands know how to deal with children.
- Council spoke to senior SENs. Will need to make a careful decision as to where the base will go.
- That underlines the importance of the support base and wherever it is located it will need to be valued. Need to carefully consider where it will be moved to.
- Ultimately it is up to the head teachers to set up the support. Head teachers will be willing to ensure support is continuous.
- Primary support base serves the whole community. 6-8 children within base and also outreach from base to support children in other schools. The primary support base is well respected throughout the county. Need to have a willing school
- We are talking to an ex Head Teacher whose brief it is to look at all primary bases.

## 4.8 Protection of Staff Jobs

There were some queries raised about what would happen to staff members' jobs.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Are the staff going to be relocated if the school closes? Will they find jobs for the pre-school staff?
- What will happen to the teachers and TA's in all of this?

The panel responded:

- Don't know exactly where the pre-school will be located. Can't guarantee jobs of pre-school staff as they are not County Council employees.
- As rolls fall, whether there are 11 schools or 9 there will have to be a reduction in staff. There is inevitable movement because of the falling rolls.

## 4.9 Christian Ethos of Alternative Schools

Some of those attending the sessions were concerned about moving their children from a school with a secular ethos to one with a Christian ethos. Queries were voiced as to what the differences were between the non-faith schools and the faith schools. Some parents felt that their choice was restricted if they were only offered for example, St Catherine's as their alternative school.

Thus the audience said:

- Will the curriculum change here (as it is a religious school and Ley Park is not).
- Do you have to be baptised to attend St Catherine's?
- What option will you give me if don't want children to go to a faith school?
- Concern about parental choice. What if parents don't want to send their children to a faith school? What is the transport like for Westfield parents? What if parents want to go to Sheredes or Forres and can't get in?
- Many of the Westfield parents do not want their children to come to a faith school.

To these queries the panel members responded:

- In terms of admission like any other community school the only question is are you happy to be in a school with a Christian ethos.
- This is not like Broxbourne which is voluntary aided. Wormley is like a community school and so no question of excluding children.

- Council is proposing to expand Sheredes. Members need to bear the faith issue in mind. St Catherine's has a very good travel plan, several children walk to school. Council need to keep the options open with the Forres School and closely monitor where the Forres children could go to school.
- Council will have meetings at Westfield to explore how the parents feel and want to hear from them.

#### 4.10 Proposed Plans For School Buildings

Some parents wanted to know what would happen to the land if the schools close. The audience were concerned to know how the land would be used eg for housing development and the likely impact on the local schools if additional children came in to the area. There was some concern that the land would be sold off to raise money.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- If decline in numbers what happens when a new housing development comes in the future? What will happen to this land? What provision has been made for new children?
- Wormley is owned by the church and Ley Park by the Council. This is a money making exercise. Also have safety concerns ie at 11am today you couldn't get an ambulance into the school.
- Can't understand why Council have to close this school. There is a dangerous stretch of road. Mobile classrooms will take up the play area at St Catherine's. There is expansion in building in the area and this will give more space to build.
- There will not be a school this side of the main road and no safe crossing. Suggest the proposal is to raise cash because other schools are faith schools and belong to the church so there is nothing to be gained if they closed. Also lessening choice because they are faith schools.
- If falling rolls are the problem, it is a perfect opportunity to develop this site. Don't feel Council has have given enough consideration to the other site.
- You have the opportunity to make this a landmark site, build a brand new school with wraparound facilities. You can't do that at Wormley.

The panel responded to these queries by stating:

- Forecasting figures do take in account new housing developments. Land will be offered to Council first and if not required then marketed and sold. This would be government money and would go back into County Council. However, you can only build on the food print of the building and not on the playing fields.
- Regarding cost, over the last 3 years the cost of doing the work tends to exceed the sale of the sites that close. Also if land is sold you can only build on the existing

buildings as playing fields are protected by central government and town planning. Thus only 35-45 houses could be built.

- Council get limited money from re-organising sites. Tend to spend more on developing existing schools than gain from selling sites. Regarding choice it's a fair point. St Catherine's head says they have a broad intake but make the point in your submission.
- The church owns the buildings not the playing fields. Council would do a deal with the church regarding the sale of the property if the town planning agrees this site. It doesn't make any difference to the cost as to which school we use.
- If Council had the money we could build a school. But Council don't have the money.
- They would be kept as playing fields or used as a community facility. They will not be sold off for building.

#### 4.11 General Queries on The Proposals

There were some general queries made on the proposals regarding how the Council came up with the current proposals and the rationale for them.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- In the south of the area the proposal is to expand Wormley from a 1.6FE to a 2FE. Why not close Wormley?
- Why is Westfield being recommended for closure? Council have a good intake. It passes the four tests. School has the numbers. Is it to do with 1FE? School will have mobile accommodation. Have no choice. St Catherine's is a faith school. It's difficult to get there and not safe to walk.
- One of the four criteria is better education standards. Have been lucky here. The school is good. How can Council go forward with the plan if our SAT results are better than St Catherine's?
- Is Council planning to spend time with the kids to see what they want?
- Why Ley Park? School has large buildings and provide extended school activities as the government wants. Have successful pre-school. Why not the smaller site of Wormley?

The panel responded:

- At top end of school the classes are fuller. Therefore less opportunity for parents to move years 4/5/6 at that time. For younger ones the parents can apply under normal rules. Need to work with colleagues on this. Rather it happened at a phased time.
- Wormley has all 1.6FE. Ley Park has less than 1FE.

- Council can't leave places empty. Have to have a pattern of provision for the next 10-15 years. There is an advantage to 2FE schools. Council would not want to leave a 1FE school where the numbers are due to fall. It would mean a continual re-organisation of the school and then it becomes very vulnerable. Council prefer not to have one and a half form entry because it creates an odd pattern of classes. Option 2 does meet the criteria but Council prefer Option 1. Temporary classrooms are there so all the children can move together if parents wish. It would be for 2007/2008 and how the children are organised is up to the head. Council must look at the issue of faith school. But there is a significant difference between voluntary aided school and St Catherine's, which has the same admissions procedure as other primary schools.
- Unlike secondary schools, it is not appropriate for non-school staff to speak to primary age pupils. Happy for schools to gather views to contribute to the consultation.

#### 4.12 Use of Temporary Buildings

Over several of the consultation evenings there were queries raised over the use of temporary buildings to accommodate the children. The queries related mainly to how long the temporary buildings would be used and the quality of the temporary buildings.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- How long will children be in mobile accommodation?
- Worried about children going into portacabins?
- Are portacabins suitable for educating children?
- How long is the building work going to take? How long are the mobiles going to be there?

The panel responded:

- Important to stress that any temporary accommodation will last 3 academic years ie 2 for those coming in and 1 for those already there. Building work will be done in term time. Pupil numbers are not going up.
- Portacabins are suitable – meet all the required standards. On site for two to three years. We can arrange a viewing of one on another site
- If all the children go to Wormley, although it will be more expensive, Council will put them in temporary accommodation. Council want to give this option so that all the children can move there if they wish.

#### 4.13 Overall Admission Process

Some parents were concerned that the proposals might affect the timetable for the overall admissions process.

The audience asked:

- Is the administration process at the same time of year?

The panel responded:

- Yes. It cannot be delayed. Government sets the timetable.

#### 4.14 Congestion, Safety and Traffic Management

There were many issues relating to congestion, safety and the management of traffic. The concerns included that the entrance at Wormley was congested already.

The questions raised by those attending the meetings included:

- Explain plans around option 1 for traffic management.
- There is a strong travel plan at Sheredes. A brand new bridge and pathway with new lighting. Also a bicycle shed to encourage cycling. With extended school there is phased entry and exiting.
- Talking about enlarging St Catherine's. It's in the middle of the town. It would bring congestion. How can Council justify closing two community schools and sending the children to St Catherine's?
- The parking is horrendous at Forres.
- There is a traffic issue and congestion problems at Wormley already.
- Talk about congestion but plans are talking about transferring 180 children. Why move them when there is space at Ley Park and it is safer?

The panel responded as follows to these queries:

- Bottom line there will be the same number of children with a redistribution of traffic to a smaller number of schools or sites. Would encourage schools to have travel plans that encourage travel to school other than car.
- In terms of access to St Catherine's, the school has a good travel plan. Many children walk to school. We accept the difficulties of the dual carriageway. St Catherine's is more or less half way between Ryelands and Westfield and we thought that it was better to have a location in the middle.
- Council do know that there is a significant traffic issue. The highways people are looking at it.
- There are advantages to Ley Park but given the 4 tests Council's preferred option is to keep Wormley open. If don't get planning consent then Council might have to reconsider this site.

- This point was raised at Sheredes. Pedestrian bridge has been out of action for some time. Now repaired so head anticipates people will revert to using it so helping traffic problem.

Several parents noted that St Catherine's Primary School had an electricity pylon located on its site that they felt contravened the health and safety of their children. Other safety concerns highlighted were that the school was on the main road and located by it was a petrol station. It was also noted that coincidentally a new crossing had been created across the dual carriageway, at the same time as the proposals. This led some parents to suggest that the decisions regarding the proposals had already been made. In one group (Westfield) there were also concerns expressed about loose dogs roaming in the fields.

The comments from parents included:

- Please explain why the plans are for sending children to a school (St Catherine's) with a pylon in the playground (linked to leukaemia), on a main road (lead poisoning), beside a petrol station (poisoning), and most children need to cross a dual carriageway. Is Council saying there are no health risks to children? Also why has a crossing in the dual carriageway suddenly materialised?
- Four different reports say that pylons are dangerous – there is a proven link with leukaemia. Would you send your children there?
- Public review paper on 5 May revealed that heads are concerned over leukaemia. There was an article in the paper. Mr Houseman said it was putting our children in serious danger.

To these queries the panel responded:

- There is a pylon in the far corner of the site. It is significant that many more children walk to St Catherine's as they come through the underpass. The Head Teacher told us the crossing would come. The petrol station we have no control over. The travel plan to St Catherine's is a well-rehearsed travel plan. We will need to look again at safety issues regarding the pylon etc.

#### 4.15 Summary and Conclusions

As part of the consultation process Hertfordshire County Council arranged a series of public consultation meetings. These meetings were facilitated by Accent, an independent market research company.

The main issues that were raised at the meetings were concerns over:

- HCC's ability to accurately predict future primary school requirements
- capacity and funding for extra pupils
- reduced parental choice regarding primary schools

- the need to minimise the disruption caused by closing schools
- the potential reduction in nursery and pre-school places
- what would happen to children with special needs
- protection of staff job
- the Christian ethos of alternative schools
- proposed plans for the school buildings
- placing children in temporary buildings
- timing of the overall admissions process
- congestion, safety and traffic management.

These issues together with those raised through other parts of the consultation process should be taken into account by Hertfordshire County Council in making their decision.