

Hoddesdon + Wormley Review, Forres

Schl Thurs

Speaker key

JW Jane Wilson
VM Vince Martin
?MS Unidentified male speaker
?FS Unidentified female speaker

JW Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the consultation evening about the Hoddesdon and Wormley School Review. It's a little silly having microphones in such a small group, so I'll explain one of the reasons why we've got the microphones straightaway. In a big hall it's necessary anyway but we're actually recording this and so consequently we'll all be wearing microphones for that purpose. When we get to the open questions, we will ask you to take a microphone and to speak into the microphone so we record it. My name is Jane Wilson and I'm here to facilitate the evening. I'm from a company called Accent who are independent market research agency and we've been brought in by Herts County Council to provide an independent assessment of the consultation process and to make sure that, as far as we're concerned, things are running in a fair and proper manner and all views are heard and reported back. I will be taking notes during the meeting and then I will be writing them back and sending them back to Accent who will collate all the documents from all of the meetings that we've run in this consultation. That will go as a report to the county council and it will be put up on their website. There will also be a transcript of this, which will go up on the website as well. So, my role here this evening, I will actually be facilitating the question and answer session. That's everything I really need to say just at the moment except to say that we're running until 9:00 but we don't have to stay here until 9:00. We're not prisoners in the school hall until 9:00. So, if we find that you haven't got any more questions to ask and you're all perfectly happy, then we'll just wind up the meeting and I'll take a consensus but we want to have as many questions from you as possible. Before we go any further, I'll hand over to Vince who's going to give a presentation on the proposals, so therefore we'll have the question and answer session afterwards.

VM Thanks, Jane. This is the programme, as Jane has said. I'll introduce you to my colleagues, give a presentation on the proposals and then we'll have an open session where you can give us your views and ask questions and so on. I'm Vince Martin. I'm the Head of School Access which means I'm responsible for a bundle of things about people accessing places – that's planning and admission and transport and buildings and all that sort of thing. My colleague, [unclear] is our Senior Primary School Effectiveness Adviser and his service provides curriculum and professional support to primary schools. So, he'll deal with any curriculum-type question. Paul Ray [?] is the Area Planning Manager who has done some of the detailed work for this review and will answer the difficult questions. I will answer the easy ones.

So, why are we here? What is the purpose of the review? Well, in the Hoddesdon and Wormley area we've got a significant number of surplus or empty school places. That's not unique in Hertfordshire by any means and we have got a programme of reviews too in all the areas where there's a significant number of open places. Why is that a bad thing? You might think that having smaller numbers is a good thing because with fewer children you have smaller classes and that's good but unfortunately there are a couple of reasons why it doesn't work like that and they're largely about the way we as a County Council and schools are funded. We as the County Council and individual schools are funded on the basis of the numbers of pupils that there are. The fewer pupils there are the less money we get and the less money the schools get. That's the way the education funding system works in England, Wales and Scotland. So, when numbers are falling, that generally means that budgets are falling also in the schools. The second and third bullet points on here are about that.

If a school is already very small or a one-form entry school, that is a school with at maximum 210 pupils in it. If those numbers then drop down to below 200 or below 190 or below 180, it begins to get quite difficult for a school of that size to afford the necessary number of teachers and also a proportionate amount of the budget is spent on maintaining the building instead of as much resource as possible going directly to pupils in the classrooms and to fund teachers and books. The fixed costs of money for the building remain much the same but there are fewer pupils to spread the costs around. So, generally it's not a very efficient and effective use of money to maintain population places. It takes money away from direct expenditure on pupils in the classroom. In addition, schools which are really getting quite small are very vulnerable to staff turnover and staff retainment. When you've got a very small number of staff it only needs one or two key staff to leave to cause difficulties of recruitment. Those schools then begin to get quite vulnerable both educationally as well as financially. So, those are the sorts of reasons why we feel we need to look carefully at the situation where there's a large number of open places.

So, what are the numbers around here? What are the places? Well, in reception year there are currently 509 places in the Hoddesdon and Wormley area. Between all the schools 509 places. There are currently 416 active pupils. 93 of those places are empty, which is about 18% of the total. So, our forecast is within five years time we would have dropped a little bit more to only 400 pupils in those places which means more than a hundred will be empty which is more than 20% empty. To visualise that a bit I've expressed it at the bottom in terms of forms of entry. Form of entry is a standard way of measuring school size. It's a class of 30 that goes all the way through the school. So, a 1 form entry primary school has 210 pupils. It's seven years times 30 pupils. A 2 form entry school, 60 per year group, has 420 pupils in it. A 1.5 form entry school, like this one, should have 315 pupils in it. So, the form entry is the way we measure the size of schools and that expresses how many forms of entry that are empty. The current surplus is just over 3 forms of entry empty and we're forecasting about 3.5 forms of entry empty. If you visualise that per year, you've got three empty classrooms somewhere in each year. That gives you a visual picture of how much space is being maintained but without pupils in them. We feel that we need to take 3 forms of entry out of the primary school system, leaving about 4% surplus by 2011. There's a little note on the bottom of that screen, the government spending watchdog for local

government in the health service, which recommends a surplus of between 5% and 10%. We're at the bottom of that range and I can say something about that. We can talk about why having a 10% surplus is a good idea, if you'd like to but I'll keep this introduction as brief as I can and then respond to questions as we go through.

Now, over the years that we've been doing reviews of this kind we've developed some tests that offer a range of options. Those tests are that any proposal should reduce surplus places and put places where they need to be developed and, clearly, an issue of surplus places is why we're here this evening. So, that's test one. The second one is about enhancing educational standards and reducing the risk of under-performance and that relates to particularly the smaller school size I talked about earlier. It's a vulnerability for the smaller schools to get themselves into and that test is very much about that. The third test is about having acceptable implications for building design, environmental impact and cost. We need to have proposals we can actually afford to implement, that's the cost bit, and we also have to have proposals that are doable in terms of the buildings that the pupils will need to be in. In other words, it's no good proposing loads of extra pupils in a building where it's impossible to find any extra space, for example. So, it's about practicality and about affordability. The last one is about acceptable transitional arrangements for affected pupils. In other words, we need to try and keep the number of affected pupils and the extent of the effect as small as possible. It would be wrong to suggest that in any reorganisation there is never any impact or any effect. Clearly there is. If a school closes or enlarges or changes on site, there is an effect on pupils because there is a change and change always has an effect of some kind. So, we would want to keep that to a minimum and the school management and staff will keep that to a minimum as well. But all things being equal, we would want to affect the smallest number of pupils. So, those are the tests that we've developed over the last few years of doing reviews of this kind.

Only two out of the three options affect this school. So, I'm going to deal with those and treat the last one more briefly because Jane will be nudging me to finish. So, the preferred option is to close Ryelands School and close Westfield School to increase both Sheredes and St Catherine's from 1.5 and 2 forms of entry and to reduce this school from 1.5 to 1 form entry. Three of those things will happen from 2008 and two of them from 2007, the increases, and I'll explain to you why that happens earlier on a later slide.

Why this proposal? Well, the basic fact is that 1.5 form entry schools will be quite awkward schools to run and manage. It's an awkward size to work with and we think that schools need to be preferably 2 forms of entry but in some instances one form entry. If we think that the future of that school is a buoyant and robust one, which is what we think here, then we propose to eliminate, as it were, three 1.5 form entry schools and create or increase two of those to 2 and reduce one to 1 form entry. So, we want to escape the 1.5 form entry pattern. That's option one. Option two is the sort of minimum change option, if you like, which is simply close Ryelands and reduce this school from 1.5 to 1 form entry. Each of these options removes from the system the same number of empty places. They're all the same thing but it's to do it in different ways. The third one is a bit of a mixture of the two in which this school isn't affected at all which is to close Ryelands, close Westfield

and increase St Catherine's. I should just add that in the south part of the area we have a proposal to close Ley Park School and expand Wormley, potentially creating a 2 FE school there because although Ley Park is a 1 FE school, it's actual number of pupils is something under 1.

So, what do the options mean? I'll spend a bit more time on 1 and 2 and a bit less on 3. Westfield and Ryelands would both remain open until 2008 but they wouldn't admit anymore reception pupils after 2007, after September of next year. Pupils already at the schools that closed will continue to be taught through to the end of the summer term 2008. We would enlarge St Catherine's from September 2007. That provides an extra 15 places in reception because there wouldn't be reception pupils in Westfield and Ryelands in that same year. In other words, it's a staged implementation. There will be some mobile accommodation at St Catherine's while the necessary building work to provide permanent accommodation for that number of pupils is done. Now, if Ryelands and Westfields close in 2008, all of those pupils will be offered places at St Catherine's because by then the work would have been done or parents could apply for place at any other school which has a place available in the year group that the child will have. In other words, although everybody will be offered places at St Catherine's to enable year groups to remain intact, parents will have a choice of going somewhere else, if they wanted. They're not forced, as it were, to go to St Catherine's. From September 2008 this school would provide 30 places at reception instead of 45. So, the reception places wouldn't be reduced until September 2008 instead of September 2007. Option 2 is basically the same pattern but just involves fewer schools. Just Ryelands would remain open until 2008 but wouldn't admit pupils in 2007. The rest of Ryelands would continue to be taught until 2008. If Ryelands closes, all pupils will be offered places here and depending on the number of pupils we might need some mobile accommodation temporarily. From September 2008 there'll be 30 places at reception instead of 45. Obviously, all the pupils that are in the school would continue in the school. We wouldn't be losing any of the existing year groups. The school would virtually be a flat shape, I suppose. Option 3 is the same pattern but I'm not going to go through it because it doesn't Forres.

So, what happens next? Well, this is the last of the public meetings. As you can see, it ended on 29th June. The consultation period goes on until 27th July, just after the end of term, and that gives people due time to give us your responses and give us your ideas, either by filling in the forms on the back of the consultation document or by e-mail or by letter or on our website until July 27th. Then we will collate and analyse the responses and writing a report for the Education Panel which will meet on September 12th and that will make a recommendation to the decision-making body of the County Council, which is the Cabinet, which will meet on October 16th. If the Cabinet decides that we should implement whatever we decide to implement, we will have to publish the appropriate legal notices called Statutory Notices which then run for a six-week period and can be commented on and objected to. If there are objections, then eventually the matter will go to the School Organisation Committee for Hertfordshire which is a body that acts on behalf of the adjudicator and Secretary of State and makes final decisions. All of those meetings – the Education Panel, the Cabinet and School Organisation Committee – are open to the public. Probably the most useful one to go to, if you'd like to, is the Education Panel because that is the meeting at which there is

discussion and representatives of groups – school pressure groups and action groups – are able to speak. Cabinet is a member-only talking environment, as it were. Only elected members speak at Cabinet and usually a decision is taken but the Panel is the one at which the discussion and the debate happens. If you would like to speak at that, it would be useful for us to know in advance. We would also like to know how many people intend to come because we need to make sure we have a venue and a room large enough to accommodate you.

Just finally, just to reiterate that we haven't yet taken any decisions. By we I mean the County Council, the elected members. It is the Cabinet that makes the decisions in October. We'd like to hear your views. We've been getting a response in on the forms and so on and a number of e-mails and letters and we'd like to get as many of those as possible by July 27th. And, of course, we'll be recording and providing a transcript of a meeting such as this and that material is available at County Council and on our website as well, as Jane said. So, I think, Jane, I'll hand over to you for the next half of the evening.

JW Now we're going to the open session of the meeting where we'll take questions. If I can just reiterate, if you want to speak, there's a microphone here, just so we can get it on record. We want to be able to make sure that everybody's views are heard. Can I just pull your attention to this form which is the Accent form on the front of your pack. If there's anything about this evening that you want to say, then please do write it on here and give it to me or you can post it to Accent. So, who'd like to start with questions?

?MS You say in option 2 that Ryelands will be reduced from 1.5 to 1 form but yet when you summed it up on the slide entitled what do the reductions mean for pupils, you say that four children from Ryelands will be offered a place a Forres School and that Forres School might increase. Previously you said that they'd be going to St Catherine's School. So, I'm wondering why you changed it to St Catherine's coming back here.

?MS I can just say that under option 1 children will be offered a place at St Catherine's but not under option 2.

?MS Well, then how can you reduce Forres School from 1.5 to 1?

?MS If I can explain that, what we're saying is under option 2, if we were to close Ryelands, then we would want to offer all of the children from Ryelands a place at another school, not spread between a number of schools, and we felt that it would be appropriate in that instance to offer them places at Forres. However, we do appreciate that if all of them were to take up those places, then it would increase the size of Forres in the short term and it would be some three or four years later before the school would get back to the size that it is today and then to drop further in terms of pupil numbers. Now, that's an offer that we feel we should be making. However, we know that there will be places at both St Catherine's and at Westfield if option 2 were adopted. We would anticipate that a number of the children or their parents would choose between the three schools that were on offer for them and so it may not have such a big impact on Forres as we have allowed for and by allowing for that, if everybody did choose to come to Forres in

that option, then we would need to provide some additional mobile classroom units here for a short period of time. But that is a downside of that particular option, yes.

?FS Can I just say that I'm really concerned about option 2? Because we're full, more or less, in year 2. If all of Ryelands were to come to us, we'd welcome that but, as I understand it, the borough said that the staff cannot take 2 forms of entry. So, if we had all of those, we've already got mobile on the field, I think it should be a consideration. People might want to go to other schools and that's fine but if they did all want to come here, I'd be really concerned about where they would go and the impact that would have on their education and the existing children at Forres. On the other side of the coin, I can understand going to a 1 form entry. I think that makes sense. If the population is going down, then there ought to be natural progression, it's going to happen naturally here. But option 2 I am a little bit concerned about.

?FS There was something you were saying about the amount of children coming through. What sort of timescale are we looking at? All we're reading in the papers is houses being built here. We've just had Boundary Park [?]. We're looking at children coming to this school from Boundary Park which is their closest school other than Roselands. In 1924 we had the houses built at the back there. How many more mobiles can we have built on the school?

?MS In terms of the housing and pupils coming from housing, there is no doubt that there is more pressure at this part, the northern part, at this moment in time. But the forecast that we have, which includes all of those new houses of Boundary Park and including a number of other housing proposals that are in the area, would still indicate that there will be a decline in the numbers of pupils in the area. Now, there is pressure here, there is pressure on Cranbourne and at Roselands at the lower but there are spaces available at Westfield, at St Catherine's, at Ryelands, and we're forecasting that that will increase those numbers of surpluses.

?FS How many people are you going to allow in our classrooms? At what level? Will it be 30, 32, 33, 34?

?MS No. There would be no question that we'd allow more than 30. That's illegal, at Key Stage 1 anyway, that you cannot have classes of more than 30 but we would certainly not advise any school to have classes of more than 30.

?FS [unclear]

?MS Well, we do know that there are a significant of new houses that are in planning for Broxbourne County Council and that was a recent announcement, in fact, this week, earlier this week I think it was, where they increased the allocation from 5,100 which had been in the plan between 2001 and 2020 and some of those houses are already built, or some of those dwellings are already built. They're not all nice three-bedroom houses that produce children. Some of them are flats, bedsets, whatever, and from those we don't get nearly so many children but that increase, yes, is going up by a further 500. They said that they want Broxbourne to have 5,600 by 2021 but that's a long way off.

?FS This estate was built in 68 and this school was built before the Forres estate. Now, I know for a fact that when this first was built none of the reception classes were there. All the mobiles that we've got over there, that had to be built about 1974. That's looking long after this school was built. We had to increase the classes then. You're not guaranteed that. You don't know.

?MS But what we're talking about is making sure that we have a good match between the pupil numbers forecast over the next ten years, really, so that the children get a good opportunity of a good education without having the constraints that some schools have where there are falling numbers and the difficulties that that creates for them. That hasn't been the case here, don't get me wrong.

?FS I know.

?MS That hasn't been the case here or at Cranbourne or at Roselands but what we're saying is that across the whole of Hoddesdon there is a mismatch and we've got to try and meet the demand better for the children now and for the children over the next ten years, maybe 15 years, by the time the impact of those new houses will have in the area and even then we don't know where those new houses are going to go. They could be on large areas of even greenbelt land, dare I say it, lying between Hoddesdon and the A10, we don't know. But if there are large housing estates to be built, then it is for the benefit to provide the infrastructure to support those new houses. That is work that has to be done. They have got to provide land, they have got to provide schools, if there are large developments.

?FS We were led to believe that as parents we had a choice of where we could send our children and that parents spoke about the pros and cons of good education versus economic and social need. In all of Hoddesdon it's not true. We cannot pick those schools, as it stands today. We can't make a choice of schools that have a short journey to and from. If you start closing schools in local communities, that community [unclear]. It starts losing its children to other areas and those children then don't become part of the community. I live within five minutes walk of this school and the majority of the parents live and work locally. If you start shutting schools down and moving children and making them go to other parts of town, what happens then? We're talking long-term. You talk about infrastructure and buildings and things like that. We're talking about communities. We're talking about social, economic, every child matters. We're not getting choice. Where is parental choice? If you talk about taxpayers and if you talk about money, ultimately our children are the future. They are future taxpayers. Their needs and their requirements should be taken first. If you start placing them in large schools... This is big. When I came here, I was so impressed that she knew every child's name. If you have intakes of 30, 60, 90, they become just a child. Maybe that's what we need to think about, that society needs schools that knows its children. If you're drifting away from that, what are you going to be left with?

VM I should just say that we're not closing any [unclear] and 60 is actually a pretty standard size. It's by no means large, not by national standards. [unclear] important for that purpose and that purpose is increasing with extended schools, children's centres and services in primary schools. Increasingly that makes them

even more community-related. Unfortunately we have some schools where not many members of the community choose to go there. The very parental preference thing means that some schools don't get chosen if you have lots of places around. If you've got quite a large number of places available, there is more choice. There certainly is more choice. The more integrated you are and the more places you have in the system, the more choice there is because it's easier to get into a range of schools. The fewer places there are, it may be more efficient financially but it does reduce choice. That's one of the reasons why we recommend a 5% to 10% surplus because if you have too few empty places, you have too little choice, if you have too many empty places, it's effectively wasted money that could be better spent directly on children's education. So, that's a balancing act, not to have too many places, not to have too few. But one of the effects of having a range of choices and open places is that some schools get chosen less than others and there are fewer preferences.

?FS [unclear]

VM I understand that but our review has to be about the area as a whole. It's our responsibility to take into account all the children in the county and even children in Hoddesdon. Sometimes the imperatives around one school are not always the same as the imperatives or pressures for a whole area of schools and so on and that sometimes happens and we have to weigh up these things sometimes and make judgements about them and so on. I understand entirely what you're saying. Of course, we're not proposing to close the school.

?FS No.

VM That's important. The ones that we are proposing to close, take Ryelands for example, there is a community there, of course, even in the school, but I'd have to say that this September only nine parents expressed a preference in the area and that is not a sustainable number. If year on year only nine children [unclear] we'd end up with a school that would collapse. So, that's the sort of thing.

?FS I do understand that but the thing is going from a 1.5 to 1 form entry you're instantly removing 17 to 20 children from the equation [unclear] and asking them then to go into another school in another area or in another part of town. There are lots of demarcations in the community. If you have a child that lives at the back of Forres and you send them over to St Catherine's, they are moving away from [unclear]. So, yes, I appreciate what you're saying about Ryelands and I understand it but moving to a 1 form entry we're already talking about 15, 20 children straightaway not going to be able to come in to school.

VM Yes, I think that is a fair point.

?MS Yes, that is a fair point. I think the other thing is that the catchment area for Ryelands is very similar to the catchment area for Forres and what we're saying is that we would make Forres available for all of the children within the area initially but we see from the forecast that the numbers in the area are going to decline and that's what we're preparing for in the whole process but if that should be ill-founded, there is the possibility that Forres could remain at a 1.5 form entry school. There is that possibility and we haven't ruled that out completely.

?FS If we're talking about choice for parents of schools and we're talking about numbers coming in to schools, you've already said Ryelands has got nine enrols coming in September [unclear], Westfield got 28 coming in September and [unclear] in 2007 and you're talking about closing that one. Why then was an option never made to increase capacity in [unclear], keep Westfield open, reduce Forres and close Ryelands? That way parents have still got the choice they want. You've got your 2 form entry, you've got your 1 form entry and you've got your community schools. Why was that never the option?

?MS Can you repeat that?

?FS Increase St Catherine's to 2 form entry, reduce Forres, which is also an option, keep Westfield because they have got seven children [unclear] to come to the school, not only this September but the following September, and close Ryelands which [unclear] anyway.

VM Well, I'll tell you why. Because that wouldn't reduce the area we mentioned which is what our calculations shown on an earlier slide would need to do. That would reduce the area by 1 form entry rather than 1.5 form entry.

?FS But in option 2 you're talking about reducing Forres but maybe not for four years. [unclear].

VM Doesn't it?

?FS Well, how can you say [unclear]? If Westfield close, they [unclear].

VM Yes. So, Westfield closing isn't part of option 2.

?FS No. I know it isn't but it's options 1 and 3 and it will close on the day [unclear].

VM In 2008, yes.

?FS Reduce Forres to 1 won't happen, you say, for three or four years because you'll phase it out but that's not going to happen on the day, is it?

VM No.

?MS But now we're mixing options.

?FS I know we're mixing options.

?MS In option 2 Forres would stay at a higher size, at a bigger size, for some time. In option 1 it wouldn't because in option 1 we would be creating more places at Sheredes, we've got [unclear].

?FS [unclear]

?MS So, that's what we'd do and creating more 2 form entry schools which is what is part of what the County Council is trying to achieve wherever that's feasible or possible.

?FS But parents wouldn't have the choice then, would they?

VM It wouldn't resolve parental choice. The extent of parental choice and empty places are related to each other, really.

?FS I agree.

VM We would have to probably disagree on where the balance lies. We probably all have a view about how much choice we can afford in a sense and how much money we want to channel directly into classrooms.

?FS But it would be a choice between a community school and a faith school. That would be the choice you're taking away from parents.

VM Yes.

?FS [unclear]

VM Well, it's two community schools closing and a community school enlarging. I think it's important to say about St Catherine's that it's a quality control school [unclear]. So, it doesn't have the requirements that relate to faith. They're the same as the community school ones. So, in that sense it doesn't make any distinction. But, yes, it does have more character.

?FS Talking about enlarging [unclear], now already we're talking more congestion, more cars, there isn't space to actually park there and if you're taking the choice of Westfield, which is within two minutes, one minute, five minutes of people's houses, you're then encouraging them to use their cars. They can't walk to Sheredes, they can't really walk to [unclear] able to get to Westfield. You're closing the Ryelands which is the next primary school to them which has got places. So, how can you justify closing two community schools in such a close area and encouraging them to go to a congested school, a school which hasn't got lots and lots of green space around it to build on? We are a suburban area. [unclear]. [unclear] squash children into one of the most popular schools for, well, what seems to me for money, really, and for more housing.

VM I think there are a number of points in there, obviously about a greenless society and about access to St Catherine's particularly. I'll ask Paul to give you the detail on that but I think in general it's possible probably to build a new [unclear]. It's about the site. It's about the state of the St Catherine site. I think it's a bit deceptive. Can you say something about it?

?MS Just in terms of children accessing St Catherine's, the school have developed a very good travel plan. Many more of their children walk to school, believe it or not, than you would expect and many more than at other schools across the country and there are easy ways of getting across to the school.

?FS Not from Westfield. You've got two main roads to cross.

[s2]

?FS But not by choice, not through parental choice. [unclear]

?MS Yes, I understand that, but the other thing about Westfield is that Westfield is a 1 FE school from a very wide area. Half of the pupils come from within that community, if you like, and the other half, yes, come from further afield, through choice at this moment, but they are coming by car, many of them, and I don't think the argument stacks up that well because St Catherines is more or less in between where Westfield and Ryelands are and we felt that if we were to retain any of the schools, it would be a better location to have the one in the middle that could attract from either side and that's what we're suggesting. I hear the point that you make.

?FS Westfield is the only local school with a swimming pool, it has a nature area, it's in a lovely position, lovely location. It's out of town, encouraging people to come a bit further out rather than into the town centre. It just seems such a shame [unclear] 26 already for next September. It's not a core school, it's not an [unclear] school.

?MS There is no doubt that Westfield School has changed over the last couple of years from what it was but at this moment in time there are 157 children in the 210 places at Westfield. I understand the point about the reception year and the proposed reception for next year, yes, but going back to your other point about the only school with a swimming pool, St Catherine's has a swimming pool as well. St Catherine's as well resourced as are the other schools around here.

JW I'm trying to make sure that the people who haven't spoken who might want to speak have a go.

?FS I'm just going on talking about the travel plans. Two things, actually. One, the travelling, our parking in front here is absolutely horrendous. So, how do you propose all these new children coming are going to [unclear] at the front there? We have no parking. We cannot park in the staff carpark because it is fully taken.

?MS [unclear]

?FS But what about the children from Westfield and Ryelands?

VM [unclear]

?MS But the point in option 2 is that it would be the Ryelands children that would be offered a place here. If you look at where the Ryelands children live, they live very, very close to the school. I know what you say about cars and parking and all the rest of it and I don't think we will ever persuade parents to walk with their children again. I'll get shouted down in a moment for saying that but that is a problem that we face in every school that we've got.

?FS You're saying that parents are not going to walk...

?MS I didn't say that they walk. I said...

?FS ...that they live in the vicinity and could walk. But parents do work as well and some parents do actually drive their children to school on the way. So, I beg to differ with that one.

?FS I'm assuming that if you close Ryelands and if you close Westfield, that you'll be selling those sites and if that is the case, undoubtedly there will be housing that goes on those sites. Where do you anticipate those children going to school?

?MS [unclear]. In recent years the playing fields have become almost totally protected by both central government and town planning systems. So, we expect to get a small band of 35 to 40 housing units on a typical primary school site. That produces very, very small numbers of children per year because it takes a thousand houses to fill a 13-class year group. So, really, the number of children coming from developing both school sites is very, very small. So, it wouldn't be an issue.

?FS [unclear]

?MS They're the same number of children that there are at the moment. As the numbers fall, whether they're in 11 schools or in 9 schools, is the same. As the rolls fall there would still be a reduction in the number of staff if we are to maintain the standard or the level of the size of school classes. Some people would suggest that on the back of something like this we should end up with smaller classes. That just doesn't work because of the way the funding mechanism comes with the children. But that would happen wherever, if numbers are declining in an area. So, there would be inevitable change, movement, having to relocate in terms of job to whether there is pressure for school places but we're finding, across a number of areas of Hertfordshire, that this is the pattern at the moment with the declining numbers of children coming through the system. So, it's not an easy answer but it's one that would happen, whether we were doing a reorganisation or not.

?FS Can I just ask what you were intending to do with the special education unit at Ryelands?

?MS A primary support base, as it's now called but, yes, I know what you mean. We had to think long and hard when we were looking at the possible option of closure of Ryelands School because there is no doubt that that primary support base is very well recognised across the county, never mind just in the area, and we would be relocating that to another local school. Obviously, it is difficult to say at this moment where but we would be working with other schools to look at that possibility because there is no doubt that a school having a primary support base has to be prepared to take that on board and weather that and we know that there are a number of schools that would be prepared to do that. We've signed it out to schools but at this stage we've only signed it out to Headteachers of those

schools. We haven't gone any further than that. But rest assured we will be relocating the primary support base and the other thing is that the staff within the support base are protected because they are employed through county rather than through the school. So, they would have the option of moving with the support base to another school and it wouldn't be far away because it would still be serving this area. We are aware of that one. There would be some schools that wouldn't have the accommodation. They will have site capacity. I don't think there's any school that wouldn't have the site capacity and, if we needed to, we would be adding an extension to any school to make provision for the support base.

?FS If you're wanting to make the schools 2 form entries generally and you are going to reduce Forres to a 1 form entry, in the future does that then affect Forres when you come to your next round of [unclear]?

VM [unclear]

?FS [unclear]

VM It's a reduction in the number of places, yes. The point about option 1 as opposed to options 2 and 3, and the reason we've been asked a third option, is that we think that leaves the most robust pattern of schools for the future, ones which we will be the least likely to have to come back to within the next 15 years. The problem with some of the other options is that they don't necessarily leave such a robust pattern and, yes, we might have to do something further in the future. But with option 1 the school is established. [unclear] and a viable 1 form entry, not a school that we think would be at all vulnerable to its numbers going below 210 and therefore we have to be every confidence that that is an appropriate and suitable size for it. I don't know what Forres's site capacity is in total. Is it 210?

?MS No, it's different. It's almost but not.

VM So, it is, we think, the best size, a 1 form entry school and in the absence of being able to make it 2, because of site exceptions, 1 would make it have a perfectly viable future, as far as we can see.

?FS We are very, very tight for space. To the parents here from Westfield or from Ryelands, I'm just thinking of Forres. It will actually be lovely to have a room for music, a room for an ICT suite. It will actually make the school, I think, a better school and if there are pupils that are not there to come in, then we shouldn't have any disappointed parents.

JW One of the things that I forgot to mention at the beginning was that we allow time at the end of the meeting for you to have individual conversations with members of the panel if you're not happy with the replies so far. But we can always go to that stage of the meeting at any point.

?FS Is there likely to be any way that option 2 may mean less reduction at the moment and then with a review in five years time... So, instead of closing two or three schools, half measures, and then in a few years time reassess, just in case, future housing and so on in the area, these trends don't stay and you find that

you've still got the option of closing another school, a second school or a third school. Is that an option?

VM Yes, it certainly is an option. That's one of the reasons why it's on the list. It's not an unfair option because we think that we will certainly have to come back and do two lots of reviews. Two stages of disruption is better. It's not as good as an option that we do everything in one go [unclear]. [unclear] but in general we try very hard to avoid doing reviews in an area more than once in a reasonable period of time. That option nevertheless exists.

?FS If I can just say that it's very, very hard for Heads if you're going to do it in five years time. In five years time, how do we know what the Heads would be thinking or the staff would be thinking? Am I going to go and work in that school because it may close in five years time? I'm thinking whatever the outcome, it's got to be for at least ten years.

VM I think it has. I think we're looking 15 years ahead. We're probably looking at quite a different picture. The government has a major investment programme in school buildings over the next 15 years and we would very much hope that we'll have some brand new schools in 15 years time and that we'd have quite a different pattern but in the next five, ten or so years we want a pattern that's going to be viable and robust [unclear]. So, even if we do get the money further down the line to rebuild schools, that would be a rebuild rather than a reorganisation.

?FS [unclear]

VM No, no. They'd have more interesting sites.

?FS [unclear]

VM We mean a new school would be made, not replace ones that are closed. We're talking about renewing the stock, if you like.

?FS I've been listening to you all evening. I can't actually see a long time down the line. I just cannot see how all these houses, how these two schools that you're proposing to close and rebuild. There are a hell of a lot of people coming in from wherever – Edmonton, Enfield, London, wherever. And children. I just feel that it's going to be a big mistake to do this and in ten years time we're going to want spaces for the children to go. We're not going to be able to take them at Forres and Cranbourne and the schools that are open. I'm not talking short-term, I'm talking long-term.

VM Yes, sure. I think it's important what Paul said. There is a target for the whole borough of 5,600 houses to build in a 20-year period, five years which have already happened, so we've got 15 more years of it, and that's just recently increased by 500 houses. That's in the whole of Broxbourne. Equally, and this goes back to what Paul said about larger-scale developments. If some of that housing, or the majority of that housing, comes in larger-sized developments, that is housing of 1,500 units or more, then, as Paul said, you would normally expect that the master plan, the development master plan for that site, would include provision for a primary school for that development and that certainly has been the

pattern in developments in other parts of the county. There's a 3,600-house development west of [unclear] that got to master plan stage and that contains three primary schools and a secondary school. The developers have to buy the land and money towards it. So, in a sense developers of that size tend not to have knock-on effects to existing schools. But I take your point. What we're seeing is quite a lot of housing being built but, of course, all that housing is already there. We already know about them and they're in our forecasting system and we've already made provision for them. It's only really developments that haven't reached the planning stage.

?FS How far in advance do they plan these houses? How far in advance do they say, oh, we're going to build houses over there? What is the Council's...?

VM If someone's going to build houses, it might be fairly short-term but it also means a very small number of children. A major development is in process for years before it gets built. The other important thing to remember is that even with a big housing development very few developers develop at the rate of more than about 300 houses per year. The 3,600-house development I mentioned is being built over a 12-year period because developers don't expect to build and market and sell more than about 300 units per annum. That's a fairly standard target. So, it is quite spread out and there's quite a bit of time to get an infrastructure in, including schools.

?FS In the future, in Broxbourne borough, are you considering building upwards?

VM Do you mean the schools?

?FS The schools. Are they going to two storeys?

VM I wouldn't have thought so. There are a number of reasons. One is that if we're adding on to existing rooms like this, then generally the structure doesn't permit development upwards on the existing structure of the buildings. We tend to avoid two-storey primary schools. We do have two-storey secondary schools. We clearly don't want two-storey primary schools because we want good access to the outside for the whole of the school. There are certainly national exemplar designs of two-storey primary schools but they tend to be designed in urban areas where they simply don't have the space for anything else. Here in Hertfordshire we do generally have the space. That's not to say that we haven't got some two-storey primary schools, we certainly have. We've got some that actually are two storeys but ideally we would prefer to avoid them.

JW Unless anybody's got another burning issue that's different from what's happened so far, would you be happy for us to now have less of an open session where you can just talk to members of the panel? So, can I just thank you very much for participating so well and please do take the opportunity to talk to a member of the panel about any issues you have. Thank you.