

070612 Greenside

Speaker key

BW Beryl Wall
LM Lindsay Martin
DV Dave Victor
PD Pauline Davis
F? Unidentified Female speaker
M? Unidentified Male speaker

BW Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I think we should start. It's a few minutes late but I think we should crack on. Welcome to this public consultation to school placement in Stevenage. If I can just introduce myself, my name is Beryl Wall, and I work for an independent market research agency called Accent. Accent has been asked by Herts County Council to facilitate this program of consultations. I just want to emphasise our independence. Accent works with the code of conduct of the Market Research Society and our involvement in this is purely to reassure you that the consultation is being conducted in a fair and proper manner. We have no other input other than facilitating. It's important that you know that. Can I just tell you the meeting is being recorded - later on when you come to ask your questions you don't have to say your name if you don't want to if you're concerned about data protection or anything. It's being digitally recorded so I understand with that technology we can post audio clips on the Herts website, if you want to go and look at that or listen to it later. Can I just ask also that you turn off your mobile phones if you haven't already, unless are on call or expecting the most urgent call? And can you turn them off and not put them onto silent because otherwise it will interfere with the sound system. Is that okay? Thank you. We started a couple of minutes late but we do aim to finish by nine so we'll keep that in mind. If at the end of that time you had a burning question you didn't get the opportunity to put the panel I'm sure they'd be happy to talk to you at the end of the meeting individually. Just to tell you the format of the evening then. First of all a presentation given by Lindsay of Herts County Council, which I think takes about 15 minutes give or take, and then it's your turn, then it's questions and answers. So I'll hand you over to Lindsay.

LM I'll just switch myself on. I'm sure you'll be able to hear me in this size of hall whether I'm switched on or not. Thank you for coming. It's really nice to see you all here this evening, whether you're associated with this school or other schools in the town, we welcome all of you and I hope we can have a good discussion. I'm sorry it's set out in a rather formal kind of way because we're not a very big group but group sizes vary and this is the size that seems to work with making a presentation, with I hope enough informality to answer your questions and comments afterwards. I'll try to get out of the way so you can see the screen. I'll introduce myself and my colleagues. We're going to talk a bit about building schools in the future, which is the background of

why we're here, why we need a review of provisioning in Stevenage, what our proposals are and then the main part of the evening, which is your opportunity to make comments and ask questions so that you are as clear as you can be about what's being proposed. So can I introduce from the top, as they say, Justin Donovan, Deputy Director, Chief Education Officer. I'm Lindsay Martin and I do what it says on the screen. And my colleague Pauline is responsible for the detail of the area review in Stevenage. And between us we'll make a presentation and answer your questions. I'm sure there's nobody here who's old enough to remember what education was like 100 or so years ago. Unless there's been some miracle cure that I don't know about yet. So that is a not terribly good quality slide of what things used to be like. How our schools used to be organized. So of you may remember this not very well focused slide I suspect, of things that you used to use at school. And I certainly used one of these Grant Thornton slide rules and I suspect many of you did. Four figure tables and maybe some of you were lucky enough to have a calculator, an early calculator, at school. I certainly didn't. And many of our schools actually look like this because they were built not as long ago as the first slide in the main, very very few of those, but certainly in terms of slide rule time we have a lot of schools built from the late forties to the early seventies. A large rash of school building, which looks rather like this. As it happens the school we're in now doesn't look much like that actually. Fortunately, you might say. It's a bit newer than that particular style but we do have very many of those buildings and very many of them are in Stevenage as you will know. Both primary and secondary. You will see them everywhere you go in the town; you will see them everywhere you go in Hertfordshire. These flat roofs, window walled buildings. And they were all built nearly that long ago. All in Stevenage were built between the early fifties, starting in Barclay and ending up in the late sixties at the Valley, which was the last complete school to be built in Stevenage. Then there have been a lot of additional blocks on schools later that that. But that was the main period of school building. So all the stock is sort of that age, which is old and needs something doing to it really. This is what school buildings can look like, on the contrary. Really quite interesting both externally and internally. I was at a primary school in another part of the county this morning where the lighting levels are simply not up to standard. Many of the windows are sealed because the frames have warped over the last 50 years, this is a school built in the fifties so it's 50 years old. A lot of the putty has fallen out, that is easily fixed, but a warped window frame, which means you can't actually open windows and get ventilation, can't be fixed easily. All of those sorts of problems beset many of our schools. They don't in the main look like this, do they? I don't know how much of Hertfordshire you know, apart from the Stevenage area we're in, but you won't see many of those around. Thanks Dave, that's probably a bit late now, I've shown the pictures, you might have done it... So, what's happening about that while we're here? Well, there is something called Building Schools for the Future, which as it says on the slide is the major government investment in secondary and special schools. It's important to emphasise that this investment is in the secondary age range. So it's both secondary main stream schools and secondary special schools. And the education support centre in Stevenage. The pupil referral unit. It covers all of those organizations and it has an annual budget of £2.2 billion, which I thought was a huge amount of money until I saw what terminal five cost, which is about roughly twice that actually, for one building. But that puts it into perspective, it

sounds an enormous sum, in fact what you get for that may be not as enormous as you might think. Even in Stevenage, which is the first recipient of the government funding in Hertfordshire, is about £145 million. And it is the biggest investment in buildings and in the education system since the buildings I showed you earlier were originally built all those years ago. The largest single investment since then and it'll probably be the same time again before government gets round to any further investment. So this is a very exciting opportunity. It's a one off opportunity really, for kind of our generation to do something. It's therefore vital that for the benefit of generations to come, for decades to come, we get this right. We spend the money in the best possible way to make the maximum difference to the educational opportunities, the educational chances of children, not only in Stevenage of course but around Hertfordshire. In a sense that's why we're here. Needless to say you don't get millions of pounds of government funding without a bit of process attached and a few strings attached. And there are quite a few strings attached to this. And I'm not going to go through this in detail because it would be boring but what you can see from here is that it takes some time. There's a more than two year time span here. We started work on this in April. We were told in December last that we were going to be in a particular wave of funding. We had what was called our remit meeting in central government agencies only in February and the first documents we had to submit for approval went in in April and the process continues, such that we expect to start building work late 2009. It could even be early 2010 depending on how this procurement process begins. That is how long it takes to get actual builders contracted. That could take some time with all the European legislation there is around that. I won't bore you even more with that. So suffice that it's a long process and there's quite a bit to be done, just so that you realise that it's not happening a week next Tuesday. But what about all this talk about buildings? You will say to me no doubt that it's not just about buildings, you might have grotty buildings and you can do wonderful things in them. And of course you can. Teachers daily, in my view, work miracles in buildings that are not fit for the purpose. Whether it's actually teaching space or even dining space. I mean, some of our schools are built with core facilities. The four forms of entry, 120 children a year, and have now twice that number in and yet still they manage. They manage to get through the lunch time and all the things that take their core spaces. But it shouldn't be necessary. We should be able to deliver what teachers really want to achieve, what schools really want to achieve in their buildings. So this program starts with a vision for education, which all of the heads in this area have been involved with us in developing, along with other stakeholders. We've had a whole stakeholder process involving not only schools, governors, county councillors, district councillors, other community organisations, in looking at what our vision for education should be. And the next couple of slides, and you have this on your chairs, this is what it says – a focus on excellent teaching and effective learning, commitment to raising attainment, schools which lead and serve the community, commitment to the promotion of healthy lifestyles and participation, a diverse range of specialisms, particularly vocational ones. We want to maximise staying on rates and all those sorts of things. Excellent ICT, very very important for the future there is a sum of money within Building Schools for the Future, dedicated to the provision of information, communications technology. About £12.5 million. And of course we need attractive and flexible spaces that can do the job. That can provide the facilities that schools need

to deliver what they want to deliver rather than having to manage the spaces that are not really fit for purpose and do the best job that they can. So, the stakeholders that we consulted generally agreed that what we needed was fewer mainstream schools with larger sixth forms and more specialisms. Big enough to be efficient and flexible but small enough still to support relationships between students and staff, vitally important. Closer links between mainstream and special schools. We'll say a bit more about that later. Developing even closer links with North Herts College. The links are already very good, I mean, nationally collaborative arrangements and working with 14 to 19 year olds in Stevenage is amongst the best in the country but it can get even better. And the education support centre is in very poor mobile accommodation and needs to be improved. So at this point I'll pass over to my colleague Pauline who will talk to you about how that translates into something on the ground.

PD Thank you very much. Hello everybody. Nice to see you here tonight. So, as Lindsay said is what we're doing alongside the BSF is an area review. And you may ask why we need to have an area review. The first thing we need to realise is that the money is not there just for the money's sake, it is only the means to realise the vision and that it's important that this once in a lifetime opportunity for Stevenage and the people who attend Stevenage schools is not used lightly. We won't get another opportunity like it so let's make sure we do the best we can with it. We need to make sure that we've got the right number of places for the right number of young people who will need those services in the future. And that's why we need to make sure that the current pattern that we've got will be fit for the future and if not to make some proposals to change it. So what's happened so far? Well Lindsay has talked about that group of stakeholders that have come together and begun to work in the very early stages with us. We started this process in January where those people came together and we had lots of discussions and they were about the vision and they were about what sort of pattern of provision might be most appropriate to deliver that emerging vision. And they came up with a list of possible options and we added to those options as well. So we all came together to come up with what we thought might be some solutions. And we evaluated those against four tests that our director devised to make sure that we took into account a number of key factors and I'll show you those in a moment. The director then looked at that work and decided which of those options we should be coming out to talk to you about as members of the public and to gain your views about those proposals. And they are the proposals that are contained in the public consultation document which I'm sure you've all had. And if not we've got plenty of spares here tonight. The four tests, I won't read them out, just give you a couple of seconds to go through them. We tested some of those options against that. Some of those criteria it's a little early to do that work. In other reviews where we don't have BSF money the cost becomes a critical factor very early on in the piece. The BSF investment gives us far more money than we might otherwise have to implement some fairly exciting changes in the town. So no doubt when we get further along the line we'll still be talking about money because there never is enough, is there? So, forgive me those of you who are obviously here and in special schools because some of this is really about mainstream school places. But just briefly the government say that we ought to be planning for ten years ahead and in terms of the numbers of pupils who will need to be in mainstream

schools we estimate that to be about 48 forms of entry. A form of entry for those of you who are not used to it in mainstream schools is an intake of 30 children into each year group. Those 48 forms of entry allow around 10% surplus capacity to allow parents to express a preference and to have a reasonable opportunity to get into a school that they would prefer. We are conscious in mainstream schools that we have an uneven pattern around the town. We have schools of different sizes and we have schools that are very close to each other and if you started from scratch with a blank piece of paper you probably wouldn't put them where they are now. So what we want to do is take the opportunity to change that and to do as best we can to make a regular pattern of schools so that all parents feel they have a local school that they could go to should they wish to. Housing developments in the town have changed. More housing in the north and east of town, less densely populated areas in the south as from the past and it's just recognising that the town is changing. And if and when the development west of Stevenage comes along, just to say that there are already agreements to provide new mainstream schools within that relatively discreet community. So this is just the town that you all know and love very well. This is the west of Stevenage, some more new housing, and this is a site potentially for another school. And we'll come back to that in a minute. So what are the proposals for those mainstream schools? The stakeholders, there was a great deal of consensus amount the stake holders as Lindsay said, that we needed fewer larger schools and very clearly a view that 8FE schools were about the right size for the reasons Lindsay has explained. So what our proposal is, and it's our preferred proposal, is a pattern of 8FE mainstream schools across the town. That will mean that one school will need to close and our proposal is that that is Heathcoat School. We have a second proposal for mainstream schools and it's one that is in a way a fall back position due to circumstances that will be beyond our control, and that is that we've got a couple of sites in the town that we need still to do a bit more work on and to finalise some of the arrangements for, which we need additional land. Clearly the new mainstream school in the north of the town is not a school site at the moment, it is in somebody else's ownership, they've agreed that they want to sell to us, we've got to do a little bit more work on sort of sorting out those arrangements. We're confident that that will come off but right at this point in time I can't finally, finally guarantee it. So we have to be careful and just warn you of that. So in that circumstance for example, one of the things that we would do to create that school in the north is not to create a whole new school but to move one of the existing schools, Thomas Alleyne School to that site, because we've got Thomas Alleyne and Barclay almost side by side in the north of the town. Marriotts School as well, we need a little bit more land to enable that school to become an 8FE school, and again for the same reasons we need to be cautious and to warn you of a small risk that that won't happen. And so in neither of those circumstances depending on which piece of land we're talking about, should there be a problem that we're not foreseeing, one or the other of those schools would need to also close, depending on which piece of land we're talking about, and the remaining schools become even larger. It's not what we want, it's not what we're planning for but we just need to make sure that that potential risk is covered. So probably what's more important to the people in this room tonight is what our proposals for special schools are. For Lonsdale School, those of you I'm sure will know, is the school for children with physical and neurological impairments, a couple of options there – one, we can retain it

on its current site and make some improvements to its building or we could relocate that school to either the Barclay or Marriotts mainstream school sites and for some synergy and co-working to develop alongside that. For those of you here tonight probably you're more interested in the proposals for Greenside School. And the proposals for Greenside School recognise that, A, this school building isn't large enough for all the children that are currently in it. And we've been desperately trying to get enough money and trying to improve the circumstances for children. And so the proposals are to use the BSF process to provide more accommodation for those secondary age students. We haven't got to the stage of exactly how that's going to happen because as Lindsay has said at the moment it's about visioning and then we'll move on to specific building plans. But we need to recognise that this school needs more accommodation and to allow that accommodation to develop for the secondary age students and for this building that we're in tonight to be used primarily for the primary age children. Now, as I say, we know that you need more space in this school and we know that this school building with more space for the primary children would be a really excellent facility. And there are some exciting opportunities to build some new accommodation for the secondary school students as well. And we'll come back to some of those issues later, no doubt. Now for the Valley School which is the school for secondary aged moderate learning difficulty children, we are conscious that those young people as well have other more complex needs. What we're really trying to do and genuinely do is encourage a debate about what's right for those young people. And therefore we have a whole range, a spectrum or potential for that school. Starting with it can be retained on its current site and look at a vision for how that might be for a vision for the future down to what could be seen as quite a dramatic solution, which is closing the school and having special needs units on each of the mainstream school sites. And you will see some other options somewhere in between along that spectrum. One is potential relocation for the mainstream school and the other is about locating the young people on mainstream schools but keeping them on the role of the Valley School and supporting them from the Valley School. For parents and for staff some of the key issues are about transitional arrangements and we're conscious of that while we're strategically planning for the future we have to recognise that it's the people in schools here and now that will be affected by those changes. In terms of building plans and works, clearly we want students, staff and parents, and governors to be involved in developing school projects. So if you're a parent of this school, if you're a member of staff of this school, if you're a governor at this school, we want you to be involved in not only the vision for the future of your school but how that vision translates into a building and the plans for those buildings. Clearly we need to make sure that those works are planned to minimise disruption because we want people to focus on teaching and learning and development but we recognise that all building works in one way, shape or form have the potential for disruption and we all need to work together to minimise that. And we want to also just reassure people that we wouldn't be moving students into new buildings until they were complete. And that's an important thing and maybe an important thing for people here at Greenside. For those schools that potentially could close under these proposals we recognise that that needs even more careful and sensitive handling. These are some of the most difficult decisions that any local authority and group of county councillors can possibly make, about closing schools. And we need to also make sure that we all work

together to maintain confidence in the quality of teaching and learning in those schools while they are going through that transition towards closure and students moving on. For the staff involved, let's be clear we want staff to be involved in those transition plans. Whatever they are, whether it's the building plan, whether it's a closure plan, whatever it is the key people involved are the people that are working and being responsible for and caring for what goes on for those students in schools. And let's not forget that whatever proposal for whatever school we're talking about, this is a town-wide issue. The one thing about Stevenage which gives it enormous strength is the collaboration between all the schools in the town and I know that there is a strong commitment from all of our teachers and all of the groups that we've worked with to collaborate with those plans so that nobody feels isolated in a difficult situation. And obviously, should we ever get into a position where staff would need to be redeployed I just wanted to reassure people here that we have an excellent track record in facilitating redeployment into other positions. We're talking about an expanding population, we might be talking about potential closures but we're also talking about expanding schools and there should be room for everybody in Stevenage to contribute towards this really exciting future for the town. For the students, we want to work with the schools as I said; to develop those clear transition plans and for those parents whose students may well need to go to schools that have new uniforms the County Council does make a contribution towards that. So, we're getting to the important point of the evening and that is to hear what you want to say and to be able to answer your questions. But before we do so let's just have a look at that decision making process. It's absolutely vital that we hear from you and get your feedback on these proposals because that's how you influence the decisions that are made and you make sure that they're the right decisions for the young people in this town. So we're having these public meetings, you've all seen the booklet, there's a response form at the back of it that you can write to us, e-mail us, post it on the website. I don't care how you communicate with us, but please do. And then what we'll do is we'll make sure that your views are presented back to the county councillors who will make decisions about this. So this consultation exercise, let's be clear it goes on to the 7 August, and then what we'll do is we'll feed your comments back and analyse them and debate the issues first of all through the education panel, which is a panel of the county council, which is really the decision making body within the county council. The education panel is a cross party, political party, and forum for debate. And they will give their views to the cabinet of the county council. The education panel meets on 3 October and the cabinet will make its decisions on the 15th. Both of those meetings are open to the public. That doesn't mean they're a public meeting where you can put your hand up and say please can I speak, it means that you can attend it and watch what goes on and hear what goes on first hand. Depending on those decisions, some of the proposals are what we call and what the government call prescribed alterations. They are significant changes to school provision, which require by law the publication of statutory notices. And a statutory notice is simply an advert in a paper saying this is what the County Council proposes to do on such and such a date. And that will stay there for a period of six weeks during which any of you will have a right to object. And if anybody objects to a particular proposal then that will have to be referred back to the county council's cabinet for it to take into further account those views before it takes a final decision. And we're

expecting that final decision to be around the end of the year, possibly just going into the New Year. So at that point I think we ought to stop talking to you and perhaps listen more to what you have to say.

BW It is your turn now ladies and gentlemen. Can I just say we have a roving mike; Karen will come round with a microphone. Because the meeting is being recorded please wait until you have the microphone in your hand before you put your question to the panel. The recording comes straight out of the sound system and so for the same reason try not to talk across each other because again, that will interfere with the recording. So, who's first? Lady over here, thank you, Karen.

F? The proposals to me don't seem to take on board the integration of the children, I didn't see anything about when you merge two schools together about what sort of things you're going to do to stop the children from in-school fighting and things like that. Being the mother of an autistic son I don't want to send him to a place where he could be ridiculed or victimised or bullied and that is of the utmost importance to me.

JD On the grounds that I haven't spoken yet I guess it's probably my turn. Yes, I think that's probably an issue we might need to dwell on a bit tonight because it is a key issue. What we're proposing here is that the children who are currently of course in the primary age here are the children that will move through and we are talking long term. And so we'd have a long time to make sure that we could get this right. What we're proposing is that we get the best; we have our cake and eat it. What we want to do by relocating the secondary area is to provide a safe secure environment that you would expect your son to be in. But on a campus which also offers other opportunities in terms of specialist knowledge with teachers, specialist facilities. Bearing in mind that these will be the newest special facilities in the country, they're be as good as you'll find anywhere in the UK because they will be brand new. I think the name of the game and it will be our responsibility to convince you over the next year or so that this is the case, I think the key word here is flexibility. Because what we want to do is create something which is based on each individual child. So if we've got a young person moving into the secondary phase that frankly needs to spend a lot of time into that secure unit or secure base, secure school environment with very specialist support and isn't yet ready to work in the mainstream then for that child that ought to be the case. And when the child is ready then we might spread that. So our view as an authority is that frankly, in cases like this where children have very special needs, the school and the staff and the parents know better than county hall. And so what we want to do is create an environment where those professional judgements in cooperation with the parents, can be taken in a very flexible way so that each program can be tailor made. Now, we've three or four years to get that right and one of the things we'd have to get absolutely right is the culture in the mainstream school. And what we've got here is a mainstream school that's very very keen to work with us and we'd have to make sure that that culture was there. I absolutely accept that point. I can say to you that there are models like this elsewhere in the country, not many, I have to say not many, but there are models like this in the rest of the country which work really well. But they work well because people have taken time to create them and invested, talking to the children in

both schools and working forward. So I absolutely accept the point and I think what we need to do as an authority is create an environment where we have two schools but with some flexibility between them so that the children can move back and forth based on their individual needs. It sounds ambitious but I think let's be ambitious. And I think we can make it work. And at the risk of sounding patronising to the school, I think we can make it work here at Greenside because we've got a really good school, with really good staff who do a fantastic job with the kids. And we've got a school at Barnwell which is improving, it's good, it's well led, it's well organised and are very very keen to work with the school. I think bear in mind we have some collaboration already. We have young people from here going across and working in the sports areas and what we would want to do over the next three to four years is gradually expand that collaboration. So I'm rattling on a bit but I do think it's a key point.

F? Hello. I have two children here at Greenside. Can I just ask outright, you're not talking about integrating Greenside children into mainstream schools when it is not going to be appropriate for them?

JD No, what we want to do here is create a system where we've got two separate schools working hand in glove. We want the schools physically connected but nevertheless separate and so the two schools would even look different. When you walked into Greenside you'd realise you were in a different school but on the same campus. And as I say, we need to be in a position, we need to be quite clever about it, where there will be some children in the Greenside school who will be spending a significant amount of time on the mainstream side, with support, because it's best for them and they're ready for it and there will be others that won't be. One of the things we want to do here is actually improve the transition from 16, 19, up to 25 and we think we can do that a lot better than we are at the moment by the children having more and more collaboration, more and more integration, so that when they're ready to move on into young adulthood it's not quite such a jump. I think what we want to commit here is that this will be done on a pupil by pupil basis because as I say, at County Hall frankly, we don't know the kids. The staff and you do and I think we need to leave those judgements to you. Our responsibility is to create that flexible environment and then it's over to the people who know the children to make that work. That will mean big implications for the mainstream school because to make that work they will also have to have flexible timetabling, certain facilities in there will have to have additional facilities, there will have to be a science lab which looks quite different to the current science labs, which is why we need to work closely with Barnwell.

DV Thank you. Can I just say on behalf of Greenside school that we really do welcome this as a proposal and we see it very much as a progression of what's already happening with our relationships both with Barnwell and Heathcote and other mainstream schools. And the collaboration, we've been pushing the LEA for a development of this collaboration for some time and for a long time before BSF and before I was head. Probably about eight years ago now there was an outstanding example of how the two schools have worked together because we are a formal partnership in the Shephalbury leisure centre, which is the sports centre that has

developed based on the Barnwell site. So for example this afternoon, as happens many afternoons at Greenside school, a group of our older students went to the Shephalbury centre and used the facilities there. There are occasions when we do games alongside Barnwell, unfortunately that is not as much as we would like but it does happen on a regular basis. It doesn't happen for all our students, there will be some students for whom that would always be totally inappropriate. But for the majority it is undoubtedly a wonderful opportunity. The two schools have worked in all sorts of ways over the years, I think it must be about three or four years ago now, we did a joint residential trip as part of a European trip, a European project that we're still involved with, and we did a joint trip to Finland. And that was a group of our older students and they shared a hotel room and it was as inclusive as you could possibly get. Again, it wouldn't be appropriate for all our students but for those that went and I think particularly for all those that had the opportunity at Barnwell it was a really important experience which I suspect will stay with them for the rest of their lives. We have at the moment on a timetable basis opportunities for students to go and use the science facilities at Heathcote, we have students again on a timetable basis, use the technology facilities at Barnwell, and often, particularly at this time of year, we have groups of students that are out on the field at Heathcote and we'll all come, hopefully you'll all come later on this year to the Heathcote field when we'll be doing our sports day. So we already have the best of both worlds to an extent. We already in many ways are a co-located school. There is just a wire mesh fence between us. We see this as a natural development and a real opportunity. And just to make the point about when students leave school – one of the things that I'm acutely aware of and one of the great advantages of an all age school is that this becomes a very isolated and artificial world for a lot of our children. Particularly those that may have been here since they were two and three, all the way through to 19. And in many ways because we're only offering them this very small space as their environment, we're not giving them what they actually require when they leave the school, which is a greater experience of the wider world. And yes, we try to do that on a timetable basis, and yes, they get into a variety club bus and they go to Tesco as a group. But to be perfectly honest there is a 'so what?' about that. It is those links with main stream schools; it is looking beyond Greenside school that is so important. We have, and again, it's a link with a mainstream school, we work in partnership with Hitchin high school for girls and we have a French assistant that comes on a weekly basis. Now, we don't teach French, the reason we have a French assistant is because we don't want our children necessarily to learn French, although some of them do, but we do want our children to learn that other people speak other languages other than English, which is so important that we have a natural speaker, a native speaker that comes in and is clearly from a different culture and a different country and is sharing with our children that experience. And it is trying to give our children that opportunity to see beyond Greenside school. We've got a number of teaching colleagues here today and I think all of us see this as a very exciting opportunity. Not in terms of necessarily the buildings, and everybody that comes to Greenside school knows that we've got a lot of gripes regarding our buildings, and hopefully this will solve many of those difficulties, but that would miss the point, it is the inclusion that is the exciting bit here. But maintaining the most important part of Greenside school which is

the culture, and it's a culture in which people feel safe and it's a culture in which people are nurtured and they feel secure.

BW Any more questions ladies and gentlemen, or comments?

F? My question is about the medical side because here we have nurses specialising in special needs, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists. Will the new department in the mainstream school have somebody there all the time?

M? All the expertise that currently here will be here. What we would like to do, can't promise this but what we would want to do is expand that. So that we would talk with health professionals and say, why not deliver some of your health services out of some of the schools? It could be one of those venues; it could be another special school or a mainstream school. But one of the things the partnership of teachers is very keen to do is to collaborate more with our health service colleagues. And so I suppose the bottom line is all the services and expert teachers that are currently available will still be available. Because remember, we're talking here about Greenside school. We'll be a separate school still, head, governing body. That's the point, it will be a separate school but it will have access to another school in a flexible way. So all those services will continue. We'd like to actually open up the facilities, not just to children with special needs but all of our mainstream children, to health services more locally in our schools. It's one of the advantages of having larger schools, so we can do that. And we're negotiating and talking with the PCT very informally at the moment, about what they have in mind. One thing we do know is they would like to have a much bigger presence here in Stevenage and they have talked to us about that. They haven't decided where or how. The bottom line is all the facilities and expertise you've currently got would remain.

M? When you talk about new buildings do you have Greenside next to Barnwell or do you have Greenside let's say on the old Heathcoat side? How close are they going to be?

PD That's a good question because we haven't got to that bit yet, have we?

M? You must have thought about it.

PD We've thought about it certainly, and ideally you would say from Greenside's perspective no doubt, that the closer the secondary department can be to the primary department the better it would be, the easier it would be for staff and student movements. And it's about that. What are the needs and how to express that in buildings - that's the next stage. And we will be working with you as a school very closely to interpret that vision into the buildings that will follow. So if it's really important for certain things to be met then that's what the architects will be given to make sure that the buildings they build suit the purpose and the method of working that you're saying needs to happen in order to deliver your vision. So it could be that there are new buildings on the Heathcoat site close to here but also linked to the main school buildings

because if we were to develop on the Heathcote site, and there are no hard and fast decisions, but if we were then we would need to expand that school as well and therefore more buildings would need to go on that site too. So there are real opportunities for that sort of progression through from that site to this site. But I can't give you any hard and fast guarantees at this point in time because really what we're trying to do is capture what the vision is, capture the way the school will need to work and then tell the architects what we want so that they can go and interpret that. And what we'll have is an iterative process where you'll say to them, this is what we're trying to deliver, they'll come back and try and interpret that for you. You'll go, no you didn't get that bit right, what we really mean is – and it will go backwards and forwards until we get to a project that best meets, as best we can, within the money that we've got available what we're trying to achieve.

M? Your proposal seemed to suggest that Greenside and Barnwell would merge.

PL No, no, that's not...

M? To me that's how it read. And we were being asked to approve a proposal. Now you're saying something which is coming across as different.

PD I'm sorry if it was open to a different interpretation. I'm conscious that...

M? It seems very vague.

PD Yes. I'm conscious that some of you have already responded to us and you may, and I'm not trying to put words into your mouths, but you may feel that now you've heard a bit more or you understand a bit more, what you said, what you've indicated isn't quite what you feel now. Let us know if that is the case and I'm not trying to suggest you should change your mind. I'm just saying if you feel as a consequence of these discussions that you have a greater understanding of what this is about and you feel differently about it just let us know.

M? I'm all for the kids that are able to go to Barnwell to go to Barnwell but there are kids here that it's totally inappropriate for that to happen. And also a concern is that if the sites are so close together that wheelchair users are going to be gawked at. Walking my son home from school with the looks and the attitude from some of the kids from both Barnwell and Heathcote - I wouldn't want my son to mix there.

PD No, we understand and that's what Justin was saying. That sort of integration will only happen when it's appropriate for your child. And secondly, there is some work to be done with any of the mainstream schools in this town and quite frankly across the country, about working alongside people with different needs. Just as Dave was explaining about needing to understand that people speak in a different language it's also about needing to understand that people have different needs in a whole variety of ways.

JD Can I just say, because I think it's come to the crux of the matter. When we wrote this document the word we use, and we tried to use it carefully, was alongside. What we tried to say was we would have two schools working alongside each other. And basically what we want to do in the architecture is to allow those schools either to operate separately or to collaborate depending on the needs of the child. What we would need to do depending on whether these proposals go through, and what we're attempting at the moment is monitoring the responses through and so far the response from Greenside parents is pretty well universally negative from these proposals. And at the moment that's what's going to go to panel. But we'll monitor those proposals through. What we are suggesting by alongside is that physically the schools will be so close together and physically connected that that integration is possible when it's appropriate for individual children but that the schools will be entirely separate schools. So in a sense the schools will share a campus. Now I don't want to be misleading you here. When we say two separate schools, it would be crazy to replicate absolutely everything. What we would need to do is say, out of the facilities what facilities will be shared? Will we have one car park? How will we use the library? And that's the kind of detail we need to look at, not just in terms of cost and efficiency but in terms of what we know about the kids. And bear in mind we need to look at the trends and patterns of the kind of children that might be coming forward over the next ten to twenty years. Because there is a tendency for schools like this and others to take children with increasingly complex needs. And at the moment we're sending children out county because we're not meeting those challenging needs. We would want to make sure any new provision we create offers something to some of those children with quite complex and challenging needs. And because they're the very children we don't want to send out county, we want to keep them internally. Now what we can't do is create something which is so integral that actually what it is is a mainstream school with a unit attached to it because for those children with complex needs it would just be entirely inappropriate. So we are talking here about two quite separate schools but physically linked. And then over the years the schools would be able to talk to each other about how far they collaborate about governance and the rest of it. But that would be for the schools to decide in the future.

BW Anybody else? This is your opportunity.

JD The questions aren't compulsory.

BW Yes. I'm happy for us all to go home but if anybody has anything they want to put to the panel this is your opportunity. Yes?

F? I assume that we're still going to have the same one headmaster. Or if we're going to split into different schools are we going to have two separate heads?

JD Yes. There will be two separate schools. Two heads, two governing bodies.

F? No, I meant for Greenside. For Greenside school as a whole are we still going to be under the same head director?

JD Yes. Dave wants to speak about that, but yes.

DV We're pre-empting that there may be a bigger division in terms of secondary and primary and to an extent that's already happened and to an extent that's governed by quickened demands. So we've recently had a review of our senior management team and we've appointed two assistant heads both of whom are here now. Catherine, I don't know if you'll all have met Catherine but this is her first terms with us. And Catherine has joined us from Harlow Field School in Essex and is the assistant head with the overall responsibility for the secondary department. And Lorna who I suspect everybody will have met is now the assistant head with particular responsibility for the primary department. And I am and hope to remain, the head of Greenside school.

LM We've been meaning to talk to you about that, Dave! Welcome to Hertfordshire Catherine. It's a much better place than Essex. It's a wise decision.

BW Are there any more questions for the panel?

JD If you've got an individual issue you'd like to pick up with regard to your particular child we will be the last here and you are very welcome to stay and talk to us about your individual cases.

M? This is the only option, there is not other option? If we don't go with your proposal, what happens? Greenside stays as it is?

JD Yes. Let's be honest about it. We would love to have a lot more money to put into our capital program. I don't want to plead poverty but we're one of I think it's 14 authorities up and down the country, or I think it's 15, a very small number, who are what's called a Floor Authority. That means any money outside of BSF or the primary capital program, which is coming this way, which we spend on our schools, which we have to borrow, we have pay the revenue back, unlike most authorities – Essex have the same problem actually. And that means if we want to spend £10 million on a school, we have to pay an extra £1 million on our revenue budget for 25 years. That's what we're talking about. So we don't have a lot of money to invest in this way. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Our view, you'll look at the options for the three special schools, they're very different, and there are fewer options for Greenside. There are two reasons for that. One is that unlike the Valley which has a good building and lots of space, there's an option there, and unlike Lonsdale which has got a building which could be a lot better, the buildings here we do not think are appropriate. We think, as an authority, this school needs more space, especially – I mean, I came here a year ago and I went away thinking it's a great school, lovely atmosphere, the kids are well looked after, they make some great progress academically and personally but it's despite the buildings. I mean, there just isn't enough space. We as officers want to push, work with the head and governors on this and deliver this program. We couldn't develop the site that we've got. That's the one option. The second point is as officers we really believe this will work the best for the children; the idea of having the best of both worlds really.

The children going to their own school with their specialist, supportive, secure environment and when they are willing, able and it's right for their progress, to develop into a mainstream school with all that offers, we think that we can try and have our cake and eat it. So you're quite right, for this school there are fewer options but as officers we're committed to it. The one thing I would say is normally when we go out to public consultation we can look you in the eye and say we've costed this, we know how much it will cost, the money's in the bank, we know we can deliver it. The health warning against all this is we still have to cost. If you're looking across the whole of the town we still need to cost it to make sure we can afford it but this is a prize we think it is worth pursuing. And the other option, and at the moment I think most of the responses so far from Greenside have been not to do this. And I think if that's the final decision basically, it's either do this or not really. We could still spend some money working on the buildings but it really would be tweaking at the edges rather than something substantial. So, I apologise that there are a lot less options. At Valley there are four or five options and there will be a big debate because some people will focus on one option rather than another. Here we think there's less room for manoeuvre. We're hoping to convince people.

BW The lady at the back.

F? I just wanted to clarify the time scale. Were you going to stagger the scheme across the schools or would it all happen at the same time? You said three to four years.

LM It's three to four years before we start really. But in terms of the actual building program, until we've got a contractor on board who can then program...