

Ley Park Wed 26th June 06

Speaker key

JW	Jane Wilson
JD	Justin Donovan
FQ	Female Questioner
PW	Paul Wray
MQ	Male Questioner
LM	Lindsay Martin

JW If anybody does have a hearing problem at all, we do have some loops. Welcome to this public consultation [unclear] about the [unclear] closure of Ley Park School. I'm Jane Wilson, and I work for a company called Accent, and I'm here to facilitate this evening. Accent is an independent market research agency, and I think it's very important that you understand that we are an independent organisation, and our role here, is helping Herts County Council to run this programme of public consultation. It's to make sure that your voice is heard, and that the consultation is run in a fair and proper manner. I will be making notes during the evening, because Accent will be making a report after each meeting, which they will pull together, and it will go out a document to the County Council, who will then have it up on the Website for you all to see. But also this evening is being recorded, so there will be a transcript of what has been said tonight, and that will also be up on the Website. The evening is going to run until nine o'clock, and we will start with a short presentation, which Justin Donovan here will be giving, and then after that we'll open the floor to questions. We will close the open part of the meeting at a quarter to nine to give people 15 minutes to come and individually talk to members of the panel, should they so wish. You can also, if you don't feel that you've had an opportunity, there are a lot of people here tonight, so it may not be possible to get through everybody's questions. I hope we will, and I'll do my best to do that, but if you don't, on your chairs you'll find first a copy of the presentation, which will be for you to check through and make notes on as the presentation goes, to make notes on any questions you might want to ask, so you can ask the questions and be [unclear], but also there is a questionnaire, which I will remind you about towards the end. If you could fill that in, and that's for Accent, and that will give you a chance to put questions or suggestions that you may not have a chance to make in the meeting. You can, of course, always talk to them, email the Council, write by letter, and the contact number and addresses are all in the [unclear] document, which I'm sure you all seen. I believe there are copies here tonight if anybody should want one. I'll hand over to Justin now, who will give you the short presentation, and then after that we'll take the open meeting and the questions. Thank you.

JD Thank you Jane. Welcome to the evening. Thank you for so many of you coming along. We have two evenings here at this school; this is the first. Okay, three parts to the evening. First, welcome. In a minute I'll introduce my colleagues, and I who are from the County Council so you can tell whom we've got here and the kind of areas that we cover. Then I'm going to take about ten minutes for a presentation just to set the thing in context, so we're absolutely clear about what we're proposing and why, what the implications are for children, so we've got off to a clear start. And then the majority of the evening is over to you, to make comments, which we will record, to ask questions, which we'll answer, or just to get your point of view across. And I'll take you through the rest of the process as we go. So firstly then, some introductions. My name's Justin Donovan. I'm Deputy Director for Children, Schools and Families, and that means anything to do with schools, learning or education, comes across my desk. I'm in charge of the education of all the children in Hertfordshire. To my immediate left is Lindsay Martin, who is one of our more senior officers, and he leads on anything to do with access to schools; transport, place planning, buildings, all the things which mean we get the right children to the right schools in the right way are down to Lindsay. Paul Wray works for Lindsay. He's sitting next to him. We have the county divided in half, and Paul is this half of the county in terms of planning, so he's responsible for all planning issues in this part of the county. And finally we have Kate at the end, who is an area planning officer, who is an expert with the figures, and the detail, and is unlikely to answer your questions, but might give us some information as we go. So that's who you have here. I'll just start by placing on the record the purpose of the review; why it is we're doing this. We know this is difficult, disruptive, controversial, and unpopular, often, so why on earth are we doing this? And the first issue is there simply aren't enough children to go round, in terms of the number of places we have available, and I'll come back to those figures in a moment. But the first purpose of the review is to match the number of children we have in the area and are likely to get in the area over the next five to ten years, and the number of places we make available for them. I'll explain the consequences of not getting that right. One of those consequences is that we've known from our vast experience in Herts, we have a lot of schools, and a lot of them are struggling because they're not full. We know that if you are not full, you're not viable, it's a distraction to the core purpose of schools; that is to teach children. You are constantly worrying about your future, worrying about your finances, and worrying about your vulnerability as the school, takes you away from critical planning, preparing and working with children. There's a lot of pressure, on the school. And also finances. Whether we like it or not, and we can have a long discussion about how we finance schools, it's true to say that the great majority of the budget that the school gets to spend in a given year is based on the number of children that walk through the gates. As the children come into the school, they come in with like a price tag, and the budget for the school is made up of the number of the children on roll. There's a funding for various bits and pieces, but the great majority of funding comes from the number of children on roll. Unfortunately, in an area like this, where the numbers of children on roll are

falling, the fixed costs of running the school don't fall at the same rate. You still have to pay for the buildings and a whole range of other things, and therefore in the end you start to run out of money to spend on children in classrooms, and classroom practice starts to deteriorate. So those are the three reasons. Can I make one thing absolutely clear, right from the beginning? We're not here because we're saying the standards in this part of the county are too low, and I think we need to get that on record straight away. There are schools in Hertfordshire that we're looking to close because, frankly, we don't think they're good enough. We spent a lot of time working with them, a lot of time talking with them, but in the end we think the educational standard has been reduced, and that is not why we're here. The purpose of this intervention is because there aren't enough children, basically, to go around. We'll come back to that. Standards are important, but it's not the key purpose that we're here tonight, in terms of the intervention we're making. Here's a picture as we're here tonight. In this part of the county there are 509 places available in this current Reception year. Of those, currently only 416 places are taken up, so there's a capacity of 93, or 18.3%. So there is an 18% surplus in schools in the area. Because we have data tracked though birth rates and also predict movements in populations, we're confident that by the time we get to 2011, or the academic year starting September 2010, that surplus will rise to 21%. About a fifth of the places in the area in schools will be empty. Going back to the point that I made before, that makes it very difficult for schools to manage themselves, both as professional organisations, but also in terms of their budgets. How does that relate in terms of forms of entry? For planning purposes, we're saying 30 children in one form of entry. And currently then there are 3.1 forms of entry, or 93 places surplus to requirements within the whole of the area, and if we don't intervene, that will rise slightly to 3.6 by 2011. What we're proposing to do, therefore, is to remove three whole forms of entry from the whole of this area. That means about 90 places, and we've suggested 45 in the north, and approximately 45 in the south, because of where children live and where the places are. That will still leave us a capacity within the overall area of 4%, just in case there's some growth, and also for leaving place for some parental choice, that's important. If we fill all the schools up to complete capacity, it only takes a few families to move in and then we have a difficulty. Where are we in the process? Well, this is phase two. Phase one is where we worked with a lot of stakeholders, head teachers, governing bodies, and others, where we shared all the data; birth rates, the conditions of the buildings, the **standard sorts of fusing [?]**, financial trends, all the information we had on all the schools in the area were shared, and then we discussed a whole range of options, which might be possible to bring forward for formal consultation, i.e. this process. And we looked at all of those proposals, under these four, key tests, and we were fairly systematic about this. The first one was that any of the options that we bring forth for consultation have to remove the number of surplus places, which had come out, but also leave places behind, where there was greatest demand, where children live, where parents expressed a preference, and so forth. The second one was this issue of standards. Although we're not here because we think standards in the area are too low, nevertheless we don't

want to leave behind a pattern of schools, which will undermine future development in raising of standards, for example, this is one example only, we are very keen, where we possibly can, and where it makes sense, to introduce two forms of entry all through primary schools, and if you like we can get into a discussion about that, but our view is that two form of entry for two forms of entry all through primary school has a whole range of advantages to it in terms of sharing workload across the staff. If you lose one team member of staff, in, say, year six, with the SATS coming round the corner, you're not left without one of the [unclear] in the sense of one form of entry, and so on. We can talk those issues if you like. So although we're not interviewing because standards are too low, we want to make sure, nevertheless the standards agenda here is integral to our decision-making. Thirdly, of course, we need to take into account the buildings, the conditions of the buildings, the costs of any proposals we bring forward. We think it will be not helpful; it will be dishonest of us to bring forward proposals or consultation, which we know we'll be unlikely to be able to afford. And so all the proposals we bring forward, we know we should be able to fund. And of course, environmental impact. That's also an important issue for us. We know that things like the school run and opening and closing times are still [?] with all kinds of difficulties. The fourth test is to look at each of the options in terms of the level of disruption it causes. This is not impact-free. Whatever proposals we come up with, they are disruptive for children, and that's unfortunate, and we will try to minimise that, but one of the tests we have here is, out of all of these proposals we bring forward, which is the proposal which will bring forward the least disruption to the children? Having gone through that, unlike in the north of the town, where we're bringing forth three different proposals, here we're only actually bringing forward one suggestion, and that is, as you know, that we close this school, which takes out two forms of entry, but slightly increase the size at Wormley, so that overall we're taking out the required number of places. That's our basic proposal, for the south of the town; this is the area that I'm talking about. In the north of the town, as I say, we do have some alternative proposals; there's more room to manoeuvre, we think, in the north of the town. There are three different proposals, which we're consulting on during this same period, but we're assuming tonight we'd rather focus on this proposal, but if you want to, during the evening, ask us about the north of the town, you're very welcome to, and we'll do our best to answer those. What will happen then, if the proposal goes through, and I'll come to the process of the decision-making in just a moment, what will happen? Well, basically the school, this school, Ley Park, will stay open, until the end of the academic year 2007/08. So the school will continue to function through till the end of the summer term 2008, but it would not admit a new cohort of children in a year's time. So if these proposals go through, the last of the children to enter the school will be this September. The following September new children wouldn't arrive in the school. The children who are already here will remain here until the summer of 2008, and what we would do, is because we will have to do some work at Wormley, we will put in some temporary accommodation a year early, before the children move, because that will be two things, one, it'll mean that we will need some temporary

accommodation for the immediate increase of 12 places on the Wormley site if the proposal goes through, but also then, during any building, of any minor alterations we'd make on the site, there's some spare capacity for that year to help manage that, and again reduce the disruption for children on that site. What will happen then is that, because of the numbers, we could make sure that we were able to offer all the parents and children who wanted to move across to Wormley could be given a place. It would mean that if all the parents and all the children decide to move across, just for the first few years of the new, enlarged Wormley, it will be slightly too many children. There will be a slight bulge, and so we've had to keep some accommodation in place for the start up. That, we think, might not happen, because not all parents may choose to send their children there, because there are other places that might be taken up, but we do think, if we can offer a guarantee that if parents and children wanted to keep together, so that peer groups weren't broken up, that model [unclear], that's something we would offer. But we're interested to see how that goes down with you.

[Murmuring from group].

JD In terms of process, then, where we are and what happens next, there are regular public meetings, the last one is on 29th June, but the end of the consultation period doesn't end till the end of July, 27th July. So there is plenty of time after that to get in issues, comments, questions, proposals, to us by 27th July. We are fairly firm though, with the cut off point of 27th July, because then we need to start working on the report, to go to members on 12th September. The Education Panel will meet probably all day that day, and will deal with; we've got Potters Bar proposals going as well, so probably we'll need the whole day. But on 12th September, the Education Panel will meet, and those members will look at the proposals we're making, for the north and south of Hoddesdon and Wormley, they will have a look at the summary of all the feedback that we've got; so we're going to capture everything that you say tonight, and capture it under themes, and feedback that to members. We will also be analysing the forms, and giving some numerical feedback to members so they understand that the point has been expressed, and the strength of feelings, and also we will attach Accent's own independent report, which will summarise, from their point of view, what was said on these evenings, and that will be attached and edited by a structured, independent report. So the idea is members are very clear about the issue, about the proposals, and they're very clear indeed about the feedback from members of the public. So on the 12th September can be taken. That meeting is open to public scrutiny, so if you want to come along to the meeting, you will be welcome. We're always limited in terms of numbers, so it's very helpful to know if you intend to come along. And also, we have a tradition here that if there's an organised, Save Our School kind of group, if you can nominate a spokesperson, we can usually arrange for the spokesperson to appear at the Panel, and present the views of that group at the Panel, so the views will get across in that way. That's up to the discretion of the Chairman, but that's something that we tend to do. Following the Education Panel, the following

month the recommendation from that Panel will then go to Cabinet. That will be a much shorter scrutiny, because the system makes sure that this is where the lengthy debate goes place. Cabinet is also open to members of the public, we're also able to go along and observe that. And if you want to be at the really detailed political discussion, [unclear]. Assuming then Cabinet agrees with the proposals, or modified proposals, we go then public statutory notices from October to December, and as things currently stand, if during that period there's an objection, we'll then go to an independent School Organisation Committee, and there's a Bill passing its way through Parliament at the moment called Education Inspections Bill 2006, it's at Committee stage, it seems to have got stuck in the last couple of weeks, it's all gone very quiet, but one of the proposals in that Bill is to scrap the SOC, scrap the School Organisation Committee, so that might change, we don't know. I suspect that if it is abolished as an organisation, it's likely to be abolished sometime in the future. They're unlikely to abolish it on the spot, but there is a chance that that bit of the process might get taken out. We'll have to see when that Bill is enacted, and we're expecting to have a Draft Act within the next three or four weeks. So that's the process, and as I say, if you want to engage in the formal decision making, or at least observe it going on, 12th September is the date. Finally then, I want to place one or two things on record. We have not yet made a decision.

[Overtalking].

JD And I can reassure you of that on two fronts. First of all, officers cannot take this decision. It's not a decision, which is delegated to officers. This is a decision that will be made at the Education Panel, recommended to Cabinet, so it's a political decision in that sense. Of course we, as officers, give advice to Members, and our advice is that this is the proposal that we think should go through, and it might well go through that way. But that's the first thing. The second thing is if we'd already made our mind up, to be frank with you, we would not be going through the public process we're going through, literally virtually every night. We are avoiding the England World Cup games, because we don't think we'd get many people here. But other than that, virtually every night we have these events on. We don't have to do that. We're doing that because we genuinely want to capture what people are saying to us. We haven't made our decision yet. We have a third option, and we've got it in front [unclear], we've been as straight as we can on it. We do want to hear your views, but the process does come to an end, in terms of feedback in this way, on 27th July, and it's quite important we hear from you by then. Please let us know your views. And you've got a whole range of doing that. At that point, I'll sit down. Thanks for listening, and we'll answer questions and take comments.

JW Thank you Justin. Just before we go into the open session, and take questions from the floor, the reason we have the microphones is not only so that you can hear us, it's also so we can record this discussion, and we really do want to hear your views, and we want to hear them on tape as well, which means that

during the questioning we will have two people with the roving microphones and I would like you not to speak until you've actually got the microphone, because otherwise we won't be able to capture it on tape. The second thing is that we are well aware of how strong the feelings are, in a situation like this, with this particular proposal, but it doesn't help if everybody's shouting out and calling over one another, because it's hard for me to record what your issues are, and hard for the tape to record it too, so if you could, please stick to just speaking with the microphone. I will also go around as many people as possible, so if you want to keep making another point, I may not come back to you, for quite some time, because I will try to take people who haven't spoken before, in order that as many people have an opportunity to speak as possible. And finally, this isn't the arena to bring up individual concerns about individual children. Obviously those are very important concerns for you, but it's not the right arena, and we ask that if you do have those kinds of concerns, that you speak directly to the Council themselves. There is a telephone line you can post concerns on the Website. But really we want to discuss the issue tonight. And I think that's about all. We will be finishing at 8:45. So it's over to you now. If we could take the first question?

FQ Nicky Brown, Chair of Governors, Ley Park School. One of the criteria you asked us to consider, when Governing Bodies, as part of this proposal was that schools in future should provide wrap around care, the concept of extended schools, by providing facilities for the community and other service users. Ley Park currently has large buildings, and space, and maybe [?] Breakfast and After School Clubs, and other extended services to the community could be offered. We also have a successful Pre School, and the option to build on if any other services wish to be offered, for example, a dentist or doctor's surgery. Why then have you chosen a smaller site that has none of the above, will need to be built on and extended into common ground, just to house the school, and will not, in future, be able to cope with any extra capacity that could arise from the demographics?

[Applause].

JD I'll start with a general point, and then perhaps Paul or Lindsay can pick up in terms of the site. You're absolutely quite right. It's important that it's a growing issue that all the schools in Hertfordshire need to look at extended services. The slight misunderstanding, I think in some of our schools, but not this one, it's completely understood here, we're not just talking about extended service from a particular school, the idea is that we will provide extended services from a community of schools. It's not possible for a single school, in our view, without disrupting its core business, to deliver all the extended services the communities may want and will want. So we ask our schools to work collaboratively, in groups across areas, so that between them they cover those extended services. Having said that, most of the schools, even though they'll be working together, will be offering themselves, each of the schools is likely to be offering things like

Breakfast Clubs and After School Clubs, but some of the more specialised services will be offered by a community of schools, not individual schools. The other thing, to be frank with you, what we can't do is deliver a programme of extended services across Hertfordshire over the next four or five years, on the back of empty classrooms, because the classrooms are there and funded in one way; extended schools [sic] are funded in another. So whilst one of the advantages, there are not many, but there are some advantages of having half empty schools; one of the things you can guarantee in a Primary School is that the buildings and classrooms will always be put to a good use. Any school you go to in Hertfordshire, which is low on numbers, makes really good use of spare space. And one of the disadvantages of being full is that some of those imaginative uses of space aren't available, so the point you make is a perfectly clear point, because if you go for a full school, it's more difficult than [overtalking] you don't have the spaces.

FQ My point is really is not so much [unclear].

JD Before the mic's coming, just to summarise, the point I'm making is that, whilst you're quite right, that's the important issue, we can't [unclear] plan for the extended services on the back of half-empty schools. We need to make sure extended services deliver out of full schools.

FQ Okay, my point actually was that you've chosen; it's not even about the issue of it being a half empty school, my point is that you've chosen a site that is disproportionately small, compared to this one. We have spare capacity in the future, so what I'm saying, I'm talking in terms of the site itself. A site's been chosen that has no future capacity, if needed.

JD Okay. Paul? In terms of site, can you deal with that one?

PW But one of the other big issues that we took on board was the disruption to children.

[Overtalking].

JW Could we wait for the microphone? We won't actually get any discussion going if we have everyone shouting out.

PW There are 304 children on the other site. There are 189 children on this site. One of the big issues for us was the disruption, and we felt that it was better that way around, but I hear what you're saying.

JW Right. The gentleman at the back?

MQ County Councillor Tony Mitchell. One of your earlier slides showed the current figures, saying you had 93 spare places, and with the forecast in 2011, at

a round figure of 400 pupils. If you take away three forms of entry from the current figure, you'd only be left with three empty spaces, which seems a small margin for error, and would represent maybe just two more families coming in to the northern half of the borough. So I would imagine people want a little bit more comfort on the basis for your forecasts.

PW With the forecasts, you can see that we're projecting ahead to 2011-12, and on the basis of that information, which takes on board live births, which are with us as we speak, it takes on board housing proposals, and we know that there's been a recent announcement which adds a further 500 houses within the Broxbourne Borough Council area, although that's over the period between now and 2021, but taking all of those factors on board, we believe that our forecast is pretty accurate. But, having said that, there are still places that are available to the south of this area, as well as the comfort [?] that we can create in additional places.

JD You need to bear in mind that when these proposals kick in, they will start in 2008, which is in two years' time. So when you look at the forecast of the surplus spaces will be rising, so therefore it will be higher in two years' time. So I'm thinking ahead.

FQ My name's Keelie [?] Cicero, a parent and a governor. I'd like to come back to your point, and another point as well. You said that moving us over to Wormley would offer the least amount of disruption to children. I don't agree with that. Everybody will be disrupted, regardless of whether they're moving or not. And also, going back to Nicky's point, that you're talking about a site that is one hectare smaller than the site here. Now, you are talking about that for a 1.6, which is only adequate, just, for their site size, to two-form entry, which then is going to make it a very small site. Now I know you're talking about building a bridge over the river, which again has its own health and safety issues altogether, and pinching part of the greenbelt land on the other side of the river, [unclear] playing fields, to use as well, playing fields, but unfortunately, you're not going to be able to use those constantly are you, because of the risk of health and safety and things like that. So my point is, how can Wormley school cope with two forms of entry, and for how many years will it be more than that, because if you're taking only 12 children from our school, what about the other 18 per class, that you will have to put up with, on that site, for a number of years until they have gone through school? It's not, logistically, going to work. That site is not big enough for what you're proposing. And you're talking about having a site that's much bigger here, a whole hectare bigger, with much more usable space, pulled down and built on, in place of a school that's just not big enough.

[Applause].

JD Two general points. First of all in terms of disruption, as I said before, I'm not here to say these are easy, simple proposals; they're not. Whichever option

we end up with, it's going to be disruptive, and we want to keep that disruption to a minimum. The fact is there are about twice as many children in Wormley than there are here, so if we're going to physically close a school, I accept it's disruptive for both, but it's more disruptive for the children in the school we're going to close, that's clearly the case, and therefore Wormley, with nearly twice as many children than here, going back to the criteria, in terms of disruption, that's clearly a powerful argument. The other point is, and we need to be absolutely honest with you here, and be blunt, just for a moment, if we're here tonight because there are surplus places, it is difficult to justify not looking at one of the school closures where there is a school which is half empty. If the purpose of this review is to deal with surplus places, and we have a school, which is half empty, then it's difficult to ignore that school, and so it's not unsurprising that we would start looking here. I accept the point, though, in terms of the sites. This is a balancing act between the criteria; there isn't any simple answer here. [Overtalking].

FQ Wormley School is much smaller.

JD ...and what we're saying is, a balance of judgement is half as many kids, much greater parental preference for Wormley than here, these are things we can't ignore, and we're here to intervene on surplus places; this school's half empty. And those are [overtalking].

FQ Sorry to interrupt; one small point. We're not saying, don't close the school, we're very aware that there is a decline in numbers, but you are choosing; we're talking about sites. You're talking about a site that is half the size, really, of this site, and you're talking about making that bigger to accommodate us. 80% of the children actually live on this side of the estate. They don't have to cross the road. And they wouldn't have to cross the road to get to this school. You're talking about children that are actually having to cross the road at the moment, to get to Wormley School, and quite a major road.

JD I absolutely accept the point you're making. What I'm saying to you is though we could argue; each of the four criteria we're using, you could make a powerful argument just using one. What I'm saying is, it needs to be a balanced argument for all four, and I think you'd have to have a very compelling argument to close the more popular, fuller school, just [overtalking].

FQ We're not saying, don't call this Wormley. Don't make Wormley school the most popular school. Bring them here.

JD In terms of site, I'll pass on to Paul for site. [Overtalking]. That might be something we'll have to look at.

JW When we've finished with this question, if we could do one for somebody else.

PW That's a real issue that we had to grapple with, there's no doubt about it, but just a couple of the points though; the bridge is there already, we would not be building a new bridge. There is a good bridge there, which is the public right of way, which [overtalking].

FQ What that health and safety issues...

PW We have a number of schools where this operates like this [overtalking].

FQ How often would they use that field, which would need to be over a bridge?

PW Sorry? How long would be...?

FQ How often would they use that building [sic]? It wouldn't be a regular use though, would it? It couldn't possibly be?

PW Yes. It would be. And it would be [overtalking].

FQ What, every dinnertime? Something like that?

PW It would be for the school management to decide how and when they would use that bridge [overtalking].

FQ [Overtalking] keeping those children safe in that field are higher than a normal school field, aren't they?

PW The school would have to take on board all in relation to the risk assessment [overtalking] and whatever else, yeah.

FQ [Overtalking].

PW ...to the point that the downside of that option, and yes, we hear what you say.

JD Just one point. If you're saying a possibility is to move Wormley to this site, call it Wormley and have it here...

FQ Yes.

JD ...that is a sensible proposal [overtalking].

FQ Yes...

[Applause].

FQ ...but we actually proposed that in our original proposals, and you just completely... The five proposals we got, you haven't actually done any of those, you've done the one that said, [unclear].

JD What I'm saying to you, if I can just answer, if that's a view of the floor that that is one way forward, we'll have to take that back and try and build that into the report.

JW Thank you. This lady here?

FQ Could you tell me why that proposal wasn't put forward then? Why there's only one proposal, when Ley Park is obviously the best site? There are four options, and you've chosen the one that we all consider to be the worst one for our children's safety.

PW If you look at the Appendix in the document, it does show, under Option H, and it says, very clearly, the one reason, which is because it wouldn't mean transferring the larger number of children. [Overtalking].

FQ Isn't it your job to make sure that you put our children's safety first, before anything else? And you're not putting our children's safety first. My son has got to come from a safe, secure school, go over to Wormley, [overtalking] yeah, go over a main road, that's going to cause traffic issues as well. Have you looked into risk assessment on the traffic, children crossing the road, and then using a public alleyway open to the members of the public, paedophiles, who knows who could get to our children? It's not a safe area. Because you're trying to squeeze two-form entry, which we already are, is for 1.6 for the school. Why? Why have you not given us another proposal for us to discuss and debate upon?

PW I come back to the point, which is that so many children would be disrupted coming the other way.

[Overtalking].

FQ The only answer is disrupting too many pupils, but in your Huddersston [?] and Review form, on one of your front pages, it says, if necessary, you will move a large site of children, so give an option. You can't say, that's your only reason. It's not a good enough reason.

JD Can I just make a couple of points? Because I think we can go round in circles here. The first point is this, and sorry if it sounds repetitive. The four tests; what we're looking for is a balance between them, and what we're saying, one of the compelling arguments is that Wormley has twice as many children as this school, and I think if you ask us not to take that into consideration, that's not being reasonable. Secondly, in terms of the second test, leaving places behind

where they are in greatest demand, again it will be unreasonable for us to ignore the fact that more parents chose Wormley, and are choosing Wormley, than parents choosing this school. That's not me making a judgement, that's parental choice. That's why that option's come forward. However, if tonight, and the next night we have here, and proposal come through, the suggestion the lady in yellow has made, is something that is felt as a sensible way forward by the group, that's something we would consider.

FQ Why are you not [sic] taking away my parental right, by shutting my school, and telling me I then have to go to Wormley school, which isn't going to be safe for my child, which I don't want him to go to. You're taking away our parental right. And really, the people who are at Wormley, their parental right was to choose Wormley school, and when they merge, it won't be their parental preference either, because it won't be the school they first originally picked.

JD Right. What happens, if you reduce the number of surplus places in an area like this, so there are some surplus places, but not one in five places, then, by definition you are quite right. We are reducing parental choice, because there's a preference in those schools. There are some advantages in having schools, which are half empty. One is that more parents can get greater choice, but we have to get a balance. We can't have parents choosing schools, which are not viable. What we can't do, as an authority, is ignore the fact that between now and 2011, one in five places in this area will be empty. Now, [overtalking]. No let me just finish my point. I have to say to you there are some givens here, one of the things we will not do, as officers, is walk away from an area where one in five places will be empty in our schools. We're not going to do that, so there will be some change here. [Overtalking]. What we're suggesting is the option we're bringing forward takes into account parental choice in numbers, but as I say, if you want us to take another look at that option, that's something we will do.

FQ I mean then option you've picked, you're talking about cost and that, it's the most expensive option. [Unclear] 2.5 million to do your option, and to do something on Ley Park got 1.5 million, so how can you say, you're talking about costs earlier, well it's not cost effective to be us to be moved to Wormley.

JD This is not [overtalking]. We can't win on this one, because we're often accused of doing this to save money; we're not. [Overtalking].

FQ So you're spending an extra million on moving us to a school that's not a suitable area for our children?

[Overtalking].

JD Sometimes we're accused of saving money, making money, whatever. What we're saying here is cost is important, but it's not the only factor. And if one

of these proposals is more expensive to bring forward, but gives a better outcome overall, and we can afford it, that's something we will consult on [overtalking].

FQ Even though there's planning constraints and everything else [overtalking]?

JW Could somebody else have the microphone now?

JD So if you're saying we haven't gone for the cheapest option, you're correct, we haven't. But that's not something that I think should be made a criticism. I think that demonstrates that we're not here to go for the cheapest option.

FQ I'm Betty Cannon [?]. I haven't got any children here, and my [unclear] family is actually leaving this year, so I'm not threatened by that. But I have got something here that says, and it comes from you, from somewhere, locating schools in the way that reduces traffic congestion around school sites, will encourage [unclear] routes to school, provides schools with [unclear] change their character and establish as a new school, with a new head and a new governing body. My argument is, in the last two weeks we had two accidents with three people being run over at the top of this road. I join the run to school to Wormley. The only people we upset were the parents because they were moaning they couldn't get into the school. What worries me, if you've got grandchildren here, or children, are you prepared to let them cross that road, where there isn't a crossing person, and hasn't been for over a year. When they get to the school, they've then got to go over a bridge to get to the playing field. I know that there has been a paedophile, who's been put away, from this area, in the last few weeks. When we went over Wormley, I was absolutely disgusted to see how easy it will be for a paedophile to get into those fields, and get away over those fields nowhere near the school. And by the time a teacher [?] got there, it would be too late; the problem would be there. If you're prepared to put your children and your grandchildren in that environment, well go ahead, and can I just say to you Jane, as you are chairing this, have you read the local paper, because it does say here, what's the point of school meeting? You don't let people answer the questions; you go to the next one. And that is what it says. If you haven't read it, I've got a copy for you.

JW I do apologise.

[Applause].

JW I impress on you that I was trying to let people answer the questions [overtalking].

FQ Well that doesn't say that in the paper.

JW Do you have a problem at the moment?

[Overtalking].

FQ I think we're just going round in circles, we keep saying about the fact that more pupils are going to be disrupted in Wormley. We seem to be harping back to that point.

JW Yes, well can we move on then?

FQ [Overtalking].

FQ No, you're moving on.

JW Have you got anything to say to that?

JD Only that if you make similar points to us, we're likely to make similar responses.

FQ And that seems to be your only argument.

JD No, what I'm saying is, if you want to know why we focussed on this option, those are the reasons, and so if you keep asking this, why we've gone for this option, those are the key reasons. I can only answer the same question, if it keeps getting asked, with the same answer.

[Overtalking].

MQ Does the same site make any difference?

FQ So far you've been asked [overtalking].

FQ Why the different site?

MQ [Overtalking] more money for this one, that's why.

MQ More money? They can't sell the other one.

FQ Sorry, so far we've asked why this site has been chosen, and yes, you've replied that it's because there's a greater amount of children in Wormley that will have to be moved. We've said that Wormley site actually isn't safe, and you've replied, well, you haven't replied really.

JD I haven't had a chance.

FQ Okay, if you reply to that question then. Why would you move the children to a site that isn't safe?

FQ Can I just add as well, we actually did look at some data, and the future school, where the children are currently deployed, and what you will be asking is, if we take 100% of our school and Wormley school put together, actually 70% of children live on this side, and will be asked yet again, in the future, will be asked to cross the High Road. Whilst you talk about less disruption, I would suggest that's quite a lot more disruption, for 80% of the future school to be asked to cross the High Road, which is very dangerous.

JW Thank you. Could you answer the question about safety now?

PR There are other schools that have a similar situation, and we would obviously not be wanting to put children in any danger whatsoever, but it is a management issue for schools to organise; they wouldn't let children go across that bridge on their own, they wouldn't [overtalking] every occasion staff would [overtalking].

FQ That would mean you are costing yourself even more money by moving us to Wormley, because you're then going to have to have the extra staff to cope with keeping our children safe. It cost you lots of money to develop this school, less staff to keep them safe. It's not logical. Your decision is just not logical.

[Break in recording].

FQ [Unclear] the school on it; it's a good question, I promise you. Now you obviously, if you do close this school, you are only allowed to build on the actual school building part of the school. That means you cannot build on the green fields?

PR Correct.

FQ Can you say that again please?

FQ No, my next question is, so if you cannot build on the green fields, can you build on the playgrounds?

PR That would depend on Broxbourne Borough Council.

[Overtalking].

PR Sometimes we are able to build on the playground, and the car parking space. But other times we cannot. But we certainly will not have, and we wouldn't even attempt to apply for planning permission to build on playing fields,

because there are local reasons, and there are also government reasons why [overtalking].

FQ So if this school shuts, they build on the school and the playground, say, how long after they would build, if it was actually flats or whatever here, how long after that could you not build on that school field?

PR Never.

[Overtalking].

JW Let's move on to someone who hasn't [overtalking].

FQ Sorry, one more question. [Overtalking].

JW You have has quite a lot, and the other people might [overtalking].

FQ Just to say that the Wormley School is a Church of England school, is it not?

PR It's a voluntary controlled school [overtalking], which means it has exactly the same admissions criteria that all community schools have [overtalking].

FQ The council do not own that site? That church school?

PR We don't own the bit on which the buildings are, but we down the playing fields.

[Overtalking].

FQ Will you make any money from the sale of Wormley School?

MQ No. Because they don't own it.

[Overtalking].

JW Please! I don't want to be accused of not allowing people to ask questions, so if you'll all please be quiet enough, so that we can hear.

MQ Going back to the lady's question about the site at Wormley, compared to the one at Ley Park, my feelings are, you don't care about the kids' disruption, the only thing you care about is how much this land is worth and how much money is [overtalking].

[Applause].

MQ [Overtalking] if you considered [overtalking] all these proposals in the first place. Thank you.

JD A general point on the money. We're tied both ways. On the one hand we're being accused of going for the most expensive [overtalking] most expensive option, now we're accused of making money. The basis is this, and you can take this or not. The funding arrangements are important. We would not bring forward proposals, which we then couldn't fund. Whichever schools close, across the county, there's a process in place for disposing of the land. And it goes through a phased process. The first thing that happens to any school building it's offered back to Council for other services. You know, do you need other Council services? A building in that area of this size? And if that's the case, that's the first process we go through. If that is not the case, and usually that is not the case, not always, but usually, then the property will be offered up on to the market. The rules are simple. We cannot build on playing fields, but you can build on the brown field, the bits where there are already foundations. Sometimes you can build on the playground but not always, it depends on local planning permission, [unclear]. And that's the process it would go through. And the point I would make to you is this. When we reorganised schools, we incur a cost of modernising buildings, making alterations, having temporary accommodation to see the building years through, and in the end we will have some capital receipts, which go back to the County Council, some years in the future. Usually the costs of the review are higher than the money you get back from the capital receipts [overtalking]. I'm going to finish the point. And therefore, although the costs of these are important, it is not a moneymaking exercise.

[Overtalking].

JD You can laugh and jeer, but I can tell you that is not; of course, we would not ignore the fact that there are cost implications here. For example we do not, as a matter of principle, value the properties before we go into a review year [overtalking] we do not do that. We know its [overtalking] because we know roughly what land is worth in certain areas. But this is not that kind of exercise, so, yes, the finances are a very important feature of the overall decision-making, and all the proposals we bring forward are fundable, but the finances are not the driving factor here. The fact, the reason we're here tonight is there just aren't enough children to go around.

[Overtalking].

MQ As a concerned parent, you used the term, bought. That you're going to build a mobile in Wormley. So does that mean that the students that leave from here would go there and not be fully integrated into Wormley School if they do leave?

JD No. What we're saying here is that if, and it is an if, because there are places in other schools that parents here, if this school closes, they could send their children elsewhere. We are saying that given if all the children, parents decided to go to Wormley, because they want to keep friendship groups together, although that would be more expensive, so it's not the cheapest option, we will put in temporary accommodation, A, to manage that move properly, and also to see that year groups through. It might well be that that isn't needed, because I suspect that some parents here will take other options if these proposals go through. What would happen then is that all the children will be part of a larger Wormley school, and all the children will be integrated into one. We wouldn't have separate children, separated out in that way. The school itself would manage the larger group of children so all the children would be part of a single school, fully integrated. And the school itself, the head teacher and the governors, would decide how best to use that temporary accommodation.

[Overtalking].

FQ My concerns are, I'm a resident and I'm also a parent. My son goes to Wormley School. They had a school trip last week, and I was quite shocked that my son had to board the coach on the High Road. I was obviously concerned for my son; I'm sure the other parents were concerned for their children boarding the coach. But I don't see why you need to take more children up to Wormley school, and put them parents, you know, more concerns to their children, whereas they have got an easy access to public transport. Also Wormley school does not have the facilities now, for you to take more children to that school, and have find days, parent evenings, things like that. There's nowhere for us to park now, for you to take all the children from here, and put them up to Wormley, its; going to be even more chaos, than it already is. I live over there at Silverfield [?], and I have to leave my house at half past eight already, to get my son to school for five to nine, because of traffic. Can you imagine what the traffic is going to be like along Wormley High Road if this school goes there?

[Applause].

FQ Sorry, I have another question.

JD [Unclear] first, then have another go.

FQ Okay.

JD Just a couple of things to bear in mind. Firstly, a lot of the children currently come to this school actually they're nearer Wormley.

MQ No.

[Overtalking].

JD Well we have a map, which shows where the children live.

MQ Don't believe that.

JD And there are some children where the distance to Wormley [overtalking]. There are some children who live there. So it's not all the children who will be moving across. It goes back to the point I was making. Here we're talking about a smaller number of children that would be moving across to that school than that school coming here.

MQ Crossing the road.

JD But we are aware of the fact, and we've said so in the consultation document, that we're not absolutely confident that we'll get the town planning permission that we'll need on that site. So it might well be that we will have to come back to the option that [overtalking] we have made that [overtalking] we have made that perfectly clear, in bold writing, in the consultation document. You can see that's in there. So there might well be [overtalking]. So it might well be that the option you're suggesting is the option we'd look at. It's not part of the third option, that's a separate point; one we would look at.

[Overtalking].

FQ I'm going to ask a question for the residents, because I think this needs to be asked. What's happened to this land if the proposal goes forward and it's empty? What's going to happen security-wise? And what's going to be put on this land?

JD Well, as I say, if we go through the process, and other Council Departments don't need a building in this area of this size and type, then it'll be put out on the market, and the likelihood is that dwellings would be put on this site. There will be [overtalking]. There will be a delay in doing that, because we'd need to hang on to those sites for a while, and what we will make sure we'll do is put some good security here [laughter] because one of the problems with empty buildings is if you're not careful they do become a magnet for vandalism, so we would have to put some security on the site, to secure the site while its future is decided.

[Overtalking].

MQ Councillor Brian Perry, from Broxbourne Ward. I can go back quite a few years ago when you did a secondary education review, and you closed two schools, one in Waltham Cross and one at Riversmead [?]. We are now sending our children out of this borough because there are not enough secondary

education places. I'm worried that the same thing's going to happen to primary numbers.

[Applause].

MQ The other thing is it does worry me that over at Wormley School, the playing field we're talking about is prone to flood at times.

[Laughter].

MQ And we're going to put children out on the flooded playing field to play, when you've got a field here, which is totally surrounded by bushes and trees, and is safe.

[Applause].

JD Firstly in terms of our forecasting tool, if you look at the accuracy of the forecast numbers, across the county as a whole, at the moment, it's accurate within less than half a percent, so it's a very accurate forecasting tool. It's one we're absolutely committed to. However, it is perfectly true that the smaller the area you use that forecasting tool, then it becomes slightly less accurate, clearly because the population [unclear] at that point, which is why we would leave some surplus in the system. There will be just over 4% surplus left in the system, in case one or two families [unclear]. The other point, in terms of flooded fields, the gentleman here was making a very important point, which I should have picked up, apologies, if, in a number of years time, buildings, houses are put on these sites, the question was, where do those children go? Actually it takes a lot of new buildings, a lot of new houses, to generate the kind of children we're looking at. I think in terms of one point [unclear] school round about 1,000 houses would need to be built to generate 30, you know, one [unclear] school. So there wouldn't be enough children, and those would be taken into account [unclear]. The flooding of playing fields. [Unclear]?

PW Most of our primary schools, particularly, the actually play on the school fields during the summer period, in the winter time, they tend to play organised team games on the playing field, but generally speaking, for their recreation at break times and lunch times, and so on, the children at practically all our primary schools are kept on the hard playing surfaces, [overtalking] it may well be that we would make sure that it was an appropriate [unclear].

[Overtalking].

MQ But children, to increase the size of the school, you're going to have to build on this hard standing playing field. Unless you build over the other side of the river, the bottom part of the field, everything [unclear] flooding.

[Overtalking].

PW We would obviously be looking at all of those issues with [overtalking].

FQ I'd just like to correct you. There are actually 168 who live on this side of the High Road, and also, with Wormley extending, and Ley Park closing, there is no choice for parents, locally, who don't want to send their children to a Church of England school. We have 11% Catholic children from the Irish [unclear] community. Is this not limiting choice? And where are they going to go?

[Applause].

JD I think I've accepted the point, and will accept it again, and be very happy to make sure this is in the report, when you take out surplus places, then you do reduce the choice available to parents. And that's a consequence of what we're doing here. I accept that point [overtalking]. Instead of having one in five places empty, we'll have a surplus of about 4%, and that does reduce the options to parents in terms of choice of schools. And if that's the point you want to make, it's a fair point, it's well made, and we will accept that point. The point I want to make is that the price to pay for having one in five seats empty in a classroom is too high for us to pay. It has a direct impact on the school's ability to manage resources, to manage the curriculum, to recruit and retain staff. It makes schools very vulnerable indeed. If you look at the schools in Hertfordshire, particularly primary schools that have failed their inspections, they usually tend to be a school, that's doing very well, perfectly okay, lose two or three members of staff, can't recruit because they haven't got enough kids in there, staff see it as a vulnerable school, don't go, standards fall, and they get themselves; they are vulnerable schools. So I'm saying, you're quite right, what we're doing here will reduce some of the opportunities parents have to express their preference for a school [overtalking], but at least they will express a preference for schools which are viable, rather than vulnerable.

FQ Yeah, but there's no other choice, apart from a Church of England school, in this area, unless you go down to Longlands or up to [unclear].

JD Well, exactly, there are no other schools.

[Overtalking and laughter].

FQ Longlands is going to be out of the question, because it's too far for the children to travel.

[Overtalking].

FQ We'll have to go in the car. Create more traffic.

JD What I'm saying to you is [overtalking]. I hear you. If you make the same point, I'm not being evasive, but if you make the same point, I can only give you the same answer. Yes, there will be less choice for parents in selecting a school [overtalking].

MQ Why do it then? Don't do it.

JD Because if we don't do it, we will have 20% of places unfilled [overtalking] and schools are not viable that way. We've decided not to close Wormley because, as I said earlier [overtalking] there are more parents [overtalking]. Because there are more parents that choose Wormley than here, and there are a greater surplus of spaces here, which is why proposals at the moment focus on this school. If you were to say to us... I have to say, if you're saying to us, ignore the fact that this school is half empty, ignore the fact that only [overtalking]. Ignore the fact that this school is half empty, ignore the fact that not as many parents choose this school as others, that's something we're not prepared to do. Which is why [overtalking], which is why this school is the focus of these proposals.

[Overtalking].

JW Can you just wait a moment please. Thank you. I'm not stopping people speaking, [overtalking].

MQ My name's Gino [?] [Unclear]. I'm a resident and I have two pupils in the school. You say that you keep getting asked the same questions, and you keep giving the same answers. The reason you keep getting asked the same questions is we find your answers somewhat insulting to our common sense. The reality of the situation is...

[Applause].

MQ ...all of us feel it's quite obvious, the reason these questions are being made, is it seems to our common sense, as a resident, parent and the electorate in this local area that the only reason that you're deciding to effectively decide to close this school, because there is no other proposal in your documents put forward, is because this site is worth far more than it is over at Wormley, or it's far easier to sell this site. This is not really a question; it's an observation, which is being made. It's the feelings on this side of the floor. The fact is that you're not answering [unclear] what considerations, when you've gone to this proposal, have the Council, or whoever's making this decision, actually considered what this site is worth? What the complications are for Wormley, and what you propose to do with this site afterwards. It's insulting to our common sense to suggest that you haven't even thought about the value of this property.

JD I'm not insulting your common sense.

[Applause].

JD It's the fact. And if you're not prepared to accept the fact that we're not doing this because we want to save or make money then that's up to you. But that is the case. We are simply here, not to save a few quid, not to flog off some land, [overtalking]. But simply because there are not enough children to go round, and that has implications. And if you close the school, then, yes, you will get a capital receipt from that. And that is funding which will go back into County Council. If this school were full, if there were enough children to go round in this part of the authority, we would not be making these proposals.

[Overtalking].

JD What I have said to you is that we will, if that is a proposal, and it's come through from the floor, that is a proposal that will go back [overtalking].

MQ [Unclear] proposal earlier on, but your document that you're handing out to this audience says that there is one proposal, whereas in the north of the borough there is three. I think why [unclear] the other ones?

[Overtalking].

LM I just want to draw your attention to the paragraph on page four of the consultation document, which I think most of you will have seen by now, which says that if town-planning constraints make expansion on the Wormley site impossible, impractical, the Wormley C of E Primary School will transfer to the Ley Park site, because of having two forms of entry. So I think what we're saying is we've by no means closed our minds to the use of this site, but [unclear] it. We think that our preferred option is the Wormley site.

MQ Why?

[Overtalking].

LM The preferred option is that that is the more popular school and site [overtalking]. And that is expressed by parental preference. There are far more parental preferences at the Wormley school than there are for this school, and that is a measure of popularity, and we have to take that into account.

[Overtalking].

LM There are already more children on that site than there are children on this site, so those are two reasons why we considered the Wormley site in particular. Now having said that, we have not closed our minds to the use of this site by any means. That there is a town planning process that will need to be gone through,

there are factors that need to be considered that might lead us to come back to this site rather than the Wormley site, but our starting point has been the Wormley site, for the two main reasons that I've just enunciated.

[Overtalking].

FQ [Overtalking] moved this area two years ago and we looked at Wormley and Ley Park. We were astonished at Wormley. It's full to the brim. You can't even walk down the corridors. There's cupboards full to the brim, overflowing. You have to go through one classroom to get to another classroom. We came here, and the space was just amazing. We were amazed that it was; we've been from London where they've got four [unclear] to here. You don't [unclear].

[Applause].

FQ We were amazed, it was like one and a half, even two full. And if you're closing this, and going to one that is 1.6, turning that into two, how long is the building work going to take? How long is the planning permission going to take? [Overtalking]. How long are those classrooms going to stay there? We had mobile classrooms in London, in our London school, they get extremely hot in summer, extremely cold in the winter, and they were only going to be there temporary, and they were there how long my sons were there. So it's absolute nonsense.

JD Can we let Paul answer that question. [Unclear] that actually if Ley Park parents want to go to not Wormley, that's just not true.

[Overtalking].

JD Can I just give you a fact? A fact is that this year more parents chose Wormley than chose Ley Park. Because it's a smaller school. Can I just tell you if there are 34 more parents chose Wormley than Ley Park as their first choice school? Now you can mock and laugh, but that's a fact, and it's no good ignoring the facts, so what I'm saying to you is some of your assumptions are not right. Wormley is a very popular school, and that's a very important factor.

[Overtalking].

PR You did mention a number of points, I don't know if I remember them all, but one of the points I did want to make was that as at May of this year, for allocation for this year, for Reception in 2006, that's the academic year, there are eight children. For Wormley School there are 42 children.

[Overtalking].

PR In terms of temporary accommodation, what we would be needing to provide, if all the children, and don't forget, we are taking three years hence, if all of the children that were here on this site were to transfer to the Wormley site, there would be 48 children over and above the size of a two form entry school, and that would disappear over two or three years time.

[Overtalking].

PR But [overtalking]. I'm trying to answer your question. I'm trying to answer the lady's question. In the mean time we would have a double mobile on site, a mobile classroom unit, which complies with all the current building regulations, and would be an appropriate building. We have a number of those across the county, and, yes I know that in some schools some of them have remained a lot longer than they should have, but we would be saying that we would be adjusting the admission limit at the school, and within two to three years there would be no need for that mobile again on the site. The building work, you asked how long that would take; we would be designing that work, designing what would be needed, during this academic year. We would be building during the year 2007/08, when before we would have all of the children moving from this side. We would be doing that work, and that's one of the reasons why we would provide a double mobile classroom early, so that the school could decant some of the children where there was an impact on the existing accommodation, if that were to be the case, though that has not been fully designed by any means at this moment, but we have started that process, which could be transferred to looking at this site, if we need to. But we've got to keep moving on these things, if we're to have the accommodation ready.

MQ I have two questions. You say that you're leaving a surplus of 4%, but the audit committee recommend five to 10%. So why are you below it? And are you listening? And the second question is, why are the people not here that make the decision, and not sent the three stooges instead?

[Laughter and applause].

JD If I take the second part, we are listening, it's to Paul to agree to answer. I'm going to ignore the last question because I found it insulting.

[Overtalking].

JD I'm not going to respond to insults. We're not the three stooges, we're professional officers, doing what we need to do. I will answer sensible questions, but not those insults. And at that point I'll pass on to Paul to talk about the [unclear].

PR The 4% we're talking about is looking at this particular area, which is the north Hoddesdon and Wormley, but if we actually take a little bit of a wider area,

we also still have more surplus capacity, and certainly the pressure for places will be t the northern end of Hoddesdon rather than at this part of the town. We have got sufficient places; I know you laughed earlier when somebody mentioned Sheredes, because that is part of the proposal; okay, it doesn't directly affect you here at the moment, but 15 additional places are provided at Sheredes, that will have an impact on the numbers of children that can get in there, and the numbers that would be remaining at the schools in this area.

FQ You are now asking us to drive, whereas we now walk to school?

PR No, what I'm saying is that there will be a knock on effect where children go to school and where they would live, so they would most likely be going to the school nearest to them.

JW Can I reiterate, I'm taking questions from as many new faces as possible, so those people who have already spoken, I apologise I'm passing over you, but the others will get a word in. I will try and get back to you if you have spoken before, before the end.

FQ Thank you. Chris Mitchell, Borough Councillor for Wormley Turnford. You talk about your confidence in your forecasting, but on your own slide you say that you're using a margin of error of 4%, but that the audit commission recommends between five and 10%. So I think to some extent you're cutting it a bit fine. And secondly, I am concerned that you're looking at a small area, rather than the wider implications. There is definitely a northern drift, within the borough as people move northwards from Chesthunt up through Wormley into Broxbourne, and I think you'll find that maybe you've misrepresented what effect that might have.

JD The 4% isn't [unclear] as a surplus we would leave behind, and the 4% or 5%, I think that was explained in the last answer. In terms of the [unclear] and where children are, we have a carefully plotted map where each of the children live, for each of the schools they go to, and I go back to the point I made earlier, a very large number indeed of children who come to Ley Park go past Wormley to get here.

[Overtalking].

JD If you require [unclear] I will show you where the children live [overtalking]. Well if you seen it, how can you say it's not the case? Because we have [overtalking]. We have the addresses where the children live, we have a map that we can plot them on, and we can see that a large number of children, close to the majority, so about half the kids, are closer to Wormley than they are here.

[Overtalking].

JD And that does deduce, in terms of congestion, that does have an important [unclear].

[Overtalking].

JD No that's a fact.

[Overtalking].

PR Can I just answer the other point, which is about this northward drift of population? One of the things that we have seen in the northern end of it is that although we'd proposed reducing for a school to a one form entry, we will be monitoring that very closely, because there may be the possibility that we wouldn't do that if there were so much movement into that area, which is, as I said earlier, where we see the greatest pressure for school places. It's right at the northern end of the area, where you've got Ryelands, Cranbourne, Forres, St Catherine's. That's where we see the pressure greater than here.

[Overtalking].

FQ My name's Marina, I'm a parent of two children here at Ley Park. I have a seven-year old in year two, and also my main concern is the fact that my three-year old attends a very popular pre-school, at this school, on this site. The fact that you're wanting to move all the pupils across to Wormley, has there been any consideration for the fact that there is a pre-school here, and not one currently at Wormley? And if so, if it has been considered, where is it going to be?

[Overtalking and applause].

PR It certainly has been considered. I can't answer the second bit for you, because we don't know at this stage which [overtalking].

[Overtalking and laughter].

PR But we will certainly be working with all the pre-schools in this area, because it's not just here, at the northern end there are pre-schools [overtalking] to replace all of that provision somewhere within the locality for the future.

[Overtalking].

MQ Just shut Wormley, bring them here, and you've solved your problems.

[Overtalking].

FQ [Unclear] clarify that mobile accommodation. You said it was only required for two to three years, and then numbers would be adjusted and they would no longer be required. Could you explain that?

PR If all the children transfer to Wormley, there would be two to three years where there would be some children over the 60 in each of those year groups, because what we have said is that we would want to offer all of the children from the closing school the opportunity to go together to another school. Now everybody may not take up that offer, because there will be other places available at other schools, but, should they do that, then we would need to provide probably a double classroom unit on the Wormley site. But because the admission number for the school would be at 60 from there on, and because in fact the bottom year groups in the school would still be under 60, even with the two schools amalgamated, all on the one site, the two lots of children together, that would change very rapidly, so that within two or three years there would be no longer any need to have that double mobile. I hope that's clear.

[Overtalking].

MQ That 60, does that represent, what? Two classes of 30? Three at 20?

JW Could we have the microphone?

MQ I don't really need a mic madam.

[Laughter].

JW For the tape, it's not for us to hear you.

MQ You're talking about intake of 60, going from here to there, or an intake at that Wormley School. What does that represent? Is that three classes of 20? Two of 30? Or what?

PR Two of 30.

MQ One of 60.

MQ Two of 30? I thought the idea was to bring class sizes down?

JD Yeah. What we do for planning purposes is we assume a full form of entry is 30, and there are rules, which allow Key [?] Stage One, infant schools, we're not allowed to go above 30. So even in Key Stage Two, we plan on 30 as a maximum, because over that it [overtalking].

MQ If you're not allowed to, why do you do it?

JD Well we don't do it.

MQ What are you saying, after the first year, you go to stage two, you do go to 30?

JD I [overtalking].

MQ In these smaller classes [unclear] better education.

JD Yes. In the interim period, where for a few years we will be over numbers, then we will not have classes over 30. What will happen is [overtalking].

MQ Are you guaranteeing then?

JD Yes. We will [overtalking].

MQ Teachers?

JD Yes. What will happen [overtalking]. If I can finish, then you'll know what we guarantee. What we're saying to you is, we plan forms of entry on 30 children per class. Then it's for the school to organise the school to organise the school in the way it wants. Now if you start [overtalking]. No. Can I just finish the point, and then [unclear] if you don't mind? [Overtalking] years you will have more than 60 children, and therefore we can't have two classes of 30, because if we only have two classes, they'd be larger than 30. So for that period of time, in those year groups, there'll be more than one class, and during that period they'll get funding issued for the school, because the fixed costs of a class of a smaller class are the same, so in our funding formula, during that transitional period, the school won't be penalised, so that adds to the cost, but we think it's a cost worth paying if the parents and children decide they all want to stay together so the peer groups can [overtalking].

MQ One thing worries me.

JD But we will not be putting classes in over 30.

MQ One thing that worries me is you say you're going to make all these arrangements, and then you walk away, and leave it to the management of the school.

JD That's not true. That's factually incorrect; that's not the case.

[Overtalking].

JD Can I just tell you why that's not correct? When these proposals go through, as soon as they've been agreed, whichever proposals for the north,

south, and the other areas, the following day, a group is called together, which will be a group of governors, head teachers and staff, but also members of the Standards for School Effectiveness Department, where we bring our expertise to them, and we will plan in detail the arrangements to take forward. So we will work with the school, in partnership with an authority. And I have to say, we've got a really good track record of doing that very well.

[Overtalking].

FQ Doreen Parsley [?] from the Wormley Society [?]. You talk about the birth rate dropping. Are you aware that just in our three local nursery schools we have 90 two-year olds? And that's just the ones that go to the nursery schools. And they are two years old now, and in 2008 they'll be wanting school places.

JD Yeah. In terms of pre-school, right across the county, but also in certain areas, there is a growing pressure on pre-school places, and we are working with the FDS [?] at the moment to become a pilot authority, actually, so we can do some quite interesting work, increasing the amount of flexible places available for parents. That's a slightly different issue. Whether or not these proposals we've brought forward will go ahead, we would need to look at pre-school places, because there is growing pressure. That's not because the birth rate is increasing, because we do track the birth rate, it's that more parents are choosing to take up the pre-school support, which is available, partly because there is some pre-school support in this part of the county that is very good indeed.

[Overtalking].

FQ Well if they're already at nursery school, and they're going to want places?

JD We've taken all those into [overtalking].

FQ There's 90 two-year olds.

FQ And that's without those that don't go to the nursery schools.

JD [Overtalking] we look at live births, we've got all that in our forecast. We have those figures.

FQ My concern is the children who have to move, if it does close, in their last year of schooling, they're going to be uprooted from everything they know, trying to settle into a new school, trying to concentrate on [unclear] before they move to secondary. How are they going to support that? My main concern is that my daughter will be in that year.

[Overtalking].

JD Yeah, that's a fair point, and what we will do, the first thing, without [unclear], one of the reasons this is our preferred option is because it involves a fewer number of children.

[Overtalking].

JD That's the case. I know it's not helpful for those parents whose children they are, but it's a smaller number. Because we will have nearly two years, if this goes through to Cabinet and we don't have objections, we will have the whole of the rest of this year, and then the following year, we will have very detailed arrangements in place, and what tends to happen is, and this will be for the schools and us to work together on, we have a whole range of arrangements where the children come together, well before transferring to the school. It wouldn't mean that at the end of 2008 the children suddenly become children at Wormley, and just arrive there, without any introduction. It will be a very detailed arrangements, joint teaching, sharing of equipment, children looking at sit, a whole range of things we put in place, so that the time the school opens in September 2008 all that work will have taken place. And the other thing again is if you look where the children live, you'll find a lot of the children go to this school live very close by and are neighbours of children going to Wormley. And so there'll be a lot of integration that way. But we do a lot of work on that. Interestingly, from experience of this in the past, the children that find the greatest difficulty are the very youngest children, clearly, but also the oldest children, so we have to make sure that this is [unclear] carefully. And again we've got a very good track record of doing that.

FQ You say you're not going to [unclear] Reception class here in 2007; my daughter is due to go up in 2007 to Reception, and I've got a daughter in the school already, how am I meant to get two children to two different schools?

JD There will be some little difficulties, and where there are maybe difficulties, we'll deal with them on an individual basis.

[Overtalking].

JD And there will be [overtalking].

FQ [Overtalking] children. In fact I'm not the only one with two children in the same situation, and it's not fair on my children to suffer, because if I've got, one's going to be late, let it be [unclear] I'm not being late this morning, you be late. Or I've got to change my eldest like, again, who is only just going to school, to another school, and make new friends again. She's going to start [unclear] her third school in three years. I'm not willing to do that, and it's not fair.

JD I do understand that for some, I think it's three or four parents in the same position, for that one year will be [overtalking]. There will be some difficulties.

[Overtalking].

JD We're talking about one year's, because in the following year, that won't be the case, because all the children will move through. So for the year 2007 to 2008, where there are parents whose children are in Reception in that year, who also have children in other years, then there will be [unclear] disruption, and as I say, we will talk to the individual parents about that.

FQ [Unclear].

JD I accept that, which is why I said we will talk to individual families on an individual basis, and try and [unclear] some solution individually. If you take another family [overtalking].

JW Is there anybody who hasn't spoken before who wants to ask a question? We've got about 15 more minutes, so [unclear].

FQ Where did you get your figures from for pre-school? You said you know how many children from pre-schools that are privately run. No one asked me for the figures, and I run a pre-school here

JD We have early years network that monitors places in a whole range of ways, and those are the figures we use.

FQ But I've got my figures in my cupboard.

[Laughter].

[Overtalking].

JD We have an early years partnership, and if there are playschools arrangements, which aren't part of that partnership, that's a shame, because that's a partnership which basically gives information to parents, shares good practice, monitors standards, so I would say if you are part of a set up, which isn't part of the network, then you ought to be. Almost all are. The point I'm making though is that in terms of our forecast figures, we do not rely on that process. We rely on live births. So we know how many children were born in the area and how many have moved in. So pre-school arrangement don't affect the forecasts, because we know the live birth date, whether or not they go to pre-school. The point to make about pre-school arrangements is that there is a pressure on them across the county. That's a separate issue.

[Overtalking].

FQ I've spoken to residents in [unclear]. Excuse me.

JD I am listening. I'm just taking notes as we go.

FQ [Overtalking] and they get really irritated with how much traffic goes up the road, and a couple of women told me that they cannot get out of their driveway because of the cars. Now touch wood, we don't have any problems round here, because we've got the road, we've got humps, which slow the cars down. The traffic has so far been safe. Up Wormley school, I know they have a [overtalking].

PR We do know that there are significant traffic issues there. [Overtalking] outside the school as well. And those are issues that our Highways people are looking at [overtalking] we don't know what the outcome of that is.

[Overtalking].

MQ There's no problem down here.

[Overtalking].

JW Can we try to have one person at a time?

MQ I would just like to reiterate these lady's comments. You talk about congestion, you've got a two form entry school here that's got access from two different ways in, you're talking about transferring 189 pupils across here?

[Break in recording].

MQ ...in the first place, so why move them back again when they're over here? What's the point? What's the point keep moving them to and fro? You've got the space here, you've got all the safety, road humps, why move them?

JD There are advantages and disadvantages for the sites, exactly [overtalking]. I'm saying, there are advantages to this site, which are over and above the advantages of the Wormley, and there are advantages to Wormley that aren't here.

[Overtalking].

JD Let me finish, and then come back. We're saying, over a balance across those four tests, and given the parental choice, given the low numbers here, given the falling numbers here, then we'll look at Wormley. But you'll notice in the consultation document you'll notice that we're quite clear that if we don't get planning permission, town planning permission, and that might be because of

some of the issues you're raising, then we will come back and look at putting Wormley here. And we have made that perfectly clear in the documentation.

MQ Because I think that's the way it should be done.

[Overtalking].

MQ You say here about the extended services, we already have this at Ley Park. A lot more extended services than what you've got.

JW I think we've had that point earlier. Do you want to go on?

JD Yes. I could go back over that point. It's not the case; virtually all of the schools in Hertford, particularly our primary schools, are good and getting better at providing extended services to children and the community, and this school has a very good practice, as does Wormley, as do other schools in the area, and this is one of the areas in Hertfordshire, which is pretty good in terms of extended services. But we will make sure that whatever pattern of schools we leave behind will be in a position to deliver extended services to the community.

MQ You're saying [unclear] school is?

JD What I'm saying is [overtalking]. Well, I'm not contradicting myself. I said, right at the beginning of the evening that we're not interviewing here because it's a poor school. This school has got our attention because it's half empty, not only is it half empty, it's declining in numbers, and therefore we can't ignore it. That's the reason we're looking at this school. But we're not saying the standard of what's going on is poor. What I'm saying, right across the area of Hoddesdon and Wormley, and like elsewhere in the county, but particularly here, there's some good practice across most of the schools, it's not just this particular school.

JW There is only about another six or seven minutes of questioning time available. So please keep your questions short and to the point. And if they've been raised before, then please write them on your paper, so that we have them, if you want to have your voice heard in that way, rather than speaking them, so we have any new issues that there might be. I repeat, I'm not here to silence you; I just want to get as many points as possible.

MQ The information that's come across your panel this evening and probably a lot of parents here tonight, I get the feeling you've done and dusted this deal already, you've probably even sold this site already.

[Applause].

JD I don't want to have to tell you how to run things, but if as a group of parents you feel this is not the way, not the proposal to take forward, and you

take the view collectively that we've already made our mind up, I have to say, from my point of view that's a strategic error, because we haven't. If you want us to think again, all the issues you've raised here, we will take back, we will take into account, we'll certainly put in the paper to members, if you want us to think again, it's not a good idea to think we've made a decision. We have done, as officers, is decide that this is the proposal we're going to bring to public consultations, knowing [overtalking], well, we have to come up with proposals that are justified. This is the proposal we've come up with, with the rider, as in the paper, that we might be in a position to actually, although we expand Wormley, put it on this site, and that's in the paper, that's one of the possible ways forward. So we haven't made our minds up yet [overtalking] because as officers, that's not a decision we're empowered to make.

[Overtalking].

JD And certainly as far as selling the site, that's just not. We haven't done that.

[Overtalking].

JW Sorry, we're going to take the people who haven't spoken [overtalking].

MQ A couple of points I'd like to make. Firstly there is a shortage of pre-school places in this area. My son is due to start; he can't start, and is unlikely to be able to start. It seems we've had very vague answers as what provision there will actually be made for pre-school. I understand there's a nice pre-school here, but you haven't actually told us where that pre-school might be based, or even if it will be based anywhere in this area. Couple of other points. You mentioned a figure, and perhaps you can confirm this, about the number of new dwellings that would need to give us a new class? If you could just tell me how much that was please?

FQ and MQ 1,000.

MQ Was it 1,000 to give you 30 places? Is that right? [Overtalking]. If you'd like to answer that please?

JD What we're saying is roughly speaking about 1,000 dwellings. It depends on the type of dwelling; the type of unit, but around about 1,000 will generate one form [unclear].

MQ You've given surplus places of 3.6. That's a lot less than 1,000. Now I believe that there's certainly going to be more building in this area than that. Perhaps, I guess people in this area know better that there is to be more building than that, certainly if this site does get sold. And could you confirm that the actual prime reason that you want to close this site, and move it to Wormley is

because of the number of places? And for no other reason, that this is actually a better site, and that the other site is just [unclear], this one just doesn't have the right number of places?

JD On three points [unclear] quickly, because we're running out of time. As I said before, the pre-school provision is, in a way, a separate issue, let me finish, whether or not we have these proposals here, that's something you're quite right, we need to look at, that's pressure, that's not because of the number of children of that age group [unclear].

FQ Can we have the answer?

JD I haven't finished on this point. However the particular point of the pre-school provision here, I can say we will relocate it. We've got two years to do that. You need to bear in mind that a lot of the pre-school provision is in the private and voluntary sector and therefore it's a slightly different issue. But it's certainly something we're involved in, and we would relocate [unclear], but what we can't do tonight is give you details of where that will be.

MQ I'm sorry, but that's got to be in your plan, has it not? To provide pre-school in this area?

JD No.

MQ No, I'm sorry, but you were supposed to be giving a community facility to this community?

JD It's not a statutory requirement for us to make that provision. It's good practice, and we will do that, but it's not the same as making [overtalking] provision for children of statutory school age. Because as an authority we do not make that provision. We encourage it, and support it, but it's various sectors provide it, not just [unclear]. So when we're doing area reviews like this, we need to make sure that if there is provision, particularly if its; good provision, and particularly in an area where that provision is needed, we will make sure it's relocated, and again, we have a good track record of doing that. But it's not a statutory part of the process. It's a separate issue.

MQ It may be separate, but it's very related, and it should be considered, and it's not being considered adequately at the moment.

JD It will be considered well in time for 2008. I can give that assurance. On the other two points you made, firstly in terms of new dwellings, yes, there will be some houses to be developed, not many because there is not a lot of places you can build houses, other than on the school site. It wouldn't generate [unclear]. Those building have been taken into account in our forecasting figure. And the last point you made, you want me to confirm the main reasons for this school, I

go back to the point I made before. The whole point here is it's not about money, it's not about the standards being too low, it's simply because if we leave things as they are, 20% of places will be unfilled. This is a school which is half empty, so it has low parental choice, and therefore it's common sense and very predictable that we would look at this school first.

JW Right. If you could be fairly brief, and take the microphone, and then that lady there, and then that will just about wrap it up.

FQ I'd just like to read out something I found in your report called Broxbourne Annual Monitoring Report. Under the housing on page three, it's written, nearly 700 houses have been built in the last year, and approved sites and allocated sites, which will come forward in the next six years will total over 1,780 dwellings. Also you mentioned schemes on brown field sites, land, not just schools. You said there's not going to be many houses built. There in your report there are nearly 2,000 houses being built within the next seven years.

PR I think that's the Broxbourne Borough Council report, but nevertheless [overtalking].

FQ We are Broxbourne Borough Council.

PR Yes, but we're the County Council; we don't build houses.

[Overtalking].

PR In the new East of England Report, which came out yesterday or the day before, they've increased the allocation for new housing within Broxbourne from what was 5,100 I think it was to 5,600, so there are 600 more houses that we weren't taking account of that will be built in the period between now and 2021. The problem for us is that we're concerned about the situation today, and over the next five, ten, 15 years. As those houses get built out, and generally they get built out at about 300 per year, maximum, then obviously towards the end of this period, there will be an increase in the population that will need to be taken on board at that stage. But we're interested in children's education now, your children's.

FQ Mine is a completely different issue. As you mentioned earlier, I'm speaking as a governor now, we are awarded budgets every year on the amount of children that come into the school. Now if the proposal goes ahead, and Ley Park is closed, then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy where people start to take their children out of the school. Our budget therefore for 2007/08 could drastically go down. Will there be any protection for us, because obviously if we haven't got the money, then our children are going to suffer, even at the final close, those children who are in the school for the final year and have no choices

at that stage? We could be facing a reduced budget, et cetera, so is there any protection for us for the last year, financially?

JD Two separate issues there. It's a very important point. If the school does close, there is a problem in that if you're not careful, parents start to vote with their feet, and we end up with a school getting into difficulty. It's a fair point, and there is a danger of that happening. So what we do is two things. Firstly, we cannot take a parental right away; the parents have a right to take their children to another school if there's a place and they meet the admissions criteria. But we work with the schools and the governing bodies, and in the area, and try and do a deal, whereby we manage that so the children don't dwindle away, but move as a group. That's one of the reasons, not the only reason, but one of the reasons we're making an offer to parents that if the school does close, we will make space available for all the children together, so there isn't therefore a panic, let's go out well as a place, and that's one of the reasons we put those extra places in. And secondly, we do have some financial arrangements where we can make sure the school gets through it all to the end, yes. It's quite right, of all the things we have to do, that's one of the most difficult to manage.

JW We're now up to about ten to nine, I think what we should do now is go to the closed bit of the meeting, where those of you who have still got issues, or things you'd like to expand on, or clarify with the panel may approach them, and just talk about that personally now. I'd like to thank you all very much for the way you have helped us handle the meeting, and I hope you feel you've had your voice. I'm sorry that obviously [unclear], but we do our best. Is that a question?

FQ [Unclear]?

JW Yes, I was just going to say that on your sheet if you feel strongly about it, and I think I beginning I said the weight of opinion will be counted. So on your questionnaire if you'd like to put your, any more points, they will be coming to me, and I will be enclosing them in the report that we give, so do feel free to fill in the forms and give them to me. They can be mailed and you can also write [overtalking]. So thank you very much everybody.

[Overtalking].