

# New Briars 31.10.06

## Speaker key

BH	Beryl Hall
LM	Lindsay Martin
NP	Neil Padley
PD	Pauline Davis
KM	Kate Marr
MD	Marion Deacon
HC	Heather Cook
JB	Jackie Bister [?]
MQ	Male questioner
FQ	Female Questioner

BH Thank you very much for coming along to this session. My name is Beryl Hall, and I work for Accent, which is an independent market research agency, and Hertfordshire has asked us to help to facilitate these public consultations. I just want to emphasise Accent's independence, and we work to [unclear] societies, and I'm here to assure you that the process is being conducted in a fair and proper manner. Could I ask you to turn your phones off? The meeting is being recorded, and transcripts of the meeting will be made available on [unclear] in due course. We are scheduled to finish at nine, and if you haven't had a chance to speak this evening, I'm sure that the panel will be happy to take your individual questions separately at the end, but we are scheduled to finish at nine. I will start the evening with a short presentation given by Lindsay Martin. Lindsay is going to be the representative [?] for Hertfordshire County Council. After the presentation then it will be your opportunity to comment, and ask questions, so over to you. Thank you.

LM Well it's good of you to come here, rather than be [unclear], or maybe you already know that [unclear], I don't know. But welcome on behalf of the County Council, and as Beryl has said, what we're going to do this evening, we're going to introduce my colleague, and some other colleagues who will be joining me. I'll make a brief presentation and then we'll have questions and answers. For those of you who were here last time, we're going to be doing the same thing. I recognise some faces around the room, but clearly I need to say what I said last time so everyone's at the same starting point. So, I'm Lindsay Martin, I'm Head of School Access and responsible for these sorts of things across the County Council, and I have with me, Jackie Bister who's the Senior Primary School Affectedness Advisor, who will talk about, or answer questions about matters relating to the curriculum, and standards and results and examinations, tests and all that sort of stuff. I'll shortly to be joined by my colleagues Pauline Davis and Kate Marr, who have done the detailed work on this particular review. And I say this particular review because we are undertaking a series of reviews of both primary and secondary provision, within about a dozen parts of the County Council, random areas of the County Council, over a two to three year period, but Pauline and Kate are working on this particular one.

So why are we here? These are the purposes of the review, and before I run over those, I just want to say that one of the things the review is not about, rather than is about, is not about poor or low standards. We do from time to time have to intervene if a school goes

into what's called an Ofsted category. If the school is an Ofsted category, which means it's not doing well enough, and doesn't improve within a certain period of time, the County Council is required to take action and almost certainly close the school. And we have to do that now and again, not very often in Hertfordshire, but now and again. This isn't a review of that kind, this is a review about the fact that there are too many surplus places across Hatfield, so we need to rationalise those places, and avoid the risk of schools being adversely affected by low numbers, which can react on pupil achievement, and we can say more about that during the evening, if you want us to. But it is also about this: making an efficient and effective use of resources. You might say to me, but isn't having empty places or surplus places a good thing? If there are a smaller number of pupils, class sizes will be smaller, and isn't that better? In some ways, not necessarily in all ways, small classes may be better, but unfortunately, the way Central Government funds the County Council for education, and the way the Council funds schools, means that most of the money is allocated according to pupil numbers. So the more pupils we educate in Hertfordshire, the more money we get from Central Government, and the more pupils we have in school, the more money you get from us.

So you can see that if numbers go down in schools, then the budget goes down as well, and there comes a point where that can reach a kind of critical point, that can begin to impact adversely on a school. Many schools manage very well, they can be quite creative, but that in itself diverts money and time and effort into coping with those sorts of things, rather than investing that effort in learning and equipping [?] the classroom. And also, it means that more of the budget is going to cover fixed costs related to buildings, building spaces, and a lower proportion of the budget goes on direct places [?] and after that, teacher supports and materials. So we don't need to say more about that, we're going to pick that up in the next session, this is in danger of going a little bit off stream, but never mind. Since the changing pattern of demand, we have of course to respond to demographic population changes, and that is not only the total numbers of pupils that we've indicated, but actually where pupils live, because they don't stay still. I don't mean individual pupils move about, of course they do, but populations can change also. One of the very good examples of this is when you see a sort of medieval parish church in the middle of a group of fields, because the village that it once served, since it was built, has moved, and it's all on its own. Our schools aren't on wheels either, they stay where they are, unless we do something positive about them, and when a population moves, or the nature of a population changes, we may need to do something to respond to that sort of change. In Hatfield of course, we've got a lot of new housing being built west of the AIM, the Aerospace site. Therefore, Howe Dell as a school is already going to a new site, to relocate to that former Aerospace aerodrome site, and partly or largely because we need additional school places for the area, and the move of Howe Dell will meet most, but not all, of that extra demand. And we can say more about that again later, if you want to. So we do need to be responsive to changes in the nature of a population.

So, the current surplus places, or empty places in Reception classes, that's just in the Reception year, across the whole, we have 22% which is surplus, but the schools in the north of Hatfield are filling up at the moment, and at the moment, those surplus places are being concentrated in the centre and the south of the town. And in fact, between these three schools, there are 44% of places empty. Now, the sort of controversial line we've plotted [?] here is that the County Council has already taken the decision not to include de Havilland Primary School into proposals for this review, because de Havilland Primary School was only created a relatively short time ago, as a result of another and different intervention in the school system, and members felt that it was not appropriate for de

Havilland to have to go through as it were, a further reorganisation change. So, what numbers have we got here? These are Reception classes, and that says current and forecast surplus places in Reception classes in Hatfield. There are currently 382 places in Reception year, and we've currently got 299 children, including those expected for the January intake in them, which means that 83 or 22% of them are empty. We are forecasting that that is going to go up, but it's still leaving 10.7%, 10 ¾% thereabouts of places empty, which expressed as a form of entry, and a form of entry is the way in which we tend to measure school size, one form of entry, 30 children going into a primary school, is 210 children in the school, seven year groups of 30 each. So, one form entry school with 210 pupils, two form entry school with 420 pupils and so on. It's a way of measuring school size, and the important thing about this that I wanted to point out about this, is that this gives you an idea of amount of emptiness that was around, if I can put it that way. This is kind of one and a third forms of entry empty that we are forecasting, so you can imagine that that's one and a third classes in each year group empty. Now of course, those rooms are not actually empty, schools are extremely good at creating good and creative use of surplus space, it may be extra library space, or an ICT room or whatever, but the pupils that were originally designed to go into that room to help pay for the buildings, are not there, and therefore the money that they should be bringing with them is not there. So, I'd like you just to visualise that and you'll see the sort of issues and the sort of scale of the problem that we are trying to address here.

Reduction of places, again I'll read this because it's a bit difficult to see on the screen, why reduce the number of places in the centre? Well, between the three schools in the centre of town there are currently 145 Reception places available and 81 children, including those expected in January are in them, which is 44% and two forms of entry, so that's two empty classrooms per year if you like to envisage it in that way. So those are the figures, so what's happened in this review so far? Well, we started back in March 2006, March of this year, with what we call a stakeholder meeting, that is a meeting of representatives from schools, County Council, District Council, and other interested organisations and community bodies. We then had a series of one to one small group discussions with those stakeholders to get their thoughts on possible solutions to the issue of empty places in this part of the town. And then we had a sort of plenary meeting where they all came together again, after a few months – this process lasted a few months – and out of that came a long list of possible solutions for the area. We then evaluated those against four tests, which we've evolved over the last few years, of giving reviews of this kind. The purpose of that essentially is that we then feel it right to bring to this stage of the process, i.e., the public stage of the process, proposals that have passed if you like, these four tests. We feel they need to have achieved that in order to get to this stage of the process, to be able to put before you and consult you about things that are not practical and not implementable and so on, and I'll go over those tests on the next slide. Having done that, the Director of CSF - Children Schools and Family service in Herefordshire - is authorised to consult, which is what we're doing now, consult on those options.

So, what are these four tests? The first one we've already talked about, the first test is whether or not the options actually reduce surplus places, and provide them where they're needed, and that was the objective of the review in the first place, and it was fairly obvious that we had to address that also, and if we don't, we're not doing what we set out to do. Secondly, and this also goes back to the reasons for the review, we want to enhance the capacity of schools to raise educational standards, and we want to reduce the risk of underperformance, but reduce underperformance, and I'm not suggesting that schools are underperforming at the moment, but reduce the risk of underperformance or serious

weaknesses. They need to have the options, and they need to have acceptable implications [?] for building design, environmental impact, and cost, or there is actually no point in us bringing to this public stage of the process options that the County Council actually couldn't afford to implement, that would be a waste of your time and a waste of my time. Just taking one example from that line, the essence is that the options when they reach this stage, have to be seen to be achievable, are doable, things the County Council can actually deliver, not just ideas that may or may not be deliverable. And lastly, we would want proposals to have acceptable transition arrangements for affected pupils. All things being equal, we would want to affect the smallest number of pupils for the shortest period of time, because there is an effect on pupils, or course there is. Change which would be entailed by these proposals are not affective-less, you can't make changes without them having some effect on somebody, life isn't like that. Our job, and the job of the schools and the professionals that we work with is to minimise that.

So, what are these proposals then that I've been going on about for the last ten minutes? Well, firstly a proposal to increase the intake of Howe Dell on its new site, for more than two forms of entry, and to establish there a 60 part time place nursery as part of the new centre of development. And that's fairly standard, even though there are primary schools everywhere in the county these days without a [unclear] years provision in it. For the remainder, for the centre of town, we've got three options, one of which is the preferred option, and you will know these of course as well [unclear] for some time now, but I'll just run over them quickly. Our preferred option is the amalgamation of Stream Woods and New Briars schools, on the Stream Woods site. What that actually means is that amalgamation is the non-technical term in our sense, what amalgamation means is the closure of two schools and the opening of a new one. So that would entail the closure of Spring Woods, the closure of New Briars, and the opening of a new one form entry school, on the Stream Woods site, a new name, new governing body, uniform etc. Options two and three are kind of mirror images of each other. One option is to close and simply reduce Stream Woods to one form entry, leaving it on its existing site. The opposite of that of course, is to close Stream Woods and to relocate this school, New Briars School and Nursery to the Stream Woods site, as a one form entry school. And we can talk at length about why all the options envisage the use of the Stream Woods site, which is a question that will arise and we can deal with that then, because as you can see, all three options end up with a school on that site, whether it is a new one, or the continuation of one of the existing ones.

What do these options mean for pupils, it says at the top there? Well the first proposal is simply to increase the number of places at Howe Dell, so there isn't actually the transition arrangements involved with that, it would simply be taking more pupils at the appropriate year. For the second proposal which is about replacements, what does this mean? Well, any school that is closed as part of this process will be closed on 31<sup>st</sup> August [?] 2007, in other words, after the end of the holidays following this academic year, and all the pupils will be offered a place at the resulting school, whichever it is, i.e. the new school, or the continuation of one of the existing schools. So all pupils will be offered, and I stress the word offered, a place at the new school, and that school will have an admission number of 30 for 2008, the year after, but of course, parents and carers can apply to another school, which has a place in the appropriate year group for the child in question, year five or four or six or whatever. They don't have to obviously go to the new or ongoing school on the Stream Woods site. It's an offer, obviously not a requirement, and the reason it's an offer is that we believe that there are benefits in keeping children together and that parents should be able to do that, if they so wish. If all the pupils currently attending both schools

do go to the new or ongoing school, there will be some temporary accommodation, for about two years, to manage the transition, and I can ask my colleagues to say a bit more about what that would be, if you want to go into that further.

And these are the resultant combined numbers, and I emphasise that these are year groups, not classes. I don't want you going away with the idea that these are class sizes; these are numbers in year groups. So at the moment these are numbers in Stream Woods year groups, and looking forward to September 2007 and we're talking about the next academic year, not the current one. So rolling the figures forward, these are the Stream Woods figures, these are the New Briars figures and these are the combined figures, per year group. We haven't put in a Reception, obviously because those children aren't here yet, we don't know how many children there will be in Reception in September of next year, but you can see from the figures, one can make a kind of educated estimate of roughly what those numbers are likely to be. So, that's where we've got to now, what happens afterwards, what happens next? Well, we've got public meetings until Thursday of this week, but the consultation period goes on until December 4<sup>th</sup>, nearer to the end of term, and that is when we would like your responses in, and I'll say something about that in the next slide. A report about the whole of this process, all of your responses, these meetings and transcripts and anything else that has happened, gets reported to a meeting of the Education Panel, on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Education Panel is a panel which meets in public, and you're welcome to attend, and that is the meeting where we will debate about the issues that will take place, and it is also the occasion on which school representatives are able to put a school's point of view, if they so wish. There's due to be a slot at the beginning of the meeting for a representative of the school, or in some instances, a representative of a pressure group, parents or a community group to be able to make a presentation to the members of the panel. The panel will then debate the matter, and will make a recommendation to the County Council Cabinet, which is the decision-making body of the County Council, which will meet at the beginning of February. Now, the Cabinet meets in public also, and you're quite welcome to attend, but it would be to attend to observe that decision-making process – only Cabinet members speak at those meetings. It's a decision-making, rather than a debating type occasion, but it meets in public, and you're more than welcome to attend. If the Cabinet decides to go ahead with one of the options, and I say if, because in 40% of the cases that I've been involved in in the last couple of years, the members have decided to do something different from where we started at the start of the consultation process. In other words, as a result of consultation, they have changed some things, and either [unclear] consultative groups a smaller change, published a legal notice to do something slightly different.

So, if Cabinet decides to go ahead with one of these proposals, one of these options, then it has to publish statutory or legal notices, which then go on to a six week period, and anybody has a right to comment or object on those, and if there is one objection upwards, then the matter is referred for a decision to something called the Schools Reorganisation Committee for Hertfordshire, which acts on behalf of the Secretary of State to decide on school organisation things. That also meets in Hertfordshire, and again meets in public. Sometimes the Chair of the committee allows representations to be made. That's slightly more variable than our own panel, because it isn't actually a committee of the County Council, and that's due to meet at the end of March. So looking between that and the previous slide, that's about a years timescale. We started with the stakeholders in March of this year, running to March of next year, so I think it's right and proper that something as serious as this should take a year or so, so there's plenty of opportunity for stakeholders, the public, parents and everybody else, to make their views known.

So, just to conclude, the elected [?] members haven't made any decisions yet, but we do have, as indicated [?] on the previous slide, we and they are very keen to hear your views if you wish to make them known. There is a form of the back of the consultation document, or you can do so electronically on our website, or by letter or email, so just let us know what you think by 4<sup>th</sup> December please, and then we'll have an opportunity to incorporate that later in our report to the members. And I think I've said more than enough, so I'll hand back to you now for the rest of the evening. So my colleagues, Pauline and Kate, as I said earlier, will help me with detail in this particular area.

BH Thank you Lindsay. I'm sure you're aware, but I'm going to say this anyway. Please wait until you have the microphone in your hand before you speak. The reason for that is because you are being recorded, and it won't pick up otherwise. We have had some feedback from the transcribing company that they can't hear all your comments, so can I just ask you to wait until you've got the microphone.

NP I'm Neil Padley, Chair of Governors at New Briars Primary School. All of the talk of new housing seems to be on the A1 side, by the old Aerospace site. What doesn't seem to have been taken into consideration is the town centre development of Hatfield, where they're proposing to put 275 units of accommodation. Now, I don't suppose for one minute that all of those units are going to be filled with families, but certainly I would suggest a proportion may, and they are right next to the centre of the town, i.e., New Briars, Stream Woods, and [unclear] it was still again, presumably [unclear] the school in the centre of the town, even though those schools are both New Briars and Stream Woods. So there are also additional planning applications in for additional housing and there's a planning application for the site right next door to the existing Howe Dell site, for 24 three and four bedroomed houses. Now, that would suggest family housing, rather than student accommodation. Again, that is bang next door to where our schools are at the moment, in the centre of Hatfield. So, I'm asking the question really, has the town centre development been taken into consideration as all that's been mentioned is the Aerospace?

LM Yes, we mention the Aerospace site because of the houses that are going there. We have certainly known about the town centre flats, or apartments, for some time, and indeed, had some discussions with Welwyn Hatfield planners about the nature of that development, at a very early stage. Pauline, do you want to say something about that?

PD Yes, just to reassure you that the town centre development is included in the forecast that we use, and our forecast, for those of you who don't know, includes not only live birth information, but it does include information about housing developments, and up and coming housing developments. And that town centre development is included as one of the developments within the forecast.

LM I don't know if we know about 24 houses, but Kate, do you know if we've got the 24 houses that Neil refers to in the forecast?

KM Not off the top of my head.

LM As you probably know, I don't know whether we said this last time, we get planning application information from all the [unclear] councils in Hertfordshire, and it's quite a list. So what I'll do is to ask Kate to look down the spreadsheet list of developments and see whether that's in it, but we will check that.

PD It's also worth understanding, and I think we've said before that 24 houses is a relatively small number – I know that there may be families living in there - but if you work on a rough rule of thumb, then a thousand houses is a sort of form of entry is actually a relatively small number of children that could be generated from that size of development.

NP Yes, I accept that, but I'm just using it as indication that there are other housing developments going on in and around Hatfield, not all happening on the Aerospace site, and while I accept that the size of accommodation perhaps being developed in the town centre may not lend themselves in entirety to families, families do live in flats in Hatfield, because Hatfield is a relatively poor town, and has been for a number of years, and people who cannot afford housing buy flats, because they are cheaper. They're still relatively expensive, but they are cheaper, and that's why they choose to live in them, even though they may be cramped.

LM I accept that and equally a lot of students live in houses, which probably in some areas produces fewer children than other areas with say a lot of houses, so there's a bit of [unclear] but we probably won't completely [unclear] and of course, forecasting is not a science, a forecast is a forecast, because if we knew what the numbers would be, we wouldn't have to forecast. And we may have got it too low or too high, but we've certainly made, I think, sufficient provision for underestimating the numbers in the area, and can you say something about what I mean by that.

PD Clearly we've forecasted for some sort of surplus capacity for parental choice, but as I said before, not only have we done that, but the proposals that we've put forward, because the Stream Woods building is larger than the one form entry school needs, there will always be the capacity to increase the size of the school, should there ever need to be. I know it doesn't necessarily meet your argument, but that is the failsafe, the added extra safety net built into the proposals that we're making.

BH Anybody else?

LM Actually while there's a pause, I might just to add to that, it comes out of what Neil said and comes back to something I said earlier, about why our preferred option is two sites [?]. Remember I said that [unclear] all three options were originally to use the Stream Woods site, whether it's a new school, or a continuation of either of the existing schools, and the reason for that comes back to the point that Pauline was just making, which is that the Stream Woods site has the potential, if need be, to take more pupils. It is a larger site.

PD It's a larger set of buildings.

LM Yes, so that's the reason, I thought I'd come back to that, because I need to say that that's the reason for that.

MD I'm Marion Deacon, a member of staff here. I wondered if you had any further information to give us at all, regarding the situation to do with the road and the congestion and the safety of all the children, if the preferred option goes ahead.

PD Yes, following the last meeting that we had here when a number of parents raised concerns about that, I think I've said before, at a public meeting, we have asked our traffic

consultants to look at that again. They are doing that for us, and we haven't had their views back yet, but we are also considering the road situation and the drop off facilities at the Stream Woods site. We've been looking at the potential first of all to get more staff cars on site, so that there aren't more cars parking in the surrounding areas, but also, to see if we can improve any off road dropping off points and whether we can improve the safe access of children from those areas into the school site, so that we're taking more cars off the road, and providing safer facilities for drop off children. And that's still being looked at through the same consultants, and the architects have been doing some feasibility for us, so we are taking on board the comments that were made, and following them up.

FQ I'm a member of staff as well. You were saying about drop off points for children for safety reasons. Number one, where would those drop off points be, and secondly by dropping the children off at different areas and then walking to the school, clearly that would make it worse, because then you've got more children on foot? You're not going to stop the volume of traffic coming down that road, because they're still going to need to get to the drop off points to drop off their children, and then you're going to have more children crossing the road to get into the school, so surely that's going to create a bigger problem than actually solving it.

PD Right, I appreciate the point you're making. What we're looking at, and it hasn't been resolved, or decided yet, but what we're looking at is there is an area of parking that's a bit of a rough area, opposite the [unclear] school, which some parents use already. And we're looking at increasing the capacity of that facility, and also looking at whether we can then make a pedestrian link from that car park directly into the Stream Woods site, so that the children don't have to go into the road, and they have safe access from there.

FQ But I know that car park and that's already used by the girls' school, and that's still not going to stop the traffic coming down that road, from both directions.

PD I'm not suggesting we can stop the traffic coming down the road, but what we can do is improve the facilities for parents to drop their children off, and once they've dropped them off, to give the children safe passage into the school.

LM I think it's worth remembering that we are only envisaging a one form entry school on that site, which is certainly no larger than the site that has been designed all along.

FQ You might not start off with a two form entry, but it's double the cars, double the parents.

MQ Six years!

PD I respect what you're saying because there will be more children in the beginning than there will be at the end, but the number of children, if every child transferred to whatever school it is, ends up on that site, there will still be fewer children in the Stream Woods building than that system was designed for in the first place. Because at the moment, Stream Woods isn't full.

FQ I understand what you're saying, but when Stream Woods was built all those years ago, there was 80% reduction in cars than there is now. That road cannot support the amount of cars there are now. It's a nightmare waiting to happen, and you're proposing putting 200 more children roughly, into that school and into that danger.

PD And this is what Ian said before, and we've asked our traffic consultants to give us their advice about those points, and we will get a report of that, and we will be reporting, because no doubt you will be making those comments in your responses.

BH The lady there, thank you.

FQ Just to go on from that, can you let us know when the traffic consultants are going to do their report, and can you assure us that no decision at all will be made until we have the report from the traffic consultants, and until parents and everybody has been consulted on the results of it? I totally agree with the lady there, that road is really dangerous and whatever happens to the Stream Woods school, you've still got all the cars [?] and the Bishop's Hatfield School there, in the morning and in the afternoon, it really is very, very dangerous. I know there's not just cars but there's buses, there are mini buses and parents [?] taking children to the girls' school, and the road doesn't cope with it anyway, and as far as I know, there is no way of extending the Stream Woods car park and it's also very dangerous coming in and out of that anyway. I can't see that you're going to make any other provisions, lay-bys or anything like that for dropping off, so I would ask you really that we can have the traffic consultants' report before any decision is made on the proposal.

PD Thank you. As I said before, the fact that those issues have been raised in these public consultation issues alone is sufficient for that issue to be logged and the Cabinet of the County Council and the Education Panel that considers the responses will not be taking their decisions without the benefit of that advice.

FQ Thank you.

BH Any more questions or comments?

MQ If the amalgamation was to go ahead, what sort of budget would the county be looking at to make the Stream Woods site ready for the two schools to join on that site? Do we have a forecast of what sort of expenditure we're looking at? Because looking at the predicted figures mentioned for that site, they're really very high, and certainly long-term, for the five years onwards [?] it's set at about £720,000, which is two and a quarter times more than any other primary school in Hatfield for that time. Plus it [unclear] before that. Would that sort of work be done before the children turned up on that Monday morning on that site, or would there still be plans for the future? What sort of budget figure are we looking at?

PD There isn't a fixed budget figure at this point in time, because obviously we're doing feasibility and we're taking on board the issues that people are raising in these meetings. As we've said elsewhere what we will be spending immediately is the money that's required to do the essential work for September '07, and then we will be following through with any residual work that needs to be done. In terms of the repair and maintenance estimates that you're talking about, every school has a list of things that will be needing to be done in future. The County Council has its responsibilities for repair and maintenance for schools of theirs. In terms of that particular school building, some of those items are several years ahead of being identified as needing to be tackled, and they will be tackled if some of them aren't tackled as part of the reorganisation works, as and when they are needed to be done, just like any other school.

LM And Pauline stuck to the capital side of it. On the revenue side, I'm sure you want to ask about that as well, but we do have tapered amalgamation funding, [unclear] funding patterns to enable schools to deal with that transitional period. Maybe they'll have more staff than they might have otherwise, or other revenue type expenses. There is three year tapered amalgamation revenue funding as well as the capital side that Pauline just talked about.

MQ Can you please tell us who's been [unclear], who else consults?

PD It's a company who [unclear] advise.

MQ So you're not using your own county people then?

PD They are the contractor that does most of the County Council's traffic consultancy work.

LM We do tend to buy in specialists as well [unclear] is our framework to contract with the County Council, what that means is that it does do all of the County Council's traffic consultancy work.

NP What are the future plans for the old Howe Dell site, and we've heard rumours that perhaps it's going to become a private school.

PD Three parts of the site, the actual listed building, it's intended to sell that. I don't even know Neil exactly who that has been sold to, and whether it has finally been sold or not. Our property colleagues handle that. I've heard the same rumours as you, that it was at one stage likely to be a private school, and I've heard rumours that that's now happening, so we watch and wait and see what will happen to that listed building. Clearly as a listed building, there are limitations to what people can do to it, and that's one of the reasons why it's been sold as a listed building. As you've also mentioned, there is a development potential for part of the rest of the site for a number of houses, and then the third part of the site is the school playing field, which is protected under the School Playing Field regulations, so we cannot sell that site, and that playing field will be allocated to Bishop Hatfield Girls' School, because at the moment, technically it doesn't necessarily have quite as much playing field as the school has [?], so it will make up their division.

NP So, having talked about the Howe Dell site then, if the amalgamation was to go ahead, and the New Briars site was then to come vacant, are there any proposed plans for that? Would Bishops be looking to take on some of the playing fields of that site?

PD Those decisions haven't been taken Neil, because what happens when a site is declared surplus to requirements, is that firstly the County Council has a look to see if there is any other County Council use needed for that site, and it's likely to be an educational need if it is. I'm not talking necessarily about secondary schools, but it could be any other part of the service, and the County Council corporately would take a decision about what they want to do after that point in time. The playing fields will be protected under the same playing field regulations, but what we don't know is who might use the site in the future, and whether they need the playing fields or not. So, it's a little premature for us to speculate on that.

NP Yes, I'm just very aware that the only thing between New Briars' playing field and Bishops Girls' is a fence, and with the secondary review in the minds of County at the moment, although it may have been postponed until its funding from Government, as regarding redeveloping secondary schools...

LM The re-use of the New Briars site is a bit complicated because of the works that have been done to that site, and the cost of that works and who benefits from any appreciation in value as a result of that works is quite a complicated legal matter. And as you say the secondary review is effectively on hold I suppose until the Central Government funding capital works is available, probably in 2011 I think, so it's five years. But in the meantime of course, if the New Briars site isn't to be used, obviously we'd want to make sure the playing fields would be put to as good use in between, that is either Bishop Girls' School, or a community, and very often actually, when we do close a primary school site and indeed a secondary school site, but more recently a primary school site - we've done this recently in Bishop Stortford to give you an example - where a local community sports organisation has taken on the playing fields. That sometimes happens, and then [unclear] in that particular area.

NP Talking about sites, I wasn't going to mention this site, but as it's an overwhelming worry, what are the plans for this site? I know the County did have plans [unclear] then you moved in and is that still ongoing?

LM Well, yes and no. Again, it's quite complicated, and the world has changed somewhat since that originally happened, as the world does. You're quite right, when this school closed, we built part of this site, the available part of this site was going to be used for a combination of two things, some adult care services, provisions and health [?], that's how it started, and then we needed to identify a site for a new [unclear], and we thought we could put that on this site as well, and build rather less housing, so it became adult care services, some children's services, and then the balance housing. Then that changed and the [unclear], onto a more suitable site, slightly more central to [unclear]. But now it could come back here again, it's slightly in the balance, it's not clear. In the meantime, I'm not certain that the adult care service is going to go ahead after all, because they've got funding difficulties in delivering it. So, what might have been an adult care centre, might now be housing instead. So you can see that in the course of how long is it, and in the course of work being a year or so, all those changes have happened. But I think the [unclear] site would be some mixture of housing and council services, but exactly what that mixture is, is still a bit fluid.

NP So would it be fair to say that there's nobody queuing up waiting for us to move out, they're not going to start moving in and developing...?

LM Oh absolutely. As I said at the last meeting here, this school will stay here as long as it needs to, there's absolutely no pressure for you to leave, in terms of use of the site, no pressure at all. I think that's important to be reassured of that.

BH Thank you. The lady in the middle here.

FQ Carrying on from what Neil said, I think you've just illustrated how much things can change in a very short space of time, and perhaps my feeling is a bit - it might be my age or whatever - but I'm a great believer in, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. I actually remember when I was a governor at Bishop Hatfield First [?] School, talking about paying

for the provision, and there were actually plans or a wish list perhaps to build a badminton hall on the site, I don't know if you're aware of that. But that would have meant that they wanted more playing field provision, and they were saying well, you could walk over the road to Howe Dell's playing fields, which weren't fully used anyway by the school. And that didn't come off, but if anything like that happened now, you've got even more of a problem with the road, because wherever they go, they've got to cross the road and get to those playing fields, and if I remember rightly, it wasn't very feasible at the time. Also, as a councillor and from my planning knowledge of things that are happening now, a development is taking place in Welwyn Garden City, it's [unclear] school in [unclear] and they're building a sports hall and things and they're not going to have enough playing field provision, [unclear].

LM They do have, what they're selling is surplus.

FQ Yes okay, but they are making extra playing field provision on New Briars ground.

LM As a result of town planning requirements, not because the school needs it, because it's surplus to the school's requirements, but because the town planning needs are strong these days, that even though it's surplus to the school's requirements, we can't build on it without developing equivalent playing fields somewhere else in the same District Council area. And that's why we're doing it.

FQ What I'm really trying to illustrate is that things change so quickly, and there are things happening in places which are going to affect things happening in others. I mean, you've already said about the number of houses for children, but going back to the planning point, I've seen the plans just this week that came through, for yet another block of 20 two-bedroom flats, and other four or three-bedroom houses in Hatfield. And it's happening all the time and we all know we need more housing, we need more affordable housing, and of course the other thing that you said was this site might go for housing, but if that goes for family housing, where are those children going to go to school?

LM We're talking 20 units or something, no more than that.

FQ Well I know we are, but I mean, that is really my feeling that you might say that you've got the capacity if things change, but things are changing so rapidly, and the population's increasing rapidly, I just really feel you should perhaps leave this school as it is.

LM I hear what you say, and clearly that is an argument for the status quo, and I accept that and we usually have had that. I think I would have to say that one has to be careful that one doesn't get into the position of actually never doing anything, because there is such a lack of certainty that we just go on with the same facilities, the same resources all the time, and so on. If everything didn't change, and if that was the case, we would have the wrong pattern of schools and not the right shape and so on. But I entirely take your point.

BH Thank you. The lady there.

FQ To carry on from the playground situation, you said earlier that you were looking into providing more staff car parking at the Stream Woods site, because you'd have double the staff if it was to go through, and to do with that site, you said on one of your slides that you'd had to provide temporary accommodation. If you can't build on planning fields

because they're protected, where exactly are you going to put this car park and temporary accommodation? And whilst doing that, surely that reduces the amount of playing fields that you are actually going to have there, and reduces the playing space for children that you've just doubled the capacity for.

LM Of course, the temporary buildings are temporary, and therefore they are not taking away playing fields, it's for probably two years, so that...

FQ But for those two years, when there's the biggest capacity of children in that school, that's the time that they've lost their playground. Surely that is not good for the children.

PD First of all, the playing field, or playground capacity at Stream Woods is adequate for the number of children that we're talking about, and obviously we will look that if we do take out any playground because of something else we're doing, whether we replace that or not will be part of that equation. And not every part of the school's site, whether it's a playground or a playing field, is actually classified as a playing field in terms of the regulations. So there will be bits of land around the buildings where you can put car parks and you can put temporary buildings, but wouldn't necessarily be classified as playing field in quite the same way. But we are very much aware of that, and we will take all of that into consideration in our study.

FQ There's not a lot of space as it is, and the staff cars are just packed out, so to double that, that's a huge area that you're going to need to take out. So to sort of say that there's sufficient, I can't see how there's going to be sufficient when there isn't really sufficient now, and then you're throwing that into the pot as well. I can't see how it can be sufficient, where you're going to get this extra land from to make it sufficient.

PD No, I understand what you're saying and it may be difficult for you to visualise, but that's why we have architects and other people doing the feasibility work to make sure all of that is right.

LM I think it's important to note that the site capacity of Stream Woods is for a two form entry school, and what we are proposing after the initial bulge [?] is a one form entry school, which requires less space for [unclear] and playing fields. The regulations clearly require more [unclear] and playing field space for a two form entry school, than a one form entry school. So in a few years, the school will actually need less space than it actually has.

FQ Yes, but a few years is no good when this is going to happen to us possibly in September, that's what we've got to look at, the initial...

LM True, there will be an interim period when the site will not function as well, if you like, as it will beyond that initial time, and it does mean that we don't make changes in a school system without there being some effect, and that is one of the effects, and we've widely drawn attention to it, and it's something that members would have to consider when deciding whether or not to take this action or not.

FQ If the school isn't going to function as well because of these changes, the two schools at the moment are functioning perfectly fine the way they are, so why are you proposing the change?

LM I'm not necessarily talking about the function of education provision; I'm talking about the functioning of the site, the way the site works. I've absolutely no doubt that the new one form entry or thereabouts school, whether it's a new one, or a continuation of one or two of the existing ones, will continue to provide the quality of education that both schools currently provide, I've no doubt about that at all. What I'm talking about is the functioning of the site and the way that works.

FQ Thank you.

BH Any more?

HC My name's Heather Cook and I'm a member of staff at the school. Something that hasn't been mentioned so far at all, is the emotional effect on children and families and staff, people who have already moved, and have gone to great lengths to ensure that the children are provided with continual quality education, and that staff work so hard to maintain it. And I think they're gaining [?] so much, that people really can cope with by way of [unclear] but the parents, you can imagine, how disillusioned they might feel with the prospect of uprooting their children, and the children are already asking in class when they are moving.

LM Sure, and then of course there would be some upheaval without the review, in the sense of going back to the original site. I know that's less upheaval, going back to something which is known, rather than something which is unknown, but it is still a change of some sort. What I wondered Jackie, is whether you might say something about the measures schools and staff can take to minimise the sort of disruption to the children emotionally that happens as a result of change.

JB Yes, you've had more than your fair share of disruption, and I think you will also have appreciated when you had to move to this site, how incredibly powerful members of staff are in terms of supporting families and children. And in this county, we hardly have a school that isn't judged by an inspection team to be good or better in terms of pupil welfare and care. And that says something about all staff in our schools in Hertfordshire, but it does mean that once the decisions have been made - and you are quite rightly engaged in the debate about your children's schooling for the future - once however a decision is made, the energies of our staff in Hertfordshire schools goes straight back into the children, and supporting families. And people then pull very much together, but they're not alone, because we know and we learn more and more as time goes on about amalgamations and how to operate them successfully, and the school will have a lot of additional, not just transitional funding, and the capital funding and the other funding streams that Lindsay referred to, but also funding in terms of people. So for example, there may be pupils who are less resilient, and other children are very resilient to change, remarkably so. But there are some children who are less resilient than others and particularly for example, children who have got special educational needs. And I particularly put at the top of that list, children who are on the autistic spectrum, and for those children, Hertfordshire specialist staff work intensively with staff at the school to give additional support for transition for those children. Also, both of the schools in this part of the review, New Briars and Stream Woods are supported by Carol Evans who is School Effectiveness Adviser. I know Carol's work, so I know a little about the situation, it's through her, and she will also be supporting the staff and the families much more intensively, and you will have access to the specialisms within the County Council. You will develop with your School Effectiveness Adviser, there will be a plan of transition developed so that each pupil's needs can be

looked at, and opportunities for getting pupils together, for facilitating change, for getting people familiar with new locations, new relationships and so on, that is all planned out well in advance. And there will be time between the final decision being made in March, and the end of the year, to put that plan into operation, but it does need handling, you're quite right.

FQ But these children have already been through a big change, so you are talking about two big changes in a very short space of time with young children, so whatever you say, it's still something that needs to be taken into consideration.

JB Yes, absolutely, I wouldn't have said all that without that recognition.

BH Thank you. The gentleman at the back.

MQ The lady just said that New Briars has already had a major amount of disruption, that is why de Havilland is [unclear] because the disruption they've had of their amalgamation [unclear].

LM Well I think the members' view was that - de Havilland was the result of two schools closing, and a whole new school opening - and I think members felt that that degree of change was larger than the relocation of an entire school, pretty much intact with all its year groups, staff, management structure and governing body still in place. I think members felt that the creation of a new school from two closures and one opening was more of a substantial change than that, and that that new school, having only just been created, should be given an opportunity to find itself, to be able to settle, without any further disruption. Now, I'm not necessarily expecting you to agree that there is a right that that is a significantly different level of change, but that is their need.

MQ But they've got more numbers of children missing than at the other two schools put together.

LM You mean there are more surplus places at de Havilland than in the other two schools?

MQ Yes.

LM I'll have to ask my colleagues to check that, and let you know, because I don't know from the top of my head, but that's a cue to check the figures, thank you. But I think that the decision that members made was for the reason that I described, rather than a reflection of the level of surplus places.

PD Okay, in terms of the surplus places, and this was a decision just before half term from my understanding [?], Stream Woods has 206 spare places, de Havilland 166, and New Briars 34.

LM Well I think the point you were making was that the majority of places were in de Havilland, which isn't the case.

MQ De Havilland is a two form entry, and why not have that just as a one form entry?

PD Jackie may want to say something about this after me, but the County Council would prefer if they were starting off with a blank sheet of paper, to have two form entry schools, not because we don't believe that one form entry schools can't be good strong thriving schools, and certainly they are when they're full, but with a two form entry school, it has more capacity to withstand any variations in a number of things, whether it's pupil numbers or staff turnover or a whole variety of things, and I'm sure Jackie will come in on that. So, ideally we'd be moving towards two form entry schools, but you don't always start off with a blank sheet of paper, and you can't always achieve that. So when you say to us, why can't you reduce the size of schools that are already larger to become one form or entry schools, what you're asking us to do is to create a pattern of one form entry schools, and if there are any changes, if the pupil population falls or something like that, the three schools that you're asking to create, will be more vulnerable than they would be if they were two larger schools. And that's the reason why we're not seeking to create more one form entry schools, we're almost trying to redress that and to create less one form entry schools, because in effect, we have a one form entry school here. We have a school at Stream Woods that's operating at around one form entry, de Havilland is operating at above one form entry, but still not at its full capacity, and we don't consider that's the right balance. We want to have the right number of schools that are full and vibrant and can do their best by the children in them, because they have the resources available to them to do that.

MQ Well what happens if there's an increase in people having babies, and you've made two schools out of four [?] and you haven't got the capacity then to add extra? If you've got three one form entry schools and you've got two at capacity, you then have the extra capacity for those other children.

PD I appreciate what you're saying, but as I said before, because the Stream Woods buildings are larger, then there is the capacity there to increase and we're also very clear and conscious that throughout the town we have a number of schools which do have a site capacity to increase in the future, should the position at this side of the A1M change as well.

NP? I would like to just carry on that point, because I accept what you're saying that if the one form entry schools are potentially at more risk of falling numbers, but [unclear] figures are saying that the numbers in Hatfield are on the increase. So, that argument, unless something drastic happens in Hatfield, and half of Hatfield disappears down a chalk mine [?], then that situation isn't necessarily predicted to arise in Hatfield.

LM Yes, I think most of the [unclear] schools west of the A1M there will be some instance as you said, and I think the other factor that's involved, is an effective use of the resources and best interests of the children. In other words, if we've got say this number of children, we've got that much money to educate them with, because that's the way it works, what we want to find is a way of using that amount of money to the best effect. And I think our view is that if that money goes to support two schools rather than three, then that is the best use of resources, because you're spending less of it maintaining more sets of buildings and more sets of grounds, and you're putting more of that money instead into the classroom. So it's not only a question of the viability of individual schools, although that's important, it's also how well we use the resources which are available, and that's why that's our preferred option. However, members might not agree that that is a valuable argument and they have changed their minds and created one form entry schools elsewhere when we've started the process at this time, and I can think of a case in Watford only a

couple of years ago, where the result of them changing their mind was indeed the creation of a one form entry school where we hadn't originally proposed, and that does happen. Members might not agree with the opposite view that we'd be better off with two rather than three schools in the area. But that's our thinking anyway.

NP I appreciate that side of things, but I will just throw in that having worked for a number of years on our budget, that we have a very healthy budget at our school, and at the same time will tell you we have the next predicted three years. So we've actually been able to spend a considerable amount in the past year on IT equipment to try and get ahead of the game on that side. So, I can't talk for any other schools, but certainly from New Briars point of view, we're a very viable one form entry school, even if we have a drop in a certain number of figures, we could survive quite happily. But as for predicting numbers in Hatfield are on the increase, I don't see that quite so much as an issue, yes it should be monitored in case something does happen, and obviously it's for the Council to do that, but I see New Briars as a safe school as it is, as a one form entry school. To go back to talking about the emotional welfare of the children, our staff team work exceptionally hard. They were under a lot of strain for about six or seven months following transition [?], and made a superb job and our [unclear] scores this year have been in the top 5% nationally again, to help prove that. And to do that once, okay it's not ideal, but you can live with it, but to face doing that again in another year, would be an additional strain on our staff as well as on parents and pupils. I think it is asking a lot, and as well, I would have been happier if the secondary review was done at the same time as the primary review, because my girls now are in year four, they're now having to go this process again, if the school conversion [?] goes ahead, and they're going to have to go through that process if they then go to a school in Hatfield, they're then going to have to go through that process again. Their prospects for the next few years, of disruption to their education, is not looking very rosy.

LM Yes, maybe. I hear what you're saying and I think that's the important point about things coming in more than one stage and ideally, we'd always want to avoid that if we can. Unfortunately we're not getting the money at the right time to enable us to do that. But in terms of the secondary stuff, where we're talking about funding in five years time, and probably the implementation in six or seven years time, funding in five years time, by the time the works have been done and so on. I think in terms of secondary, the transformation of provision, and the money it will bring [?], will be sufficiently attractive and exciting to more than compensate for some disruption that might take place. And I'm not sure how much disruption there'll actually be, because did you say girls?

MQ Yes.

LM They're likely to go to the girls' school, I suspect. Let's say that they do, I very much doubt whether the girls' school is not going to be the girls' school in the future, and maybe it will be larger, it may have better buildings and I suspect it will be there. I don't think the amount of disruption will be that great. Ideally we'd like to avoid it, but I do think that the scale of funding we dreamt about for the area, which is going to be about £150 million, is sufficient to make the prospect of improvement so great, that I think it would be worth it. But I entirely hear what you say, it's not in principle good to have a child's total education career disrupted at more than point, if we can possibly avoid it, but in this case, probably unavoidable for those who are young enough to still be in the system in six or seven years time, which of course mainly primary school will be.

MQ Having lived in Hatfield for 42 years, I have real concerns for Hatfield, and there's been so much uncertainty in the employment side of things, and the NHS side of things, and now with schooling, it's just a continual process for parents, and so that most of the adult population have uncertainty from year to year. I mean, we've been looking at this review process for primary, and we've had that in our minds for the past two or three years, and so have our parents. And the uncertainty of a secondary review going on also, if the parents aren't happy then the children won't necessarily be happy.

LM It's not ideal and I agree with you. I wish I could come up with a solution to make it easier in general. I don't think I can, I think that things that are on the horizon, whether it's a change in a university, or a major housing development, a complete change in the nature of the industrial or employment base, things like that happen, and some of those things we can [unclear] the education side, many of it, the nature of the housing, industrial and business development and so on, it's entirely beyond our responsibility. And these things have rather accumulated in Hatfield, I entirely take that point.

MQ We all appreciate that there is an issue in Hatfield, and it is more about the centre of Hatfield, but we would really rather see a situation where the issue was resolved in a less disruptive way, so it's all of the children, not just New Briars school, all of the children involved. And that's why the suggestions that we've had for the Stream Woods thinking as well, about having just the two schools to one form entry for the time being, and possibly going back to two form entry.

LM I think those are very fair points, and I would expect you as an individual and maybe the governing body and respondees to make those points and certainly members will have that in mind when they're trying to come to a decision, because I think they're all important points that you make. All I can say to you is, make that known, encourage your parents, and anyone else you can persuade to do so, to send in the responses, because certainly there are two elements to the consideration of the responses to a consultation, one of which is the quality of the argument, i.e. the reason that you put forward for not doing something, or doing something else. But so is the scale of the response, and to exaggerate for the purposes of illustrating the point, if only two or three people send in a response, no matter how they're argued, that's not going to cut a huge amount of ice. But if two or three thousand do, and the argument makes sense also, then that's a very powerful thing that members are going to take a lot of account of. So that's really all I can say I think, but I entirely agree with what you're saying.

FQ Can I just ask, the argument that you just suggested people make, who actually considers those arguments, does it go to the Education Panel?

LM Yes, essentially the report that contains all of that, goes initially to the Education Panel, and as I say, that's the panel at which schools are also I think going to put their point of view, if they wish to, they don't have to, but general plans, or the Head or somebody comes along and reinforces, if you like, the responses that have been made in writing. But the same report with the same information does go to the Council as well, it isn't just the Education Panel, but there tends to be more discussion at the Education Panel, because that is a multi-party panel, with parent governor and Church representatives on it as well. So it's a more varied group, and that's the group where the debate, if you like, potentially takes place, and the recommendations they make to the County Council's Cabinet, which is of course a cabinet of the ruling party, because that's the way that the Government is organised these days, as a result of Government legislation, and that will be

the decision-making body, but they will have exactly the same information to go on, that the Panel has, so it goes to both. And indeed, if it gets as far as here, the school [unclear] has that information also, it follows through the decision-making process. It's quite a tortuous one I'm afraid.

FQ The County's taken the decision to [unclear] process, but from my point of view, it seems extremely unfair then to still include the surplus figures of pupil spaces that they had of 160 odd spare places, it just seems so unfair.

LM Okay, I hear what you say. If we were to remove both sides of the equation, in other words, both the places that Hatfield has got, and the surplus that [unclear], I don't think the resulting percentage of surplus places in the two remaining schools, would be lower would it, or much lower? I don't know, that's something we can do. I understand what you say, but I think to that, if you look at the percentage of certain places across just the two schools, there would still be a case for consideration, and possibly taking action.

FQ But those places are left to the two schools, yes New Briars has 30 something, so I don't think it's quite as many spare places, and it's unfortunate that Stream Woods has been operating probably as a one form entry school for several years now, and it just seems so unfair that the two schools are in the centre of the town, yes there are obviously some spare capacity places, but it just seems so unfair that we're bearing the brunt of this huge surplus.

LM Sure, I hear what you're saying, and that's tantamount to saying that we think that Hatfield also ought to be reviewed also by process and I think that's a fair point, and I've no doubt responses will make that point, and members will have to think about that as well. But yes, I understand what you're saying. Just for your information, just in the Reception year, if you look at the numbers going into the two schools environment, it's about 50% capacity as well, or just under 50%, 41 out of 85 places.

FQ Is that because Stream Woods [unclear]?

LM Yes, because that is actually the school [?]. That is the amount of space that there is.

FQ At previous meetings I've heard you quote figures that you're using the birth rate figures from GPs to base your argument on. Is this the only basis that you're using?

LM No, the forecast is based on a series of things, one is birth rate is measured by GP registrations, post coded, and sorted into academic years, that's only one. The other is the thing I mentioned earlier, which is the housing planning information that we get from each district council in the county, which we then allocate into planning. So when Hatfield and all the others send us information from the planning system, as soon as the development has sufficient information for it to be of use to us, i.e. the developers have audited the number of units that are likely to be completed there, and again, that is sorted by geographical area. We also look historically at movements in and out of areas, because obviously there are flows of pupils between areas, between geographicals, not everybody goes to their nearest or their local school. We capture that, because we know where pupils live and where they go to school, so our forecast is able to take account of the flows between areas. So we have those three things on which the forecast is based.

FQ So, you're not taking into account any nought to five year olds then basically in the area?

LM Well yes we are, because if we capture every year live births, then we capture them when they're born, and then we know when they're one and we capture the next group, and then they're two and then one and we get the next year's birth information and so on. We keep it so we've got information about every year group.

FQ Right, but basically when you said about Onslow at the Howe Dell meeting, you were basing your two form entry school on the live births on that site.

LM We group the live birth data by planning area.

FQ That was in one year, not over a spread of years wasn't it?

LM Well we capture it everywhere, every year. In every geographical part of the county, we have that live birth information every year.

PD But what I think she means is, it was at the meeting where we had this discussion.

LM I've missed the point, sorry.

PD No, what we did was, we did a bit of extra work, just to check on those GP registrations, just how many children of nought to five in each year group were living on the other side of the AIM, because people repeatedly said, are you sure there are enough children over there to need a two form entry school? And so what we did, we actually looked in far more detail than we would otherwise do, to check how many children, and what we're saying is that from this year onwards, I think it's just under three forms of entry, going on to just over three forms of entry already in each of the next several years to come, where we know there's going to be at least three forms of entry of the children who live on that side of the AIM. Now, obviously not all of them will go to school on that side of the AIM, because parents express a choice, they may want to go to paid schools, but then people on this side of the AIM may also want to express a preference to go there too. And obviously the houses haven't yet been completed on it.

FQ So you did the detailed numbers obviously for that side then, did you do them also for this side?

PD We broke it down into lots of different areas, so I think we'd have to do a bit of deduction if you wanted us to take that area out of the way from the sum total of the others, but yes we do have [unclear].

FQ As a member of staff facing a very uncertain time, I wonder if you could give us the names of some successfully amalgamated schools, so that we could perhaps do some research. This is just personally speaking as a member of staff, facing an uncertain time, to name some of your successfully amalgamated schools.

LM In the sense that [unclear] and de Havilland is a successful one. I think in terms of its results, then it has been successful.

MQ [unclear] is empty.

LM Of course it's not empty.

MQ Well it's not at full capacity.

LM Yes, I think the school in Watford that we amalgamated i.e. closed to open a new one, and I think South Stevenage as well, so we could mention the Shuttlebury [?] schools in Stevenage...

PD The federation is still the sum total of two sets of amalgamated schools.

FQ But the schools have their separate heads...

BH If you have a point, could you wait for the mike, because otherwise we won't have the comments?

FQ My understanding is, and I live in Stevenage as well, and I visited those schools in the summer term last year, and they still have their heads don't they with an overriding federation head. They share a governing body.

LM But they're still an amalgamation. Each of the individual schools within the federation is itself a result of amalgamation, and then a federation.

FQ So there were four schools that have ended up as two schools.

LM The reason I'm struggling with the Watford schools, I'm trying to remember the name of the combined school, sorry?

MQ [unclear]

LM What's the resulting? Yes, Chloe [?] Road Primary School in Watford and...

PD And Lodge Farm in Stevenage.

LM Shall we give you a list, we'll write them down afterwards if that would be helpful?

FQ Thank you.

LM And that's in primary. I think other things that we've done in the secondary sector have also shown a successful change in the system, and quite a considerable improvement in results, and I think in Borehamwood, where just before my time, there was quite a major intervention in the secondary system, and I think the results compared with previously have quite considerably improved. But that's secondary, so we'll concentrate just on primary.

FQ And have you got success stories of schools that have actually moved site? Going back to Stevenage federation, those schools are on their same site aren't they? Like Lodge Farm, that's on the same site.

PD And first of all, one pair at the Stevenage schools weren't on the same site, so they have moved site to join on one site.

FQ Okay, so have you got some examples of amalgamations?

LM Yes, I don't think we've got any amalgamations which didn't use either of the existing sites. The point about the amalgamations is it's two schools becoming one, so you tend to use one of the two sites, as is the proposal here as it were. So we've got quite a lot of those. What I'm not sure that we've got are any amalgamations where we haven't used either of the sites, and used a completely new one, but we have moved schools successfully, [unclear] in Stevenage, which moved across the town, because the nature of the housing changed, is a recent example, and the school in Bishops Stortford that moved, which is called Hillmede [?]. So we do have some reasonably recently moved schools, perhaps Hillmede in Bishops Stortford and [unclear] in Stevenage are the two most recent, where we've had to pick up and move a school to another part of the town because of the changing pattern of demand, and we can give you those details afterwards if that's any use.

MQ Are there any schools that are amalgamated that haven't worked?

LM A good question, let me think.

MQ I know of one.

LM Which one is that?

MQ Hereford School and Howard School, which became [unclear] is now houses.

LM Is that the school that wasn't successful because of not having the numbers?

MQ It was my secondary school, [unclear] that amalgamation with Howard School had become St John Newsome [?], and now it's houses.

LM That's right, but I can't answer you because it's before I was around, I'd have to find out, but if that is because the school didn't do well, or simply because the numbers dropped.

MQ If that's an amalgamation [unclear].

LM Do you know the period of time between the amalgamation and when St John Newsome eventually closed?

MQ It amalgamated in 1985, and it went...

[overtalking]

LM It doesn't always work, none of us are perfect, and both Central and Local Government and indeed any public service planning is not perfect. We wouldn't claim to be perfect would we, and I don't think the elected members would claim to be perfect either. What we're advising members to do is what we think is the best thing at the time, and we may be wrong, and I'm quite happy to admit this. And I'm sure there's a reporter here writing this down, and it's a brave Local Government officer that admits he might be wrong, so if I'm out and you don't see me again, it's because I've lost my job. You can get things wrong, yes. Obviously we aim to do the right thing at the time, and the best thing for

the needs of the children, which is what we're employed for, which is why we're working in this area of work. Just the same as the staff of a school, we have to be based in an office rather than a school, but we have the same, I suggest, motivation and the same interests of the children, and trying to do the best thing consistently. But of course, as an authority, you as staff or heads of individual schools rightly have a responsibility for the children in your school, and as parents you have a responsibility for your own children, I do for my children, although they're grown up now. But as a local authority, we have 160,000 children in our schools, and we have a responsibility of all those children at heart, or try to and we have to try and do the best thing for as many of them as we can. And sometimes, doing the best thing for all the children can conflict with doing the best thing for some individuals and smaller numbers of children. Sometimes you have to do things for the greater good I suppose, and that's hard, it's a difficult decision to make, which is why we spend about a year of the process, that members are rightly involved, that we seek to consult you and get your views as well. But I entirely take your point, but as I say I don't have personal knowledge of it, but it sounds as though that wasn't a very successful move, if it only lasted 12 years.

FQ [unclear] how it works?

LM I'm not sure whether we've got very many amalgamations that subsequently closed, certainly in recent years I can't think of any, but there may be some going back, further into history.

PD I've been around for about ten years and I've done several amalgamations, and I can honestly say there isn't an amalgamation that I've been involved with, and that's not because I've done it, but simply subsequently, even though at the time, various groups of people, staff or whatever, may have argued at the time that they didn't think that was the right thing to do. I can't think of a single example where the people afterwards haven't come back after a couple of years and said, do you know, that was the best thing for us. Now, you may not think that, and I'm not saying that that will happen on absolutely every occasion, but I'm just relaying to you honestly the sort of feedback I've had after doing this several times over.

FQ It seems to me as a non school person, that all that seems to happen recently is all the schools are being closed, and there's no future if there are no schools.

LM Well that certainly isn't the case, and the reason for that generally is that we have had and we do still have in many areas, falling numbers of children. It may not look like it always, and people often say we're building new houses and we see lots of children around and so on, but the statistics show that we have got falling rolls in other parts of the county, not absolutely everywhere, in some parts of the county it's about level, and there are a small number of areas actually going up again. But generally in Hertfordshire, and indeed in the country as a whole, because we're by no means the only authority having to do this, there are falling rolls. The Department for Education and Skills published not long ago, in a booklet on primary provision, the forecast for the whole of primary school population in England, and it does show a picture that goes like that, and then comes up again in about 15 years time, which isn't very helpful, if you've got a situation like this kind of now. So that decline is not unique to Hertfordshire, it's happening all over the country, and I meet officers doing a similar job to mine in lots of other authorities who are doing meetings like this in various schools up and down the country. It's just a feature of our population at the moment that we've had a birth drop in recent years of about 1.8, or thereabouts, which is

about the European Union average, but that's nevertheless of course, a declining number, because it's not two, it's not a replacement number. Now, we've also had quite a bit of influx of population in this country, and we have immigration for a variety of reasons, most recently for skilled labour in the construction industry for example in Eastern Europe and that can be temporary rather than permanent, but the general pattern has been a decline, and that's why there have been a lot of school closures, or quite a lot of school closures, in recent years.

BH Can we go to the lady here now?

FQ Thank you. You quoted the names of some schools which you consider have been successfully amalgamated. How many of those did you amalgamate and then reduce? Have they been amalgamated and then had two forms of entry, and would you say that contributed to their success?

LM What was the size of the resulting schools? [unclear] because it's a slightly special case being a federation, the federation of the two former one form of entry, but it is as a federated change, not exactly the same as two freestanding primary schools.

PD But both of the schools did reduce in size as well.

LM They did reduce the size, yes.

FQ Are you saying that they went from two forms of entry to one form of entry?

PD One pair went from three forms of entry to two forms, and one went from two forms of entry to one form.

LM But they are federated, so that's not a pure example, but that's similar. Watford, I can't remember the resulting size of the school off the top of my head, but you didn't do that did you, it was Sarah? What was it, it was three to two was it? Yes, there were three forms of entry in the schools that went into the amalgamation and then two forms of entry that ended up at that school, two forms of entry, not one. I think we'll have to agree to give you some of this information afterwards if we can, because we're going to have to look some things up.

FQ And what was the timescale for those?

LM Well I've been in Hertfordshire for four years, so all of that's within the last four years.

FQ And these schools are approachable?

LM Oh yes, I'm sure.

FQ Can I just ask what sort of timescale was that again about this merger that didn't work, and the schools are now houses?

LM That was a secondary school example of a primary school.

FQ Yes, but with that in mind, on a sort of comparison of de Havilland, with that similar situation, and with the timing of Howe Dell moving to its new site, in this life there's no guarantee, and although you have projected figures of all these children to be going into Howe Dell, surely it would be better - because you said earlier that you've left de Havilland out of it, because you want to give them time to settle, find their feet etc - would it not be better to leave this completely, and find out if de Havilland finds their feet? And if it is a success, and give Howe Dell time to settle in over there? Because if you go through all this, and then you find out that Howe Dell, all those projected children don't go there, and they want to come over here, and you've taken away a school that is then needed, surely that would be more waste of money. So would it not be better to leave until these two schools have had their settling in period, and then review it?

LM Could be, I mean, that's a plausible argument that I accept entirely, and it's based to some extent on children being happy to come over the AIM to school on this side, and certainly not having more children on the Aerospace site, and houses get built. And we're already seeing them there, so they would have to want to come back over here, and that's not impossible...

FQ There are children from this side who are going over there.

LM You've absolutely right, so they could do, and I think that's a plausible point. All I can say is that's the argument you need to make in your response to the consultation process, and that is a point of view that has merit. And it isn't our preferred option, but that's not to say that it isn't a doable thing, and I would just suggest that you and other colleagues who feel that, put that forward.

MQ Just to sort of carry on that, don't the county have a recommended sort of time between reviews as such? [unclear] because it's only been done two years ago, would you be happy to look at it again in two years time?

LM Two years would be a bit brief, I think [unclear], don't actually like to disrupt children's education, more than once if they can help it. We had no choice with the removals from New Briars, we didn't choose to [unclear], that was obviously something that we couldn't avoid. So, ideally they would like a generation as it were, a school generation to move through before looking at it again, which implies maybe slightly more than another two years, but maybe beyond that they could be persuaded to, yes.

MQ My other question then is, with the Education Panel, how soon do you with County, be getting their information pack as such, to the Education Panel?

LM When we report? Sorry, I should have said. We are looking at about, for a meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, we would send out the report a couple of weeks before, and we would make that available at the time that it goes to members, and becomes public, and goes on our website, and we can make it available to schools at the same time. So you could expect it maybe a fortnight or thereabouts before the meeting.

FQ I was talking to your colleague Mr Hardcastle this afternoon, and he said he didn't have an answer to your question [unclear]. Why does your decision in April, why did it have to be so quick, the merger, when we've got the children's education between September and also the staff and the new heads and everything, to take into consideration, why does it have to be so quick?

PD It needn't be so quick, and we could say September [unclear], we didn't say that simply because A, the building was there, it's not as if we've got to build lots or do things like that, and if the decision is taken in April, you as staff and parents will then have a much longer period of uncertainty and wondering where do I fit into this that and the other, and how's it going to happen. So we took advice, and the advice was that it was actually quite a long time for parents and staff to wait for the implementation, if we made them wait longer than a year, because it would be a year and one term, when it was possible to do it, do it relatively much more quickly than that. We sometimes do these things at different points of the year, other than from the start of an academic year. And you may have different views about that, and I'm sure parents and staff could have different views, but sometimes it's just easier to start everything off at the beginning of an academic year. So we felt the choice was either September '07, or September '08, and we chose '07 because we didn't want to prolong the period of uncertainty. You may have a different view of that, and again, as Lindsay said repeatedly, please make those known.

FQ That's what happened wasn't it with the last merger, and it worked out that in September the school wasn't actually ready, so half of the children were at the new de Havilland, and half were still on the [unclear] site, and I think that was just because it was rushed through.

LM There were two reasons for that really, one is that one of the two schools was in special measures [?] and therefore we had to take action on a rapid timescale as Ofsted expects us to do. So that's one thing, the other reason was that there was very extensive building work done on that site, which meant that it was difficult for the all the children to join it straight away. But I think as I say, there were two reasons, one was the speed that we were expected to act on for the special measures that forced the pace onto us really, but the second thing was the sheer amount of building work that needed to be done there, because it was a school that needed quite a lot doing to it. It's a lovely big site, and it was the obvious choice of a site compared with the site here actually I think, but the buildings needed work doing.

FQ My main point I think is about the children and the staff building teams, and how short a time can you build a team and have a new head coming in ready to start the new school in September, [unclear].

LM Yes, how long was Tim in before the school opened, was it just a term?

MQ Tim and I were appointed a term before the school opened, but if I could just say that I feel really strongly about this, that the time be actually as short as possible, from the decision being made to the school opening, because if you're thinking about the actual impact on children and on their learning, it's the period of uncertainty that has a negative impact. Once the decision's been made, the sooner you can get the school open, the new whole vision and ethos of the new school being established and up and running as soon as can to minimise the negative impact on children and their learning. So I feel really strongly about that, that it should be as short a time as possible.

FQ I actually disagree with the younger children in the early years, stage one, I feel that they actually need the time to make the relationships and get their security and their self-esteem before they make another move when they've only just made one. I actually think for them or their parents that it's a big step for them that it does work.

MQ I can only share with you what I've seen from my experience over the past two and a bit years, and really it's about minimising uncertainty, and shortening that period of transition as much as possible.

LM I think that's interesting because really one can get different professional views I think of that, about this idea, and I hear them both and there are arguments on both sides I'm sure, for the length of time, and we're happy to obviously hear what you say, and members will need to weigh the evidence and advice that there is about children.

BH Probably the last question now.

FQ Can I just ask that the period of uncertainty as just mentioned then, can I just ask...

BH Can you pass the microphone?

FQ How many of your original staff are still working there, the two people who were in the two sets of schools?

MQ I think different schools have different amalgamations, have different situations to deal with. We've had a significant staff turnover, but that's not necessarily true of all amalgamations. It's a very different and individual experience with different schools from what I understand.

FQ Can I just ask how you started there, are you an amalgamation or are you a different school completely?

MQ I don't know the actual percentage or number, but it's not very many, we've had a significant staff turnover as a new school.

LM But I think the other factor there you'd have to bear in mind with the de Havilland experience, is that one of the constituent schools was in special measures, and therefore had at the time, I think it's fair to say, had got quite a number of staff on short term contracts and temporary contracts and that there had been, I suspect staff recruitment difficulties in the school before the amalgamation. So we're probably not dealing with an identical set of situations, but I take your point. I think it's true to say there are certainly schools aren't there Pauline, where a very high proportion of people have stayed within the new school. I mean, I don't know whether Roy [?] made this point when we talked to staff, but our general experiences in primary amalgamations and even closures, is that pretty much all the staff who would want to be involved in the new school are. That may mean that there is temporarily some sort of over-staffing, if I could put it that way, and that's why there is some amalgamation funding, to allow for that. But with natural turnover, we would expect that larger than establishment number to get down to a normal establishment over a period of time, and it will inevitably mean that there is some turnover and some change. But I think our general experience is that very much people tend to go to these schools and stay there.

FQ If your preferred option is to go ahead, Howe Dell is settled in, the amalgamation or merger has taken place, what guarantee do we have? How many years are you going to leave us alone, if all things fail?

LM Well, you'd have to tell me, what are the things that are going to fail?

FQ If the birth rate has gone down, it's the other side of the A1, it's up here, are we going to be moved again, what guarantees do we have?

LM Absolutely none.

FQ Yes, I thought that was the answer.

LM I'm not giving you a flippant answer, this is a serious answer, but I am asked this at almost every public meeting that I do. Somebody asks me for a guarantee about something, and it may not be that. I was asked yesterday for example if [unclear] the county, for a guarantee about ongoing standards and examination results and things of that kind. Now, in the world in which we live, there are no guarantees are there? I mean, I couldn't guarantee for example that the staffing wouldn't change significantly in one of the two schools we're now talking about, even without any reorganisation, as an example, because heads can change, deputy heads can change. Rob's going from Dagenham [?] to somewhere else for example, there is turnover, there is change, and I can't guarantee those sorts of things. Neither can I guarantee that some, I don't know, [unclear] might not happen, that [unclear] or whatever, that means that some action has to be taken. What I can say is that my experience is that leading elected members are very, very reluctant to review an area a short time after it's been reviewed. Sometimes when we have proposed in some larger parts of the county, to do a staged change, like if it's quite a large town, take Hemel Hempstead for example, we're reviewing Hemel Hempstead at the moment, with about 35 primary schools there, so it's big, sometimes we proposed to them a rolling programme of change, rather than doing a review of the whole of the town of that size all at once, we've said why don't we do it in stages. And members have never accepted that, because they don't like continual change, they like to do something and then create a stable system and leave it alone as long as possible. So I can't guarantee it, but what I can say is that's the members' objective, that's their aim, and it's our aim too, but I can't guarantee it.

BH I'm going to bring the meeting to a close now. Thank you all very much for coming, and I think everybody's told you how to send in your responses.