

What is this document about?

As local education authority for Hertfordshire, the County Council has to keep under review the number and sizes of schools in each area.

Sometimes the County Council has to bring forward proposals to open new schools or to move or enlarge existing schools. In other circumstances there are too many school places, and the County Council must try to rationalise schools, through reductions in admission numbers, school amalgamations or closures.

The County Council also monitors the levels of unused places at individual schools. These are sometimes significant and cause a school to receive less funding. If this happens, schools are often obliged to reduce staffing levels, which in turn can lead to the reorganisation of classes, often resulting in several age-groups being taught together.

These particular circumstances can be found in Hertford and underpin the County Council's review of The Pines School.

This document sets out a proposal to close The Pines School in August, 2003 and to offer the remaining children a place at Wheatcroft School in September, 2003. We welcome your views on both these linked proposals.

The document is organised in the following way:

- Information about primary schools places in Hertford and what the demand for places is likely to be in future
- Information about the current position and likely future situation at The Pines Primary School
- Implications of the County Council's proposals for children and parents
- Implications for staff
- An outline of the likely timetable of events following the issue of this consultation document
- Details of how you can let us know about what you think of this proposal.

Why we are making this proposal now

The County Council has been monitoring the pupil numbers at The Pines Primary School alongside the demand for primary school places in Hertford as a whole for some time. As explained in further detail in this document, the County Council now thinks it should plan for the closure of the school at the end of the summer term in 2003.

However, no decisions on closing the school have yet been taken and this document is being issued in order to start a consultation process with parents, staff and the local community. All views are welcome and will be taken into account when the County Council considers the outcome of this consultation and decides whether or not to close the school.

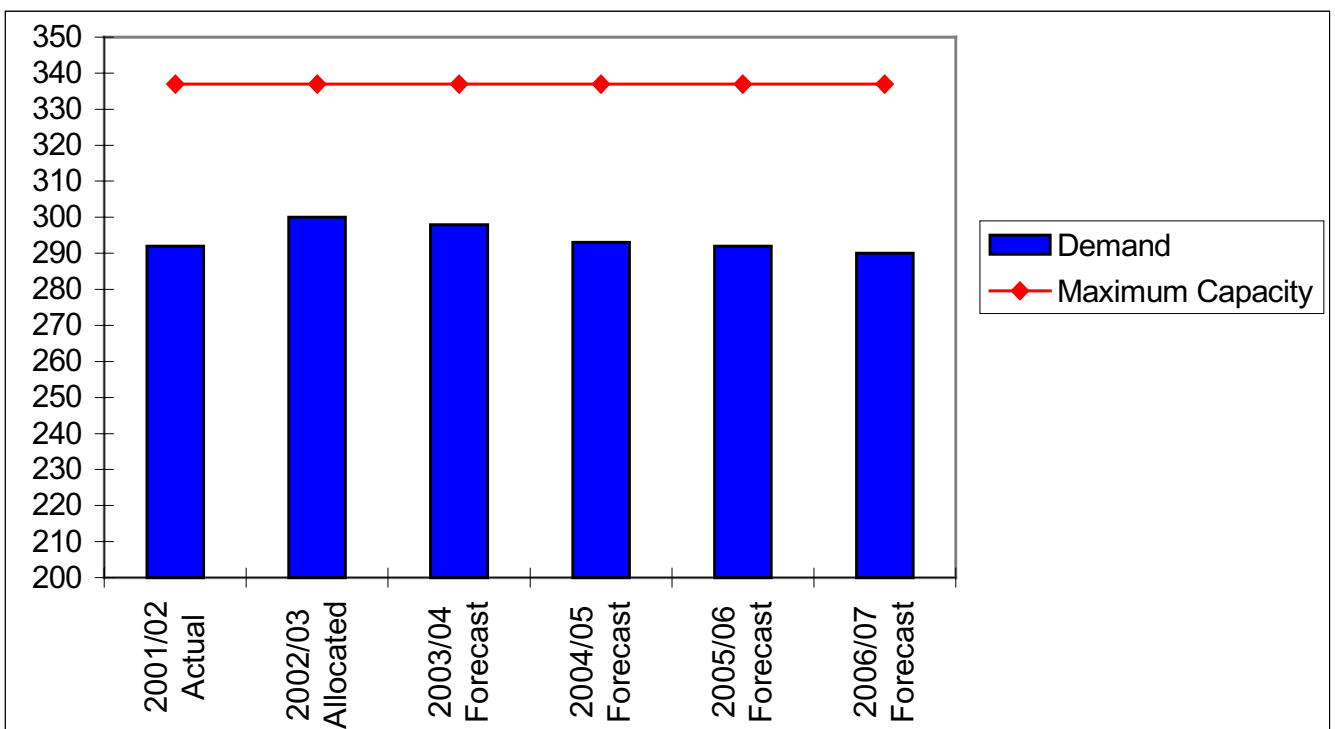
Primary Schools in Hertford

There are nine primary schools in the Hertford area, providing a total 337 Primary School places each year. The map on the front cover shows the location of the schools referred to in this document.

The chart below shows current reception year numbers and our forecast for future demand for the 337 places.

The forecast includes an assessment of current demand, births (and the birth rate) in the area and the impact of future housing numbers, including those in the recent East Hertfordshire Council Second District Plan review, which covers the period up to 2011. The East Herts Local Plan Second Review envisages a further 635 new homes in Hertford in the Plan period to 2011. The estimated yield has been included in the following charts.

Hertford Area: Reception Places - actual and forecast demand

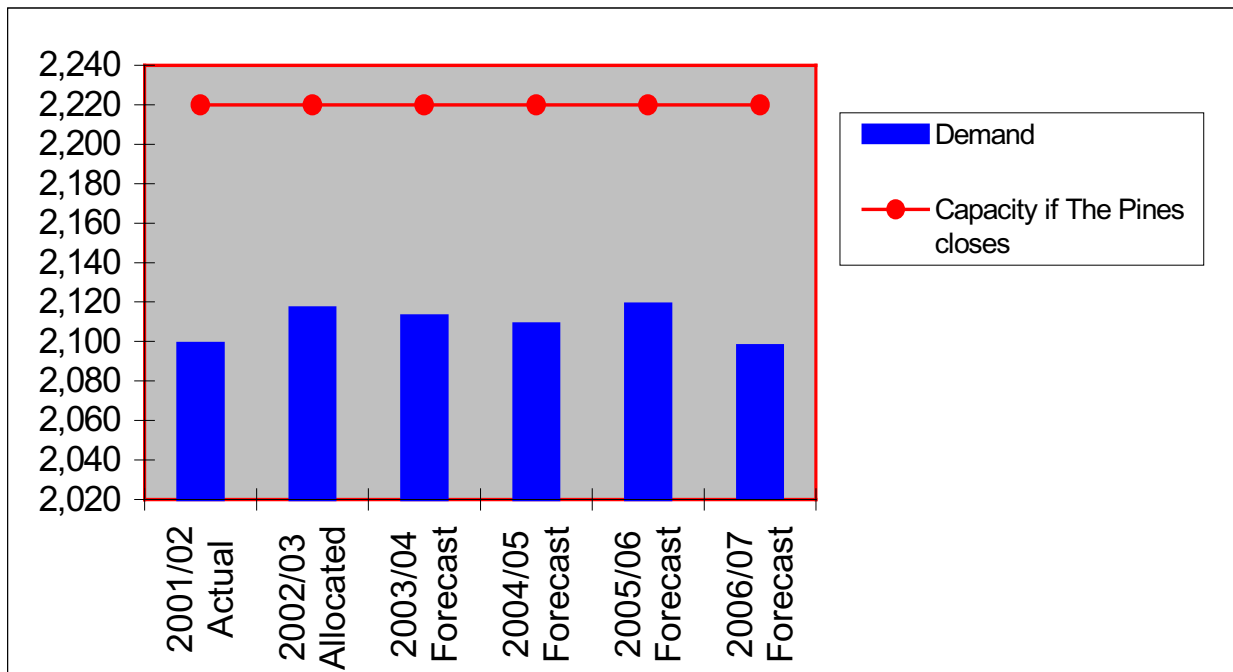


Primary School Places

In total there are currently 2,341 places in all of the primary schools, in the Reception year through to year six. The following chart shows:

- the number of places there would be if The Pines School closed
- the demand for places up to 2007, based on actual and forecast pupil numbers

Chart showing all years (Reception through to Year 6) in the Hertford area:



As can be seen from the above chart, even if The Pines were to be closed, there would still be a surplus of places in the area.

The Pines Primary School

The current number of places and future anticipated numbers at the school are shown in the following charts:

Current numbers at The Pines School in September, 2002:

MOE Capacity	Admission Limit	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL (incl. nursery)
121	17	2	11	4	4	3	2	11	37

The estimated figures for autumn 2003 are:

MOE Capacity	Admission Limit	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL (incl. nursery)
121	17	4	2	11	4	4	3	2	30

Pupil numbers have fallen at the school recently. The school is not recruiting from its immediate or wider locality and, although the Governing Body has made strenuous efforts in recent years to improve recruitment to the school, they face considerable difficulties because the overall number of children in the area means that there will always be a surplus of places in the town's schools.

The County Council is grateful to the school governors, the Headteacher and staff for the efforts they have made to improve recruitment. However in view of the low numbers at this school and the level of surplus places in Hertford overall, the County Council considers that the school is unlikely to increase in numbers and will become unviable if it does not close. In the current financial year, the running cost per place at The Pines is £3,740. The equivalent county average cost in the primary sector is £2,151.

If the school were to close all local children would still have access to a local primary school place, and there would still be some spare places for new children coming into the area.

What would closure mean for children and parents?

The County Council is proposing to close the school in the summer of 2003. Until that time the school would remain fully operational and would receive financial support to enable it to maintain an effective education for the pupils. At the point of closure there would be 30 children on roll for whom an alternative school place would be required. We have looked carefully at the home locations of the children who will be at The Pines in July 2003, and the positions of alternative local schools. The County Council would like to offer places at one school so that the children can stay together to complete the remainder of their primary education.

A number of children living on the Pinehurst Estate already attend Wheatcroft School. By providing an extra mobile classroom at Wheatcroft School, linked to some reorganisation of classes, there would be space to accommodate the remaining Pines' children. Further discussions with Wheatcroft School's Governors and Headteacher are needed about this idea but we wanted to include this proposal in this consultation exercise in order to seek views upon it at this stage. The additional places at Wheatcroft School would be temporary; the school's admission limit would not be increased, and the offer of a place would only apply to children on roll at The Pines School when this consultation exercise is launched on Friday 15th November, 2002.

Parents are not obliged to accept this offer of a place and are welcome to consider the alternatives available. Further advice is available from the East Quadrant Admissions Team on 01992 556922.

What would this mean for staff?

All staff would be at risk of redundancy. However, the County Council has a redeployment scheme in these circumstances and some staff may also qualify for early retirement. As part of this consultation we will be talking to staff and their professional associations.

What happens next?

Children, Schools and Families Resources Panel	Consider outcome of consultation	15 th January, 2003
County Council's Cabinet		27 th January, 2003
If decision taken to proceed, publication of Statutory Notice		31 st January, 2003
Two month Notice Period		31 st March, 2003
(If required) consideration by Hertfordshire School Organisation Committee		(late) April, 2003
Proposed date for school to close		31 st August, 2003

You can let us know your views by:

- ◆ **Coming to meet us** to discuss the proposal, on

**Tuesday 3rd December, 2002 at 7.30p.m.
at The Pines School, Divot Place, Hertford, SG13 7SP**

We will explain the background to the proposal and answer your questions. A County Councillor will chair the meeting and other County Councillors will be there to listen to your views. We will take notes and record the meeting as well.

- ◆ **Sending in the form** in this document.
- ◆ **Writing to us (freepost)**, if you do not want to use the form, to:

Sarah Nicholls
CSF Planning
Business Reply Service HJ71
Hertfordshire County Council
County Hall
SG13 8YD

- ◆ **e-mailing** us at sarah.nicholls@hertscc.gov.uk

If you have other suggestions or options, please make sure that you say so in your response.

Your letters and forms need to be with us by 6th January, 2003.

This document is being widely distributed within the area. If you would like more copies please telephone Sarah Nicholls on 01992 556722.