

PR 6969

For Immediate Release

22 January 2008

Cabinet announces decision on Letchworth Primary School Review

Hertfordshire County Council's Cabinet has confirmed its decision on the best way of dealing with the problem of surplus primary school places in Letchworth.

On October 15 it approved the publication of statutory notices to close Lannock Primary School and Westbury Primary and Nursery School from August 31 2009.

Confirming the closures of both schools at yesterday's meeting (January 21) Deputy Leader David Lloyd said: "These have been difficult decisions to make because Lannock and Westbury are both good schools with committed staff and strong links with their local communities.

"However we have to look to the future and unfortunately this is the only way we can reduce primary places in that part of Letchworth. Closing schools isn't something we take lightly but I think it is better than seeing schools go downhill because they don't have sufficient numbers and lose out by lack of resources."

Under new government regulations the School Organisation Committee has been abolished and the statutory proposals for Letchworth now fall within the county council's decision making process.

"The School Organisation Committee was independent and used to consider controversial proposals and could refer them to the adjudicator. But the new regulations mean that we are put in the unacceptable position of having to react to any objections that have been received to the statutory notices," said Councillor Lloyd who, as Executive Member for Education, had overseen the consultation.

Three objections were received to the statutory notice for the closure of Lannock School, and 87 objections and a 1095 signature petition against the closure of Westbury School.

"Although I understand that the decision to close Westbury is upsetting for pupils, parents and staff, I firmly believe that this reorganisation is in the best interests of the children and we will do everything we can to make sure the transition to their new schools goes as smoothly as possible. The planned Children's Centre and Pre School on

the Westbury site will go a long way to support families and children on the estate and will be a focal point for the whole community," added Councillor Lloyd.

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Notes for editors

The review of Letchworth's primary schools was carried out because, in common with some other parts of Hertfordshire, there are significant numbers of surplus primary school places in the town. The figures reported to the October panel were 26 per cent for reception places in Letchworth and forecast to rise to 29 per cent in 2013/14.

Surplus places are concentrated in the centre and south of the town and specifically at three schools - Lannock, Radburn and Westbury - where a total of 57 per cent of reception places were empty in the 2006-7 school year. A public consultation was carried out on two proposals: to close either Lannock or Radburn School and to close Westbury School in 2009.

The majority of the 311 responses to the consultation agreed with the County Council's preferred option to close Lannock School. Strong concerns were expressed by some local residents about the closure proposal for Westbury School, but the majority of residents in the Westbury area - over 65 per cent in 2006/7 - already choose schools off the estate for their primary age children.

All pupils at Westbury School will be offered a place at Icknield Infants' or Wilbury Junior School, which are both within walking distance.

Location

North Herts - Letchworth

For political comment

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