

070605 Radburn 12

Speaker key

JD	Jim Dalton
PD	Pauline Davis
JW	Jane Wilton
JC	Julian Cunningham
AJ	Ann Jenkins
CM	Clive Mitchell
WD	Wendy Dellar
UF	Unidentified Female Speaker/s
UM	Unidentified Male Speaker/s

JD Good evening everybody on behalf of the County Council. Can I say how pleased we are that you're able to come this evening and I hope that you find this is an informative and helpful meeting. As Jane has said, after I've just briefly introduced my colleagues, Pauline Davis will be giving us a presentation about the review and the reasons for it and the options that the County Council has put forward for consultation, and then they'll be a period for questions and discussion, and clearly that's a very, very important part of the occasion. My name is Jim Dalton and I'm here this evening, standing in for Lindsay Martin who is the Head of School Planning. That's the part of the County Council's services responsible for ensuring that we have the right number of school places where and when we need them. And with me is Pauline Davis, who is the Area Planning Manager with particular responsibility for this part of the county, and Janet Robinson, the Planning Officer who works with her. And also Clive Mitchell who is our Head of Primary School Effectiveness. So that explains who we are and what we want to do this evening, I'll now ask Pauline if she can take us through the initial presentation.

PD Thank you, Jim. So, I suppose the fundamental question is, why do we need the review? Well, first of all, we have to ensure that there are the right number of places for the children in Letchworth in the right places, and we can make sure that we have the right number to meet projected demand. We also have a concern generally, and we share this concern with other local authorities, that too many school places potentially creates a vulnerability in some schools if they don't have many pupils in them. The Audit Commission would argue that we need to manage your resources, this is public resources, public money, in the most efficient and effective way, and having too many schools, keeping too many sites, heating and lighting too many buildings, is not focussing money on the right number of schools that we need. And also because what we need to do is to reduce the places in this town, and we believe we need to reduce the places by between two and three forms of entry across this town. So we currently have an admissions capacity of 14.8 forms of entry and for those of you that aren't particularly au fait with that, a form of entry is 30 pupils going into a year group. In 2005/6 the reception numbers indicated that we had about 12.4 forms of entry and our forecast for 20012/13 shows that we need about 10.9 form of

entry. So pupil numbers are declining. Nationally birth rates are falling and Hertfordshire is no different to anywhere in the country and this is just manifesting itself in your town at this point in time.

So this review... we've already started the review. The review started in January, in fact. We invited a whole range of stakeholders, head teachers, different governor representatives, local councillors, pre-school people, key people who have a keen interest in education within this town. And we worked with them to identify what the issues were and what the potential solutions might be, and we came up jointly with a long list of possible options, all sorts of ways to reduce surplus places within your town. These options were evaluated against four tests that our Director is quite keen to make sure that whenever we're making proposals, that they do actually meet certain criteria, and I'll go through those in a moment. And then once we'd done that, we presented back to our Director and he took a decision whether he would want to consult you, as the public, on any of those options or any other options. And that's that we are, here today. This is the first public meeting in Letchworth. There will be others and we will take you through the proposals in a moment. So, let me go back to those four criteria. I won't read them out to you, but I will give you a few moments just to look at them. And you will see that they're not all about numbers. They are about achievement, they're talking about buildings, but they're talking about pupils as well, they're fairly well rounded principles that whenever we have a proposal we need to test them against those criteria.

So, let's be clear what the proposals for the town are. In particular, for most of you I would expect, although I'm sure we may have other people here who'd be interested in other parts of the plan, our first proposal is either to close Lannock Primary School on this estate, and I have to say that's the County Council's preferred option, or to close Radburn School. And then we have a second proposal, to close Westbury Primary School and the timing of those proposals for each of those three would be from the beginning of the 2009/10 academic year.

So, let's have a look at this proposal for this Jackmans Estate here. Why only have one school? Well, certainly it provides sufficient places on this estate for the demand that is manifesting itself and what we believe it will be in the future. And we can have a look at some of those numbers in a minute. It creates a one form entry school because the proposal isn't just to close one or the other school, it's to make the resultant school a one form entry school. It creates that one-form entry school and the stakeholders were quite clear that what they really wanted to do, whichever school remains, that they want that school to be able to house a children's centre as well, so that it was quite a coherent package of community offer within the estate. It's clearly what stakeholders wanted. Overwhelmingly, people were saying to us, there needs to be a school on the Jackmans Estate, but there probably only needs to be one one-form entry school, and a full vibrant one-form entry school will provide a better foundation to build upon the achievement levels that both schools are achieving at this point in time.

So, you may then say, well why have you come out with a preferred option? Why are you suggesting that we need to retain Radburn School? It provides better accommodation. The rooms are bigger, they're in pairs, they've got excellent lighting and ventilation. It just offers a better suiting arrangement in terms of accommodation.

It disrupts fewer pupils and the extended school users. The difference in the pupil numbers... I think the last PLASC that we picked up was about 114 at Lannock and about 180 at Radburn, so less pupils and less families would be disrupted by the move, but we have to acknowledge that there are quite a large number of children still in Lannock School with their families. Extended school users, Radburn has a fairly comprehensive range of extended school users already. There's a pre-school on site, an opportunity class for children with special educational needs, there's a primary support base, a range of other things going on. We have to acknowledge Lannock also has other users on site. It's a temporary home for the children's centre, it's got Senco arrangements where they support other schools as well. So both schools have these facilities. There's a larger concentration of them on this site and therefore those people will not be disrupted and those people are some of the more vulnerable people in this community. It provides a closer school for more pupils. One thing that was quite clear to us when we looked at the two schools, it's very clear that both schools attract people from all over the estate. It's not so much that everybody in the southern part of the estate goes to Lannock and everybody in the northern part goes to Radburn, so that's Lannock and that's Radburn. And in terms of distances and things like that, there's interesting information here. When we looked at the travelling distances for pupils, on average if all the children went to Radburn, they would have less distance to travel than if they all went to Lannock. It's not significant... I'll be honest about that, it's not a significant difference, but there is a difference. What I'm trying to say is not that one is better than the other for travel distances... there's not much in it. It's not as if a greater number of people would be disadvantaged in terms of travelling distance, and quite clearly there are strategies to overcome that, walking, buses and things like that, but clearly that might an issue for you.

It's clearly less expensive in terms of the provision of the accommodation that will be required for a transitional period and you may wonder why. Well, there's more accommodation on this site in one respect, but we would need to provide some additional classroom space for the transitional period while there are more children in the school, until those additional numbers work their way through the upper year groups. So we would have to put possibly up to three classrooms on the site to accommodate the children. If we look at the Lannock site, though, the Lannock School uses part of the adjacent building and if we were to provide enough accommodation for all the children, we would have to bring back into use the remainder of that building. It's currently occupied, but those users are going to be moving next year, so that would be possible, but because they're classified as office use, the town planning and the building regulations mean we would have to do a considerable amount of costly work to bring that accommodation back into use for school use, because all the new building regulations about acoustics and ventilation and all of that would apply and it would be very costly. In terms of access to the sites, we would need to do some improvements to this site. We would probably need to create an in and out flow for access to this site and just look at that issue because it's clear there's a single track road there. But nevertheless we have to acknowledge that the access to Lannock is better, and let's be clear about that.

Now, let's tackle an issue. We've been asked on more than occasion, why don't you close both schools and open up one new school. First of all, it increases uncertainty for everybody because the proposal was, in fact, close two schools. That means every single member of staff, every parent, every pupil won't understand, won't know what

their future is until such time as that issue is resolved. It will increase the time scales and you might say, well, why is that? The law has recently changed. For the last year or so what's happened is that if anybody proposed to open a new secondary school, the authority couldn't just say, we want to open a new secondary school, we're going to do that. We have to go to competition. We have to invite bids from other people, other school proposers, to say, do you want to run this school and, if so, let us know and tell us what your proposals are. And we have to go through a fairly lengthy statutory consultation process, a whole bidding process, that takes, I think, up to about nine months to a year. Just recently, and from this May, the Government has changed the law that says that if we want to do that for a primary school now, we have to go through that same process. Now, it's our judgement, and that's why we haven't proposed it, that to close both schools and open a new one, would add that amount of time to a process. It would elongate the period of uncertainty for everybody and none of us would know who would end up running the school, and that could be a good thing... I'm not knocking that. I'm just saying, it would increase the length of uncertainty. And, again, let's be clear, if we're closing both schools, it would put all the staff of both schools at risk. In a closing school situation, all the staff are at risk of redundancy, and if we close both rather than one, then every single member of staff will be put at risk and that doubles the degree of uncertainty.

So, let's have a look at the practical implications for these proposals. First of all, in terms of pupils, all pupils at one or the other school... because we are consulting you about one or the other proposal here, all pupils would be offered a place at the remaining school. Now clearly parents are free to choose places at other schools if they wish to take them up, if there are places available in the relevant year group, but we would ensure that everybody who'd come to whichever school would remain here. And if we look at the numbers here, we can see that what we're ending up with are low numbers in these schools and that the total numbers... and there are allocations, so we have to allow for the potential for some more pupils to join the schools in the coming months, but we're ending up with relatively low numbers and although we can't guarantee what next year's reception and the one after that will be, we know that if we have proposals that start in 2009, we will definitely have an intake of no more than 30 in that year. That maybe below. It looks as if it's likely to. It could marginally be above, but we will make sure that all of those children are accommodated.

On the basis of those figures, as I've said, additional accommodation will be provided for the transition period. There are more children in the upper year groups, as you can see, than the lower year groups. It will take about three years for that to work its way through. We may therefore need to provide some accommodation on this site, or we would have to do the works to the other building on the Lannock site if it was that proposal. We would have to adapt to whatever numbers we were dealing with. As I've said before, for staff... and we have to remember these are staff and they're real people with mortgages and careers to think about, staff at the closing school, whichever that will be, will be at risk, but I have to say the County Council has an extremely good record, almost 100%, of making sure that staff are redeployed into other schools if they wish. And we have a really good track record of doing that and we work very closely with them on an individual and a group basis to make sure that their needs are met.

For parents here, school uniforms... the County Council makes a contribution towards the cost of a new uniform. There's a fixed sum of money. I think it's just under £25. What schools normally do in these circumstances, they work with parents. They will probably provide items of clothing for your children, because they get greater economy of scale if they order in bulk. So what normally happens is they consult you about your children's sizes and then they'll buy that in for you on bulk and hand out packs of uniforms. In transport terms, there are good walkways through this estate. We've been told that many times, but nevertheless if any child, as a result of a school closure, has to travel more than two miles if they're under eight, or more than three miles if they're over, then they will be entitled to free transport under the County and the National scheme. And any costs of any building work will be borne by the County Council and any external funding sources that it can attract.

So, back to the proposal for this estate, but this consultation isn't just about the proposals for this estate. There is another proposal there, and that is to close Westbury School and this proposal to close Westbury School is not because we believe that Westbury School isn't a good school. They have some really good achievements. But what we will be doing here very briefly is to go through why we propose to close it, what the issues may be and, again, those practical implications for parents and pupils. So, why propose to close a school that's doing a good job? Well, first of all it reduces surplus places at the school with the greatest surplus in that area. Let's go back to the original statements that said, we need to lose between two and three forms of entry in the town. Too many places means that either all the schools have slightly fewer pupils or that some schools will end up with a significant shortage of pupils. So we need to manage that supply and demand of places. In admissions terms, our PLASC counts, that's January in 07 and 08, show that there were 10 and projected 11 children going into Westbury in reception both this year and the coming year. That 11 may rise, it may fall, we'll have to wait and see in January how many people turn up, but the population figures, the pupil forecast for this town is falling. It also retains a pattern of schools where there's stronger parental demand. Quite clearly, parents are going to schools because we have so many places where they want to go to schools, and most parents manage to get into the schools that they want to go at the moment. And it goes back to that issue. Not all small schools are vulnerable, but there is the potential for them to become vulnerable if they are small. If, for example, they lose key members of staff, a head teacher or two or three other key members of staff, or if there's a sudden decline in pupil numbers, a number of other facts would need to be at work, but there is a potential for vulnerability.

But let's acknowledge the issues, because there are always issues for a school closure proposal. Westbury School achieves well. It does well by the children it has. It has a high proportion of children with special needs and other needs. It has a high proportion of that, but in numbers terms, other schools have similar numbers of children and cope well with those children too; concern about travel distances for those people that do attend that school because they may have to travel further and how, for some of those families, those children will get to school. Travel distances on average are no more than about a third to half a mile extra for some people. We have to acknowledge that the school has opened a pre-school. It's got a popular pre-school. It's early days. We'll have to see how those numbers will filter through into the school, but we need to work over the next couple of years if... and it is an if, the school closes to make sure that that demand in that area is met. And we also have to

support the pre-school learning alliance as the lead agent for the children's centre in finding suitable provision for their activities in that area.

The same sort of thing, all the pupils of Westbury School will be offered a place in other schools. They will be offered places at Icknield Infants School or Wilbury Junior School, as the closest two schools, if they choose to go. The numbers here, the numbers are higher at the junior end, but these are well within the tolerances. Both Icknield and Wilbury are schools with an admission number of 80, so these numbers here are well within that to be able to accommodate those children. On the basis of those figures, we will need to, if all the children go there, provide an additional space at Icknield. We may have to renew a space or two at Wilbury, but they will be able to cope with that. And again, and this is an important issue, all the staff at Westbury will be at risk and we will work very hard with them if it comes to it to ensure that they are redeployed if they wish to. The same issues about school uniforms, transport and costs, exactly the same as I've read before. I won't labour that point.

So there are our proposals and there's some of the reasons why, and I'm sure you have lots of questions for us. But before we get to that question session, let's just show what happens next. This consultation... it ends on 6th August. We will then analyse, we will count all of those, we will analyse the issues and we will advise our County Councillors, first of all in an Education Panel, which is Cabinet Panel, as to what your responses to the consultations have been and what the key issues are. They will then give their views to the Cabinet on 15th October and the Cabinet of the County Council will take all of that into account in its decision making, and the decision at that point in time is whether or not to proceed to publish statutory notices to effect any of those proposals. Those statutory notices will run for a six week period between October and the end of November this year, and during that six week period, there will be a notice in the paper and anybody can object to that if they wish to, and if there are objections, it will go back to the County Council, probably in December, at the end of the year, for a final decision. And you'll notice that both the Education Panel and the Cabinet, their meetings are open to the public. That doesn't mean they're public meetings. It means that you can go and watch and listen to what happens and the Cabinet usually allows key representatives from the schools involved an opportunity to perhaps say something for up to three minutes or so, so that they can make their case on the day.

So, let's conclude. It's really important to stress that no decisions have been taken yet. These are proposals and we genuinely want to hear your views. As I say, the consultation period finishes on 6th August and we really want you to let us know... you've seen the consultation document. I think there's a copy on your chairs or there's more copies in the hall, and you should have had some at home with your pupils. There's a form at the back of that. Please send it in. We have a website. You can send us emails. We really don't mind how you tell us, just make sure that you tell us. So please do so. So at that stage, I'll hand back to Jane for the most important part of the evening, which is your questions.

J Right, so this is now over to you, but there are a couple of points before we start. We do want your views. We do want them to be recorded. So that means that Karen will be running around with the microphone to give to you. Now, we understand that often these issues do arouse some feelings and people want to get

their points in, but we do please urge you to just wait for the microphone because otherwise you won't be recorded and you won't be [unclear] in the transcript. And I will get to everybody. My job is to make sure that as many of you as possible have had a chance to speak. And so what I will do is, if you raise your hand just to show that you want to speak, I will try to get to you and I will try not to forget you. If I do, just wave at me. It depends on how many people are trying to speak at once. And if you could relinquish the microphone after you've put your question. I know there's a temptation to go on and on and on, but you'll probably take the point, and if they don't take the point, I will come back to you. I think that's about it. We will be closing the open part of the meeting at 8:45 to give you some time to speak individually to members of the Panel about particular issues. Can I stress that this is a public meeting to talk about the issues and if you have individual issues about your children, then they're much better dealt with with individual members of the Panel or there's a contact number in the review document that you can actually get in touch with people. So, with no more ado, let's kick off and see who'd like pose the first question?

JC Good evening. My name's Julian Cunningham. I'm one of the District Councillors representing this estate and I will declare an interest. I am the governor of Lannock School, but I'm trying very hard to put that aside this evening. My concerns this evening are about the estate. I have a series of questions but I will try and restrict them to two to start off with. The first one is about the actual process. Clearly a lot of work has been done on projections of increases in school size reductions and new developments. I'm interested in the question of new developments because there is a significant development planned for what most people know as the old school centre site in Letchworth and it is well within the bounds of possibility that children from that site would want to access schools on this estate. It's not the nearest but there is parental choice. Can you just explain how those sorts of factors have been taken into account? And a second general question about the process, and if this is not within the scope of what we're talking about, please stop me. Clearly the issue of closing one school, closing both schools, creating another school, leads to the release of a site on the estate. To what extent do the proceeds of the subsequent sale of that site fall back to the school remaining on the estate or is it simply going to disappear into Council funds.

PD Thank you for that. In terms of sites, you asked about housing developments. Our forecasts take into account known new housing developments, so that would have been taken into account and it would have been dealt with in terms of the different planning areas that we work with. But let's follow your question that said, well, it might not be the nearest school, but what happens if all of those people want to come here? First of all, we believe we've got the right number of places, but, secondly, either site would be big enough an expanded school should there ever need to be. What we don't want to do on this estate is to say, well, there's a one-form entry school and never will you be able to take any more children if they happen to live here or want to come here, because that's not good for you and it's not good for your school. So we're planning a one-form entry school on this site and, as I said, most stakeholders agreed with that. We've taken those housing projections into account but if we find over time that the school is increasingly popular, if there are more people living here or suchlike, we do have the site capacity to expand the school if ever we needed to.

In terms of your second question, which was about a capital receipt from a closing school, that presupposes that we would sell that site, and that isn't something that we are necessarily supposing will happen. What happens with County Council premises when they become surplus to a particular service's needs, is we have to declare them to the corporate landlord, which is another part of the County Council, and they then circulate to all services the fact that there are some vacant premises available for us, because the County Council is here to serve you as residents of Hertfordshire and you require a range of services. So if there is a service that needs provision within this area, they would make a bid for that and the County Council would decide who would use that property. If there aren't any bidders for that property, then they might take a decision to sell that property and there would be a capital receipt. What the County Council will do, was it would make sure it could afford to do whatever it needed to do on either school site, but I'm afraid the County Council's capital resources are such at the moment, that it wouldn't be able to guarantee that all of the proceeds from a redundant site in any part of Letchworth would fall back onto any of the remaining schools within the town because, quite frankly, there is a shortage of capital to service all the needs across the County Council, and our County Councillors would decisions about where any proceeds would be invested. And that's not to say, it wouldn't be in Letchworth, but there can be no guarantees.

UF I have a couple of concerns, my first one being my first baby on its way. We live two minutes from the school. We want to make sure that all the children within the Jackmans Estate have a place in a school in Jackmans, because I don't want to travel unless I have to. It's one of the reasons why we moved here. Secondly, getting out of here between 10 to and 9 o'clock in the morning is horrendous. With at least an extra 100 parents bringing cars because of travelling distances, you're never going to get out. It's just such a nightmare. I think that needs to be thought about quite carefully.

PD First of all, congratulations on the new addition. The County Council's admission rules will continue to apply so that apart from those overriding rules about looked after children, siblings and suchlike, distant rules apply. Now we genuinely believe a one-form entry school is the right size for this estate and I have to say all of the stakeholders agreed. That's what they were saying to us, it needs a one-form entry school. So we're fairly confident that that will do for all the children. Secondly, as I said, we are conscious of the restrictive access. You can only get it and then you have to turn round and get out again, so we've had a team of property people looking at this particular site, and the Lannock site, and looking at what those access arrangements would need to be to improve circulation in and out of the site, and, as I said, the advice that we've been given is that we will need to do some work about that and provide an in and out scheme to improve the flow. Let's be clear... what we're talking about is additional pupils for up to three years, and each year those numbers will reduce as the higher numbers in the higher year groups will move off into secondary schools and in the lower year groups, there will just be 30 children coming in.

AJ My name is Ann Jenkins and I'm a resident round the corner, just a few minutes away, and I'm regularly trapped in. It is a very dangerous area for parents. 30 years ago when my children both came here, there were very few cars and it was

very safe for our children. It is now totally unsafe and you only have to come up here and sit and see for yourselves. No matter how carefully you drive, there is a potential danger just round the corner. So I would be very interested to see what you're going to propose and I think there are quite a few residents who would want to be involved in that process. As I say, I've had two children here and my grandson attended Lannock, so I feel I have a foot in both camps, but I what I would like to say is, my grandson lived on the opposite side of the estate, they've now moved, but I, for one, would not encourage them walking through this estate on walkways. It is not a nice area sometimes to walk through. Some parents don't come with their children and I think again children would be at risk. So perhaps the County Council could put in some form of walking bus, something that would protect children? As I say, I have no children here, but children do need that protection. The other point I'd like to make is that I have been part of a school closure at Willian, the site which was sold off just round the corner, and the saddest part of that was staff members left. And I appreciate that they did because they had to look after their families. What ended up then was part-time teachers, teachers who had no commitment to the school, no commitment to the children, and our children got a really bad deal. I would like to know what provisions you're going to put in to provide some form of loyalty towards the teachers that stay to the end, no matter which side, and I think really that's all I have to say.

PD In a way, I have to thank you because you almost gave my answer to yourself in terms of the travel thing. I'm not underestimating the issue about transport and travel to school. I think most schools would say, it's pretty difficult outside at peak times. There's a knowledge that we need to do something at this school. What I would have said to you was exactly what you said to me... there are other strategies that can be adopted and walking buses is certainly something that I think that, whichever school remained, I would be recommending to them that they adopted and, in fact, I believe our town planning colleagues would be recommending this to them as well, because that provides an escorted safe walking route. And, as we said, this estate is well placed for that, but safety of children comes first and I'm sure that that's strategy that can be employed.

In relation to your second question, clearly we work very carefully with people when a school is closing, and you're absolutely right, people do have their livelihoods to worry about and we do work very carefully with them. I will ask Clive just to explain the sort of support that his service gives to schools in those circumstances to help encourage and support, because the one thing that is important is that, for those children and staff remaining at that school, the quality of their experience is absolutely important too.

CM I think the most significant point about the staffing issues that you raise is that it can be a feature of closures like this that staff get anxious. We have to acknowledge that that's a reality. One of the advantages of running a consultation like this two years ahead of when it's actually implemented is that, at the moment, it's a good way away for staff and that by the time you get to the end of this calendar year and we've got some clarify about where we're going, it gives us time actually to look at the arrangements, whatever they will be, the provision, the number of classes we need, the number of staff we need, so that we can actually make those decisions as early as possible and reassure staff before they have to get anxious and get too close to the

implementation date about the security of their jobs. And whilst there can be disadvantages in running a consultation two years ahead in terms of the long run in time, there are advantages inasmuch as we can get the ground work like that done ahead of the time when staff get too close the time when they're anxious about their jobs. So I think our real answer to your question is that as soon as we're clear about the outcome, we will work with staff to look at the actual provision that we need, the classes that we need, and the job security that we can give them so that they are clear about their futures in good time, without them having to get anxious about, you know, it's next term or it's six months away.

AJ But would you then be able to encourage them to stay... that's what I'm saying. When the school closed last time, pupils were left in the middle of nowhere and I think it's very unfair if there are very young children that the relationships they build... and really for some of them, it's one of the only relationships they have.

CM Yes, we would absolutely want to encourage them to stay. We can't avoid going through what we're going through between now and the end of the year, when the question's in the air about what's going to happen, but throughout that we would want to work with our teachers and say that we've got the same number of children whichever school we've got them in and that there will be jobs for, if not all of you, then the majority, and we would want you to work with us through that, knowing that we've got the time to go through that process.

AJ It still doesn't really answer it and I am labouring the point because I have had experience of this. Teachers will need more than just that. They will need some incentive and I would hope that during your time of deliberation, you will think about that very, very clearly. That's all I want to say.

CM Okay. We will think about it very clearly.

JD Sorry, Jane, could I just pick up the third point that you made which was about the involvement of residents in thinking about any physical changes. That is something which we do always do, so if there are going to be physical changes, then residents are informed about those and invited to come to meetings, see plans, and contribute to getting it as good as it can be.

UF We've talked about staff needs and obviously that's very, very important, but I wonder what education, teaching, counselling is given to the children, not just for the decision that's going to be made in the future, but right now because they're obviously very aware of what's going on and it can be pretty scary if suddenly you think your school, your sort of safe place, is going to be removed just like that.

CM In all of the schools affected, the head teachers and staff will be talking to the children about what's going on and the time scale over which it's happening. Once we're clear about what's happening, and we're clear about what we're working towards, then we can start doing preliminary work with the children as well so that they're not faced with some kind of distant deadline which suddenly arrives, but actually there is preparatory work in the time between the decision and the actual implementation of whatever outcome there is, to ensure the children are properly involved. At the moment, that's really an issue which is for the schools, because for

us to be involved at this point might, in a sense, lead us to suggest that there's a predetermined outcome which there isn't. But as soon as we've gone through the consultation process and are clear about what outcome we're working towards, then we can start working with teachers and with children in order to ensure that they're looking at the issues, taking their feelings on board, and if it's a case of, for example, two schools coming together into one school, going through a range of preliminary activities so that children get to know where they're going, who they're going to work with and closer to the time, the teachers and so on. So we do have a process that we go through, but we are at the very start at the moment in deciding what the final outcome will be.

UM Can I just come back to the point that Mrs Jenkins made. I thought maybe it was an oversight, but it's been made twice now. You referred to teachers. I'm sure you don't need me to remind you that the school community is made up of many, many more people than teachers. Teachers I can accept have a career and are likely to move around. Teaching assistants, dinner ladies, etc, and all the other things that make a school function, don't necessarily have opportunities in that way. Many of them are mums and I didn't hear any reassurance on that subject in replies that have just been given. The unfortunately reality is whilst the County probably can provide opportunities for career development for teachers, for mums who live on the estate and are tied to school hours, it's not going to be quite so easy for them to find alternative employment. They will, I think, take the first available opportunity... it may not be two years down path, and I think whichever school we're talking about, when the decision is made at the end of this year, you are likely to see a significant exit of the teaching assistants, etc. I'm not in any way reassured by the responses that have been made.

PD Yes, thank you for mentioning that because, as you say, every member of the school staff is equally important. They all have a vital role to play and they will all be affected by the proposals... you're absolutely right. And, yes, teachers potentially are more mobile and we have to acknowledge that. You're right that quite often mums are the dinner ladies... forgive me for not using the right terminology, and also the classroom assistants and suchlike. And, yes, that is potentially more of an issue because of their lack of mobility. They take those jobs sometimes because of the short hours and their ability to support their families as well around their job too. So, yes, you're right. We do treat all staff equally, but we have to be clear their mobility and therefore their ability to take up other positions, even in another part of the town, might be more compromised and I acknowledge what you're saying.

JC I'm sorry, but I am prone to talk a lot as people who know me... can I come back to the question of process. I have read the document quite carefully and you have talked about stakeholder options. Interestingly, and I have looked at the consultation document on the website and the issues that were looked at and some which were discarded and therefore not included, there is one you have spoken about tonight, which is not part of that original process, and that was to close both schools and to amalgamate under a new school badge. Can you explain to me why that now appeared in presentation without actually seeming to have been part of the original consultation and if it is now part of the discussion that is taking place, is it allowed to make a response on that or are people only allowed to make responses on the options that are being put in front of them?

PD Thanks for that. It's useful for me to be able to clarify that. When the stakeholders came together, there were a number of options as you rightly say, which haven't ended up in the consultation document and for those of you who weren't part of that process, there was an option to close both schools and re-locate a new school on another site on the edge of the estate and that was evaluated and proved not to be possible in town planning terms. So, yes, you're right, an option like that didn't come forward and it is not what the County Council is proposing. Since we've started the consultation, though, we have been approached by one or two people saying, but why not? Why can't you do that? And so what I was simply trying to do in this presentation, was to answer those issues here because if people are asking those questions, we might as well deal with that question and answer it. Now I'm not being flippant when I say that, but you can say what you want to us in your response. You don't have to contain yourself to the proposals, but the County Councillors are actually consulting you on those proposals and would like to hear your views about them. It doesn't stop you saying anything else you might want to say there.

UF [Inaudible]?

JC All right, I have to follow that one up. I think what you just said was, you did take into account a particular option, it was discarded, it's therefore not part of the consultation process and therefore whilst we can say whatever we feel like, no notice will be taken of it because it's not one of the options up for consultation. The point I am making is that the option that you are talking about is not the one I'm talking about. The option which you are talking about and which is mentioned in the consultation brief was to close both schools and build a new school on a new site at [inaudible]. What I am concerned with... I will now be honest and say, I have a major concern about the entirety of this exercise because what is coming through is an expense/cost driven answer. I will be the first one to accept that there are not sufficient children on this estate to run two schools. Logically, economically, on every other test, only one school is viable, and I'm not even going to try and pretend otherwise. The question, however, is not necessarily what is the best cost option, it is what is the best option for all the residents and all of the children on the estate. I find it quite sad... I won't go any further than that, that you struggle to actually accede any reference to the children who are affected by this in the arguments which you put forward on either side. I would like to have seen a more considered argument about the question of closing both schools and reopening on a site... I've seen the arguments you've put forward and I have to say I don't find them particularly convincing. I don't know all the facts. I believe that in several other areas in Hertfordshire where such things have been done, that has been what has happened. Schools have been closed and amalgamated onto one site. I didn't see any particular reason why that was not appropriate here. I was concerned that the major reason for not doing it seemed to be a concern that Hertfordshire County didn't want to necessarily lose control of the process and if I got the wrong impression, I'm sorry, but that is the impression I got and I have to say that I have major concerns if the reality is that the option of amalgamating two schools on one site has not been considered and is now not going to be allowed for comment and discussion.

PD Yes, there's some important issues there. First of all, the very first thing you said, that if we make a comment on anything other than a proposal in the document,

the County Councillors will take absolutely no notice of it whatsoever, and I'm afraid that really isn't true. The County Councillors are interested in what you have to say and they will take notice of what you say. They will listen to what you have said, and we will have to report to them. Not only will we have to report what you have said, but we will have to make available to them every single response for them to look at personally and we make those available on every single review we do, so that they can make sure that we are not misrepresenting your views. They have that check. Secondly, it wasn't that we didn't consider closing both schools and opening a new one, because we as a local authority and officers of the local authority did. In the past, we have considered in these circumstances closing two schools and opening a new one. We call it an amalgamation, although that has no currency in legal terminology. And in the past there have been some merits in doing so, but as I explained during the presentation, the law has changed and in doing so, we have open the promotion of that new school to alternative bidders, and I'm not suggesting there's anything wrong with that per se. The County Council would have to decide whether it wished to proposed a new school itself at all or whether it just wanted to invite other people to open a new school. The reason we didn't add it to the list that other stakeholders joined with us in putting together was simply because of the time scales involved in doing so and, at the end of the day, to elongate this process... because we wouldn't come out with a decision at the other end probably until next summer, before anybody knew what was going to happen when the net result was wanting one school to serve this estate, we didn't think that that was appropriate. Stakeholders didn't put that forward as an option either. And that is why you didn't see it discounted, because stakeholders didn't propose it and we chose not to add it to that list. But you've clearly expressed a view and if you wanted to make those comments to the County Councillors, they would be prepared to listen, of course.

JC Does that then mean that if a proposal for an amalgamated school or a new school on a new site is put forward, then the proposals that have been put forward by the County Council would be discounted themselves and the Councillors could opt for a view that is not part of consultation process?

PD Yes. Let's just say that if somebody proposed the closure of both schools and the opening of a new one as a new option they wanted the County Council to consider, and the County Councillors took that into account, and let's just hypothesise and say, they decided, yes, that's a reasonable idea, we need to think about that and move that forward... what would happen? The first thing we would need then to do... let's just say the County Councillors took that decision and they wanted to pursue that option, first of all they'd need to get the Secretary of State's permission to propose the opening of a new school because of the competition rules. They'd probably then have to re-consult you because that wasn't part of this consultation, so that's another public consultation. That would have to be a minimum of six weeks and the County Council's standards for consultations is 12 weeks. We'd then have to invite other promoters to bid for running the new school and that would take around a 17 week period. We would then have to publish to everybody those proposers' bids so that you could all see what each of those people saying, please we'd like to run this new school on the Jackmans Estate and this is what we would do, and that would take another period of time. We'd then have to publish statutory notices about that, which would take another six weeks and we'd have to then hand over all the decision making, because if we as the local authority wanted to make a bid for running that

school too, then the School's Adjudicator would take a final decision on who actually would run the school and that would take another two months and, as I said, that would elongate the whole process through until possible the next autumn. Now, if that's what the County Councillors chose to do, that's fine, but that would be the consequence of doing that and it's perfectly possible that they would do that, but that's entirely up to them if you want to make those suggestions.

CM Just to go back to your earlier point about, is it because we want to lose control of the process, it isn't that we worry about controlling processes, but against that timeline that Pauline's described, we think that the disadvantages of the uncertainty do actually mean that it's better not to be going down that road.

UM I am concerned about what is happening. I understand what you're saying, but I think the whole thing is now being predicated on a meeting that nobody here had any great input to, that very few people would even have known that there was a possibility of suggesting an amalgamation. You're the professionals and, more importantly, in looking at the consultation document on your website where you are talking about closing those schools and opening a new school on [unclear], not one of the objections that you have just put forward is mentioned.

PD In terms of the stakeholder process, let's be clear about this. The people that joined with us in that were all the key people involved and responsible with Education in this town, and some of the people from the political arena, and most of those people would be aware of school amalgamations. We, as an authority, have done that before... let's be clear about that. We're not denying that. We have amalgamated schools before, but the law has been different in the past. I won't go over the reasons again, but I am absolutely confident that the people that joined with us in that process were very well aware that amalgamations are things that have happened time and time again across not only this County, but other authorities in the country, and therefore I don't believe that those stakeholders weren't aware of it. None of those stakeholders proposed that, and as I said, we chose not to for those reasons.

UF I just want to make some broader comments, because I want to talk about the children, because I just sometimes think we've lost the point tonight about what's best for the children. And I'll admit I am a governor at Lannock School, but I don't want to talk about Lannock School. Just on a broader point, I want to address some of the comments. By the rather rusty maths, I calculate there must be 300 children in both schools. Now I don't know the make up of this audience, but actually I'm looking round to see where are the 300 children's' families that this consultation actually will affect? There are very obviously some caring parents, prospective parents to be, and I am delighted that there are staff members here. There are clearly governors here. There are clearly very interested members from the wider community here. There are people who care because they've sat in this process before. But where are the 300 children's' parents? That's my first point. Secondly, I don't want to comment about layout, access... though I do have serious concerns about the access. The bit about the buildings, well, I went into the building that's cited as an office a couple of weeks ago and I took some photographs, because I struggled to find anything in that building that did not look like a school. Now, I know we've heard about ventilation and other things, but actually it looked like a school. I walked into the caretaker's office, I walked in the school hall, I walked into classrooms, I saw a playground. It was a

building... but that's not my point really. Why I'm standing up here and clutching my bit of paper is because when you stand up and want to get passionate about children and better outcomes, you sometimes lose the thread. So I'll apologise that I'm clutching this. And I want to comment on the staff. I've got some dedicated colleagues here who are staff members, just as looking round, I can see dedicated Radburn staff members here. We all care in whatever capacity about the children this community serves. I am sure they will stick with it and stay with it, but actually these staff members have had their education, they've got their careers, they've had their life chances and for some people, it's a way back into work and accessing, but I care about these children, these unborn children, these very small people that are our citizens of the future. And whether we like it or not, the community of the Jackmans Estate has long been a very disadvantaged, in places, community, a very hard to reach community, given the fact that 300 kids seem to have not many of their parents represented here. And when these families are the most hard to reach, you have to think long and hard about what is best for their needs. And can I just comment on something else, that map was really interesting about the patterns of travel of the children. There are deeply held perceptions and beliefs in this community about which is the best school. It's always been, and I think it always will be... and if you're sitting here as a parent of whichever school, if you're sitting here as a governor of whatever school, or member of staff, you will know that you have heard people say, I'm not sending my child to... Those perceptions run underneath, through the roots of both of the schools. The prize for this consultation is a school that serves the whole community and I feel strongly about it. It is about one school that doesn't have those deeply held divisive perceptions running underneath them. It is a school that does not haemorrhage the children off the estate which I really think is an option. One new amalgamated school would be a school that I would love to see in ten years' time was a school that people flooded into the estate, not try to go anywhere other than the two schools on the estate as sometimes happens because they think that, for whatever reason, they don't meet their needs. I think we seriously need to consider an amalgamated school on the Jackmans Estate that serves all of the needs of all of the children. I've got a question. In ten years' time... 2010 when we have this vision for public policy about children centres, extended schools, the bright new future where children's trusts will be in place, are we genuinely believing that either of the options in the consultation will deliver outcomes for these children, so that at the end of key [?] stage two, the results will be on a par with anywhere else in Hertfordshire? I have my doubts. I don't know, but I just think that if we do what we've always done, we will get what we're always given, which is issues and problems on the Jackmans Estate that just don't seem to go away no matter how much we pour in, how much we do, how much we try and develop. Sometimes I think we need to try and do something different. Someone once said to me, this is a great phrase. It's called, No Lids on Kids. Well, actually, I think it's about No Lids on Communities. We have an opportunity to take the lid off the Jackmans community and create something that would be lasting and make a difference.

UF I'm the chairman of the governors at Lordship and I have to have this lady a question. One of the problems we have is, we have a 51 intake. Now, I'd like to know why in the current reception year, the County Council gave five children an appeal to come to Lordship, so we are five children oversubscribed for that year. When I looked at the figures none of them had any special need, they were all just because they chose Lordship. They would have come to either Radburn or Lannock

and I think the County Council are at fault for this, because they're moving children to schools. Yes, we are a popular school, but we are quite happy to stick at 51 children each year. Every single year in our school is oversubscribed by children who have won appeals. We have nothing to do with the appeal system in the school, but the County Council does, and I think if they kept the children in that area in that school... because you say yourself that schools become more vulnerable with lower pupils. I know how schools run on finances per child. That is the problem! If you take the children away from the schools that have lower numbers and put them into bigger schools, you're creating the same problem. If you kept those children in that school and we all had just the same numbers, we would be fine. I'd like to know why those children were all given appeals.

CM The appeals are arranged by the County Council, but the actual Appeal Committees are independent and it's not a County Council decision to grant the five appeals. It's the independent Appeal Committee's decision.

UF How do they independently choose? What's the point if you've got spaces? We are literally are only, what, two miles distance, Lannock to Lordship? If there's spaces at Lannock, why are they giving children places at Lordship where we haven't got the spaces?

CM Well, at the outset, the County Council does not give those places, but any parent who has not got the school that they preferred are able to appeal, and then the Appeal Committee has to decide, first, whether it would actually prejudice the efficient education to admit the child and invariably we're able to demonstrate that, yes, that would be the case. But they then have to go on and say, well, are there specific overriding circumstances in this case which mean that we should allow the appeal? And what has happened in the five cases that you've quote is that the Appeal Committee has said, we think that there are sufficiently strong reasons and, yes, those children should be admitted, but that's an Appeal Committee decision. It's not a County Council decision.

UF Do you not think the County Council should have some say in it?

CM Well, yes, the County Council goes to the Appeal Committee and says, we do not think that these children should be admitted. The County Council always presents a case at the Appeal Committee to say, this school is full. There are places elsewhere. But the parent, quite properly, they have the opportunity to give their reasons and the independent Appeal Committee has to decide which one should win the argument.

UF But that still doesn't make sense, why you give children places at a school that's full, and you've got schools that have got spare places?

CM We have to allocate up to the admission number of the school if that number of children want to go there. So, as you say, if 60 people want to go to Lordship Farm for 51 places, we have to allocate 51 places.

UF Yes, that's right. We did have 51 places. But we now have every year oversubscribed.

CM Yes, and that is because of the outcome of the appeals process. It's not because of the County Council's decision making.

UF But I personally think to stop this happening... I mean, anybody in education does not want to see a school close. Obviously, I know we are a successful school at Lordship, but we don't want to see a school in the Jackmans close. And the other thing is, obviously we have been inundated with phone calls from parents for places at our school. You're not going to be able to stop those children leaving and you don't blame them because the parents have got to give their children the best education. And I don't blame teachers... if they're offered jobs at other schools, they've got to take them. They can't wait to see what's going to happen. Somehow the appeal system has got to be worked on to say that if there are spare places, you can't just move around the school. As a school, we don't have any say whether we accept them or not, and we are now running over the numbers we can possibly cope with.

CM And that is the law of the land, because the appeals process is established through the law of the land.

UF And it doesn't work!

UF I want to go back to the point that this lady over here made. I agree that children are desperate to go over to Lordship, but we have to address the quality and outcome issues from the schools on Jackmans Estate. Surely, if the outcomes for the children are improved, if the quality within the schools is improved, then the children aren't going to want to go off the estate. It goes directly back to what Lynne was saying, we need to have a good quality school on the estate and I really do think that an amalgamation is the best answer. This is already a divided community. There are people that walk past Lannock to come to Radburn, past Radburn to go to Lannock, due to family feuds, because of the deep rooted, this school's better than that school. We can counteract all of this with an amalgamation, concentrating on quality and the outcomes of the children. The children of either school, whether they're at the school that stays, or at the school that closes, there are going to be huge issues there with change. If this school is the school that remains open, you may well find children in the nursery and reception classes here that don't know how to cope with a huge influx of another 20 or so children into their class. What's going to happen to them? Who is going to manage the change for the children in the nursery and the reception class of the school that's closing? I really do think we need to focus on the issues of quality and outcomes for the children.

CM Just to come back on that, I agree with you, we should be concentrating on issues and outcome and both of the schools on the estate at the moment are very focussed on those issues and work hard at both of them. The point that I think Lynne's making, and that you're making in actual fact, is that the best option in your view is a new school and the closure of both, so that everyone gets a fresh start. The change issues, however, that you mention are the same or more in an amalgamated school proposal. The change issues actually apply to a greater number of numbers than in the proposals and they have to be managed anyway. This is not a process, however we go through it, where we can avoid chance and uncertainty. The point that you're making is, how do we best manage that? And we best manage it, I think, by going through this consultation process, getting your feedback, getting clarity about

what's the best provision on the estate, and hopefully the right decision and the right outcome that you will all agree to, because when people can see the purpose of change and want it to happen, then the change process is better. But we're at the start of that process at the moment and what you're giving is a view of how to achieve the right outcome, which is what the process is here for. However, we are all about those outcomes. Underpinning this... and you might say we're not making enough of it, and maybe we're not, is the fact that unless we do something, we will see deteriorating outcomes on the estate because we know that as numbers fall for reasons that one of you referred to earlier, it can become increasingly difficult to maintain high quality provision, particularly when other factors kick in like staff change and so on. So we are all about that and don't be in any doubt about it. What we're talking about tonight is the best way of achieving it and Lynne has given her view too about what you think that will be.

UF Just a final comment really... both schools on the Jackmans Estate, Radburn and Lannock, have excellent committed staff doing their utmost to provide the very highest quality education for the children. That's a given. We just want to prevent the children haemorrhaging off the Lordship Farm. We want to say to them, you are getting the best education on the Jackmans Estate. I don't think we should be frightened of change. The process is there. The legal framework has been set up because, for example, City Academies have been found to be a real way forward for some secondary children in some areas of disadvantage and under achievement, as a way of improving outcomes and, yes, all right, it might take slightly longer, but these kids have one go at being educated. I want the children on the Jackmans Estate to go on to well paid jobs, stay on into higher education. I want to see the Jackmans Estate having the very best quality education in Letchworth and people coming in, not going out, not having school panels having to make tough decisions on admitting children because the parents, as you've rightly said, have such deeply held perceptions about what they see happening in the schools, that they can't see beyond the quality that's going on in both of them. There has to be a way forward.

J Thank you for that. I think your point has been very well taken. I'm conscious that [inaudible] for time. Are there any other issues you'd like to make?

WD Wendy Dellar, I'm headteacher at Radburn School. I'd just like to comment on a few things. The first is about, there are 300 children at each school, where are their parents? Obviously, we have a number of parents who work during this time of the evening. We have a lot of single parent families. We have not been able to give a crèche for this... it's obviously late and perhaps wouldn't have been suitable. It is a time of night which is difficult for people to come out. People will give their responses on the consultation forms and I'm sure that a lot of parents will make their views known in that way. So this is not the only forum, and it should not be taken that people are not interested because they're not here tonight. The second thing I'd like to talk about is just briefly about the access. I know a lot of you said tonight that across the County there are many different methods of accessing schools. There are various systems of in and out of schools, walking buses, which we've talked about, and I certainly don't think that that's an insurmountable problem. We've even talked about results and how we should have better results. Yes, if we look at pure results, it is true that Radburn and Lannock are lower in terms of the County. However, it's not just about pure results, it's about achievement, and if we look at achievement, which

is a value added figure, of where a child is when they come into school and where they are when they leave the school, I think you'll find a very different picture. There are also other things involved in results, for instance. We have a support base and those figures in our results. All of those children have statements of special educational needs. We've talked about change and us not being frightened of change, and I think that if Lannock ask for an amalgamated school, as they have done in the press last week, that the process will be lengthened and this can only be to the detriment of both schools.

J Right, we're sort of winding towards the close now. Are there other points?

UF It is about the amalgamation again and obviously that's the big issues, because I think both Lannock and Radburn agree and accept that we only actually have pupils enough for one school at Jackmans Estate. I'm quite interested here in the theory really, and I do think it's extraordinarily emotive because actually what you're suggesting is that we close both schools and therefore make futures for a lot of people double trouble if you like, and even more pupils worried about what's going to happen to them. You're quite prepared to accept that would be a much longer process and for what at the end of the day? You want to knock down both schools and start up a new school. Where would you put this school? Well, let me suggest... it will most probably end up either on the Radburn site or the Lannock site, and who's kidding who? What is the perception then? The reality is, wherever that school is sited, whether it's Lannock or Radburn, people will think that they're going to the Radburn School or to the Lannock School. As I understood it, from what people have said to me, it wasn't the fact that a few people on the estate hated Radburn or hated Lannock, it was that a few parents on the estate don't want their children going to school with other children of so-called families. Now, I'm sure that they're in the minority and let's be very honest about it, the truth of the matter is you can call the school what you want. If the pupils are going to be mixed together, they will go off the estate anyway and there's nothing that we can do about it. I think it's far more important that we accept and we are actually quite fortunate that we've been able to get one school on the estate, because originally they were looking for two form entries and we don't have the pupils to sustain that. We should be grateful that we have one school and try and work together to make it the best possible school that we can. And I think throwing this amalgamation thing into the mix at this very late stage is just going to make life a lot more difficult and start a winner/loser situation, and I think that would be dreadful and I do not think that's in the interest of the estate or the pupils on the estate.

J Thank you. As I pointed out earlier, emotions [inaudible] runs very high, talking about issues like this and I think your response was an interesting one. I'm not sure there's a lot of value in arguing the toss between those two views at this moment in time because obviously we've gone over them. But thank you for your comments. Obviously if you feel that's something [inaudible]. Is there anybody else with an issue beside that one, something that we haven't covered?

UF Can I just say that a lot of parents are frightened to come to these consultation evenings because they don't understand a lot of things? But I talk to parents in my job at Lannock and they are really frightened about coming [inaudible] and a lot of them don't understand what's going on anyway.

JD I think that we just perhaps need to talk outside the meeting about whether you think there are things we could do in addition to what has already been planned to give people more of an opportunity to express their views.

J I'm going to suggest that we close this part of the meeting and that if any one of you wishes to talk to the panel and further the discussion with them, they would be very happy to take your points. So thank you very much because I think you put some very passionate points in a way that's made it very easy to respond to [inaudible].