

Hatfield Stream Woods 16-10-06

Speaker key

J	Jenny
JD	Justin Donovan
FB	Fred Butland [?]
PD	Pauline Davis
MD	Mike Deacon
LD	Lynn Davelin [?]
MR	Marjorie Rage [?]
JB	Judy Brentworth [?]
LS	Lynn Sparks [?]
?FS	Unidentified female speaker
CN	Claire Naturevera [?]
?MS	Unidentified male speaker
JR	John Reeds [?]
LH	Lisa Howick [?]
SA	Stephen Altheim [?]
JW	John Weight [?]
MM	Meg Manuels [?]

J Good evening, everyone. Welcome to this public consultation. My name is Jenny [unclear] and I work for [unclear] who are an independent market research company. I'm here to make sure that your views are heard and that the [unclear]. As you can see, I haven't switched on the microphone. That's good start to the evening. I am wearing a microphone not because, as you can see, I can't project my voice but because we are recording this. The reason we're recording this is so that there is a transcript of what goes on in this meeting that other people can access. It will be on the Council website and it's a further way of getting your views to be heard by those who are not here this evening and by elected members. I think it's important to say that we want to run this evening in a pleasant manner which means having respect for one another and having respect for myself and the panel. We know there are strong views but we'd like it to be a positive debate where all of your views and all of your questions can be heard. So, if there is a lot of shouting out and talking over both the panel and one another, the most important thing is that your views won't be heard and I'm here to make sure they are. We want them on the tape, we want them to be heard on the tape and that's why you will be getting a microphone when we get to the questions a little bit later on. So, I may well remind you of what I've just said a bit later on. It's absolutely fine. We know you have strong feelings and you're here to express them and I, for one, hope that you will but I hope we can do it in a manner that everybody will be heard. Now, Justin is going to kick off with a very short presentation and then we'll open the meeting into questions and I'll say a little bit more about that when we get there. Thanks very much.

JD Thank you, Jenny, and welcome. Thanks for so many people coming along to what I hope is a very good evening. The programme then for the evening looks a bit like this. A very brief welcome introduction, just a few minutes, just to let you know who you've got here on the panel tonight and then a presentation of what the proposals are. These are difficult, they're controversial, they're not welcomed in terms of proposals. So, I think it's

very, very important, before we have a debate, that we're absolutely clear, so there's no misunderstanding, why we're here tonight, why we're conducting the review, what the proposals are, what the impact of those proposals will be, if implemented, and also where we in the process and, very importantly, if you want to, how do you engage in the next part of the process after these public consultation meetings. It'll take me about 10, 15 minutes but it's very important, I think, to get those things on the record. And then, really, the rest of the evening is open to you, to answer questions you might have, to listen to comments you make so that we can take those comments back and feed them into the process.

So, who's here then? First of all, myself. I'm Justin Donovan. I'm Deputy Director and as Deputy Director also Chief Education Officer here in Hertfordshire. So, I'm responsible for anything to do with schools and education across the county as a whole. So, in the end, if you like, the responsibility for what we do in schools, including this area of reviews, lie with me. In the end I'm accountable for this. I have with me Pauline Davis. Pauline is one of our two very senior planning officers. Pauline's responsible for the planning at all places of buildings, the heart of the county. So, she'll be here to answer any questions of detail on numbers and sites and why we've got these proposals here. Kate Myers [?] is unlikely to say anything but she's welcome anyway. It's not that she doesn't want to, it's just that Kate is here really to provide us, if we need, during the evening, any more detailed information. Kate, as a planning officer, has the real detail of the figures and the statistics and if we go into that detail, it'll be important for Kate to be with us tonight. So, that's who we are. Thank you, as I say, for coming along.

The first thing then to get on the record, if you like, is why do this. It's unpopular, it's difficult, it's controversial and it's expensive. Now, there are lots of reasons why we ought to shy away from doing this. So, why on earth are we putting yourselves through this uncertainty and any disruption to the system? There are three reasons. The first is there simply aren't enough children to go around in this part of Hatfield. In terms of the number of places available for children to go to school, there is a growing issue in terms of surplus places and it's a responsibility of any local authority to make sure that it makes available the right number of places in schools in the right part of the areas. So, it's a case of getting the right number of places in schools and also where the children don't have to travel excessive distances. So, the first thing, really, is to address the balance of surplus places. One of the main reasons for doing that, we know from experience across the county and elsewhere in the country that if you're a school which is working in an environment where numbers are reducing and you've got less and less children coming onto your roll in the future, that has the potential of having an impact on standards. What it does, if you like, is it's got the potential of distracting schools away from the business of teaching and learning towards survival and making ends meet. So, what we want to do is make sure that all of our schools are focussing on teaching and learning, not staying alive, if you like, by getting enough children through the door. The third reason – and I know it's unpopular and I know it's difficult but it's true nevertheless – there are financial issues here. The way schools are funded, their revenue budgets to pay their bills and their staff, is largely – not entirely but almost entirely – based on the number of children that come through the door on their roll. When the children arrive, they're on what's called the age-weighted pupil formula. So, each child brings money to the school and a problem is as the number of children start to decline and therefore the budget starts to fall, some of the fixed costs remain the same. You end up having to pay teachers to work in smaller classrooms. A big advantage is smaller classes but, again, it's not generating enough to pay your budgets and if you're not careful, what happens is you start to squeeze the money you can spend in a classroom on teaching the children and, again, if you're not careful, resources will dry up.

Up until recently we've had an additional grant called the Transitional Support Grant, so where that was a problem, we could put that money into schools. That grant doesn't exist anymore. We don't have access to that budget. So, those are the three reasons, first of all to get the surplus places out of the system, partly because of a standards issue and partly because of the finances of running schools.

The other point to get on the table is, particular to Hatfield, that the residential shape of Hatfield is changing. As you'll know, there are large new housing developments west of the A1(M) which will bring with them a number of children and that's why we're looking to relocated Howe Dell the other side of the A1 and also expanding the places in that school once it's been relocated because of the extra houses and residential area west of the A1(M). So, if you like, the residential shape is changing. This is also important. There is a surplus across the town as a whole. If you take Hatfield as a whole, there's a surplus of 22% of places and that's a problem because that will start to bring into effect the difficulties I've just mentioned. The basic going rate in terms of surplus places is between 5% and 10%. The idea of having some surplus capacity within a town or an area means that, first of all, if there's a slight increase that there is the capacity for children coming into a town and also, if you don't leave any capacity at all, it restricts too much parental choice. So, between 5% and 10% is the number we're working on. At the moment we're running at 22%. The problem is that surplus isn't evenly spread across the town. Places are filling up quite easily and quite well north of the town. So, in the centre and the south, that's where the surplus places are. Now, for De Havilland – and, again, people have disagreed with this – we've taken a policy decision not to include De Havilland in this for two reasons. Firstly, if you look at the map, where De Havilland sits, right down in the south of [unclear], we do need a school in that area otherwise children will have to travel excessive distances. Also, De Havilland was only created two years ago and therefore we think that that school needs to have time. There's a significant issue there about the position of that school south in the area. If you look at a map, we do need a school in that position.

Just to reinforce that on this slide. So, as you hear today, the overall surplus in this bit of Hatfield is 44%. That's far, far too high and we had to do something about that. Now, although we're here to listen and we will change and move things and listen carefully, there are some givens here. What we won't be doing is going back to our political masters, if you like, our elected members, to say, it's okay, that part of Hatfield where 44% of places are surplus of requirements. That's not something we'll be saying. Status quo is not something that as officers we will be recommending to the elected members. And so we do need to address the issue, not ignore it.

Just to let you know where we are in the process, this is the process so far. The review actually started back in March with what we call stakeholder discussions. So, before we had any options for discussion like tonight, what we did first of all is discuss the issue of surplus places, where they are. We shared all the data of all the schools in terms of SAT results, budgets, the number of children on roll and which schools had what parental preferences during admission. So, we shared all the information we had which were relevant to the review to all the stakeholders, to all the schools and talk, if the school wanted us to, individually with their developing bodies. And with that discussion comes a long list of options. So, officers will say, okay, after these discussions we're suggesting these are possible solutions and stakeholders will not always but in most of these also suggest possible options. We'll have a long list of options and because we're only having discussions, we're not consulting on anything, we're not making any firm suggestions,

we're simply discussing the issue, our view at that point, anything can be suggested. We'll look at any possibility in terms of the solution. What we then do is apply four tests, four key tests, to each of those options and decide which ones will bring forth a perfect consultation. I'll come to those tests in a moment. And so what we then do is make the decision over which of the long list of options we're going to consult upon because we want to make sure we only consult upon options which deliver on four key areas and here they are.

The first is going back, if you like, right to the beginning of this talk in terms of the purpose of the review and that is whichever pattern we leave behind, it must be an option which reduces the surplus places by the required amount but also leave those places, where possible, where the children live to reduce the idea of children having to move. The second test is all to do with standards. Will this leave behind a pattern of schools which are not vulnerable, which allow schools to get on and plan for the serious business of teaching and learning the curriculum and also do these proposals allow schools that we leave behind, if you like, in Hatfield with a capacity to deliver extended services to the community? You're probably aware between now and 2010 we want all our schools to be providing not just teaching and learning for the children but services to the community, things like childcare from 8:00 until 6:00, adult learning classes, support the parent, a whole range of things, and when the pattern is left behind in Hatfield, we want to make sure the capacities can do that.

The first test is can we, frankly, afford it. We've left public meetings like this with a range of proposals which, although we think will be good, we simply can't afford. So, although we'll be investing a lot of money in this process, we need to make sure that we can afford to invest the kind of sums we're talking about. And also which site is the best. The environmental impact is also a key issue for us. The last test is about disruption to the children. We know one of the outcomes of any review of this kind is it is disruptive for children and that's unfortunate and it's regrettable but what we want to do is have an option which might take that into account and reduce that disruption to the minimum possible. Now, there's a balance sometimes between these. Some of the options that we come up with meet these tests better than others. So, it's a balancing act between them. But those are the four tests.

I'll just say one other thing. As you're probably aware, there's a number of reviews going on at the moment and what we tend to find is sometimes, during a consultation phase like this, even at this stage alternative solutions come out of the process. If that's the case, that's fine, we'll put up any proposals which come forward but, again, they'll be tested, if you like, against those four criteria.

So, what are the proposals then? Well, first of all in the west, that's the other side of the A1(M), what we're saying, well, in addition to moving Howe Dell across to the other side of the A1(M) that will also expand into two forms of entry, taking into account the housing development that side of that bit of motorway. And when it's established a 60-place nursery as part of what will be a children's centre, again serving that community the other side of the A1. The bit you probably want to dwell on tonight, but we'll see, is this and it's very important that we make absolutely clear what we're talking about here. The first option is our third option as officers. With all these reviews, if we have a third option, it's very important we say so, again to be transparent in that process rather than, if you like, hiding that away and having a hidden agenda. The third option is that we carry out an amalgamation between Stream Woods and New Briars to create what would be a brand

new school on this site, a brand new one form of entry school on this site and the reason we want that as our third option is because what that allows you to do is bring the best of the two good schools together into a new school and open a brand new school. I want to make it clear that the word amalgamate... Because there's been some confusion about this in a number of reviews, not so far in this review. The word amalgamate doesn't have a technical, legal basis. What it actually means in reality is, the bare facts of it is, the two schools would close and a brand new school would open. So, that's what we're talking about here. It's not a nice, simple process. I'm trying to be as honest as I can be.

An amalgamation means two schools close and a brand new school is opened by bringing together the two best bits of the schools into a new school. There's a process that can do that. The second option then is to close New Briars and simply reduce this school down to a one form of entry. That would also be four tests and then option three is the reverse of that and that would be close this school and relocate New Briars on this site.

So, whichever way you look at it, the options that we're putting forward here all lead to a one form of entry primary school on this site, either a brand new school or the current school reduced to one form of entry or New Briars moved across to here. The impact of that, what will happen to the children? Well, the first issue, there aren't any transitional arrangements involved because that school would naturally grow as children took up places in that development. Irrespective of which of the options went through, if one of those options went through what would happen is whichever school or schools close, they would so at the end of this current academic year. All of the children affected then would be offered a place in a new school, should they want to take them up. And then, from 2008, not 2007, the new form of entry would be 30. So, there would be a school which will only be one form of entry in the long run but start off quite larger than that and gradually reduce from 2008 as those new forms of entry work their way through. If – and it is a big, I understand that – all or nearly all of the children and parents who come to the two schools opted to go to the new school, then for a few years, as they work their way through, we would need some temporary accommodation but we do think it's important, even though it adds to the cost and some of the disruption on site, if children want to keep friendship groups together and hold them into a single school, then we think we can do that with slightly extended financial implications. You'll see what I mean here because in 2008 these numbers will be 30, 30, 30 going their way through. So, the new school will be quite large to start with and then gradually reduce down to one form of entry, starting from 2008. So, it will be a school which was evolved in that way.

Just to finish up then, what happens next? These public meetings will come to an end in the first part of November but the process itself will carry on for another month and that's important because once the public meetings are finished, very often pressure groups emerge or governing bodies come forward with different ideas and it's very important that we have at least a month between the end of these meetings and the end of the consultation period so we've got time to take in those additional points of view. But it has to finish on December 4th because we have to produce an education panel for January 23rd. We have the Christmas break in the middle and we want to make sure that members have that report in good time to read it and take it on board before the meeting in January. What that report will do is set out for members the process so far, why we are doing the review, what are the options and, most importantly, it will summarise the feedback from evenings like this but also all the letters and e-mails and an analysis of the forms that you got at the end of the consultation document. That will all be put over for members. This is a key meeting, the education panel. It's where most of the political debate takes place and what we'll do

is make sure that, if there are particular views that a particular school want to make sure are put across at that meeting, the chairman's discretion will allow a spokesperson from each of the schools to come forward and address the panel if they want and/or if you want to, you can submit a written response which we will make sure elected members get at the same time as our report. So, if this school, for example, Stream Woods feels that it wants to put in a formal submission and respond to the process, then what we'll make sure is, if we've got that in good time, that elected members have that at the same time they have the report and, as I say, we will make time available at the panel – it'll be brief but nevertheless time – to put things forward. It would be very useful to know if you're going to do that because we can make sure we have a venue big enough. If it's going to overflow, we'll have audio arrangements so that people can hear what's going on and it's also important so that people can have a place at the table but nearer the time we'll get in touch with schools to talk that through. What then happens, the Cabinet will meet on February 5th and that will take on board the recommendation which emerges from this debate and it's really a half-day discussion about Hatfield. So, although there'll be a half-day discussion there, it'll be a much, much briefer discussion, the Cabinet, because the political debate will take place in that setting. But, again, if you want to come along to a Cabinet... A Cabinet met today to consider the outcomes of two reviews, one in Hoddeston and one in Potters Bar area this afternoon, and members of the public came along to that. If you want to do that, then you can and, again, we'll give you the information for that. What then happens is that we have statutory notices which are published for six weeks and, as things stand then, if we have a formal objection to these proposals, the School Organisation Committee will meet on March 29th and that's an additional committee which is independent that will have a look at the process and consider any formal objections.

Now, for those people tracking the Education and Inspections Bill through Parliament – perhaps you're not but one or two might be – you'll notice that the proposals are at the moment, if the Bill gets enacted, as we think it will, at the end of November, the School Organisation Committee will be deleted, it won't exist, but there will be a time delay before that's enacted. So, for the purposes of this review, we'll work on the assumption that the School Organisation Committee will meet on March 29th. If, as we suspect, the Bill enacts and the removal of this, that won't be until the following academic year. So, that's the process.

I know your immediate reaction is that's not the case but I can tell you we haven't made our minds up yet, we haven't taken decisions. This is a general consultation and we do want to hear your views. That's why on so many of these evenings we try to get enough people in as possible but the consultation must finish on December 4th. So, if there's any further input you'd like to make after the public consultation meetings are finished, we do need that bit by December 4th, please. The document you have available to you, the consultation document, it sets out lots of different ways to communicate with us. At that point I'll stop. Thanks for waiting so patiently and we'll take on questions and comments.

J Thank you, Justin. Just before we move to the open part of the meeting, I forgot to ask you to put your mobile phones off, please. I know you'll all be wanting to say things, there are a lot of people here, but in order to record it, I need to ask you to use the microphone. Can I also say that in order for us to have as many people put their views as possible, I would ask you not to hold the microphone. Each one of you probably has a million questions to ask but can you just restrain yourself as much as possible and pass it on when you've asked a question? There are lots of people here, I believe, who are

speaking on behalf of others. So, if there are speakers here, when you actually ask your question, so that I know that you're asking a question for other people, then just say who you are – a parent, governor, teacher – and which school you represent and then we'll know that we're getting a view from other people, not just from that one person. I hope I'm making sense. We're going to close the meeting at a little bit earlier, at about 8:45, so that you can have a chance to talk to the panel individually. They'll be the last people out because they're here for you to talk to this evening. So, without much more ado, let's go for it. So, let's have a question from the floor.

FB My name is Fred Butland. I'm a [unclear] for Stream Woods School and a non-teaching governor. I would like to ask a question on behalf of the governors. What will be the logistics of the transfer of the furniture, books, equipment to Stream Woods site should the preferred option be adopted and when is this likely to take place?

PD It does depend, obviously, on what option but clearly the logistics would happen largely over the summer but, obviously, preparation for the summer will fall in the autumn term. When we do any works we usually have a budget that is set aside for any necessary furniture and equipment. Clearly if two schools come together there's quite a substantial amount of furniture and equipment and both schools. Nevertheless, there may be some key items that'll be acquired for the new school and also, as part of that budget, we'll set aside some money for that and as part of that we have some money for removals so that there would be some money to enable people to move from one site to the other.

MD Mike Deacon, governor at Stream Woods. I have three questions, actually, on behalf of the Stream Woods governors. Justin mentioned that we're talking, in option one, the preferred option, of a brand new school here. We're conscious of the various legal obligations when opening a new school, things to do with disability access, allocated budget and so on. Our question is when and how does county propose to do all the necessary building work in line with meeting those obligations and doing it in a way which will minimise disruption caused to the children in this school?

PD As you say, it does depend on which option but either way we have to ensure that there's adequate accommodation for the number of pupils that will be on this site as from September. We've obviously done some feasibility work already and we're reasonably confident about the amount of accommodation that there is available on this site. What might be needed is every child currently [unclear]. Obviously we'll carry on looking at those issues and once Cabinet has taken a decision, what we'll do is we'll set up a temporary governing body if we're talking about an amalgamation because, as you say, that will be the establishment of a brand new school. If either of the other options are the options that are proposed, then clearly there will be a governing body in existence. What we will do then is work with that temporary governing body and the management of the school to identify and confirm the accommodation requirements. We have a view about what will be required but obviously that governing body and management may have a different view. What we're planning to do is to make sure by September that all the essential work to accommodate all the children is done and that will mean, for example, bringing back classrooms which are currently not used as classrooms but are classroom sites and spaces; providing any temporary accommodation, if need be; dealing with any parking issues as, as we know, there'll be more members of staff on the site and also making sure that there are adequate facilities for staff and whether there are any ITT infrastructure issues that need to be done. So, as I say, that we're currently negotiating in the school term. So, we intend to do that work largely at the end of the summer holiday.

There may be parts of that work that can actually be done during the summer term ready for the autumn. Anything else on top of that we can plan with the governing body, with the school's management to make sure that it is done, as we did with all building work at any school, to minimise the disruption to the children.

JD Thank you. Can I just add to that just two points, really? Firstly, speed is of the essence. We have a balance here because what we don't want to do is pre-empt a decision but at the same time we don't want to wait on the decisions taken before we do any planning. It's a difficult balance to make, so what we want to do is make decisions which can't be undone or which we can pre-empt, if you like, those long-term issues. Two things to say, one, we will move as quickly as we possibly can to get the governing body in place if it's an amalgamation because that's very important to get all the issues resolved, including the HR issues which are really crucial. The second thing is we do use specialist contractors for the human resources, personnel issues for the staff. These specialist contractors are used to working in schools. So, they know that if there's anything intrusive or noisy that can't be done during the day when the kids are here, they know they have to work around that. So, there are specialist contractors that work to that. But it's a fairly tight deadline, so what we do need to do is get some decision-making, so we're not leaving it to the last minute.

MD Thanks. I'm encouraged to hear that because there have been other transitional arrangements where there does seem to be a high level of disruption and it's good to hear your awareness of those issues now and some commitment to package the most disruptive work away from the children.

JD I think it's important that we don't see ourselves and only ourselves. We will minimise that disruption. Nevertheless, it is disruptive and what we'll do is keep the disruption down to an absolute minimum. Sometimes, I think, we overestimate the impact on children. Children are much more resilient than adults, actually, but nevertheless there will be some disruption, there always is, but what we'll do is work very hard with the governing body to keep it to an absolute minimum.

MD Thanks. If I could just follow on with another question about the traffic arrangements, I was encouraged to hear Pauline say that you've done some planning on this. We as a governing body couldn't really come up with any idea as to how we would sort out the situation which at the moment we consider dangerous with the numbers of people trying to drop children by car. How have you managed to address the situation locally with potentially twice as many children coming to this school?

PD As we've said at other meetings, obviously we have done some feasibility work and we have consulted traffic engineers but we have listened to what parents have said at other public meetings about their concern at the current level of traffic and congestion. As you know, this school is a school for [unclear] children and our traffic engineers will say, of course, the whole system was designed for that size of school but we're hearing from you as parents that you are concerned about the traffic congestion and we promised at the New Briars meeting that we would ask the traffic engineers to have another look at that. They've been asked to look at it, they're working on it at the moment, but what we are aware of is that there is move, for example, to get staff onto site and then are some ideas around how we can do that. There are also issues about how we can most effectively use the carpark in the new ground to increase its efficiency and perhaps potentially to create safe access from the carpark onto the site without children having to go into the road. But

that's what we're expecting to come through based on the views that have been expressed while we've been having these meetings.

MD My other question is on a different area but it also relates to the county's preferred option one. It's a question about that. In our view both the Stream Woods and New Briars schools have superb management teams and staff. We're interested in what type of consultations would take place in order to ensure the integration of the staff at both schools in any possible amalgamation, please.

JD This is a difficult one but very, very important. The bottom line on this, one of the reasons we would go for an amalgamation as our preferred option is it puts all the staff on equal footing. We have a good track record on this. In other amalgamations, similar to what we're proposing, all the staff, that's teaching and non-teaching staff, who we've wanted to carry forward into directions, we've managed to secure a post for them and sometimes staff said, well, it's actually time to move on and we made sure we secured posts for them in Hertfordshire, if they want to. So, technically so far we've got a 100% record in all the amalgamations we've done over a number of years. All the staff who wanted to remain have held their posts. Technically we can't guarantee that because technically those appointments will be made by the governing body itself but, if you think about it, the governing body will be made up of two governing bodies which are currently in place and our advice to those governing bodies is to recruit the new team from the existing teams especially given we're aware of the fact there's some really good practice in both schools. So, all I can say is so far we've got a 100% track record of doing that but in a sense we do that in partnership with the governing body in that process and what we do as part of the team we will put together, we will put a transitional planning team together to take care of these issues and one of the people on that team will be from human resources and what we will do is prioritise this work so that the staff as a whole of the two schools, as well as any individual member of staff, teaching or non-teaching, if they wanted to, they'd have support from our HR officers. So, that's difficult but we have a good track record in that.

Where it's different is for the headteacher and deputy headteachers because there national arrangements apply and when we bring two schools together into a new school like this under an amalgamation, if we end up with one head who's interested and one deputy head who's interested, then the governing body can go through an HR process just with those people before going out to national adverts. If you have a competitive situation, i.e. more headteachers and deputy headteachers in substantive posts that would like to join the new school, then the legal requirement will be to go to national advert. So, it's very important that we handle this properly but, again, I can only say our track record of this is very good. Where heads and deputies wanted to continue working either in the new school or in the county, then we do that. To be brutally frank with you, we're not overrun with headteachers and deputy headteachers. We do have a shortage in the authority and that's a shortage which, in about three years time, is going to become very difficult because in three years time a large number of headteachers will reach retirement ages and that's going to prove difficult for us. So, we're very keen to hang onto heads and deputies that we've got in the system but there are national arrangements for headteachers and deputy headteachers which make it more difficult than the teaching staff. And, again, that will be done through the governing body.

LD Thank you very much. Lynn Davelin, chair of governors, Stream Woods School. It's actually in connection a little bit with what you've just said, Mr. Donovan. Your

experience of the effects of these reviews in other parts of Hertfordshire, does county intend doing anything between now and final decision by the School Organisation Committee to assist with the uncertainty that the staff [unclear] and, most important of all, to ensure their retention in such difficult times?

JD As I said before, there's a balance to be struck here. We certainly wouldn't wait until a decision from SOC. There are lots of things we can do between having the decision and School Organisation Committee because any decisions we make would have to be pending, if possible. So, for example, the interim governing body immediately after Cabinet and that governing body can go ahead and make appointments but it will be appointments pending the School Organisation Committee meeting. So, you can appoint, for example, a headteacher on the assumption that the SOC agreed with the proposals. If we wait until March, then we're in great difficulty. So, it's a given to do that but what we would have is make those appointments pending the School Organisation Committee meeting. Basically what we'd do is push the barriers so that we can go as far as we possibly can without tripping over important statutory requirements.

One of the reasons why the School Organisation Committee is going to be taken out by the Education and Specialists Act is because people will realise that it actually makes it quite difficult to make firm decisions and in reality nationally the SOC very rarely overturns previous appointments. But we'll work on the assumption that the School Organisation Committee won't meet in March.

LD Yes, but we're talking about the end of March. I'm asking whether there's going to be anything that you'll do between now and then.

JD Yes. Before March we'll have appointed a governing body which can go ahead and appoint the head and deputy head but we've got to make that appointment pending that decision.

LD Yes. Well, you personally, as officers of the county, are not going to do anything.

JD What we will do is as soon as the Cabinet decision's taken, the planning team from the county will start. So, we'll have people meeting from our human resources, planning and building, that governing body, all that will start to happen as soon as the Cabinet has met. We won't wait for the SOC to do that. What I'm saying, though, is there'll be some decisions which we'll love to make but can't until March.

LD I understand. Thank you.

MR Marjorie Rage, parent at Stream Woods. The governing body, who will decide who they will be and who will appoint them?

PD If we go for an amalgamation, and that's if because, as Justin said, there are no decisions made, there are rules about the size of governing bodies, the sizes of schools and the type of people that can be on it but it will usually be a process which somebody from our governance section would facilitate to start with and they'd advise just what that process would be, the numbers of people required. As Justin has already said, the people on the governing body, or the new temporary governing body, are fully expected to be people already on the existing governing bodies so that they have the knowledge and experience of both schools to bring to the new one. They will then facilitate the setting up of the

temporary governing body and that temporary governing body will then recruit the other governors which it will need and then, once the decision is taken by the School Organisation Committee, that temporary governing body can become the permanent governing body. So, there are rules and regulations laid down about the size and composition but somebody from our governance unit will take the lead on moving the schools through that process.

JB Judy Brentworth, parent at Stream Woods. You say you don't want to touch the De Havilland School but if you reduce the intake to 30 here, you would not need to shut any of the schools in this part of town with parental choice.

[applause]

PD I understand what you're saying and clearly that has some resonance to people in this room. Clearly the county council took a decision several years ago now to amalgamate [unclear] De Havilland and to two forms on entry and we say to everybody that if we starting from scratch, ideally we'd want schools to be two forms of entry and the reason, as Justin has said earlier on, is that where we have one form entry schools, especially in towns where there is choice, if the numbers fall or if there are too many spare places and parents all choose to go to one school or two schools rather than three, it means that one or two schools begin to struggle in terms of making ends meet and covering the ground that they need to and therefore not providing potentially the quality of education that we would all want for the children. So, what we're saying is that where possible we're trying to create a two form entry school but clearly we don't start with a clean sheet of paper every time. Now, yes, we could reduce De Havilland to one form of entry but we're not going to do that. Our county council has already asked us not to revisit that. It's a two form entry school and it will remain as such. If we had three one form entry schools, we might still have the same problem that we've had before. Even if we kept two one form entry schools, as somebody else has suggested on another occasion, if the numbers aren't met at best both schools will only be half full and at worst one will be full and one will be empty and we don't believe that that's the right solution.

LS My name is Lynn Sparks. I'm a parent at Stream Woods. I just want to know [unclear] and what happens then.

PD My understanding was that the commitment was that [unclear] would move back to its substantive site once the extension works were undertaken and that still stands as we speak.

[general laughter]

PD Well, if, as a result of this consultation, none of the proposals up here are accepted, as Justin as said, and we can only reiterate, no decisions have been taken but if any of these proposals go through, we've made it quite clear that we believe that this is the site that a school should be based on.

LS [inaudible]

JD I was at the parents' evening when we talked about the [unclear]. What we said there, and continue to say, is that we would separate the issues out.

LS [inaudible]

JD Because we were accused of moving the school off that site in order to close it and basically what we were saying is that we would move the school as a temporary measure to that site whilst we looked at [unclear] and got that resolved. But that would not necessarily then make an impact on the review. So, what we've been doing in this review is treating the review as if New Briars was back on its original site. But then, if you look at the two sites, if you're going to leave a one form entry school behind, if the [unclear] never takes place, [unclear], but if the school had moved, then these proposals would still be as they are because of the difference on the two sites and if you look at the sites in terms of which site would be better to develop, this would remain to be that site. So, what we've done is carry out the review in a sense as if New Briars hasn't moved because it's important to keep the two issues separate. The other point about making our minds up, if you want to influence the process at the risk of sounding a bit defensive, that's not a good strategy to assume. If you assume we've already made our minds up, what you might not do is [unclear] what we're doing. I can only tell you this afternoon that the proposals that went through to Cabinet on the Hoddesdon and Worthing review were substantially different to the proposals we will have in a meeting like this because when we were consulting like this in Hoddesdon and talking about closing West York [?], which we're now not doing...

LS [inaudible]

JD What I'm saying as an example is that we have a history of listening to these consultation events. Now, it might not be the case that we agree with what's moving forward and we might not change our minds when we go up to make the decision. All I'm saying to you is that there is a track record here of us listening at consultations like this and changing what we do, not every time because at the same time, if you talk about Potters Bar, they'll [unclear]. What I'm saying is if you assume we've made our mind up, that's not [unclear]. [unclear], if you like, on going forward is apart from the fact that we have changed our minds on a number of these things through consultation, we would not, frankly, have so many of these evenings if we'd already made our mind up. We could just have the one night and move on. It's very important to get as much detail as we can. The other point is [unclear]. So, I know it's [unclear] to say we've already made our mind up. We haven't and that's the case.

?FS I'm a parent of children at this school, I'm a teacher at New Briars, I've worked at [unclear] and then at De Havilland.

[applause]

?FS My question, really, is I wondered if you had any more information, if the merger was to happen and this was to become a new school, what level of refurbishment you are thinking about. Obviously I'm aware of what happened down the road and also impressed with the refurbishment down the road and I would just like to think that the children that will be on this site would get the same expert standard of building in which they can carry on with their learning.

PD As I said earlier on, we will concentrate on the essential work to start with. There will be other things that either the governing body or management or we would want to achieve for this site and that will be a process that we'd work through with them. We don't have millions to spend on sites but, nevertheless, we've got a good substantial school

here. There are clearly issues that [unclear]. So, we'll bring as much of that into play as we can but the essential work [unclear] to make sure that the accommodation is available from September [unclear].

JD Just two points on that. I'm glad you made that point. I agree with it. It's a great site. What's helpful is that the building at De Havilland is not that similar to lots of buildings in Hertfordshire. [unclear]. So, we've learnt a lot from De Havilland. The other point to make is that what that school looks like now is different to what officers had in mind because what we did is we went back to [unclear] from chair of governance and that planning group involved the headteacher and the governors and we made some significant changes to the site based on the teaching and learning curriculum. It needs to be said on record here that we don't have a blank cheque. We will have a budget to work within but we will make sure the site is a good site and suitable for the children.

J [inaudible]

?FS [inaudible] from the specialist advisory service and I'm here representing people from the community [unclear] and I want to know if you've given any consideration to what's going to happen to all the specialist groups, the reason being [unclear] and everybody had to find their accommodation. [unclear] and we're all specialist people and very much part of your community and what we want to know is are you going to tell us that whatever happens, you are going to include us in the facility [unclear]?

[applause]

PD Absolutely right. Justin went through the four tests earlier on. It's about the school's ability to be expending further energy on the specialist services [unclear]. The headteacher has made that perfectly well known to us when we've visited the school in the past. We've had in our plans no plans to alter the current arrangement, no plans from our point of view as to change the arrangements, the accommodation, that those groups currently have. Maybe we would need to share that with the [unclear] governing body but the reason you're not hearing about it is that we certainly [unclear].

CN Claire Naturevera from Stream Woods. It sounds like the building that is vital at the moment, from what is said around, is building that is needed from September. So, that is why there seems to be a rush. Could we not wait and hold on and see how the change from Howe Dell goes as we'll have more children coming to both of the schools who won't maybe travel over to new Howe Dell School? Would that not be a...?

[applause]

JD Just to reassure you, in terms of the potential use of the New Briars site, as Pauline says, until this has gone through the process, until it's gone to Cabinet, that New Briars site needs to be available for New Briars School because members could say we don't agree with any of these options, we want you to think them through again. So, that will be the case; we're not going to rush this through in order to suddenly make the New Briars site available. What would happen to any site that eventually becomes available or, if you like, not needed for a school, we will have asked other council services, do you require a building of this kind of size and nature in this part of the county and that's the first thing we'd do. It might well be that somebody else from the county council says, well, yes, actually for XYZ and have a look at the building and go through a process. If that doesn't

happen and the site becomes available for disposal, typically what happens – and we're not getting into this same money argument – is county council ends up spending more money on the buildings and the schools which are left behind at the end of the review and any money that they make from the capital sales of any sites which become available. Every time there's a review there are all kinds of rumours about the use to which buildings might or might not be put, no decision will be made on any site until the review has been properly done.

CN [inaudible]

JD Well, as I said, at the moment it's not one of the options that we're consulting on but [unclear] will work out a proposal which is...

CN Would it not be worth seeing how the transition with Howe Dell and the building goes before you make any other transitional...?

?MS Why is it not an option?

JD Sorry?

?MS Sorry for interrupting. Why is it not an option for the children?

JD We have looked at a number of options and basically we're very confident indeed about the future prediction of the needs in terms of Howe Dell on that site.

J We'll come back to you in a moment. I'll take this gentleman here and then the lady over there and then we'll come back to you. Hold that thought.

JR John Reeds, parent from Stream Woods. The last condition survey which Stream Woods had, it highlighted about three-quarters of a million pounds that was needed to be spent on it in the next six years. How much of that money will come from county now if the proposed option goes through?

PD Thanks for that. You highlight what happens with every school. There is a condition survey on every school and it will identify virtually everything that needs to be done for the next X years and clearly that work has been assessed by a qualified surveyor as to when it needs to happen. Some things may well be taken into account by the work that we plan to do and other things will take its course, as I said, in the normal repairs and maintenance programme and it just depends what it is and how it fits into the overall plan for the school building.

LH Lisa Howick, [unclear] of Stream Woods School. [unclear]. As New Briars will be closed anyway, would it be fairer to give those children the choice of which school they would like to go to rather than forcing them to come to a site which might be a long, long way from their homes?

PD First of all, I think it's quite clear from the options that – forgive me if I get this wrong – as New Briars is going to close anyway, that isn't...

LH [unclear]

PD So, let's be clear about that, everybody. There is an option there for New Briars to continue, there's an option there for New Briars to amalgamate with schools as well but what Justin said earlier I think does help. Whatever option we're talking about, what we're saying is that because we are closing either two schools or one school, we will give a commitment that any child in one or the other school will have a place in whatever school [unclear]. That doesn't mean to say that parents don't have the right to express a preference for another school, should they wish to, and if there's a place available, then that place will be made available to them. So, what we're trying to do is to give some reassurance to parents that if they want friendship groups and all of the things that go along, continuity with the staff... Clearly, while all of those children are working through, one would expect that the majority of staff from both schools will work in the new school, therefore they'll know some of the adults, both teaching and non-teaching staff. If parents want that reassurance for their children, then we will give that commitment [unclear], that they can come across to the site. If a parent makes a decision that this isn't the right situation for them and there is a place where they would like to go to, it is their right, under the law, to move their child.

J Would you like to ask the second question?

LH Yes. As recent figures show, Birchwood School is an underachieving school whereas both New Briars and Stream Woods are not. Why has this school not been taken into account?

[s2]

JD We need to distinguish between two processes here. It's unfair, if you like, to start getting critical of Birchwood [unclear]. So, I'm not going to get into that. What I will say is that the area review here, although it's very important for the schools we leave behind, is there to maintain good standards or raise standards even further. Actually, this is not an intervention for good standards. If we are concerned about the standards of schools, we do have intervention measures and, if necessary, we will close [unclear]. We have done that quite recently in one or two areas of the county. Birchwood is full. It's in an area where it's popular. There aren't a great deal of service places in that area. It seemed to us that if we had to just take out service places, a place to start is where those service places exist. Bearing in mind what I was saying earlier in terms of making sure that as well as leaving the right number of places behind, they're equally spread in the areas they are needed and, actually, we would close those [unclear]. But I think it's very important to say that we're not proposing the amalgamation of these schools on standards grounds. That's not the case. We've got two schools here which in a sense you can argue that they're very good schools and both parents... I understand the New Briars [unclear] was quite difficult because people were very supportive of their school and the parents here will be supportive as well. So, we're not, yes, these schools should be brought together to do something about the standards. In fact, more importantly than that, what we've got to be very careful of is that by merging the two schools or amalgamating the two schools we've got to make sure that we somehow the good practice in both and bring them together [unclear].

LH [inaudible]

J Okay, and then we'll move to the gentleman who's been very patient there.

LH Earlier on you were talking about bedding-in period. How long would you assume is the bedding-in period?

JD Of a new school?

LH Of a new school.

JD It's difficult to say. If you go to De Havilland, for example, what we found was that the standards moved very quickly and very soon but it's taken the first year, really, to get the school to feel like a new school [unclear] and I think it takes 18 months to two years before the school really settles down and forgets, if you like, the history of the separate schools. But that's not to say that those two years are difficult or disruptive to the children. What we do with all these reviews, if possible, is to track the individual achievement of children so that we're able to say that, for example, the children that currently attend year 4 in these schools, if this review hadn't taken place, they would likely have gone on to achieve F, X, Y or Z and then we'll track those children through the new school and see how they actually fared and whether or not the review had [unclear] and what we're finding is that actually we've certainly managed to hang on to standards and usually boost them. What we're also learning is there are some individual children who, if we're not careful, will find the disruption quite difficult. They're either children with special needs, very specific learning requirements, that have been dealt with by [unclear] relationships between children and staff and handle that very, very carefully, or sometimes we find children who actually don't have any problem, are actually very quiet settling into the background and if we're not careful we can lose track of them. Some of those individual children we need to spend a bit more time on. So, as part of the planning group, what we'll do is we ask the teachers, are there some children in your class who you might think will be particularly impacted upon and then we'll work out strategies for individual children. So, our overall learning experience is actually children tend to fly through these situations, [unclear], but there are some individual children who we need to be very, very careful with to make sure it's a positive experience for them and, if necessary, we have to build in some additional resources during that transitional period.

SA Stephen Altheim, parent and [unclear]. In a real situation, my son is in year two at the moment, could you clarify what size his class would be with the changes? Would he go into a class of 40 or would he remain in [unclear]?

JD None of the classes would be the size of 40. What we do is always plan that the class size would be 30 and some classes would be slightly smaller than that. Having said that, some schools may take a range of different decisions at different times during the week, that sometimes they'll have classes which are slightly larger than that for certain activities and they've got another class with much smaller numbers. So, in terms of classes and classroom teachers, we're seeing 30 as a maximum.

SA [unclear] and there are more than 30 in that peer group, what will happen to those that are over 30?

PD The management of the school will take decisions about how [unclear] those classes will be managed but, for example, if I look at year two, at the moment this school has got 46 children, clearly more than 30. It will be for the management of the school to decide how they want to distribute those children. [unclear]. So, they will take a decision

whether that's two classes or how they're going to manage the numbers throughout the school. We tend not to interfere in that because [unclear] expertise that counts in these matters and they also know the children and the way in which those groupings will be better organised.

SA [unclear]

PD Generally schools don't have classes over 30. [unclear] give them some additional resources in the first two, two and a half years, to help ease them over the transition and that should allow them to organise their classes in a perfectly reasonable and satisfactory way.

?FS [unclear] and on the education panel. The concern I have with these proposals is the numbers. You're only going to briefly put up the numbers that would be in the new school [unclear]. In fact, there are a lot of children between these two schools [unclear]. Now, the following year you'll only take 30 children [unclear] reception and what worries me is where the rest are going to go because at the moment it's clear [unclear]. So, where are those children going to go? They'll obviously have to go to De Havilland. If Birchwood is full, Howe Dell by that time will have moved over the motorway, so therefore they're going to have to go to De Havilland. Well, I don't know, I would think that it's at least a mile from here to De Havilland site. So, I feel that we're going to have a lot of children that have to trail across Hatfield. I just really worry about that. And then we've got the question of [unclear] but some of the Howe Dell children may not, in fact, move with Howe Dell [unclear] to go to school. So, therefore they'll come here and they'll be able to be [unclear]. So, I think this to be a worry and I would be much happier with a proposal that left you with the three schools because then we'd have the schools where the parents are. I just don't think that's [unclear].

[applause]

JD Just two points and then I'll pass to Pauline for some of the detail. Firstly, I think it's important where the children live. It's quite interesting, if you look at the maps of all the various schools, where the children currently live and travel. Actually, a lot of children who currently go to New Briars or Stream Woods live much closer to De Havilland.

[overtalking]

JD I understand the point about parental choice and I'm very happy to go on record as saying that when you reduce the number of schools in an area and when you take out certain spaces, you do reduce parental choice. That is absolutely the case. There are advantages for having schools which aren't full and one of them is if you've got schools which aren't full, parents have greater choice. That's absolutely the case. But the downside of that, where schools are finding it increasingly difficult to balance their books, can't spend money in the classrooms on the children on learning and in the end there's a balance to be struck. So, what I'm saying is if you look where the children live, because the point was made about the distance to travel, actually that's not the case. The other point about leaving the three schools behind, we would be very concerned indeed and we know from experience elsewhere in the county of the impact. So, we're very concerned that if we leave schools behind in an area where we know the rolls are falling, where we know there aren't enough children around and where we know the schools won't be filled, that what you'll end up with is either two or three schools half full and struggling to get

through or you'll end up with two full schools and one empty school which then will by default close because it can't afford to run and it doesn't seem that's a very sensible way of planning provision. So, what we're saying here is that this will leave us with the right number of places in a spread across the town but it is certainly true that we would certainly be reducing parental choice. [unclear], whichever of the options go through. Do you want to add anything to that, Pauline?

PD Yes. Just to pick up on Justin's point, yes, the children who attend [unclear] come from all over this area and so in terms of distance, I think that those issues will be covered. But just let's have a look at the numbers. There are 81 spare places between the three schools and we're proposing to take out 55. That still leaves you with a form of entry to spare between three schools. Now, clearly somebody's going to say, yes, but you move to Howe Dell and therefore there'll be [unclear] that go to Howe Dell at the moment. In the future people who live in this area will want to go to a school in this area. Yes, that may be the case but, as I said, there'll be nearly a form of entry spare and Howe Dell currently is a one form entry school. Their children travel from all over the town and currently from the other side of the A1(M). So, not all of the children attending Howe Dell currently in every group [unclear] will actually live in this area and therefore may still wish to have a place in [unclear]. Well, the balancing side of that as well is some of those children coming through in future years may well have very strong sibling connections to Howe Dell School and they still choose for their younger children to go to Howe Dell and our experience is that that will happen for some years in the future. Another balancing factor is that there are people currently living in the other area who come over to this side of the town because they have no choice at the moment who may in future choose to go to Howe Dell because it's actually quite near to them. So, we've taken account of all of those things. We believe that there's enough space [unclear]. People have said to us in the past, but what if things change, what if more families move into the area, what if there's a sudden influx of people? What we say then is that because we are proposing this site rather than the New Briars site, this building is already big enough to take in 55 children that it could take in any time now and therefore we will cover immediate expansion potential, should we find that to be the case, but we're not [unclear].

?FS [unclear]. Just a first question, you said at one point that [unclear] was an option, so obviously, if we're going to have another option, we have to look at another option. Would it be possible to make all three schools into one form entries – De Havilland, Stream Woods and New Briars? I take the point that you said about De Havilland being a two form entry school but it is only a two form entry school in name. According to your figures here, in year one next year it looks as if there's only 27 children at De Havilland School and therefore... I don't know what the predictions would be for the reception class at De Havilland School. That's one of my questions. What predictions would you have for Stream Woods, De Havilland and New Briars if all three schools stayed the same? Have you done any costing on, if you have the three schools, the difference in what it would cost you to do all the transitional arrangements, all the plans you'd have to have to refurbish this school whereas New Briars have already got a very decent site? Have you done any costs as to the difference in cost for staying as three schools or to amalgamate two schools on this site?

J There were several points there.

JD Yes. I'll pick up on some of them and then perhaps Pauline will pick up on what I've left out. First of all, the status quo. What I'm saying as an officer is that we wouldn't

recommend to elected members that we stay [unclear]. It might well be that members say, actually, we disagree, you ought to stay exactly as you are. So, I'm not suggesting that that is impossible, what I'm saying is we don't think it's right for us to say to elected members it's okay to have 44% surplus places in a relatively small area because that [unclear]. As I say, that's not [unclear], it's our very strong advice to members. The second point, on the three forms of entry, as I say, we'd be very reluctant to leave behind three forms of entry primary schools. We know there aren't enough places necessarily to fill them and the roll falling because what will happen is if those surplus places were spread evenly amongst the three, we'd have three schools that are struggling to spend money on teaching and learning in classrooms or if, which would be more likely the case, the surplus places will be unevenly spread, one of those schools will become vulnerable to closure, if you like, from an unplanned back-door approach and that's something that we really need to avoid because if a school gets into that position, it's very detrimental in terms of teaching and learning. In terms of the cost, it would probably be cheaper. The status quo clearly would be cheaper but we do think it's important if we get this right for the future, the next five to six years, to have to spend something on getting it right, that's what we'll have to do. It certainly would be cheaper to leave things as they are but in a sense, when we come out of consultations like this, we make sure that we can afford all the proposals and we make sure that there is sufficient funding there and therefore cost is important but we're not necessarily looking for the cheapest option.

?FS I'd like to know when the classes are going to be merged between New Briars and Stream Woods. [unclear]. She's been with them for four years and she's entering another class with kids that she hasn't known at all. Are their friendship groups going to be separated or is it going to be like Stream Woods classes and New Briars classes?

JD Well, we'll leave that decision up to the new governing body of the new school but our strong advice on this, because these are operational matters and we try [unclear] to have schools with sensible economies of independence but our advice would be not to separate [unclear]. If you've got a new school, entering a new school, it's very important that the children come together as if they all belong to a brand new school, rather than continue as [unclear].

?FS [unclear]. They know they're not together and they know they're not going to be with their best friends anymore. It's the fact that they've together since nursery, reception and year one and they've moved up and now they're not going to be with their best friend anymore because all of a sudden you've closed the school across the road. I don't see why you can't keep that school over there and then just stop anybody else coming into it and [unclear] because New Briars will stay New Briars and they basically will close because there'll be no more to go in there and [unclear]. In the same way, on Fridays we have assemblies, two form entries aren't going to be able to sit in this hall. So, what personal touch we have, there'll be no more personal touch at all.

JD A couple of things. Firstly, your original point about the children being together. In the proposals we're trying to make it possible for all the children who decide to come to the new school, to do that, so that those peer groups can be kept together.

?FS [inaudible]

JD I just want to finish. Just let me finish the point. That's the first point. The second point is when the children arrive, whichever option is taken, it's very important indeed that

they all feel part of the new school. I have to say that schools elsewhere in the county who have gone through these processes have been really good at this. They don't wait for the first day of the new school for the children to suddenly meet at the gates in their new uniforms or in existing uniforms, depending on which option. What will happen is that the schools will work very hard to integrate the children long before that and so the children will come together for a range of events and share each other's school plays, for example, or might even share a sport. There's a whole range of practical things we can do to make sure that when the children come together on the first day of September it's not for the first time. There's a compromise to be struck here. The children will know their friends will be coming to the new school with them but not necessarily in separate classes. My personal view, and this would be a view for the school to take, it wouldn't be helpful to have Stream Woods children in one class and next door to have New Briars children. I think it's very important that the new school...

?FS I wouldn't mind.

JD Well, I would disagree with you on that point. I think we're not always going to agree on everything. Our experience tells us if you've got a new school, you need to integrate the children as soon as you possibly can.

?FS [inaudible]

JD In terms of the second point, the phrase you've used is let it fizzle out. That's the term I picked up. The point I was making was that's something we certainly would want to avoid. Going back to the point earlier, why not just leave them and, if you like, [unclear]. Well, what we don't want to do is for schools to fizzle out because if you have a school which is fizzling out, it's a very unpleasant place to be because the resources dry up, the staff leave, you can't equip them anymore and children feel more and more left out. It's a terrible experience for children to be in a school which is closing in an unplanned, uncoordinated way. One of the reasons we're putting these proposals forward is to avoid the fizzling out notion.

?FS I'd like to tell you how I feel, really. When you shut New Briars [unclear], we have no option but to move to Hazel Grey [?] because every time you contact the other schools in the area and tell them to close their books. Once again, when these letters are [unclear] you inform these school heads and other nurseries to close their books. I feel this is dictatorship and we have no choice to go with the flow of what you want and it should be parental choice.

JD Again, I fundamentally disagree with what you're saying here. We cannot and would not wish to take away parents' legal rights. We're not closing books on schools.

?FS [unclear]

JD I'm going to finish the point. You might disagree with the point but I'm going to finish it.

?FS Well, don't lie.

JD Well, I'm not going to stand here and be accused of lying.

?FS [unclear]

JD I suggest you listen to the answer first. Basically, whenever any review takes place, any parent has a right to move their children to another school which has a place in that year group. So, if any parent here feels that they want to move their children from one school to another, if a place exists... What we try and do is [unclear] we don't close books in that sense, what we do is just build in a little bit of extra management into the system. What we try and do is make sure that, if parents are moving their children from one school to another because of an area review, we try our best not to remove the right to do that. They have a right to do that. But we do like to build part of a system in that we talk to those parents and explain the process because otherwise, if you're not careful, the [unclear] start working around and instead of having a planned organisation, an orderly organisation, in terms of review, it suddenly starts to get out of sync. But I'm quite happy to place on the record for you to make it perfectly clear, if you have a child that you want to move to a school where there is a place, you simply go through the [unclear] arrangements and then that place will be made available. What we're trying to do is not ask heads, if you like, to start encouraging parents to move their children to other schools. Pauline, do you want to add something to that?

PD Yes. [unclear] there was an agreement that the casual arrangements, what we talk about outside of the annual admission to reception class, county council was asked to manage that system on behalf of the schools [unclear] and that, in effect, is protection to the school because obviously some parents do say, well, I don't want to hang around in this, it all sounds a bit too difficult, I'm going to move my child. Sometimes that's not in the best interests of the child but nevertheless a parent is the best person to know what's best for their child. So, what we did, we took back, in our admissions team, that management of the system. When we came to this review, when we started talking to the headteachers in the town, we came to an agreement with them, did they want that to continue because we agreed to continue that until New Briars [unclear] and therefore we asked the question...

?FS [inaudible]

J Could you hold on, please, so we've got it on record?

?FS Why did notification go out to school heads and managers that when the [unclear] that people fill in their options, it's the informal schools then once again to close the books so we couldn't move our children?

PD The schools were asked to... It wasn't about you couldn't move your children, it was about the fact that instead of the schools managing that casual admissions process themselves...

?FS But if you were at the school they would say we've had to close our books because we're being instructed by you. So, that's dictatorship to us.

PD No. It's a consequence of an agreement with all the headteachers in the town that the county council would manage that process rather than individual schools.

?FS So, what are we going to do when you dictate to us your child has got to go to De Havilland and I don't want my child to go to De Havilland. How are you going to educate them then because I will have a choice.

PD You will have a choice as to whether you want to send your child to any other school that has a place in that year group.

JD I think it's very important that we don't get any mixed messages out here. Basically, what we're saying is the way in which the system is managed is different, that your right to send your children to a school of your choice has not been... In that sense we're not closing books, what we're saying is we're managing the system from the centre but it doesn't take away your right to move children from one school to the other.

JW John Weight, governor at Stream Woods. You say that Stream Woods could absorb the two schools coming together but there still would be temporary accommodation requirements. Would that mean then that our community rooms would be lost because those rooms then will be used for teaching purposes? If so, does that not mean that one of the four tests that you adhere to is not being looked into?

PD The answer to that is, no, that doesn't mean that the community rooms would be closed. If every single child currently in the two schools wanted to come across and depending on the agreement with the governing body and management of the school about how the spaces in the school would be used, we may need an additional classroom and that's why we say we may need some temporary accommodation. That will be, obviously, for a very short period of time because in a year's time there will be more children leaving the school than entering the school and there probably will be a need for one less class, for example, in a year's time. But that's why we say there may be a need for temporary accommodation. But as I said to people in the specialist services before, that would mean that [unclear] we do want to support the school to being able to reach their extended school remit and to encourage a wide range of activities in the school and it will be counterproductive to do [unclear].

JD Just to add to that, I know we're here to talk about Stream Woods tonight but it's worth pointing out that New Briars also has very good activities in terms of extended services to the community. We need to make sure that all that is brought together on the new site.

?FS [unclear]. Can I just say, before I say anything, I don't mean to be disrespectful to the parents of New Briars but for the past couple of weeks they've been in the papers and they've been doing petitions down in the town. We haven't done that, not because we don't want to, we just don't want to worry our children any more than they need to. When it comes in front of a panel on January 23rd, will you think, wow, look at this for [unclear]?

JD No. I understand the point and you're not the first person to make that point. I think what's important to place on record here is that the arguments which we'll discuss at the education panel will be rational arguments and it's the weight of the argument, not its volume, that actually makes the difference. If you go to the education panel and observe the discussions, I'm biased because I'm involved in those discussions, but they're really good debates and members do put officers under, quite rightly, some pressure and ask quite difficult questions and at the end, if we don't get it right, they say so and we make some

changes. But during that debate it's not necessarily the passion and noise, it's how compelling the argument is that makes the difference.

?FS I've got a younger child who I've got to apply for a school place for. How can I apply for a school that may or may not exist?

PD You're applying for the schools that exist at the moment and if the decision... Well, New Briars exists and Stream Woods exists. You apply for the school you want because, as Justin keeps saying, no decisions have been taken yet. If a decision is taken, then whatever the outcome, you will be advised and offered a place [unclear] and if you choose to choose differently, then we will facilitate that.

?MS [unclear]. There's a number of questions I don't quite understand. In Hatfield Stream Woods is expanding. The town centre is growing. There's a thousand flats going up in the town centre itself above the new shops and at the [unclear] site. We have 700 houses in Hatfield that are let to students. This student housing is in the decline and it's going back to family housing. For example, the street [unclear] have actually gone back to family units. If all these places come up, where on earth are you going to put these children? Could there not be another option, to perhaps defer this for another five years?

[applause]

JD This is not something we would defer for five years because [unclear]. We want to make sure that the children who go to schools in Hatfield are in secure schools for now and the future and we spend money on classrooms. If you talk about forecasting of schools, it does take into account housing developments, and what's interesting in Hatfield is that where these housing developments are, are very specific. Actually, flats tend not to generate families with children. There are some that do but they tend not to generate the same number of children as housing would. The point I would make is we are aware of the housing developments in Hatfield and those have been taken into account in our forecasting figures.

J Thank you very much. I'm conscious of the fact that we're gradually coming towards the end of the meeting. [unclear]

MM I'm Meg Manuels. I'm a member of staff at New Briars School. Earlier on you were talking about amalgamating the two schools. You mentioned a ballpark amount of time for a decent bedding-in of a new amalgamated school would be 18 months to two years. Don't you think that just giving this school one year only to bed in and then further changing and causing more disruption is going to cause a problem for the school?

JD If we could do this with no disruption, we would do that. It's a fair point you make and it's an important one. I think, though, and you might disagree, when... As a teacher I've been involved in a similar issue of an amalgamation. When I say the schools are bedding in, I wouldn't want to give the impression that whilst that process is going on teaching is not up to speed, that resources aren't there. What we're finding is, particularly when we amalgamate schools and bring the schools together, as long as you do the detailed planning early enough, although there'll be some bedding-in period where they'll be tweaking the curriculum, working through some pedagogical issues, actually it's very important that the school gets off to a very positive start on day one because children will have first impressions and the first day they go home and talk about the new school, we

need them to go home and be very positive about it. I wouldn't want to overplay the fact that during that bedding-in period there are problems. What I'm saying to you, though, is our experience is when schools come together it takes a while for the school to have its own ethos, its own assumed way of doing things but the children will come together, particularly some of the older children, with slightly different approach to assemblies, a slightly different approach to competitive games, a slightly different approach to [unclear]. There are differences which need to be ironed out. We find that doesn't have a direct impact on standards. It does take a while for the school to really bed in and have a feel of its own. That's what I'm saying. So, I wouldn't want to overplay the point in terms of what goes on in that period but I do take the point that it is disruptive and during that period, that's when we'll put official resources in, in terms of time, so that the staff have some time to do that additional work to put the two schools together.

MM I just wanted to add to that. [unclear]. Therefore you'll likely cause insecurity in the family to have older children, older siblings, in a school and younger ones who would like to be at the school, who would like their children to be going to the same school, now you're proposing to start cutting off at that end. What is that going to do for a school that you've been trying so hard for years to bring it together? And the staff, at the end of one year are wondering... I am a reception teacher. I'm going to be thinking, oh God, am I going to have a job next year?

[applause]

JD In terms of the staff, that's an important point. What I can say is and I know it's not that reassuring but we do have a 100% track record of making sure that the teaching staff do secure a post, on protected salaries if necessary. What we're trying to do is get the interim governing body in place as quickly as possible, make those appointments as quickly as possible, take that uncertainty out, because uncertainty can be quite damaging. So, we will do that as quickly as possible.

PD The admission rules will be applied to children entering the school [unclear] but generally preference is given to siblings before other people. So, I'd like to reassure parents that siblings are more likely to get into this school than anybody else.

?FS [unclear], what do you propose to do then? Are you still going to force the school to actually cut back to only 30 [unclear]?

PD Our proposal would be that that would be a one form entry school with 30 places available to it and that will be the [unclear] that that new school would take in. Parents express their preference. They also identify other schools that they would want to go to after their first preference and the admission system will allocate children so that the first 30 that meet the rules at that time will get in and then any additional demand will be allocated to other schools in accordance with the other schools that they have ranked. That is the normal admission system and that happens now across the county and across the country. Where more people express a preference for one school, then they are placed [unclear].

?FS You began the process saying that you felt that two forms of entry schools were more effective. If you end up in 2008 with a situation where you could have a two form entry school, are you still going to push to cut off that school and make it a one form entry when it could be a two form entry school?

JD Our starting point is that we would start from a two form entry school. [unclear]. We do feel that two form entry primary schools to provide an advantage but we also say that depends on where the children live and the particular needs of those communities. So, we're not going to always have two form entry primary schools but we would have to have reasons for not doing that and I think [unclear]. Just to go back to your point, it's a very important point, that you're absolutely right, if these proposals go through and in 2008 the reception is set at 30 and more parents want to send their children here, I'll just be frank, you are quite right, some parents would therefore be disappointed. Unfortunately that's the case right across the county. You do have schools which are oversubscribed. But the point you're making is quite correct. If the school does have 30 and 37 children want to come here, seven will be disappointed. You're correct.

J We'll take a final question over there.

?MS It's fairly related to what's just been asked but can I ask you in the event that you take up a brand new school with effectively two forms in each year and then over the next seven years decreased it to one form entry, do you have experience of that elsewhere and, if so, how did you address issues of staff morale where there's a potential redundancy per year for the next seven years?

[applause]

?MS So, you have very much here what will be a decline in schools for seven years.

PD You're right there. We do have experience. We have amalgamated schools that were larger and then moved down into a smaller size for the same reasons as here. So, we do have experience of that. You're right, the school will reduce in size very gradually, with more children in the younger years leaving and fewer children in reception coming through. Clearly there will be more staff required to look after the children in the first year than there will be six years later but all of our experience shows that every school will normally have a turnover of staff every year and therefore the numbers of staff actually naturally decline. The other thing we do when we're doing this, because we know that it's a transition and one that needs to be handled very carefully, what we do is we make rationalisation funding available. We make sure that the money that would have gone to the two schools is still available to enable a cushioning effect on the budget to allow the governing body and management the flexibility to have that large number of staff and then gradually work their way through. After about three years it usually works out quite nicely and that's why [unclear]. So, we do experience, it does work and we do provide some resources to manage that transition.

J Thank you very much. [unclear].

[applause]