

Hatfield Stream Woods 2-11-06

Speaker key

B Bella
JD Justin Donovan
PD Pauline Davis
?F1-?F13 Unknown female speakers
?M1-?M11 Unknown male speakers

B Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming this evening. My name is Bella [?]. I work for an independent market research agency and we've been asked by the Hertfordshire County Council to facilitate this series of meetings. [unclear] I'm sure that you know the meetings are being recorded and transcripts will be made available on Hertfordshire's website in due course. Normally we have, as you know, a short presentation from Hertfordshire and then we have questions and answers from you guys. Is there anyone who hasn't been to one of these meetings before? [unclear] It is important that everybody knows what's being proposed. So firstly we'll give a short presentation and then we'll have questions and answers. Thank you.

JD Okay. So the programme in that case will be; I'll just introduce who my colleagues are, especially for those who haven't met them before, and then I'll take you through the presentation. We've done that usually as evenings on the basis that these are difficult, important decisions which will be made. Therefore it's very important to get all the issues on the table and make sure there's no misunderstanding about what we're proposing and why. [unclear] Most of the evening we'll set aside to answer your questions, but mostly importantly collect your views so that we can feed those back into the report, which I'll talk about in a moment. So I'm Justin Donovan. I'm Deputy Director of Children, Schools and Families. As part of that I'm the Chief Education Officer, so anything that goes on in schools comes across my desk. So in the end if you want to blame anybody for this it's me you need to blame. Pauline Davis is one of our few most senior planning officers. We have one for each half of the county. Pauline is responsible for all issues to do with planning to do with schools in this half of the county. Kate works with Pauline and Kate is here, not to answer any of your questions, not because she's shy or rude, but actually her role is to, if necessary, give us information we need to respond to you in terms of the detail of how it should be, any statistics and information which we might need or might not. It depends how the evening goes. So that's the three of us. There are three points I'd like to make about why we're doing this. As I said before, this is unpopular. It's controversial. It's disruptive. It's not why people coming to look at education rationalise schools, so we need a good reason for doing it because again, the ones at risk are children. The first reason is really the main reason that we're here tonight. There aren't enough children to go around. Basically we've got more places across Hertfordshire schools, particularly in the primary sector, than we have children and that gap, if you like, that surplus, is going to increase and is increasing. So the first

thing is we're trying to rationalise and make sure we've got broadly the right number of places for children in the right areas of Hertfordshire for the children that are born and exist. Secondly, we know from experience across the county where we have falling rolls and there aren't enough children to go around we've kind of got, if you like, a natural evolution. One or two schools start to struggle. Some physical. Some die out. Children start to move because the problem with surplus places is those surplus places are not evenly spread. Now, it doesn't happen straightaway and some schools run at half-empty for some period of time, but in the end the funding [unclear]. If the structure you're running is half-full or even less than half-full it becomes an issue because whether you like it or not, the resources for those schools are almost entirely, not completely, but certainly for a very big amount dependent on the number of children on it's roll. [unclear] The problem with schools which aren't full, or are very empty is that the fixed costs don't fall at the same rate. So in the end we find that they're unable to spend as much money in the classroom, on children, on teaching and learning. But the main reason is there just aren't enough children to go around all the areas of Hertfordshire and we need to rationalise that. There is an impact on standards if we're not careful and there is a national inefficiency [?] issue. Just to place on record the fact that you're aware of this as well, the residential shape of Hatfield is changing. There's a lot of development on the west side, the other side of the A1A. That's why Howe Dell [?] is being relocated over there and increasing in size because we're affected by the expansion in terms of the new places on that side of the A1A. So if you look at an area photograph of Hertfordshire and then down in terms of Hatfield, the residential shape is changing. Overall there's about 22% surplus across Hatfield as a whole as a town. But as I say the surplus places are not evenly spread for lots of reasons, not least of where the children live. So the schools in a lot of Hatfield, I'm not sure that they are filled. There's a row [?] about the right number of places. In the very south of the town we've already got to have them in place, and there are a few issues why [unclear] has been taken out of this review. One is it's only been running for a few years, but more importantly if you look on a map of where it sits we will need the school in that part of the town. So that gives a surplus of about 44% and it's located particularly around the centre of Hatfield. So in terms of real numbers then we've got 382 places currently available and these are the actual numbers of children taking them up. So the current surplus, the overall surplus across the town is 22% as I say. Now, what's interesting is that surplus is coming down, but not evenly across the town so we're still left with a future difficulty here in this part of the town. If you take the three schools I'm talking about, at the moment there are 145 places available and 81 being taken up. That includes the kids that we're expecting to take up places in January and therefore the surplus in this area is about 44%. In terms of forms of entry, for planning purposes one form of entry is 30 kids and so there's a surplus of 2% per form of entry. Basically what we're saying is there are two weak places in Hatfield. There are surplus places and they tend to be centred on this part of town.

Just so that you know where we are in the process, we've had stakeholder discussions which started back in March and out of those a list of options were developed. Some of the options were brought forward by officers and other options came from stakeholders themselves. We had a long list of options. What we then do is take the four tests which are enshrined, if you like, in our school organisation planning and in other departments which we've agreed at cabinet against these options and then a decision is taken by the director, John Harris, in consultation with myself and one or

two senior elected members. We decide then out of that long list of options, having applied those four tests, what options we go out with on public consultation. Those four tests look like this. The first one goes back to what I said earlier. We need to make sure once we've taken out surplus places that we leave behind enough of the right number of places, particularly where children live so that we cut down on the need for children to travel. Particularly some of the younger children. The other issue I also mentioned right at the beginning is that we want to make sure we leave behind acting [?] schools which are likely to even maintain existing high standards, or improve standards further. I think it's very important in terms of getting the record straight that we're not here talking about closing, amalgamating, or moving schools because we're worried about the standard in schools. That's not the case. We're not saying at the moment that there is a difficulty there. What we want to do is make sure that we don't leave behind a pattern of schools, which [unclear], particularly when we're talking about extending the surfaces, which is an increasing need so that we have patterns of schools that can provide extended services for the community. Child care facilities for example, from eight till six, parenting classes, adult learning, a whole range of services which will be needed. We have taken time into account for the suitability of the site, the buildings, the costs involved. We think it would be dishonest for example, to bring forward to meetings like this a proposal that we think we could get members to pay for. In the end we are talking about large sums of money. We'd love to build brand-new schools all over the place, but we haven't got money to do that. So the proposals we bring forward we must be able to afford, and also have a look at the impact upon the environment. Fourthly and very importantly, as I said at the start, whatever we do is going to be disruptive. The children have already been disrupted. The Rye School [?] for example, already moved over the Christmas holiday to a new site. There's a lot of disruption every time you make things happen in this way. So when we look at these options we need to find a way to get the disruptions down to a minimum.

What are the proposals then? Well, the first proposal is that Howe Dell, which is on the outside of the A1, will become two forms of entry instead of one in order to take into account the developments on that side of the A1. We're reluctant to have children, if we can avoid it, travelling across the A14. So that, when it's established, will have a 60-place nursery. The main proposal that we're talking about here... There are three options, all which will have an impact on Stream Woods. The first is that we amalgamate Stream Woods and New Briars into a new school on this site. Let me just make one thing absolutely clear because there's some confusion about this. The word amalgamation is banged around a bit too much. There is no technical or meaningful [unclear] what it actually means in technical terms. The reality is both of the schools would close. So Stream Woods would close and New Briars would close, and a brand-new school would be developed on this site. The reason we use the word amalgamate is because that allows us to have processes in place to make sure we can bring the best of the two schools together. But we're talking here about a brand-new school on this site. The second option is simply to close New Briars and reduce Stream Woods down to one form of entry on this site. The third option is the mirror of that, and that would be that we would close Stream Woods and relocate New Briars on this site. We've done that for example, in Hoddesdon between two schools. One school was closed and the other school was moved onto that site. So those are the three options. Where we have a preferred option because it's very important to say so, at the moment, and we hang onto what our preferred options are until the end of the

consultation, what we're advising elected members as officers is that our preferred option is the first one and that is to put a brand-new school on this site. We can feed that out if you like as we go. What does it mean for the kids in terms of that disruption? Firstly, any school that was to close within each of those options would do so at the end of the year. So they would close in August 2007, and all the children would be automatically offered a place in the new school, whether it be New Briars here, Stream Woods here, or a new school. All the children involved will be offered a place in that school. That school then will have a new admission of 30, i.e. one form of entry, but not until the following year, not until 2008 because remember we're talking about forecasted figures here so there will be a transitional period when the school is evolving to one form of entry. The point to make on that that's important, and this is controversial in various places, is that whatever is happening in terms of reviews, school amalgamations, closures, or whatever, parents still have a legal right to move their children to any school they want, when they want, if there's a place available in that school for a child of that age and the admission rules allow it. So what we're trying to do as an authority [unclear] is to try to manage a process so that we have an orderly process rather than allowing chaos to rule. If we're not careful the movement of children can get a little bit out of control. But the bottom line is if parents want to move their kids at any stage they can and again, we can talk about that later if you like. If all of the children and all of the parents in the schools involved decide they all want to go to either the new school, or the new New Briars, or new Stream Woods, then we would need some additional accommodation and we'll work that through. But what we'd like to do if possible, it's not always possible, in terms of minimising disruption for the children is to try to organise it so that peer groups could stay together rather than break out. As for the cost, those are what the figures would look then like if the two schools came together, whichever option we pursue. You can see it would start off as larger than 30 children, and in 2008 the one form of entry will start to work its way through the system.

Just a couple of points to finish then. What happens next? This is the last meeting. You are the last. We've had a lot of these. This is the last one. You'll notice we've left a gap of a month between these meetings and the closure of the consultation period. That's important because what we've often found having gone through these meetings is formal groups emerge. They think through what they've heard and what they've said and bring forward a whole range of suggestions and proposals, and it's very important if that happens that we've got time to consider them, go back and talk, and have some additional work before we write the report. We do have to close down on the fourth and send them though because we need to get the paper to the education panel, which takes place on the 23rd of January. Now, I have a couple of things to say about the education panel. If you want to get involved or just observe the political decision making because actually this is not a decision officers can make... You'd be surprised actually how many powers I have as chief education officer delegated and devolved to me. I could for example, close this school tomorrow morning if I thought the standards were low of the children. It's amazing the powers you have, but not here. This is not a decision an officer can make. Members will make it. It's a political decision. I think that's very sensible. So if you want to either observe or influence the political decision-making that is the meeting you need to come to, and it will take place in the morning. There will be a ten o'clock kick-off. If that changes we'll let people know. Originally we were going to have one meeting for this review and Hemel Hempstead, but what we're going to do is change it so that we can spend the

whole morning just on this because an awful lot is going to happen at these meetings and we need to spend time doing that. Each of the schools will be invited, if they would like, to make a presentation at that meeting. What tends to happen is we will ask if the schools want to – we don't want to pressure groups – to put together their thoughts, if they want, in writing. What we would do is undertake to make sure that that went to elected members at the same time that they're getting the report, which is another reason for finishing in time for the 4th of December. We need all of that in because we've got Christmas break and we want to put this report and all the documents in the hands of members a few weeks before the meeting so that they can read them. Then what I do is I meet the leaders of each of the different parties and they drill me, if you like, on this report. What's this? What have you done here? Why have you done that? Sometimes they can be quite interesting meetings, but you're not allowed to observe those. Actually you might be able to, but we don't at the moment. There will be time to do that. So the 4th of December finishes. If you want to put a written report in we can attach that to the report and then, if you want to, a spokesman for each of the schools involved can speak very briefly at the panel. Members will ask a few questions of the speaker. They'll ask some more questions of the officers, and then they'll move on. What will happen at the end of the education panel is a recommendation will be made which will go to cabinet the following month, perhaps a few weeks later. They're quite close together. Again, you're perfectly entitled to come along to observe that meeting, but you won't be invited to speak. You can if you like. One or two people do, but you won't be advised to speak at that. This is at the chair's discretion and the idea is that if we've got any [unclear] it goes on there. It'll be a much, much briefer discussion. This will take all morning and if necessary, will go on through the rest of the day. [unclear] This will be a brief conversation, half an hour, because the political debate takes place here. But again, you're welcome to come along. At the moment we still have the school organisation committee. The new bill is likely to be enacted. The Education and Inspections Bill 2006 will probably be enacted in the last week of November at the latest. It's making good progress at long last. In fact, it's being discussed today in parliament. At the moment we have the school organisation committee and that still applies. So if you have a formal objection once we've published the notices, then the school organisation committee will be reviewing the whole process and looking at it fresh. That's an independent committee and again, you're very welcome. In fact, you're encouraged to go through that. So that's the process. I have a few points to make and I know nobody believes this, but I'll say it again. We genuinely haven't made a decision. We've given it a lot of thought. This is not a decision officers can make. I can tell you we did a bit of maths once and out of that 40% of the school review carried out so far in the last few years that we've been doing this we ended up putting forward proposals to draft which were significantly different to the proposals we started with as a result of consultation. So there are some times that we go to members still with the same options, still with the preferred option of officers. For example, that's what happened in Potters Bar. A long discussion like this will actually... In the end we held the line as officers and felt that we still had it right and the proposals went through. The opposite has happened where we came to a school, we took one school out, and made some significant changes to the proposals which went to members as a result of consultation. So we haven't taken a decision. We have a view as officers and we've expressed that view, hopefully clearly. But we haven't made a decision yet, so it's very important that we hear your views. If you do have views and you assume that we've already made the decisions that's a technical mistake because you won't actually come back with compelling

arguments. As I say, we're very, very keen to get your views and what we will do is make sure we summarise them accurately and present them to members. These are the number of meetings. These are the number of people who came. The key issues were these. And you can read that report and make sure we got that right. I'll stop at that point so that we can spend the rest of the evening on questions.

B [unclear] Please wait until you have a microphone in your hand before you make your comments or questions because without that your questions or comments will not be recorded. It's quite important that everything you say is on record. So the first question, comment...?

?F1 Hi. I'm [unclear] and also chair of Stream Woods School. First of all, the [unclear] services that we have here at Stream Woods, have they been informed about these meetings? [unclear]

PD [unclear] So for example, we send documents to the school for distribution in the school. [unclear] Therefore the people within the school should receive the consultation documents, and also be published I think in other places so that anybody who needs to know will be able to read it.

JD I have to check. [unclear]

?F1 My second question is about the staff car park. [unclear]

PD We are aware that obviously if there are more children on site and more staff on site, then there will need to be provisional car parking for staff, and we have started... We have looked at that and are continuing to look at that. [unclear]

?F2 I have a question about the traffic congestion on Stream Woods on the avenue. It was not answered in enough detail at the meeting at New Briars. Please provide greater detail about what, if any, things you've done to evaluate or amend the situation.

PD As I said before, and I don't know whether I can offer you any more detail that will make it any clearer, in response to the concern that has been expressed in other meetings we have asked the county council to look at the situation again. They've been commissioned to do that. They're currently working on it so I can't give you the details of the outcome of the session because I don't yet have it. But we have asked them to have another look. [unclear]

JD When we have these conversations with members at the top of their list number one is what impact is this going to have on payment [?], the disruption of children, all those kinds of issues. Number two is all this traffic, the environment and congestion because actually almost any school you go to in Hertfordshire it's very difficult to get... We don't have many schools, but they're on a site which [unclear] in terms of traffic. We've got some. So when we increase the capacity of any site that's always an issue. So we know we can get something like that from members so we'll make sure that we come back with...

?M1 Hi. My name is [unclear]. I'm the site manager at Stream Woods School and in the school government. Sticking to what you were just saying then, [unclear] in the afternoon and seen probably 30 accidents out there and within our grounds as well. So when you do decide what's going to happen out there with the car park, will you be talking to people like myself?

JD Yeah, certainly. Yeah. In fact, without sounding patronising, site managers can be really helpful on a whole range of issues, not just traffic.

?M2 [unclear] There was one merger recently with [unclear] Grove. How can the county ensure the difficulties experienced in the merger would not be repeated? So what lessons have been learned and have been brought forward to this proposal?

JD What particular difficulties?

?M2 There were a number of difficulties. I've spoken to parents at the school and there have been a number of issues raised with regards to staffing, entrusting [?] children, just to see whether or not lessons have been learnt and what lessons have been brought forward.

JD Yeah. Basically whenever we have any organisation like this we always follow and check to see how it's gone. In other words, we look to see how smooth the actual transition has gone and we can always learn from others. But I have to say, and you might disagree, but I think the transition seemed to happen overall quite well in the sense that it's a good building, the standards are there. The feedback we're getting from the parents and the children themselves who visited the school personally on more than one occasion are actually quite positive. Nevertheless, anything like that will have difficulties. But what we also do is track the [unclear] of children. So if we hadn't done anything, what was the [unclear] level of the kids before we intervened, if you like? And therefore what those parents and those children could generally expect to get from their time in the school, and then we monitor actually the performance of those children. What we find is that the great majority of children tend to do well because schools like to have, and others that we've pulled together have a lot of tension from a lot of people. In fact, if we're not careful we could get in the way if we don't do that carefully. The kids that worry us are some of the more vulnerable children, particularly children with special education needs. We need to be very careful there because their strength, if you like, is based on the relationships that they've got and the security of where they are. Also, some kids, not necessarily the very youngest ones, but some kids who are very quiet, none of them have issues with the school. [unclear] There are some children, so what we do is we talk to the staff about the individual children and work around that. [unclear]

?M2 If I could just expand on that? When [unclear] did close there were a number of extended services that were offered, which they were then left without any premises to work from and those were mentioned at the last meeting here. According to your four tests one area to look at is that it does not disrupt the extended services. How did this still happen because from what the lady said at the last meeting it appeared that one of the four tests was not adhered to.

JD Which extended services are you thinking of?

?M2 The opportunity class that was run and if it had a premises...

JD Yeah. The opportunity class still runs.

?M2 It does now, from here, but for a period of time they didn't have a premises to work from.

JD Right. I think that was very short. I have to check on that. But it does run successfully and I think, to the best of my knowledge, the gap in terms of what's required I don't remember having anything...

?M2 At the last meeting a lady stood up and commented that they did not have a place to run their class from.

[overtalking]

?M3 One of the classes ended up having to be run from the dining room or something.

JD If it's individual I can go back and check.

PD [unclear] We're not proposing any changes to the accommodation of any of the used [unclear]. We need to be particularly vigilant and careful about making sure that what goes on here and that New Briars are able to continue during this period of transition.

JD I think it's a particular issue with a particular service. I think we'd better follow that through. On a more general line just so that people are aware that in terms of the commitment to extended services from April, this April coming, we will make available the plans to schools, just this year and next year, to develop the sites for extended services. Very often schools say, well we don't need to knock a wall down. We need to do some minor alterations for further community use. We're going to make available £6 million to schools to do that between this year and the coming financial year. [unclear]

?F3 I'm [unclear]. I'm actually a parent of a child who finished five years ago. I'm also now a grandparent of children here. Can you tell me what will happen to the staff if you have an amalgamation, or a new school, or whatever? What's going to happen to the staff? The children have got to go through a traumatic time of change in the school, but it is for the staff as well.

JD Yeah. There are two sides to that story. I'll put it this way, when we carried out these reviews in the past any member of staff that's teaching or non-teaching that wanted to take up a post has been provided one. We haven't yet – touch wood – made any member of staff redundant because of these area reviews. Now, we're relying on keeping that track record running. That's partly because the teaching staff, we just can't afford to lose them, and partly because it reduces disruption to children and it's also a professional commitment we have to our staff. Having delivered that so far it actually depends on the governing body. What will happen is that as soon as we know

which option it is, for example it is option one, an amalgamation, we will immediately put together a shared governing body that will be responsible for making appointments. [unclear] What we've found is that in some cases it provides an opportunity for staff to do something else. There are some difficulties. For example, you only need one centre [?] so you only need various posts, perhaps one coordinator or two. So there is some shuffling and some difficulty, so it's not easy, but we do that with the governing body. Where it's more difficult is with the head teachers and the deputy head teachers because there are national arrangements that we can't go back on. When you're amalgamating schools, if you have the right number of current head teachers and deputy head teachers who are interested in the posts there are HR processes you can go through without having to advertise. It's only fair to have HR processes, but if not we need to go through advertising. Again, to be brutally fair, we are not overrun. We have a surplus of good head teachers and good deputy head teachers. We're lucky we've got some smashing heads and deputies in the authority. But we've set pretty well in the national average in terms of [unclear]. So what we do outside of the process is to make sure we have in place packages of [unclear]. But on the whole again, we've got a 100% record of making sure we're able to keep those heads and deputies in the county, or in the new school if they decide that's what they want to do. Each member of staff has an individual interview with HR and a personal contact. Sometimes that's enough, one interview is enough. Other times we meet staff. What we normally do for example, is have an HR officer physically visit the school on certain times during the week so the staff don't have to travel across. [unclear] We can't give any guarantees. What we normally find is that the governing body of the new amalgamated school [unclear].

?F4 [unclear] If we're going from merging two half years down to one class that means that year two will have two teachers and then eventually there'll be one class. So obviously one teacher is going to end up going and then some will follow. So there will be teachers leaving every year because you're turning the school back into one form entry. So okay, we have one head teacher, but the rest of the years will have two teachers and then eventually it will be going down to one teacher. So every year we'll be losing a teacher. How will that be decided? It can't all be decided in wastage. You can't waste that many people. So we'll be having redundancies every year and teachers who are in their final length who have no passion for the job because they're only going to be here for a year. So what's the point?

JD Well, first of all it's very rare to hear a teacher to say, I'm only going to be here for a year so I'm not going to do my job. The point I'm making is, even when teachers, and I've been in this position myself, are in a school which is collapsing down profusely there are not many teachers who will say, I'm not going to bother. [overtalking] On the last point you were making, I think as a profession teachers will see through it and put the kids first. The point you're making though is a very important one. It will be tense over a period of years as the school settles down. What we will do is, first of all, we have a lot of help in terms of the HR process to make sure that happens smoothly and we'll plan it from the beginning. Secondly, during the transition phase that the school works its way through we have additional financial arrangements, if you like, to protect the school during that transitional phase. But there certainly will be a case of staff leaving over a period of time and, as I say, in the past when we've had that that went well. What we try to do is when staff are leaving encourage them to go to another school nearby, and what we do find is that because

there's a lot of tension on those particular teachers in that particular school we will help them, if you like, not just find a job, but help them in terms of their professional career and try to, if you like, turn it into a positive experience. But you're absolutely right. The point you're making is that for a number of years the school will have staffing issues. That's quite right. But our view is because this is a review that's led by the local authority that's our responsibility towards the governing body and we'll work with them over a period of time to make that happen as best as we can. What I can say is that those staff that wanted to move on, in the past we've been able to do that. But it certainly is an issue and it will be managed properly, both by the school and also by the local authority.

?F4 How long will that period of time be? How long would you be monitoring that?

JD We negotiate that with the school through our NCSI framework. What we would do is put in the support that the school requires right through to when it gets to where we think it's evolved to. After a year or two... For example, if the head was here. He would say in the first instance they're very keen to have a lot of support. After a while the school will say, we don't need you. We need to get on. So what we would do is negotiate that each year with the school and gradually we would maintain that level of support depending on what the school felt. The other thing we'd probably find in year two or three is the support the school found helpful would be different to the support in the first year. The first year is a case of bringing together reading schemes and a whole range of other issues, but by year three we've got a new school running. It's got its own culture, its own systems in place, so the support would need to be something else. It's something that we would negotiate each year with the head and chair of governors.

?F4 Also, there are 166 vacancies in [unclear]. Why was it not possible for the parents of New Briars to put their children into New Briars when they requested it? Why weren't they allowed to do that? [overtalking] When New Briars was told they were moving to a new site they asked if they could move their children to different schools and they were told no.

JD Okay. Well, she's wrong if that's what she said.

?F4 How could she be wrong?

JD I'll answer the question. What happens when we have these reviews... We can't remove the right of parent to move their child from one school to another because the admissions rules are there. So if there is a place available at a school in that year group and the admission rules allow it parents can move their kids there. [unclear] So that parent could move their child to a school, but they would need to do it through us. That way we can monitor the situation. There's no way we would tell a parent you're not allowed to move your kid.

?F4 You said that peer groups wouldn't be disturbed. What did you mean by peer groups wouldn't be disturbed? Did you mean that the classes would stay as they are?

JD Well, that will be up to the governors and the head teacher of the school. What we're saying is that if all the parents and the children decided they wanted to go to the new school or to Stream Woods or to New Briars we would make that happen by putting in place the accommodation. [unclear] In other words, if all the children decided to go then that's what those year groups would look like until the form of 30 came in. If on the other hand, which is likely, some of the parents say we're sending our children elsewhere, then that wouldn't be necessary. So the peer groups I'm talking about are, you know, if all the children who are currently say in New Briars want to come to either New Briars here or to the new school or to Stream Woods, then we'll try to make that happen so the children can stay together. But once they're in the school it's up to the school how they'd be grouped.

?F4 So it's up to the school how the classes are formed? [unclear]

JD Yes. That's something the local authority would never be involved in. The school decides how they do the management and the teachers.

?F4 How will you be monitoring the children that are in these classes that have merged?

JD We monitor them until they leave and move on to the next school. For example, I get reports now of the children who were in schools some time ago. So I'm getting reports of children who have been moved in schools before I came to the authority. When we get the results in the summer for example, we get all the standard results and then we also get the results of the children who have been involved in reviews.

?F4 As a last thing, when I said to you that if they were merging together and my child was in the same class as all of her friends and not be merged into a class with New Briars you said that wouldn't be an amalgamation so it wouldn't happen. Now you're saying if the schools would like to keep it like that, then that's how it can be. I would like for my child to stay in her class that she's been in for the last four years with the same children that she's been with. You're saying that if New Briars does merge with our school, that if the school decides to keep it like that and keep New Briars' year four as New Briars' year four that wouldn't be a problem.

JD What I'm saying to you is that as an authority we will make sure if the parents and the children wanted to they will stay together in the new school.

?F4 But not in the same class?

JD No, that's not something the authority... I don't think I said that. If necessary we can go back to the transcripts. The authority does not tell schools how to group its children. That's not something that we would do. We might advise.

?F4 We might have a problem when this comes in and my child is not in a class with the people that she was in before. I can say to the school that I would like her to go into a class with her friends and it would be no problem?

JD Well, you can say that to the school, but it would be up to the school to decide whether that's possible or not. The point is the authority would never want to micromanage its schools. That's what we've got management teams and governing bodies for.

?F4 My child knows what's happening. You're saying it's going to be a new school, but it's not going to be a new school in her mind because she'll be coming to the same building and seeing the same friends. Therefore she's been with the same children for the last five years and it's taken them a long time to build up this relationship. So come September she doesn't want to walk into a class and not be in a class with the people that she likes because her confidence is at a level where it's just got to a point where she can relax with them and work. I would hate for her to come back and say it's all changed.

JD I understand the point you're making. What I'm saying to you is that as the local authority and the planning authority what we will do is enable the children to stay together as a group. It will be for the school, whether it be the new amalgamated school, New Briars, or Stream Woods to decide how the children will be grouped.

?F4 When will we be told what the decision is going to be? When will the letters come out that this is what's going to happen?

JD It depends. The decision will be taken at cabinet, as I say, on the 5th of February. Then we'll put out statutory notices for six weeks. If we don't have any formal objections, then the decision is made to go on. If we have a formal objection it then goes to the school organisation committee, which will be later on. So it depends whether we have any objections or not. What we won't be doing is waiting until we come to that point. As soon as we've gone to cabinet we will start the planning. What we won't do is make any decisions which we can't then undo if it goes to the school organisation committee. One of the reasons why the school organisation committees will be disbanded, and the last time I checked was yesterday but I'll check again tonight, is that they almost never overturn a decision made by the cabinet. [unclear] So much consultation has taken place that it's almost unheard of. I don't think it's ever happened here in Hertfordshire as far as I can tell. So the idea is to take that out of the system, but that won't happen until the next academic year. So this might be one of the last reviews the school organisation committee will be given.

?F5 I'm a member of staff. Can I just say I'd like to, if we pick option one, could we have an option four and that is to keep the parents and the children happy for the big upheaval that's going to put both of the heads at the helm to start the new school off? [unclear]

JD [unclear] There are some schools in Stevenage where we have an additional head teacher. Those are federated schools. In Stevenage we were looking to build a three-form entry primary school. The residents were dead against it. [unclear] So what we've done is federate schools there to create different schools. But there we have much more flexibility because we have three forms of entry of choice to play with. So what we did was create two forms and an amalgamated school on the same site and a head teacher for each and an overseeing head of federation, and that's how we run it. But each of the schools will have its own head teacher. I suppose the way out of this

without giving too much detail is any proposals which people put forward we will look at, but that's not something we've thought of.

?F5 [overtalking] I mean we've got a happy school. New Briars is a happy school. I would hate for it to turn into a sad school.

JD Okay. Point taken.

?F6 Hello. I'm a parent. I have a child who will be going into year six in September and it's very clear that there's going to be a large amount of dysfunction. For a child to be going into year six, do you propose any extra measures to get them through that assuming the disruption alone, plus the stress, and the fact that it's a hard year for any child, much less having to cope with all of that?

JD What we found with other schools... We work with the staff in particular. [unclear] You're quite right. Year six is important, as is year two actually, but year six in particular because it's their last. It's a big change in life, isn't it? I went to New Briars at the end of, when the year six were running around making T-shirts. It was quite an emotional experience and it's important [unclear]. So what we will do is as soon as a decision is taken to cabinet we'll put together a planning group and what they will do is plan very carefully that the year six is supported. What we found through other schools, and most surprisingly, is the best way to work with year six is actually to involve them in the process. You know, you've been here a long time. What advice would you give us in terms of supporting you and other colleagues, you know, the pupils and so on? That's been one of the better strategies, to actually involve the kids in what we do. But certainly we focus on the most vulnerable kids clearly and the staff know exactly who they are. Not just special needs. There are some bright, clever kids who are actually quite vulnerable in other ways, particularly in year six. So it's important that we get them actually continually looking ahead to secondary school rather than looking back at the changes that are going to go on. It's difficult, but it's something we'll be committed to making sure works out there. As I say, we've got quite a good track record of this. We make sure the disruption to kids is kept to a minimum and on the whole if you look at one of the reasons we track the kids is that on the whole there isn't even a little difference for kids who do quite well because of the extra resources we place on them. But I take your point and it's something that we would manage very carefully. As I said right at the beginning, nobody denied it. This is a disruptive process and we need to keep that disruption to a minimum and manage it very carefully. Year six would be a priority group for us. [unclear]

?F6 My concern is with the year six child having got used to all of the staff members. If the staff members and increasing support staff are having to reapply or go through any kind of process like that for their positions you're adding more disruption because you're now taking away the people they rely on the most. I'm sure that there is that chance that they will be taken away. Why don't you just take that out of the equation? Less disruption immediately. Take out of the equation that the staff will have to apply for their own jobs.

JD Well, we're not allowed to do that. What we do is keep it to an absolute minimum. [unclear] For example, we don't expect staff to do full blown, fully

developed applications to jobs as if they were applying in Sussex or Kent because these are the staff that are known. So we try to keep it to a minimum. We need a selection process and we have to go through HR processes that we would certainly do as quickly as humanly possible and secondly, keep it to a minimum so the staff don't feel as if... Actually in many ways it's more difficult to apply to a school [unclear] than apply outside because you know people on the panel and in many ways it's more stressful. Our advice to the governing body will be to keep that to a minimum. It's a [unclear] process, but a process nevertheless. It's important the staff feel that they've gone through a fair selection process, one which hasn't taken up all of their time, and most importantly to do it as soon as we possibly can to take that uncertainty out of the system.

?F7 [unclear] chair of admin, Stream Woods. You touched on the question of proposed building work should your option one go through. Can you tell us please when and how is the council supposed to do this necessary building work in line with your leading obligations when everybody will be in what will be, in fact, a new school in order to minimise disruption and adhere to legislation on issues such as disability access, budget, etc?

JD I'll ask Pauline to answer that.

PD We're not building a brand new building. We're adding to existing buildings and our prime concern in the first instance is to make sure that there are enough classrooms for groups of children, and that there are enough staff, and the right sort of staff combinations and other combinations. [unclear] So in the first instance the real concentration will be on making sure that those things are happening. So if we do need a temporary classroom we will make sure that that is there. If we do need to bring classrooms back into use and if there are classrooms in this building that are not currently in use, then we'll concentrate on that. [unclear] We won't necessarily be rummaging [?] absolutely everything in this building because clearly there are other [unclear]. We have different budgets for different arrangements and all of those things come into play. What we will do is identify what needs to be done. [unclear] But in the first instance we will be concentrating on making sure that there is adequate accommodation for September. [unclear] So for example, there may be an opportunity where some of the rooms that are not currently in use as classrooms could be worked on in order to bring them back into use. [unclear]

?F7 I, on a personal level, have taught in a school where building work took place when there was an amalgamation on two occasions and it was horrendous. The noise was impossible. It was impossible to work in. Now, any building work, can that take place out of school hours or does it all have to take place during school hours because it's money, isn't it?

PD I'm interested in continuing this conversation outside of this forum on what your past experience has been because I think we can benefit from that experience. Certainly within Hertfordshire we do have a very good record of working with the council because we have a set number and a limited number of [unclear] work on our schools, and they work on different types of projects inside of a project. So they are very experienced at working in and around schools. They work when the students aren't there and in many instances when the students are there because you can't do

every piece of building work in every school over the summer holidays because the building industry just can't cope with that. [unclear] That's why I said we would negotiate with the school what we can do during the summer term. I don't think it would be fair to try to exclude you, but what we're talking about is working after school and at the weekend. [unclear] We have a lot of experience in doing that.

[tape jumps]

JD [unclear] Where we have school building going on I think they're really quite good at it. Anybody who's had any experience as a builder here, you know, deadlines slip, things come up that we're unaware of so it has to be a flexible negotiation and it can be disruptive, but we'll try to keep that to an absolute minimum.

?F7 You have a very, very tight schedule, as we just found out. [unclear] will appear unachievable.

PD [unclear] None of it is internally absolute major work. It's bringing tables back in, bringing things back into use, redecoration, window work, that sort of thing. It's isn't the major work like construction. It's not as if we're going to go around knocking lots of walls down and building extensions and all that sort of thing. We know that we don't need to do that. [unclear] That process is what needs to happen, how, when exactly... [unclear]

?M4 You say there's not any major work that needs doing to the school. According to your own survey there's three quarters of a million pounds worth that needs to be spent in the next six years. So if you say there are not a lot of big jobs that need to be done, where will this three quarter of a million come from?

PD Right. Every single school in the county and actually across the country has got some conditions [unclear]. So they can come round to every single school on a regular basis and they identify the spots of work that will be required in their view over a period of time. That's not to say that's just because it says, you know, over the next six years there needs to be £750,000 of work, but it all has to be done in one go at one time. [unclear] It depends what it is. But we're aware of those issues. [unclear]

?M4 How many of those jobs would come out of the pot of money that is available to us and what guarantee can you give us that a percentage of that work will be done through the allocated money rather than from the money directly from the school when the new school sets up?

PD I can't give you any guarantees here and now. [unclear] What we tend to do is we manage the budget. [unclear]

?M5 Hello. [unclear] site manager, Stream Woods. Going back to accessibility, New Briars has a wheelchair dance room is it in the evenings? We've had it here, but this building really isn't suitable for that. We haven't got any ramps. We haven't got the toilets. [unclear] I know there is an accessibility plan, but I'm not too happy about that.

PD We're aware of those sorts of issues. [unclear]

?F8 [unclear] You said you want a brand-new school for the children. Is that what you said before?

JD Within option one it will be a new school, new name, new governing body, new everything, yes.

?F8 You're saying it's just a refurbishment and painting and everything. Surely Stream Woods School, no disrespect to the children or whatsoever, [unclear]. I just think that Stream Woods School would still seem as their school. Surely all the children deserve a brand new school with a quality learning environment.

JD I think it depends what you refer to as a school. I know it might sound corny, but my idea of a school is made up of the children, the staff, the committee and not so much the building. One of the reasons I like option one as a starting point is that it's a new school, new name, new uniform. But you're quite right. I suspect the kids, assuming this goes through, on the Stream Woods site would feel probably less disrupted than the children coming from the New Briars site, especially the New Briars children that have already moved once. But we're not talking about a new school. We're not talking about a new building. I'm talking about a new school with its own reigns. It would take a year or so, certainly a year, probably two, for that school to develop its own ethos so that the children feel as if they're all part of one new school rather than two old ones. [unclear] Kids get on a lot better than parents and even the staff. It doesn't take long for children to come together and gel and feel part of a new school. I think it takes a little bit longer for the staff. I think if we're not careful we'll underestimate children's flexibility and resilience. I'm saying it's certainly disruptive, but I would not go that far. So my view is while we're talking about a new school we're not talking about new buildings. What we're talking about is buildings which [unclear]. In fact, to be frank with you, if it was a new building, although it would look very nice parts of it would be smaller than they currently are because the space [unclear]. What we find is that when we are negotiating what needs to be done in the school we are perfectly aware that the head teacher, the governing body, and in particular the site managers will put a lot of pressure on us and say, whilst you've got builders in don't come back next year and do this. We will get into negotiation, but the guarantee we will give is that we will make sure the site is suitable for the number of children coming through. What I'm saying is new name, new uniform, new governing body made up of the existing government body, and staff from the existing staff.

?F8 Can I just come back on a point that you made there regarding the children settling in? We still have children at New Briars who are still having some sort of settling in problems and putting them through it again in such a short period of time is really not fair. Another point, you said earlier about minimising disruption. [unclear] Surely to minimise disruption you could take that figure completely out of the equation, reduce Stream Woods School to a one-form entry school, keep New Briars as a one-form entry school, and that will minimise any disruption.

JD [unclear] It's a case of putting the capacity in the area of where the children live and that's why we need to keep that going. [unclear] Because of where the children live and where the schools are located it's so far south of the town that we

think it would be best to [unclear] that area. What we're proposing will be disruptive to children. You are right. But at the some point in order to get the right number of places and the right number of children in the area of the town it's going to be disruptive whenever we do it, and we're better to get on with it before those issues start to make a real impact on the way the schools operate. I accept that it is disruptive. What I'm saying to you is that we will do everything we can to manage that disruption.

?F9 The way the town is divided that side of the town where New Briars is there will be no schools, so you have to walk all the way over here. [unclear] Where we live at the moment I can send my child to school and it's not a problem. It takes five minutes for her to get to school. It takes literally no more than five or ten minutes to get to school. [unclear]

JD Well, yeah, it depends how you look at it. I think I have to agree with you that although there are big disadvantages in to having surplus places and to be frank one of the things we will not be saying to members is these things are... It might well be that members say, we disagree with you, we're going to leave things alone, and they have done that. Our advice will be you can't leave the status quo. You can't operate a surplus. I'm just making a point. That's the first. Now, when we get to the point where we say we can't leave things alone, therefore we do need to make some changes and therefore there will be disruption and it's how we manage that. The point where I would agree with you is there are a number of advantages to having surplus places. One of them is parental choice. If you've got surplus places, then by definition parents have more choice in terms of where they send their kids to school. If you look at the area in terms of [unclear] and parents getting the school of their choice that happens slightly more often in areas where there are higher levels of surplus places. The other thing it does in terms of travel to school is, if you've got fewer schools in a town in an area then more children have to travel to it than they do now. I have to accept that point, but in the end if you look at the distances children have to travel they are much, much shorter than elsewhere in the county. It's a case of what you call local. If you use the school on your doorstep and the new school is a mile away that's a long distance. But for other parts of the county that's no distance at all, so it's relative. It's certainly true that if you reduce the number of schools you reduce choice. You focus cars and the school more in one place than another and you do also get a lot more children travelling longer distances. That is a consequence of having fewer schools.

?F9 [unclear] The road is travelled a lot. There are three schools on this road. If they come out the same time we come out the road... You can't... [unclear]

JD What I'm saying is that there will certainly be an increase. [unclear] In other areas they're not going ahead with that, but in other areas of Hertfordshire where there are schools all gathered in a very small part of town we encourage the schools to finish at different times just by a quarter of an hour or so. [unclear]

?F9 [unclear]

JD From what you just said it sounded like the schools all finish at the same time. I'm accepting the point. There are advantages to having surplus places and those are

some of them. There are others. I've you've got a school which is has a lot of surplus places it has spare buildings we can do all sorts of imaginative things with, and we do know that schools are very imaginative with space, particularly primary schools. They do all sorts of fascinating things with space. So there is an upside to having surplus places, but the downside is so significant, particularly over a period of time. We see it time and time again in Hertfordshire where schools get into great difficulty. [unclear] We think it's much more important to manage that because the disruption for children in the long-term is reduced by managing those surplus places rather than allowing schools to fizzle out, which has happened elsewhere in the county and that's far more disruptive.

?F9 Okay. [unclear] You're going to be disrupting another school again. [unclear]

JD It's simply where the children live. [unclear] The old New Briars site, the one that we're talking about, they're very close together.

?F9 [unclear]

PD [unclear]

?F9 [unclear] How long will I have to decide if I want to or not?

PD What we're saying is that you will know on the 5th of February what the county council will be able to decide in terms of what it wants to do, but there will be a period of statutory consultation after that. That will have to go to the school organisation committee in time for a decision that will be taken on the 28th of March. So by the end of March you will know what will happen. [unclear]

?F10 Can I ask about uniforms? Will you be providing us with full new uniforms?

JD Yes, and a PE kit.

?F10 So we would not have to pay for another?

JD No. That's if it's option one. If it's option one we provide a new uniform for everybody. If Stream Woods is providing new uniforms for the Stream Woods kids, then New Briars would provide new uniforms to the New Briars kids, unless the school decides to change its uniform. But the assumption is that this change is not [unclear] and we aim to do the two sets for the future.

?F10 One more question. [unclear]

PD Not at all. [unclear]

?F11 In connection with what you said about the timing I wondered whether [unclear]. You said that the education panel is meeting on the 23rd of January at ten o'clock.

JD Yes. It's an all-day meeting, but it has other business to take care of. What I propose is that we start the meeting at ten and that we start with this, so if necessary

we can take the whole meeting up. We would expect to do this work and make a decision by lunch time, but there are cases where members have said, oh we want to think about this and come back. But it'll be a ten o'clock start.

?F11 And then can you carry on?

JD Yeah. The cabinet normally meets at two o'clock. [unclear] It's normally two o'clock and it's normally on a Monday afternoon. I haven't got my diary, but it's normally at two o'clock. It would be very helpful to know if people are going to come along because what we will do then is make sure for example, that somebody from the school, someone who represents the school, it's usually the head or the chair of governors, has a place at the table. [unclear] If the school says, well there are going to be 20 or 30 of us coming along we can think about [unclear]. So if necessary we can talk out of chamber. [unclear] We can't even sit around the table, or look people in the eye, and have a general debate. Once it's in the council chambers it's a set piece. But nevertheless, once we get up to 60 or 70 people we'll have to either move across into the council chamber or have some kind of [unclear]. So you're welcome. That's your democratic right. It would be helpful to let us know who's coming and roughly how many.

?F11 And if there are any changes? [unclear]

JD Yes, we will. With change for example, we're running a review which is actually a bigger review. It involves nine schools and we changed the date for the panel. [unclear] But it's very unlikely to change because once again you have to change member's diaries. [unclear]

PD [unclear]

JD And again the school organisation committee [unclear].

?M6 If the school has surplus numbers and if the merger does go ahead and for example, 25% of New Briars parents decide to move their children to [unclear] and 25% of Stream Woods parents did the same, would we not be left with a building here with still a surplus that we started with?

JD In the end I think it'd be very unlikely. Because of where the parents live some of them have to travel right past the school all the way down to the county.

?M6 Like myself for example, I drive past Avalon [?] to get to the school.

JD But we wouldn't... [unclear]

?M6 So it could happen?

JD Well, in the end parental choice and such... Surplus places are unevenly spread. If you look at the numbers overall that's not something...

?M6 But we could end up with a number of surplus places at this school?

PD [unclear] The whole point of this is that there are so many surplus places. Any school in the area could end up [unclear].

?M6 There's a number across there and they have double the amount of teachers here with not a massive number of increases...

JD Yeah. If your worst guess becomes true what's more likely to happen is the school then does again [unclear] and we'd have to look at that We could speculate what parents are likely to do, but our experience elsewhere tells us that that's not going to happen.

?M6 So teachers would be laid off sooner rather than later?

JD If the plan to move the children is more significant, then we'd have to manage that and again we'd put additional finances in to make sure the school is protected against that. We can speculate what parents are going to do, but it's not a science.

?F12 [unclear] Over six or seven years it will reduce year on year. You say that's not good for the school and yet...

JD No, I disagree with you. I think there are two different scenarios. A school which fizzles out, if you like, in an unmanageable way and which just dries up as the number of children just start to go out of the system is not something that is managed properly. That's a very, very difficult place for the school, the kids, and the staff to be. If we would know in advance what the numbers are likely to be over a period then you can plan for that, you can staff if, you can finance it, even if you have to put transitional funding in. That's not the same as schools just falling by the wayside because there aren't enough children to go around. Managing a reduction in size is completely different from schools that are suffering from falling rolls in an unplanned and uncoordinated way. What we're saying in terms of numbers is that that is a scenario if all the parents decide to send all the children to what would be a school on this site. We suspect that's unlikely to happen. Those are the maximum possible numbers.

?F12 Right. So obviously you'll monitor that in the same ways you've been monitoring the numbers that the amalgamation [unclear]? So what have you noticed? [unclear]

JD The numbers of children are broadly what we were expecting.

?F12 [unclear] Whether it's managed or otherwise we are going to be looking on this site, whatever the school is called, at a reducing school.

JD Yes. The school will be set up and it will be managed transitionally over a period of years. It will evolve into one school, one-form entry primary school on this site. What I'm saying to you is that is a manageable arrangement. It needs some funding and all the rest of it, but it is manageable. What I think we have to avoid are the costs of a school which gets reducing numbers in an unplanned way, budgets go out of control, they're unable to pay their costs, and eventually the school fizzles out. That's quite a different process than a managed reduction in size.

?F12 It's a different process in one sense from the county's point of view, from the governor's point of view, even from the members of staff's point of view. As far as the children are concerned it is going to be a reducing school. Every year there are going to be fewer children. There are going to be fewer children around. I think quite logically [unclear].

JD I fundamentally disagree. A school which is properly managed in terms of reducing size is something that can be managed professionally, financially, [unclear]. That can be managed in advance if you plan for that and the children, in a sense, will be protected from that environment. They are not protected in schools which are just reducing the size in an ad hoc kind of way, and the schools have got themselves into difficulty. When I first came here there were 28 schools. We looked at those schools across categories and they were actually quite good schools. Some were very good schools, and suddenly there were falling numbers, a couple of staff go, and they get into difficulties very quickly. In an unmanaged way the decisions were taken earlier and that's what we're trying to avoid here. Where I disagree with you I think a school which just reduces in an unplanned way is completely and significantly different to a school which reduces in a managed way. Sorry. [unclear] I disagree on this point and it's a very unpleasant and difficult place for children to be in a school which is just fizzling out. It's not a problem for the children if it's managed properly.

?F12 Of the two schools New Briars and Stream Woods are currently basically one form entry schools. I know that the numbers at Stream Woods are higher, but [unclear] one form entry for quite some time. As somebody said earlier, why can't we leave the two schools as they are and have them both functioning as one form entry because what you're actually proposing is that in the short-term you'll fill this building up, but in the long-term it will revert to a one-form entry school which is basically what it is now.

JD Because of the [unclear] and where children live is what I'm saying. [unclear]

?M7 Hello. [unclear] chair of governors of New Briars School. I expressed all this at our meetings, but just in case I'll say it here as well because there is a lot of talk about the new housing going up in the area and the numbers we'll have there will become [unclear]. But there is a development; the town centre in Hatfield is due for redevelopment, which would start next year and be finished by 2010. They're planning to build 275 units of accommodation there. Now, most of that is going to be flats and not all of those are obviously going to be filled with families. But families do live in flats in Hatfield because Hatfield is such an expensive area. A lot of people in Hatfield are classed as poor. That is on our doorstep. That is in central Hatfield where we are now. There is also a planning application for 24 three- and four-bedroom houses to be built right next door to where [unclear] is now, which is right around the corner. There are other houses in this area as well and you yourselves have said that the numbers in Hatfield will be increasing year on year anyway. So having said all of that, yes there is an issue with numbers, but as has already been expressed it can be dealt with without disrupting the schools that are presently there and that is Justin's justification [? or classification?] of the school from two to one form of entry. I understand his reasons for not wanting to touch the hamlet [?]. If you wanted to delay the decision for another couple of years to see what the effect is and see if numbers do

actually rise in this area and then perhaps re-look at that decision, then fine. But I feel that the disruption that this will cause can be avoided just by changing the classifications of the school. That's all I have to say on that.

JD [unclear]

PD [unclear] I appreciate that you said that before. We hear what you're saying. [unclear] It's not just about sizes of schools and declining numbers. It's also, and people don't like to hear this, about the efficient use of resources. We've got three schools in the same centre of the town and actually a population of [unclear]. I know that's not an acceptable amount particularly. [unclear]

JD What we'll do is make sure that point does come across in our report. [unclear] That's something we'll put to members. Just a point on finance; although we talked about the efficient use of finance here it's not finances that we would save and put back into the council. In terms of the efficient running cost of schools the funding goes back into the school, not back into the council. It's not a case of saving money to be spent on roads and other things. It goes back into the school system.

?M8 [unclear] I've been to the meeting at both schools just to listen to what people have to say. A number of parents have brought forward different options; reducing Stream Woods down to one-form entry and leaving New Briars as it is, or merging New Briars into [unclear]. But what you've done is put forward three options, all of which have exactly the same effect. The New Briars site [unclear] and Stream Woods continues to have a school. You've got three options, all of which are effectively the same. Wouldn't it be better and more open to give the committee a choice of options that were different so that you can then go in to them and say why some options are better than others rather than to have three almost identical options?

JD Yeah. It's certainly true that the three options have a very similar [unclear]. Whenever we possibly can we would want to make sure we consult in this way on more options than that. Sometimes we can do that and sometimes we can't. In one or two cases, certainly in two cases recently, not only were we unable to come up with more varied results [unclear]. The guarantee we're giving is that we would look at any proposals anybody brings forward, actually write out an approach [?] before the 4th of December, and apply those four tests to them. If a group even now brings forward a proposal which meet the tests in terms of minimising disruption, environmental issues, issues on standards, and most importantly having the right number of places in the right places, those are options that we would even now have a look at and work our way through. If necessary if one of those options is significantly different to what we've proposed so far, then we'll even begin a consultation process. We wouldn't want to do that because it adds to the uncertainty, but if there are groups that are working on different options we're quite happy as officers to come along and talk through those options.

PD I think it's also worth mentioning that in the consultation document we do refer to other ideas that were evaluated and proven why they weren't evaluated, and those other options are available on the web sites in the consultation documents.

?M9 [unclear]

PD It's a Roman Catholic school.

?M9 So?

PD So first of all, it's a Roman Catholic school. [unclear] So it would be a rather fruitless exercise if we came to say that we needed to change something when A, there is no rationale for changing it and B, they had no cultural demand for [unclear].

?M10 [unclear] That is such discrimination when [unclear] to say that no, sorry, you can't touch it because it's a church school. It's just blatant discrimination.

JD We can have a fascinating, philosophical debate about this and of course we've had interesting discussions with both communities over our policy to remove transport to them and there are a whole range of them. But what Pauline is saying is the reality of the world is that there are limits of control that we have over some schools. What we don't want to do is muddy the water and bring forward proposals which A, we don't see a direct need for and B, we know we can't deliver.

?M10 So you don't want to upset anybody?

JD Well, it's not a case of not wanting to upset anybody because we're upsetting you, aren't we? What I'm saying is, you know, it's not that we're worried about upsetting people. It's just that we need to be conscious of who controls what sites and which schools. [unclear]

?M10 Are you trying to upset me?

JD Well, no. There's no point in upsetting people. Why engage in [unclear]? That's the whole purpose of stakeholder discussions.

PD [unclear] It's not their fault. [unclear]

?F13 Hi, it's more a point than a question to be fair. I just feel that I've spoken to management and governors about any school leads to a nervous staff and government body. We feel that both schools are successful and happy and can tell how supported they are by their head teachers. What I'd like to know is how can new management form effective relationships with the staff and families in such a short period of time? In my opinion a good head would not be available within the timescale that you have said, unless you already have a management team in mind as you did with [unclear]. [unclear] by the leadership of the pupil and staff needs is a barrier to a smooth transition.

JD Basically all I can say to you is that the most urgent of all things with response to the decision taken is to get on with the HR processes so that we can make appointments so we can take out that uncertainty straightaway. All I can say is of all of the reorganisation to be done, the staff, including the head, the deputy and the governors that have taken on that new school have been staffed, or are already 10% staffed. They are now familiar faces. All I can say to you is...

?F13 Sorry. Can you just make that point again.

JD The point I'm making to you is that the staff of the new school, whichever of the three sets in, will be staffed by our current staff if the staff wants to. I'm not necessarily talking about new staff from outside the existing schools. That is a decision for the governing body to take. But we've never yet had a governing body that hasn't taken that view. All I can say to you is we will do that as quickly as we possibly can to take out that uncertainty. It's very unlikely because going back to the point Pauline was making about buildings, the curriculum, getting the children to work together long before they come together in September, needs to be done by the staff. We need to secure the teaching team and the governing body long before decisions can be made.

?F13 I agree with you on that actual fact that it needs to be done. All I'm saying is that the staff also need somebody to turn to and they, as professionals, are wonderful and they will support the children and they will do their best whatever the outcome. But they are [unclear] and they rely on them for support and that's why to get a good head that they can turn to in such a short time [unclear].

PD I can offer some information at least about the timescales on that. We expect that the head teacher... There are three options. [unclear] Obviously if either option two or three were approved, then it's quite clear who the head teacher would be because you're just continuing one or the other in two schools. If option one goes ahead the plan would be that the head teacher of that new school [unclear] because the process will have to be subject to the decision of the school organisation committee on the 29th of March. [unclear] It's entirely up to the individuals concerned whether any of the existing post holders go to those posts. So it could well be that one or more of the existing people [unclear] new post as well. It might not be like that.

?F13 I'm saying it would be a shame in both cases.

PD I understand that. [unclear]

?M11 I'd just like to comment with regards to the disruption to children now if the amalgamation goes ahead, certainly for the children in years five and six when they're coming towards their important exam time. There's also a secondary review which will have been delayed but will be going ahead later on, and those same groups of children will possibly have had schooling in Hatfield will be getting to that stage in their lives when they'll fail [?] again when that construction will be going ahead. So if we can try and eliminate some of the disruption now along the lines that have already been discussed, then hopefully they will help the secondary phase of their education.

JD Point taken. In terms of the secondary review, and this is just for the record really, we've delayed that because we know by Christmas we'll have a lot more information about the resources for the future. There are large sums of money, lots of £150 million to rebuild and refurbish our secondary schools in seven blocks, and the first will be Seabridge [?] and we'll get what we want from that back in 2008. [unclear] Because we get that information in December it makes sense to delay the secondary provision, but I accept the point. If we're not careful, particularly with the kids in New Briars, [unclear].

?M11 I'll just pass on the comment that even though during our move we had no help from the county our staff were wonderful in helping the children along. [unclear] Even so there were bill takers from January all the way through to July to try to alleviate most of the effects of that financial reducing the... That was with the idea of the children in mind that we would be moving back to our old school anyway. So the disruption of causing that will go on for quite some time afterwards. Going back a couple of slides, the resultant school will have an admission number of 30 from 2008. Is that January or September 2008?

PD September.

JD September.

B Okay. Thank you all very much.