

# Hoddesdon Review Westfield 22-06-06

## Speaker key

JW	Jane Wilton
JD	Jim Dalton [?]
UM	Unidentified male speaker
UF	Unidentified female speaker
PW	Paul Wray
CM	Clive Mitchell
PS	Paul Stephens

JW Good evening everyone and welcome to this public consultation on the review of the primary schools in the Hoddesdon and Wormley area. I'd just like to ask you, [unclear] your mobile phones, if anybody's got a mobile phone please could you put them on silent or vibrate so that they don't interrupt the meeting. I'm Jane Wilton and I'm a facilitator for an organisation called Accent. Accent is an independent market research agency who have done a tremendous amount of independent research into public sector issues and we are, as I say, independent and my role here is, we've been asked to come in by Hertfordshire County Council to help run this programme of consultations, and my role is to make sure that it's a fair and proper meeting and that everything here is recorded and goes for consideration towards the decision that is going to be made with this proposal for the different primary schools. So you can be absolutely sure that we are going to be writing a report which will record what you have said this evening. I will be scribbling away like mad to try to try and make sure that I get as many points as possible and that report will then be put up on the website so that you can see it.

The other thing is that this meeting is being recorded, which is why we have microphones, and a transcript of that will also be done and will be up on the website. So everything that is said tonight, hopefully, we will try and record in one way or another. I'd just draw your attention to, on your seats you have seen slides [?] that are part of the presentation that you're going to be given very shortly, and also there is a questionnaire. That is for Accent, for my company, and I would be very grateful, I will remind you at the end, if you could fill that in and leave it with me at the end. So, last night we had a presentation that perhaps some felt was a bit too long, so we're going to try and shorten it this evening, but we do want to make sure that we give you as much information as you need, and the time to actually discuss all the issues. Can I underline that this is a public meeting, a public consultation about the issues. I know that some of you do have very important concerns, individual personal concerns, either about jobs, work, teaching staff or your own children, but those are best dealt with personally and there is a number that you can phone to contact and you can meet people from the council to actually deal with individual issues and that will give us a wider brief for everybody to discuss the main issues in the meeting. And I may just move you on if you stray into that sort of territory. So I think without further ado I'm going to hand over to Jim Dalton.

UM Excuse me, I don't quite understand, sorry if I'm a bit stupid, we're parents and the reason why we're here is because of our children.

JW Oh, yes, I know, we're talking about if there is a particular problem with your individual child. If that kind of takes up the meeting time and is not an issue really, if you can deal with that individually with the council. I'm sorry if I didn't make myself clear. OK?

JD Jane, thank you very much, and good evening everybody. My name is Jim Dalton. I'm the Head of Access and Effectiveness [?] for children's schools and family services at the county council and I'm going to make this presentation. I'll introduce my colleagues in a moment and then, as Jane's already said, we want to spend most of the time this evening in discussion, for you to make your views known and for us to answer your questions. My colleagues are, starting on the right, Clive Mitchell, who is the Head of Primary School Effectiveness, and then Paul Wray, who is the Area Planning Manager, and Kate McGuire, who is [unclear] Planning Officer. Can I make it clear that we are all officers of the County Council and I think it's important that you understand the role of officers and the role of members because it's the members of the County Council who take the decisions and as yet no decisions have been taken about what should happen. The only thing that has been agreed by members is that there should be a review and it's the officers of the County Council who had the initial discussion with the schools and other stakeholders and have then come forward with the proposals in this document. And what we do at the end of this consultation is report back to members on what has been said. And they then take the decision and it's quite interesting that when it comes to the decision taking an awful lot of our proposals are asked to be given further consideration.

JW And we're going to do the presentation and then we're going to open the floor to questions afterwards.

UM I have an immediate question to what has been said.

JW If you do have questions could you make a note of them and then actually we'll answer all the questions at the end. Could you do that, otherwise we'll have a very stop-start meeting and we'd like to get the presentation over and then start.

UM It was something you said about objectives and I don't think it's that straightforward. A recommendation's been made to close the school so it's not like it's a neutral no decision's been made, that's my point.

JW Can we make sure these points come up when we open the meeting to the floor? We'll do the presentation, if you'd like to write down your question.

UM I'm just saying that a decision has been made, a recommendation has been made to close this school. So starting from a position of overturn that recommendation, that's the point I'm making.

J It's a proposal and that's the purpose of this evening's meeting. That's the purpose of the meeting but I think there was some understandable cynicism last night about whether a decision had already been taken and what I was trying to do

in those introductory remarks was to emphasise that a decision has not been taken, because the members of the County Council have not yet considered the outcome of the consultation.

UM We have got a recommendation for further options to be kept [unclear].

J And I was wanting to clarify the role of officers and members because I think that caused some misunderstanding at yesterday's meeting.

UM And the officers put forward that?

J Yes.

UM Great, OK.

J What I now just want to quickly remind us of is the purpose of the review and why we're here this evening, and what I want to make absolutely clear at the outset is that this is not a review about the standards of achievement in the schools. It does sometimes happen that the County Council has to review the schools because of the standards that are being achieved. That's not the position here. The position in this area, along with many other parts of the county is that we've got a serious issue of falling rolls, the number of children who need places are considerably down now on what they have been, and what we are wanting to do is to get a better match than we've now got between the number of places that are needed and the number of places that are actually provided. Because if schools are not operating at the level that they were planned to operate at, there is a serious risk of undermining those standards and of the school getting into financial difficulties. We have obviously also got to use our resources most effectively because if we have a situation where we are maintaining a lot of schools that are not full then we're having to put money in to keeping up those empty places, rather than funding the school provision. As I say, it's most important to remember that this is not about the standards of achievement.

Now, here is the basic data about the number of places that are currently provided, 509, and the number of pupils that are actually in the reception classes last April, 416, so you can see there the number of surplus places, about 90, equates to three forms of entry, a form of entry being 30 pupils. And that situation is going to worsen in that the number of surplus places is going to increase over the next five years. What we are planning and proposing in this consultation is that we should remove three forms of entry, that's the starting point for the consultation, and if we were to reduce by three forms of entry we would then have a surplus of 4% and that's an important figure for you to be informed of and that's slightly below the advice of the audit commission, which is the government body that oversees spending of local councils, they recommend that a surplus of five or ten percent is adequate.

When we are considering proposals, when we need to reduce numbers, we have what we call four tests that we need to satisfy ourselves over. And the first of those tests is that we want to get the right number of places where they needed and when they are needed. The second test is that the pattern of provision that we then emerge with is able to raise standards. The third test is if building work is

involved that that building work meets all the up to date standards. And the fourth test is that we have acceptable transitional arrangements for the children who would be affected.

One of the things that I'm going to be explaining at the end of the presentation is the process from now on. And one of the things schools affected by consultation proposals are able to do, and invariably do do, is make a presentation to the appropriate body at the County Council when the time comes. And very often schools put forward alternative proposals. And when a school puts forward alternative proposals it must bear those tests in mind. And those are the tests which, if you are thinking about putting forward an alternative proposal, you will need to be sure that you meet. So it is important that you're aware of those tests. Going on then just to remind you of the four options that are in the paper, three for the north and one for the south. The first option, which is the officers' preferred option, would close this school, close Ryelands, make more places available at Sheredes and St Catherine's and also reduce the number of places at Forres. And I'm sure you're all aware of the impact of that. The second option would be to close Ryelands, not do anything here, and also to reduce Forres. The third option is similar to the first option, although it excludes Sheredes and Forres. In the south, we are proposing that Ley Park should close and Wormley should expand slightly so that it becomes a two form of entry school. So those are the proposals that are currently being considered at these meetings, and there are meetings at all the schools affected.

Now, again reminding you of the impact of these proposals and what particularly the affect on children would be, if Westfield and Ryelands were to close, they'd actually close in August 2008 but wouldn't admit any children into reception in 2007. The pupils already here would obviously remain here until the end of July 2008. There would be additional accommodation provided at St Catherine's and this would enable children here to go to St Catherine's or, if parents preferred and places were available, to go to other schools in the area. Then just to finish by mentioning Forres, that reduction would take place in September 2008. That wouldn't obviously affect any of the children who are already there.

So far as the second option is concerned, that follows very much the same format, but only affects Ryelands, it would not obviously affect you here. And again, option three so far as you are concerned has the same impact as option one, but it just excludes Sheredes and Forres.

Now, can we just go over, in slightly more detail, the arrangements from now on? As I've already said, we are taking in all the views at these meetings, the views that you submit through the website, the views that you email, the letters that are written, the resolutions of the governing body, all these are taken to members, because as I said, it is they who take the decision. And there's two public meetings at County Hall, the first of these is the education panel on 12<sup>th</sup> September and that's the meeting where members debate the issues, hear representations from schools, look at the points of view that are being expressed and they then make a recommendation to the County Council's cabinet and it will be the County Council's cabinet which actually takes the formal decision as to whether it seeks to implement the review, and if so it would go on to publish what are known as statutory notices. But the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> September is absolutely

critical and that's the occasion when, if you are wanting to make representations, you need to be prepared to do so. Now, I was anxious to go quickly through that presentation so that we've got maximum time for questions, for comments, and I and my colleagues will respond to those. Thank you very much.

JW We'll open the meeting to the floor. We will run the meeting until 8:45 as an open meeting and then from 8:45 until nine o'clock we'll give you the opportunity if you wish to talk individually to members of the panel. There are a lot of you here and obviously there are a lot of points that you want to get across so we understand the strength of the feelings here, but I would ask you if you could possibly try to contain yourself until you have a microphone in your hand. Two reasons for this, one is that it's much easier for us to have a sensible debate if we can all hear what's going on and if everybody is shouting over one another then it's going to be very difficult, but I think more importantly from your point of view, if you have the microphone and you're speaking into it clearly it is recording what you say and it will come up in the transcript, so that's what we want, because we want to hear what you've got to say, literally, we want to hear it tonight and we want to hear it on the tape. So we will have a microphone on either side of the room coming to you and I would ask that you respect that and wait. The other thing is that I want as many people to put their point as possible, and so I will go to new people to get their points rather than going back to people who keep wanting to make further points. It's just so that with a large group like this everybody can have their say. I think that's about all I really need to say, apart from re-emphasising the fact that we really want to talk about the issues and we'll hand over to you now. So who would like to actually make a first point? The lady in white just there.

UF It seems bizarre to me that when a housing estate is being built at the end of the road you're closing the school closest to it. Where are those children going to go to school if you close this one? Surely it would make more sense to close Forres and leave this one where it is as there will be nothing between Sheredes and Cranbourne if you close this one and there are five in schools in a road down the other side of the town [?].

J I'm going to ask Paul if he'll respond about the number of [coughing] which have been generated by the housing at the end of the road.

UF The end of this road, down here?

J Yes.

PW Those houses are taken into account in our forecast. But one of the big issues that we had when we looked at the numbers of children, and where they lived in relation to the schools, there are more children who live in the area closest to Cranbourne, Forres and Roselands, that's where the real pressure is, in Westfield about 50% of the pupils at Westfield, 157, come from within the area close to the school, closer to this school than to other schools, but 50% come from further afield, and what's happening at the moment, because we've got so many surplus places, people are choosing different schools that are sometimes a very long way from where they live, or what would be their nearest school. But we've

had to look at all those issues in relation to it, but going back to your point about housing, that's all taken into account within the forecast.

UF But surely [coughing] school nearer to them. This school might not have that many empty places if there's a housing estate being built there.

PW But what I'm saying to you at the moment, of the 157 children that are in this school [unclear] over half of them, or about half of them, were coming from away from this area so, OK, some others might come in, living locally, but they wouldn't offset all of those who are nearer to other schools, that's the point.

JW OK, this lady here.

UF First of all, just to make a comment that those of us who do travel in from further away travel in by choice because this is an excellent school, and I don't particularly want to put my children in a school nearer where I live, so the choice of this school being the best one for my children is important. I've got a two fold question really, it's about the actual structure of the consultation itself. In the consultation document I'd like to know where this prospective parents, and I'm just looking at it from a parental consultation rather than a larger issue at the moment because it simplifies it slightly, if you tick you don't know, in any of the options, is that then going to be read as, if you don't really know what you think about it you're not opposing it, and if you're therefore not opposing it, all those don't know ticks account towards bumping up your numbers in favour of putting through your proposed option? If that's the case then there are somewhere in the region of just over 500 possible parental votes for Ley Park and Wormley that could put down a don't know for Westfield and Ryelands on a closure list which we don't number 500 pupils between the two of us here. I'd like some assurances that our proportion of the vote will be representational of school rather than the number of pupils that are actually in them.

JW Could we get a paper [?] around that.

J What I think it's important also to note is that the form does ask you to indicate where you are from as well, and that obviously is a way of ensuring that what's being said across the different schools is properly reflected. And we always have a don't know, not because we think it applies to people who can't make up their minds, but if they genuinely aren't able to give us a view on that particular option, if it's not an area of the dispute [unclear] they can just say I don't know.

UF So what happens to the don't know votes?

J All the votes, and it's important, I think votes is not necessarily the right word, all those numbers are presented to members and they're able to see a breakdown of who said what, and where they came from.

UF And is that breakdown part of the document?

J It's all part of the document, everything.

UF So you are saying that the don't knows go down as a number, say there were 400 don't knows or whatever, so it doesn't get [unclear] to anything else?

UF My concern was that if you put down that you didn't know, then you weren't physically objecting to the closure. Right, thank you.

UM First of all, maybe I am being really stupid, I just could not understand why Westfield is being recommended for closure. I look at the four tests, I look at a school that people choose to come to, an excellent community school that's got full intake, rising SATs results, a generally good record in terms of its behaviour, its children and its success, and its policy and platform, and yet the council decides to close it. And I honestly don't know why, because when I look at the meeting that took place in Ryelands last week, according to the local paper someone from the Education Authority, Justin Donovan, said something like, because of falling numbers the status quo is not an option. That's not the case for Westfield. We also heard that maybe because of the fact that we had single entry is the issue, well then the only thing I would say is does that mean every single school in Hertfordshire from Broxbourne to Welwyn Garden City, Hertford, everywhere in Hertfordshire, if you are a single form entry, you will be threatened with closure, is that going to be the case? And my further question is that if it somehow, for some bizarre reason, that this part of Hertfordshire should seem to be having a fall in birth rate, despite the really obvious thing that people look around and see, as in all parts of the country, new houses being built, and I think the best thing to do would be to leave the meeting, go home and do an activity that [unclear] and think of the Queen [?] and schools, because I do really think it's strange. A couple of quick questions, one is that my daughter will be in her SATs year when she'd finish and she would have to go to a portacabin which the council now, or the committee [?] tells me it's mobile accommodation, that's if she's lucky. Presumably those portacabins or mobile accommodation will be at the expense of a playing area for the children at St Catherine's and I do not really think that's a very good way for my daughter to take her SATs year, and that's after two years of uncertainty for the school, understandably possibly even [unclear] expect the teachers due to the fact that they may have wished to leave a school that's threatened with closure. Quick other question is about the fact that I chose to send my children, or we chose, to send them to a school which is a non-denominational school, I did not expect that I had no choice in the matter, because choice is a big issue in education. If I was to move house and my local school was a faith school it would be quite reasonable for the council to say to me, you chose to move here. I did not choose to close Westfield School, or recommend its closure, therefore I will accept that the school does [?], I will be offered as an alternative [unclear] at least will maintain the standards that I believe that Westfield has achieved. And that is a non-denominational school. I will accept nothing less. My third point is just about transport, and [unclear] as my children get older the intention is for [coughing] to walk them home from school and part of that on-going process of growing up into adulthood. Now obviously if they have to go school on the other side of Hoddesdon town centre, that would not be possible. It's not possible, it's not safe, to walk across the town centre, through the subway, particularly in the winter months, so I would also ask the council, what feasibility has been done about the question of people having to put more cars on the road in the school run to get to St Catherine's in the early morning or mid afternoon. Thank you.

J Thank you very much. I'm going to ask Clive if he could pick up the issues around school size and so on. Then if Paul could take over on the accommodation. And yes, we'll review all four points.

CM On the issue of in option one, why Westfield? Just to start with the comment reported from Justin Donovan about status quo is not an option, that applies to the whole area, i.e. that we can't leave the number of surplus places as they are, we have got to do something. And the three options we put forward are the things that we're putting forward.

UM Excuse me, it doesn't say that here.

CM Well I don't know what it says, I was at the meeting and I'm telling you what he said.

UM [Inaudible].

CM I'm closer to Justin. But that's the issue.

JW Can you just let him answer the question?

UM He's not answering my question. [Unclear].

JW Can we stop now because I think that Clive has to be able to answer the question and you can't necessarily assume that what's in the papers is accurate.

[Unclear].

CM With respect, I haven't got to answer to what a newspaper report says, but I'll answer the point [overtalking]. I don't publish the paper.

UM Are you going to put a correction in?

CM I'll tell you what Justin Donovan said and meant now, if you care to listen.

UM I'm reading what the report said.

JW I think it's not [unclear] and it's wasting a lot of time.

CM [Unclear] about status quo is not an option mean that in the whole of the review here we cannot leave things as they are, we have to make changes. And the three options set out those changes. Now, in terms of why is option one as it is, in other words, why does option one include the closure of Westfield whereas option two doesn't? From our perspective, what we have got to leave in the area is a provision over the next ten to 15 years, which will be the best possible provision for the children in this area. So we have got to look at the children who are not yet in school and the children who are not yet born, and think about leaving the best pattern of provision for those children. The reason why we're going for the two form entry option, which is really the argument behind option one is that whilst the size of a school doesn't make it either good or bad or indifferent, in other

words the standards of the school aren't related to size, the standards of the school are related to the quality of the leadership and the quality of the teaching. Where those things are equal, there is absolutely no doubt about the advantages of two form entry schools. They simply have greater resources to focus on the education of the children within them. And in practice, and we have examples across the county, that means either additional teaching assistance, a non-teaching deputy, a non-teaching special needs co-ordinator. There are options open to the head teacher and governors in a school of that size which simply aren't open in the same way to smaller schools. There are other issues to do with school size which we will be keen to [unclear] in the review and which also explain why option one is as it is. We would not want to leave a one form entry school where numbers were set to continue to fall because we know that we have considerable experience that in those cases schools can quickly become vulnerable. They can remain stable for a while, even if numbers fall, but numbers falling in a one form entry school means that there's a continual reorganisation of classes, the number of teachers actually reduces over time, and there only needs to be one or two other factors, like the head leaving or something like that, and the school will become very vulnerable. And our case history of schools shows that that is true and it is not as true of two form entry schools.

The other issue in terms of size which explains why option one is as it is, is that we would prefer not to leave one and a half form entry schools if we can avoid it. And that is the case of Sheredes and St Catherine's. And that's because in the work that we have had done for us in terms of the resources that schools have available to spend on the children one form entry schools are the most expensive sorts to run, in the sense the least options in terms of additional resources to enhance the children's education. That's because they are a difficult size to run and you get a very odd pattern of classes. So when we're looking at option one we are looking at trying to secure the best overall pattern of provision for this area over the next few years. But it is also true that option two meets the core tests. It just doesn't leave, in our view, looking at the area as a whole, and the children who have yet to come through and yet to be born, it doesn't leave, we think, the best overall pattern of provision in the area. And that's the thinking. And we have some other answers to the questions from Paul.

PW You mentioned the portacabins or the temporary classrooms. Certainly what we have suggested if option one were taken forward, we've suggested that we should try to make it possible for all the children from any closing school to move together rather than being separated to a number of different schools. In the context of that need, we would be providing additional accommodation, temporary accommodation, at the receiving school, in this case, if option one were taken forward, that's St Catherine's. The idea would be that between the summer of 2007 and 2008 we would be, if this is taken forward, carrying out the building works to create the full two FE school that would be required in the medium term, but we would also then, in 2008, be bringing onto site, actually we'd be bringing them onto site earlier, so that we could decamp current children from St Catherine's into those temporary accommodation classrooms while building work would be going on throughout 2007/8 and then, with the other children coming in, it would not be necessarily that those coming in would be in the temporary accommodation. That would be something for the head teacher and the governors of any school that was taking in a significant increase in their pupil

population. How that would be organised to the best way, because we appreciate and they appreciate, and anybody in this situation would, that a transition like that is not an easy time and it's something that needs to be managed very carefully with a lot of support and it would be something that they would need to take on board carefully. That's the reason for the mobile classrooms, so that the children could have the opportunity to all stay together in the sense that they were not being separated to a number of different schools, but how the classes would be organised within a larger school would be for the head and the governors. That's the point. The second point, the business about choosing a non-denominational school, I quite understand that and this is an issue that is something we've got to look at carefully. I think the one thing that we would want to point out at this stage is that there is a very significant difference between a voluntary aided school, such as Broxbourne Primary School, or St Augustine Roman Catholic Primary School, or St Cross Roman Catholic Primary School. They all have their own admissions rules and very often they will have in those rules that you must attend church or you must have a letter from a priest or something like that, St Catherine's, as a voluntary controlled Church of England school, has none of that. They operate the same rules for admission that all our other community schools, such as Westfield or Ryelands or Roselands or any of the others. So there is no barrier on people applying for places but I do understand the point about it having a Christian ethos. But, as the head there would say, it's not an in your face one. But that's a judgement and you've got to make that judgement and we need to get those points... [Overtalking].

J Before we ask any supplementaries could we [unclear] and there are a couple more points to be addressed.

PW The other point was the walking to school. I know that, certainly when we first went to look at St Catherine's for this purpose, I mean I've been in St Catherine's a number of times previously, but for this purpose you look at it, and you think, yes, the school is right in the centre, on the middle of a roundabout, and you think, does this make any sense? And yet you look at the school travel plan and you see how many children from that school walk to school, why? Because actually it's not very difficult for many children to get to that school very safely. And that is what [unclear] and that's what's happening, there are a number [?] paths and there's this new pelican crossing which everybody says we've just done that at the same time, we knew nothing of that at all until it happened. [Overtalking]. But what I'm saying is that really that need not be as big an issue, but we understand what you're saying.

JW Can we take some more points? The lady at the back in white.

UF On one of your slides you say about the four tests and the options all have to meet these four tests. Well the last one, you say about having sensible transitional arrangements for affected pupils, last night when questioned about these you said, there will be arrangements put in place but at this stage it's too early to say what they would be. So how can you say that you have in place acceptable arrangements when you don't even know what they are?

J Paul will comment, but I think there's a misunderstanding there because what Paul was just talking about, no it was really what Clive was talking about, the arrangements that would be made at St Catherine's, that is what...

UF No but here, for the two years that our children have to stay until it closes, you said there was going to be acceptable arrangements put in place so that the education of our children isn't affected. And then last night when it was questioned they said, you'll be working with the head teacher and the other teachers here to keep the continuity of education the same, but you couldn't say what those arrangements would be because it's too far in advance.

J Yes, Clive will want to elaborate on this but the quality of education here is in the hands of the head and the staff...

UF They will be looking for other jobs, won't they? They're going to be having to make sure their careers continue, you're not giving any job assurances to those teachers, so over two years there's going to be teachers going, children in and out, so the education of our children is going to be severely disrupted even though you said last night there's going to be minimal disruption. I can't think how you're going to get round that.

J I wouldn't want to be suggesting that there would be no impact because that would not be right. But I wouldn't accept that there is going to be serious disruption because there's determination on the part of the local authority and of the school to implement whatever is eventually decided in a way that does not have an adverse impact on the children.

UF So all the teachers that are currently in the school will be kept on? You can guarantee that?

J No, I can't.

UF So then if there's change of teachers how can you say there's no disruption?

J I can't guarantee that, of course I can't. But I can't guarantee either that there will be no staff changes if nothing happens, because staff do move on.

UF But they're moving on for different reasons. This is being imposed on them because their careers are being taken away of teaching at this school, otherwise they wouldn't be leaving the school for that reason. After two years this school will no longer be here so they've got to go, so they're going to be looking from the word go really, aren't they?

J But they may well be saying, we want to stay here until the...

UF Why, are you giving out massive bonuses to keep them here, is that what our taxpayers' money is going on then, to keep the teachers here you're going to give them big bonuses? I work down the City and when an institution is closing that's what they do to keep people on, to keep continuity for clients, they have to

pay out massive amounts of money, otherwise people wouldn't stay there, they'd be moving on to the next thing, wouldn't they?

J That's not our experience of staff who are working in schools where there are going to be changes. Our experience is that, yes, some people do move but they might very well have been moving anyway. Others say they want to stay until the end, and arrangements are then made for them to secure jobs in, say, a couple of years' time. I don't want to imply that there is not going to be an impact because that would not be right, and I don't want you to think that we're just sitting back, not working with the staff, not wanting to make sure that there is continuity over those two years.

UF There is no assurance from that comment whatsoever that my children's education is not going to be affected.

JW I think the point's been well made. Could we pass on to somebody else?  
OK, thank you the lady in white.

UF I'd like to say that my children all attended this school and have done very well. My grandchildren come here and they live out of the area. I cannot understand why you want to close this lovely school, the setting's super, it's a lovely atmosphere, the teaching is good and send them to St Catherine's. I disagree with you entirely about not being dangerous, because it is. That new zebra crossing, I've seen people come round that roundabout, right up, and just about stop to let people, to go across, even when it's green. I don't think that's a very good idea at all, on that dangerous stretch of road. I look at people like that gentleman about mobile classrooms ending up in a playing area and the government are always on to us about, oh the children need places to play and they're going to take some of that away. Look at the wonderful place they have here, and also behind [unclear]. And everywhere in Hoddesdon will just [unclear], even the doctors' surgeries are having to expand because there's so many patients, and they're not all adults either. I honestly think you're doing a great injustice to the parents and children of this school. I know it's only a proposal, but what do you propose to do if that report [unclear] and it's closed?

J Thank you very much for those comments, it's important that things like that are recorded and members of the cabinet when they're making their decision do know the traditions of the school and the school life. But if it closes then we would have to see whether there was another community use for the school as a set of buildings, or if the borough council or any other public service had a use for those building. But if there was no community use for the buildings then the reality is that the site would be sold and there would be some residential development. [Short break in recording]. The only part of the site that could be built on would be the bit that's already built on, increasing the footprint, that's the only bit that could be developed [?] and our experience is that you get about 30, perhaps 40 houses on the footprint of a primary school. Now, just to give you another figure, sometimes helpful, that 30 or 40 houses would perhaps be built here if there was [unclear] use. In order to produce a one form entry school you need 1,000 houses [unclear]. So, an extra 30 or 40 houses won't make a significant difference to the need for places in the [unclear]. Can Paul pick up on the other point?

PW That was the second point I was going to make because it's the 64 houses that you mentioned plus the 20, the 30 or 40, that possibly could be here. And that's only being looked at in very general terms, it has not been specifically looked at at all. Because we're not anywhere near confirmation of any proposals as yet, sorry, any option being taken forward as yet. But the third point that you mentioned was about mobile classrooms at St Catherine's being on the playing field. Yes, they would have to take up space on the site, but that is a very large site, it's a much larger site than this school, it's much larger than some of the other two form entry schools. [Overtalking]. Yes, it will have more children but it won't have as many children as it could accommodate in site terms, according to the DFES regulations and requirements. It's a very big site.

UF For anybody who wasn't here last night, we raised a question which we did actually fail to mention at the beginning. Your proposal is that you would prefer everyone to go for option one, which is to remove all our children to St Catherine's. Now we brought up a point that was raised on 5<sup>th</sup> May by Wayne Howsen of St Catherine's that he was most concerned about the pylons. So we spoke to Mr Philips, who is the Chairman and the Director for Powerwatch. He basically sent an email back, I will quote exactly what he said. He said, on the current information available to me, in my view it is most inappropriate to close Westfield VP School and relocate the children to a portacabin close to the overhead power lines, it is a very unwise decision to be taken at present. We discussed this last night and obviously you can't answer my question of current [?] because you don't have the information but somebody very kindly got that information for me today. We had a quote from Doctor Ian Gibson, MP for North Norwich, who is the Chair of Science and Technology Select Committee, [unclear] a biological scientist and research into childhood leukaemia. He has expressed his concern at the position of the pylon which, as I spoke to Mr Alec [?] this morning is actually 200 metres away from your proposed mobile classrooms. He is in parliament today but he was actually going to speak to you and I have passed his telephone number to you and he should get back to you tomorrow. We looked at papers for childhood cancer and EMS, which is obviously [unclear] by these pylons. Now, what these EMS do, it is actually proven fact, that these increase the risk of childhood leukaemia, adult brain cancer, [unclear] disease, miscarriage and suicide. If we are being told we've got four different reports from four different people and have been told it is very, very unwise for us to move our children to St Catherine's, which is your proposed, where you want us to send our children. Now, I as a parent will not be sending my children to St Catherine's due to this fact, and I would urge everybody in this room to do the same, because you are basically putting our children's lives at risk. Again, I have all the facts, all the figures here, you are welcome, anybody, to look at these now.

J And because there was discussion of this last night...

UF Yes, but my question wasn't answered, that's why...

J We've been able to do a little bit more work, and Paul can now comment further and give a little bit more...

UF Having spoken to both of you, this is a personal fact, both of you said to me last night you didn't [unclear] our children a lot, but if you read that as a parent you wouldn't send your children to that school either.

PW. I didn't say that. Sorry, I never said that.

UF If you had children of nine and seven and you read that report, would you possibly think about sending your children to that school? Would you? Yes or no? Yes or no, that's all I want is a yes or no.

J No but I can't give you... [Overtalking].

UF Just one question, if you had a nine year old and seven year old and you read the data that is in front of me, that isn't just willy nilly data, these are personal emails that have come from different scientists, they've been researching this for 20 years, would you send your child to that school? Yes or no.

PW Could I answer my way? That is, I would want to find out as much as I could. I've found out...

[Overtalking].

PW What we've said, and we're not taking this lightly, by any means, but we've done this research today and there's nothing conclusive in it from a variety of scientists. But what we are doing and what we've agreed since yesterday, we've agreed with EDF, who are the suppliers of the electricity through those power lines, it's not actually where the pylons are that matters, it's where the power line is. The power line is 120 metres from here.

UF No it's not.

PW You can measure it on the map. But anyway, the point is that we've in fact contacted them and the chap there who is in charge of their health and safety, Tim [unclear], I can give you his number if you want it. He's agreed to come and take measurements at both St Catherine's and at Westfield just to look at the situation and will let us have the outcome of those readings. We've also contacted Broxbourne Borough Council environment health department. They've no records of any, and I find this hard to believe, but please don't quote me on that even though it's on the tape, I find it hard to believe but they say they've had no complaints to do with anything to do with these power lines but Mr Brian Foster has asked his assistant, Laura Shallack [?] to take measurements at both locations and again they will share the results with us in due course. We're not taking this lightly but there is not conclusive evidence from the scientific world. I'm not a scientist but there is a lot of evidence on both sides and we are certainly looking at that very closely.

UF OK.

JW Thanks very much. OK, next question.

UM One of the four criteria that you put up for making a decision on the closure, I think it was number three, was a better educational standard for the children. I think we've been quite lucky here, we've managed to attract a very good head teacher who in turn has been able to attract some very good teachers to the school. We've already had a very good TA in year six and we've had a very good teacher in year six in my opinion. How are you going to go before and put your proposal to the committee if this school gets better SATs results in July than the school that you propose for us to go to? Are you not going to look a bit foolish on that part if that's one of the main criteria, increased educational standards for the children?

J What we are obviously seeking to do is to find the right solution for the area as a whole and what we are anxious, and that's why the tests [unclear], to ensure that the total solution is actually one that is able to enhance [inaudible] to improve. And that doesn't mean just improvement at one school or another, it means improvement at all the schools. And I think this gets us back to some of the discussion we were having with Clive earlier, when he was explaining some of the advantages of a [coughing] two form entry pattern. That's not to say that one form entry schools don't achieve well, they clearly do achieve well. This school is achieving well and we will be pleased...

UM So my parental choice that you're giving me is you want me to move my children from a school that gets better SATs results to a school that doesn't get such good SATs results, and that's my parental choice you're giving me?

J What I'm saying is that the proposals that we [unclear] have got to respond to the needs of the area as a whole and we are pleased that an individual school does even better than it did before.

UM Sorry, I'm missing the point. You've got four criteria that you've set out, now you're going back on one of those criteria because you're saying that it doesn't really matter if the school that you're proposing to close has got better standards and results than the school you're proposing to send the children to? Which one is it?

J What we're wanting to do is to ensure that the eventual outcome is one that is going to help standards to be raised across all the schools in the area.

UM So you're not really interested in my children, you're just interested in the children that are coming through?

J No, we are trying to find the best solution for all the children, bearing in mind that over the area as a whole we are going to have to...

UM Sorry, we're going to have to disagree on this because we could go on all night. You are proposing that all parents with all the children here take their children out of the school, which possibly will get better SATs results than the school that you're proposing us to go to.

J Possibly that will happen but we don't know that...

UM So what's the point of having the four criteria then?

J Well the four criteria are to ensure that the proposals that are put forward to all of those four things and for reasons that Clive was saying earlier, we believe that option one is the best option so far as meeting that particular one of the tests is concerned. But I think we are going to disagree at this juncture on that.

PW Can I just add, though, that the reason option two is there is because we do appreciate that what has been happening at Westfield, increased parental preference, improved, you talk about your head teacher and I can do nothing but support that, in what you've said, and there's also the improved results that we've seen which are similar to the other school that you're referring to. I don't think I would be prepared to say that they're better or worse at this stage, they're very, very similar.

JW OK, I was going here, then we'll do the gentleman over there.

UF I have two points. One is to do with transitional arrangements for younger children coming into the school. What exactly are you going to do about people who have already got a brother or sister here, and then have a younger child who would normally start here but can't, and therefore would have to go somewhere else? You can't be in two places at once. The other thing is to do with timing of the decision. Basically you're not making the final decision till January 2007, at which point the younger children would have had to have chosen their schools. No-one's going to choose a school which is planned to close, therefore you can then say, oh sorry, you've got no-one to start in 2007/2008 so we'll close it anyway. So why is the decision so late?

J To deal with the second point first. The timing of the decision is very largely set by the need to go through the formal processes that Clive reminded us of over the last [unclear] and I'm afraid whenever an exercise like this begins and ends, because it does take place over a number of months...

UF Yes, but you could have started it earlier.

J Well, that would have had different disadvantages to it. I'm afraid, given the annual cycle of schools and what has to happen in schools at sent points of the year, whenever you begin an exercise like this you will always find that it doesn't sit well against one part of the school cycle. The first of your question, about the difficulties that parents would face who have a younger child and at present there is no easy answer to that. We said as much last night and I think it's most important on these occasions that we don't try to gloss over any [unclear]. That is a [coughing] it's one of the things the members will consider when they hear about the outcome of this consultation. A decision will be made at the time of [unclear] the report.

UF I'm just thinking, my son is due to start in January 2007. He will be the last intake. He's got seven years of school ahead of him and you're thinking of shutting the school. How can you possibly know what's going to happen in 2011, not even all of our children will be born then.

JW Right, the gentleman here.

UM Before I ask my question I would just like to make a couple of remarks to explain why I'm here. The youngest of our children left this school six years ago. We're here tonight because Westfield remains our family's primary school. When our children were pupils we, like many other people here tonight, worked in the classroom, in the PTA, [unclear] concerts and plays and also on the governing body. And we continued our involvement in the community for some years after our children had left, not least I was Chair of Governors when this school wasn't doing so well and we had serious weaknesses and then a subsequent change of the senior management team. It's all part of being involved in the community of this school. It's not the council's school, it's not the LEA's school, OK, they own the buildings, but it's our school because we're the people here. When I moved to Hoddesdon one of the attractive things about Westfield was that it was within easy walking distance of our home. And my wife gained much free and valuable exercise pushing a double buggy twice a day or more up the footpaths leading here, indeed we weren't feeling quite so good when we got to the top of the path tonight, but anyway. That was guaranteed safe walking for unescorted children and we've already touched on that a little bit from one or two other remarks. When we first visited Westfield it was clearly a small community where all the staff knew all the pupils and most of the pupils knew one another. That's very different to two or three form entries that we'd been used to in North London. I don't accept the point that's been made therefore about the benefits of the two form entry. It seems to me that the proposal to close the school is driven by, amongst other things, assumptions that bigger is better and also, I suspect, financial considerations that we hinted at. But I leave others to speculate on the precise nature of capital revenue there. I conclude that the current proposals attach inadequate priority to the comfort of the [unclear] community, the benefits of a school which is nearby in the neighbourhood, and the strength of a school with its beautiful approach. This seems strange when central government is realising the problems of children who are not really properly in the community and the government is trying to persuade us to take more exercise, and [unclear] trumpeting the benefits of small class sizes, so my question is can you comment, is any importance at all assigned to these three key factors? When you listed out your talking points you didn't mention any of those three points.

J There's no doubt about it, that a school which serves a distinct community has a very important role in that community. But unfortunately the assumptions that underpin the location of many of our communities in Hertfordshire and the schools that serve them, about the number of children that would be needing those school places have not now stood the test of time and we do have this very serious difficulty of there not being the number of children in the community to keep all those schools alive and viable and continuing to make that community contribution. We would much rather not be where we are because we would much rather that all the schools were able to continue to be as strong and viable as they have always been. But the reality is that with the drop in the number of schools [sic] some very painful decisions have got to be made and the purpose of this consultation is to bring out all the issues that are relevant to taking those decisions so that members in due course, armed with all that information, are able to do what they think is right, given that we have got to do something because of the drop in the numbers. And I'm quite certain that they will be considering the role of

the school in its community, but the fundamental role of schools is to enhance children's life chances because of the quality of the education that they receive. And going back to what Clive was saying, if you accept that the fundamental issue for schools in their quality is the quality of the head and the quality of the staff and teaching, if once you then say, well, if those two are equal, are there going to be many more opportunities in a larger or a smaller school, that's when the larger school does win the argument. So those are the sorts of issues that are in the back of people's minds and not for one minute to we want to decry the very important point you were making about the role of the school in its community.

PW Sorry, can I just make one further point? A point, small class sizes. Many of us would love to see smaller class sizes but the way in which the funding comes to schools, it's not our decision how much funding comes per child, but 80% or thereabouts of the funding that goes into a school follows the [unclear] so that's the way it operates at the moment. If we could finance smaller class sizes, then many of us would be very happy to do so, but that's not the way central government has organised it at this moment in time. And it would be very costly if they were to say they were going to reduce class sizes even further. This government did make a pledge five or six years ago which said no key stage one class size should be more than 30 and that has cost a significant amount of money, but that's where it's at at the moment so in a falling roll situation sometimes there can be classes that are smaller than 30 but that can't be sustained for very long. That's our experience.

JW Thank you.

UF I want to pick up on a point that the gentleman in the front said about getting to school and safety. You've all just said that it's safe to walk to St Catherine's but what about us, people that live this side of the subways? We had two major roundabouts to cross, we have either got the Jet garage, the Fourways roundabout to cross, or the [unclear] roundabout to cross. There is no subway on this side that leads to St Catherine's School. How are we at half past eight in the morning, quarter to nine, rush hour traffic, meant to get our young children safely over that road?

PW Yes, I think we did talk about the subway, but the subway is only in one part, yes. I totally accept what you're saying, there is a busy road, yes there is, and that's something that has to be considered every time. Point taken.

UF That subway that leads to St Catherine's [unclear] our children's lives. Because every time we cross that road we are putting our children's lives at risk because they speed round that roundabout. I've been on the kerb and they've sped around that roundabout and almost had crashes because the car in front has stopped to let someone across and the other one behind has just near enough gone up its backside. So how are we meant to cross safely with our children? Parents with babies in pushchairs, how are they meant to do that? What happens if you're rushing the child across the road in case they get hit, and they fall over? That child doesn't stand a chance. How can we guarantee their safety that we're not going to get hit by that car?

PW There's no easy answer to that. And certainly for those of you who walk with your children to school, yes that is a problem. The problem for us is, as we look at where children live and where they go to school, many of them actually cross that road, some going one way, some going the other way. But many, many children, obviously hopefully with their parents if they're walking, I know some of them will be driving them, but if they are walking they will be crossing that road, and it's not easy. I'm not trying to belittle that.

UF More parents are going to want to drive to school because they don't want to risk that road.

UF And then they're going to block the road up. What if a fire engine or ambulance needs to come out, and they can't because the road's chockablock? Someone else is risking their life because they could be buried in a building, trapped under a car.

UF The reason, as I understand it, for thinking of closing any of the schools is that there isn't enough demand for places in this area. Now my grandchildren come to Westfield. They moved into the area less than a year ago and both of the schools that were within reasonable walking distance for them had no places whatsoever. They could not take them. They then came to Westfield and I would stress that we are very happy with them here and the way they work, and particularly because my granddaughter has special needs. How would this be addressed at a larger school because here she is an individual, not just one of a number?

J We'll take those two points in reverse order and Clive will respond initially about the special needs issues and then Paul will comment on the [unclear].

CM We talked briefly last night too about children with particular needs on transfer. And all of our schools in Hertfordshire would pride themselves on considering their children as individuals, whether they're one form entry or two form entry, there is no doubt about that. And if you look at our schools OFSTED reports, whatever their size, their provision for children with special educational needs or other children with particular needs is always praised as good. Now in terms of the provision for children here, should this school close, and those children be transferred to another local school, the issue of the children here with special educational needs, they will be looked at most meticulously. Those are the children that we will be taking the most particular care in terms of transition and our teaching force in Hertfordshire, and there is no doubt we have an extremely good one, and whilst Diane and her staff here at the moment will be not wanting to see their school closed, I know that should that decision be taken, that they will also want to ensure the very best for the children in whatever transition arrangements the children have to go through. So will the teachers at the schools that they're going to. And that is the sort of commitment we always get from our teachers in Hertfordshire and the support they will get from the advisory service in order to do that will match that sort of effort. So I absolutely understand your anxieties. They would also be our high levels of concern too, to make sure our provision for those children is right. And there was another bit to the question.

PW It was about the schools and places being...

UF [Overtalking] the fact that there were no places at either Cranbourne or Forres when they first moved into the area, not knowing anything about local schools but just wanting to find, obviously, the school nearest to them because at that time they were only five.

PW And were they both five?

UF Yes.

PW Right, OK, so to find two places is tricky in the same year group. What I was going to say was that there are a few cases in a number of different schools in a number of different year groups but if you have two children and even in two different year groups it's very difficult in many of the schools...

UF [Unclear] the birth rate is going up and not down.

PW Other than in a few of the schools that are feeling the impact of these falling rolls more than others, there are some schools that are feeling that impact greatly at the moment, but certainly it is an issue. Yes, there are some schools in particular areas and as I said earlier on in the meeting the area where there are most children are in the area where Roselands, Cranbourne and Forres are. That's where the pressure is still on for places in that part of the town, the northern part of Hoddesdon.

UF Hertford may not be the largest place for multiple births but it certainly comes very high on the list. We've had a lot of twins and multiple births in the last five or six years and, I don't want to upset anybody here or dismay them if they're pregnant, but it is quite a normal thing here, we were really, really surprised at how [unclear] that is in the Hertfordshire area.

UF The enquiry into the East of England [coughing] published today recommends 300 new homes a year for the next 15 years to allow for local needs and migration into the area. This is 5,500 new homes in the Broxbourne area over 15 years and 1,500 new homes in the next five years. How then can the panel justify its predictions for a falling child rate in the area and will this present the need over the next 15 years to open new schools rather than close the existing ones?

J When we are producing our forecast of [background noise] we take our information from the returns that we get from the health authority about the children who have been born, not yet at school, and we also get information from the district council about the approvals that have been given in the district plan for new development of housing and for the planning permissions that have been approved. So the information that is already known about the expansion in this area is factored into the forecasts that we have already got which I showed at the outset and which showed this decline in the overall [unclear] numbers. Now, if there were to be, and I emphasise if, if there were to be a massive new development in the area outside the existing built up area then as part of that new development there would be negotiation with the developers about them making a new school, if a new school is needed, [unclear]. But that is in the situation where

you take an area that is not now built on and actually put an enormous development, bearing in mind what I was saying about the 1,000 houses needed for the one form entry. Sort of more routing planning permissions and more routine expansion is already factored into the forecasts.

UM Sorry but that question hasn't been answered. The lady said it was announced today that 1,500 new homes are going to be built. You're telling me it takes 1,000 homes for a primary school, there's 1,500 new homes being built, and we can find that information, why don't you know that information?

J Because the information is already in the local plans...

UM It was announced today, the lady's just said to you.

J Yes, but this debate about the number of new houses in the south east of England has been going on for a very, very long time and...

UM It's no longer a debate, she's just told you they've announced today the building of houses in this area.

J What I'm trying to tell you, because this has been going on for a long time, we've known about these numbers and have already included them.

UM So you have included the additional housing that's going to be built that was announced today?

J Unless it's something very different, which I don't think it is, and obviously I would need to do research on that, it will already have been taken into account.

UF If you know about all the houses that are going up in this area you'll know that there is a proposal to build [unclear] hillside the three fields that back onto the A10, I actually live there, so I made some phone calls to the local Planning and at the moment Leach Homes has got it, along with another company, and it's been declined as yet, but being as it's Leach Homes, they're not going to let that go, are they? They want to build on that. And for those of you who know those fields, they are very big fields and there are three of them. But do you know if they're going to build on that and taken that into account? That's so close to us, they're all going to need schools aren't they?

PW We do know about the proposals and about the desire that some housing developers have to build up to the A10. Yes, and on those fields and on other parts of green belt land.

UF It's green belt land at the moment, yes.

PW Yes, but at this moment in time those have been rejected by the local council and...

UF They're not going to let that go are they?

PW I think the point that Jim was making earlier that at such times when developers do get proposals through, then there would be negotiations with developers on funding the infrastructure that goes with housing like that.

UF Surely you've got to take that into account now. If there's a proposal to build there, those people are going to need schooling. This is such a close school to them, it's literally just a two minute walk away. They're not going to let it go, are they? Leach Homes have got it.

PW What happens if fairly large housing developments happen, they build them at a rate of something like 250 to 300 houses per year? They would build them out [?]. That would be starting in two or three or four years' time. [Overtalking].

UF [Unclear] fields down there are...

PW Oh yes, we know about those houses. This is the other houses where there's no planning permission granted at this moment that we're talking about. And what we are saying is, we want to get the schools having the right size, having the right number of pupils in them for the next five to ten years. [Overtalking]. In five to ten years we might have to be something slightly different, but we want to get it right at this stage.

UF Sure, but you're going to have to build another school to compensate for that amount of people there, and you're going to close this one and build houses on here, [unclear].

PW It depends on the size of the development.

UF A biggish development, there's three great big fields.

PW And sometimes with [unclear] new developments we would have to be negotiating for land as well for school but we're not in that position. You're surmising, where are we going to be in some years time. And we would have to [overtalking].

UF A couple of years' time, three years time they're going to reapply and you're looking to close this in 2008.

PW Just going back to the point that the other lady made about preferences on school places, at this moment in time we've just checked the figures again, no school in the area is over subscribed on first preferences other than Sheredes and this one.

J The only other point I would make, just about the three fields and Leach's interest in those fields. To my knowledge they've been seeking planning permission for a development there since 1970 [?].

UF Well I bought the house six years ago and I had a letter saying this was about to be built on in ten years.

UF [Unclear] start building there in December of this year.

J They've been trying to build there for 35 years.

JW I think the point's been made that obviously they have been trying and it's not yet...

[Overtalking].

JW I don't think we can take this discussion much further because it's just going backwards and forwards. It's not going anywhere. Right, so has anybody been waiting a long time?

UF I have spoken before but I'd like to know, there's hundreds of homes being built in Hoddesdon as you know. They're not finished yet. How do you know how many children are going to come from them? Which area are they going to come from? So would you like to tell us how many children there are going to be?

JW I think we've probably answered, I think that point has been covered of how the forecast was done and I don't think there's any more to be discussed about it. Can we move onto another issue because that has already been dealt with?

UM Your fourth test is that you need to have acceptable transition arrangements for affected pupils. In my opinion walking young children across busy roads to a portable classroom in a denominational school next to an electricity pylon does not count as an acceptable transition arrangement. And my question is, in my opinion there seems to be an awful lot of information being gathered through the internet from the forms, from these meetings where everything is being recorded and if I'm imagining myself on the panel that's got to make a final decision, I can't imagine how I could possibly listen to all of those tapes, read all of those forms and collect all the information from the internet and sift through all that information. Are those people on the panel actually going to be looking at everything, listening to every tape, or is there some other way that it's done? And also I'd like to know what the criteria are for how the final decision is made once the panel get together, which way do they use to come to their final decision?

JW Can I just answer the first part of that because that's relevant to what I'm doing here and it's actually one of the most important things. And that is that the company that I work for, which is an independent agency, is going to be sifting through all this material. Obviously, as you say, there's going to be hours and hours of tapes and hours and hours of notes, that we're making, and we have to collate this. And nothing will be lost in that collation, it just means that we'll be able to say, this was said 500 times, rather than them having to read it 500 times. So that is going to be locked [?] in that and that will be collated. Similarly we are also responsible for the transcripts so that we will be collating that, making sure that all the points that have been mentioned are highlighted and it will be put in a report that will be aimed to be read.

J That's right. And the points that you made in your introductory comments about the transitional arrangements, picking up what you felt were some of the weaknesses, some of those points have obviously been debated tonight, they

were debated last night and I'm sure you will feature also the [unclear] that parents make. And what is then explained to the members who have to take the decision, that there was concern about the transitional arrangements in respect of... And then that is itemised. There were concerns about the pylons, and explain that. Yes, there is an enormous amount of material, but it can actually be distilled in a way that presents the arguments that were raised and the issues that have to be resolved for the members who debate and then the cabinet who takes the eventual decision.

UM If the panel's decision is that of sending children across a busy road etc, etc, does not count as transitional arrangements, then can option one still be considered as an option? Because you said that they have to meet all four of those tests to even be considered as an option.

J And what I also said was that it is a fact that when the members of the County Council consider the outcome of the consultation they do quite often say, we want more work to be done on this issue. We don't think that any of these proposals are quite right, we want to have some further consultation in order to see if we can come up with another alternative. It isn't often the case that the decision is, we're not going to do anything, and it is definitely the case that further work is often requested in order to develop a proposal [unclear]. And one other thing that I ought to make clear about the process, the County Council publishes the statutory notices, if that's what eventually happens, and then there is another opportunity for people to object, that's the technical term, to what is in that proposal.

JW Right, the lady in white and then this lady here and then [unclear].

UF As I'm sitting here tonight listening to all of you in the front, I think you've already made up your minds and you're just going through the motions to make us feel a lot better about what you're going to do to our schools. I think that closing down schools and moving to another school is quite simply just silly, because how are you going to say that a school is running to its full potential when there's overcrowding in the classes?

J I was trying to contain my remarks to the last question that the decision has most definitely not been made and the County Council's track record in what happens when consultations are reported to members is giving clear evidence that minds have not been made up and we are certainly not doing this in order to make everybody feel better. We are having these meetings so that issues can be brought out and presented to members of the County Council so that eventually the right decision is taken.

UF Thank you.

UF This question's already been asked but not answered. Out of choice my children don't go to a faith school. If under option one I don't allow them to go to a faith school what other option are you going to give me?

PW If option one was taken forward we would be expanding St Catherine's as you say, but you don't want, but we would also be expanding the capacity at

Sheredes School. There is also the possibility that Forres might still be [unclear] we haven't finalised that really. And there are places still available at a few other schools, but they would be only in certain year groups.

UF I've got three children.

PW That would be very difficult to accommodate them in any of the other schools.

UF And I'm not letting them go to a faith school so what alternative are you offering?

PW We wouldn't be offering you any other alternative.

UF [Unclear] send them to St Catherine's, I would be forced to educate my children at a faith school [unclear].

PW You would either send them to [coughing], yes, or if you wanted to you could do other things in terms of educating your children, but that costs a lot of money.

UF Yes, money I haven't got. Will the council be paying for this then?

PW No, they wouldn't.

UF [Unclear] or have them at home uneducated.

UF I think this is probably a pointless point to make, but I do want to make it because I do feel from the panel here that you have always made your decision that two form entry is good, one form entry is bad. And certainly from this gentleman in the middle here, you put your point across on two form entry, it may be economically good for the council, but in terms of my children, I chose a single form entry school. Like many parents here I looked round at the other schools [short break in tape]. I think that Westfield SATs results and the teaching is absolutely fantastic and I chose a single form entry school for my children and if you do go ahead with your proposals my question is will you close other single form entry schools or is it a postcode lottery for those parents who would prefer a single form entry school. And I would just like to raise the point about other people, the other reason I chose this school was because it was a local school as my children developed they could have that freedom of developing into adults and I could let them walk to school knowing that they would be safe. I cannot do that with St Catherine's. I do not want them to go to a denominational school and I don't feel that they'll be able to develop and blossom into adulthood and in preparation for going to a senior school where they will have to go to school by themselves, I wanted them to walk to school. So there are my two questions about single form entry, are all single form entry schools going to be closed, or is it a case of if you're lucky enough to live in a different area you can send them to it?

JW OK. Have you got that, Clive?

CM Thanks very much for that. The first thing you said, you thought we'd already made a decision. That's simply not true.

UF How many times has the council offered us, gone against the preferred option for [unclear] how many times the council has not researched [unclear] that's what you're there for [unclear].

J If I could interrupt, as I mentioned earlier, there have been many occasions where just that has happened. Many occasions.

PW I would just say in the last five there have been twice that they have not been affected. Two out of the last five. That's 40%.

CM Back to your question about are all the one form entry schools therefore vulnerable, the answer to that is no, but in areas where we are doing reviews we have to look at the best pattern of provision for that particular area. And sometimes that means that we would leave some one form entry schools as in this case we would leave Forres, and create other two form entry schools, and sometimes it doesn't. It's not just a simple question of size, it's a question of size and locality and accessibility. The issue about two form entry schools are more economical for us. They don't make any difference to us in terms of cost, the costs go to the school and they get exactly the same funding because it's per pupil funding. The fact is that a two form entry school simply has more flexibility to spend money on the children where it needs to be spent rather than either maintaining premises and other fixed costs. I think your last question was about the local schools and safety, and we've been over that ground, haven't you been into that Paul?

PW I don't think so. But I think the point is that there are more children who actually live outside of this area, nearer to other schools that still come to Westfield, that's the point.

UF You talk about demand and parents' choice, but people have chosen this school.

PW And that's why we have promoted three possible options in this area. In the size of the area we felt that there was one option to come forward with and we brought that forward. There are three options here. I would imagine that many of you would be sending in your documents, sending in your forms, saying that you would prefer an option other than an option one or option three.

JW Can I just say that we're almost coming up to quarter to nine. I'm going to take this lady here whose hand is up. And then I think that will be it and I can't see any other hands up at the moment. Can I just reiterate before we take the last question that if you do have things that you feel you haven't been able to say, or that you would just like to support things that other people have said, then please do use the channels that there are, the email, you can write letters, you can write on these forms that we have here tonight, so that we understand and we get the strength of the feelings. So I just wanted to say that before we took the last question.

UF Thank you. Two main things, one I'd like to know if the panel actually have taken into account the fact that the government projections for buildings in this area actually include 60% of the houses for people migrating from other areas, that's one thing. But the main point I'd like to make, I've heard tonight money, I've heard numbers, I've heard buildings, I've heard very little about children. These children are individuals, they're the most vulnerable members of our society. The government recognises this because of their Every Child Matters policy, and I wonder if the people who are making these plans recognise it. Children will be disrupted by having to move school or having to be educated in a portacabin, by having building work going on around them, and this will affect their emotional, social, and educational welfare. Now, if your preferred option is put into place, almost half of the children in this area will be disrupted. 44% of them in fact, I've worked it out. Whereas if your second option is put into place, it will be just 9% of the children, which is still very, very sad for that 9%, but a lot different to 44%. And I would just like to know the panel's thoughts on that please?

J That's correct information. The first option does affect more children, it is more complex, but we believe that it is right for it to be the preferred option because it would give us, in our judgement, the soundest basis for the continuation of high quality education in this area in the future. The purpose of this consultation is for people to consider that and to let members of the public understand [coughing] as was the case last night, you were all really wanting to put forward your views on how you think we need to [unclear]. And just as one final point to end on, I do want to assure you that the members of the County Council are absolutely committed to meeting the needs of all the children in Hertfordshire and taking very difficult decisions, it's not easy, the dilemma that we are faced with here but we believe that [unclear] to be resolved and they I know will think about everything that's been said and will exercise their judgement about what they think is the best approach.

JW I'd like to thank you all very much for [unclear] and we have a great deal of material, we've covered a lot of issues. If you feel... we're not taking any more questions.

UF Sorry, I'm just interested about the committee members, the people making the decision, how many of them have children at any of the [unclear] schools?

JW I have no idea but maybe that's something we [overtalking].

UF That should be part of the information.

JW OK, that's fine. We won't take that now but if you want to perhaps you could talk to someone afterwards. What I'm suggesting now is that we close this part of the meeting and until nine o'clock or just after, if anybody has individual things like that that they would like to raise [overtalking]. Individual to you at this moment. And what I would also like to do is hand over to Paul Stephens who actually would like just a moment to talk to you before you are able to talk individually to the panel. So thank you Paul.

UF The individual questions, will they be recorded?

JW No they won't be recorded, it gives people the privacy, this is the idea, that you've had an open forum and people there are people here who may want to [overtalking]. We are giving people who might not want to say anything in public the chance to talk individually. I'm sure you would all agree that if you actually wanted to talk personally to somebody without talking in the meeting, you would like the opportunity, and that's what we're doing. We have had the open part of the meeting now. Paul.

PS To the people from the community, I'm the Chair of Governors at the school, I'd just like to thank you all for turning up tonight, especially people who are not closely associated with the school, thank you for your support. And basically I wanted to say to the panel, over the last two nights you've heard the strength of feeling that the community, the parents, everyone involved in this school, has for Westfield and we are determined that this school does not close. We strongly, strongly disagree with your decision to make us number one. We think that you are affecting our parental choice in a very great way, basically not leaving us with a choice, and I just wanted to really emphasise that and to close the meeting on that point. Thank you.