

**CABINET  
MONDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2002 AT 2.00 P.M.**

**THE FUTURE OF WALL HALL NURSERY SCHOOL AND NURSERY  
PROVISION IN EAST WATFORD AND ALDENHAM/RADLETT**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member:- Robert Gordon

**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 For the Cabinet to consider the outcome of consultation about the future of Wall Hall Nursery School and nursery provision in East Watford and Aldenham/Radlett.
- 1.2 For the Cabinet to decide whether the County Council should :
  - (i) relocate Wall Hall as a free standing nursery school to the site of Newberries School, Radlett;
  - (ii) publish a statutory notice to close Wall Hall Nursery School, Aldenham;
  - (iii) publish a statutory notice to open a nursery class at Knutsford School, Watford;
  - (iv) publish a statutory notice to open a nursery class at Newberries School, Radlett.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 Wall Hall is an excellent nursery school, but it cannot remain in its current accommodation that is being sold for residential development by the University of Hertfordshire. Pupils are 'bussed' to the school from Knutsford School, Watford and from Radlett.
- 2.2 Consultation was undertaken last term on the proposal that Wall Hall should close in December 2003; that in future children from Radlett should utilise spare nursery class places at St John's Infants' School, Radlett; and that a nursery class should open at Knutsford School in September 2003.
- 2.3 All the responses to the consultation are available in the members' room and are highlighted in this report. In summary the case for establishing a nursery class at Knutsford has been supported; but there is considerable resistance to the prospect of closing Wall Hall, even though there are sufficient places to make up the shortfall at St John's. Newberries School, Radlett want a nursery class and have expressed reservations about the relocation of Wall Hall as a

free standing nursery class on their site, which is what Wall Hall governors, parents and staff wish to happen.

### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 There is general agreement, though with reservations from Knutsford Pre-School, that Knutsford School should have a nursery class from September 2003; but there are strongly held, differing views about future nursery provision in Radlett. There are places available at St John's for Radlett children who would not in future go to Wall Hall if it closes. Parents, staff and governors at Wall Hall argue that the School should relocate to the site of Newberries School, but Newberries want to establish a nursery class.
- 3.2 No capital funding would be needed by the County Council to implement the potential decisions set out in paragraph 1 above. A nursery class-room is already available at Knutsford; and the University is obliged to provide suitable alternative accommodation as a consequence of terminating the County Council's lease at Wall Hall. This could secure accommodation at Newberries for a nursery class or the relocation of Wall Hall. If that is not required a capital sum would be paid by the University to the County Council.
- 3.3 The Cabinet is asked to consider the outcome of consultation and decide what action to take.

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 This issue arises because the University of Hertfordshire is disposing of the Wall Hall Campus for residential development. Conditional planning permission has been granted to the University and the developer, Octagon, for 98 (expensive) houses and flats. The Nursery School occupies one room and associated accommodation in a teaching block.
- 4.2 The consultation document is attached as Appendix A.
- 4.3 The location of 38 pupils attending Wall Hall in May is shown on the map on page 10 of the consultation document. This attendance pattern is typical of the past few years. The majority of children come from around Knutsford School, Watford, for the morning session; and from Radlett, for the afternoon; with a handful from surrounding areas. They are 'bussed' to the nursery. LEA schools and private/voluntary pre schools in East Watford and Radlett are shown on page 11 of the consultation document.
- 4.4 There is considerable spare capacity in the nursery class at St John's Infant School Radlett. Of the 52 places, approximately 20 are taken each year by Radlett children with a further 20 taken from outside the area. There is also spare capacity in the private and voluntary sector.
- 4.5 So far as Radlett is concerned therefore, the proposal for consultation was that Wall Hall should close and that existing spare capacity should be used to make up the shortfall.

- 4.6 The proposal for consultation included a proposal for a nursery class at Knutsford School. Places are needed for that community; a nursery classroom was provided when the School was rebuilt recently after a fire; and there is an excellent opportunity to integrate a range of early years services in partnership with Knutsford Pre-School that uses the adjacent room.
- 4.7 It is important to emphasise that Wall Hall is an excellent nursery school. It has Beacon status. Its strengths are provision for SEN children, working with parents, curriculum development, meeting the needs of individual children, assessment and record keeping; but these are also found at other nursery schools and classes.

## 5. Outcome of Consultation

- 5.1 There have been 252 responses to the consultation and a summary of these is attached as Appendix B. Copies of all the responses, the Minutes of the Consultation Meetings and officers' answers to questions raised at the CSF Scrutiny Committee on 19 June are in the Members' room.
- 5.2 The responses to the proposal for consultation were as follows:

<b><i>Wall Hall Nursery School should close on 31 December 2003</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
Agree	57
Disagree	173
Don't Know	22
<b><i>Knutsford Primary should open a Nursery Class on 1 September 2003</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
Agree	150
Disagree	35
Don't Know	67

- 5.3 The views of the main stakeholders are as follows:
- (i) The governing body of Knutsford School want a nursery class with 52 places and to continue to work closely with Knutsford Pre School.
  - (ii) Knutsford Pre School accept the prospect of a nursery class at the primary school; but are concerned by the possible impact on their budget, particularly if the nursery class is too big. The suggested size for the class of 52 places was in response to this concern.
  - (iii) The St John's Headteacher reiterated the possible consequences. "At the moment, we have less than 20 Radlett children attending St John's. If Wall Hall was sited at Newberries, I do not think it would be unrealistic to state that St John's could not sustain a 52 place nursery and that the present staff who are full time would face redundancy". The letter is attached as Appendix C.

- (iv) The leaders of Christchurch Nursery conclude “if Wall Hall moves to the Newberries site it would mean that Christchurch Nursery would not be viable and would have to close (ten members of staff would lose their jobs) as Wall Hall would be taking more children from the Radlett area than at present, because at the moment the morning sessions are taken up with children from the Watford area. This means there would be no places affordable to many families for the younger three year olds in the village”.
- (v) The Headteacher of Newberries says on the response form “Wall Hall should relocate to elsewhere in County”. Her letter on behalf of the governing body states that “The Governors believe that a nursery class is essential for the future development and indeed, viability of the school”. She also says “Newberries School site is not large enough for two establishments. There has not been any real discussion about the proposal .... We have the following concerns .... space .... parking .... neighbours .... security.” The documents are attached as Appendix D.
- (vi) The Governing Body of Wall Hall Nursery School strongly disagree with the proposal to close the School. They do agree with the proposal to open a class at Knutsford. “Our proposal is that Wall Hall Nursery School should relocate in its current format to suitable, alternative accommodation in the Aldenham/Radlett area.” Their rationale for relocation rather than closure is based upon the excellence of the provision; specialist provision for children with significant and complex special educational needs that cannot be replicated in a nursery class; continuing Wall Hall’s provision in Radlett; and the optimum use of resources. Their vision is that Wall Hall should be relocated to the Newberries site. The Governors’ response is attached as Appendix E.
- (vii) The County Early Years Partnership concluded:
 

“The Nursery School cannot continue on its current site. The need for early provision for children aged 2 years 9 months to 5 years in Radlett needs further exploration.

The case for a nursery class at Knutsford is made.

Every effort should be made to retain the early years expertise, particularly in SEN, and dissemination of good practice recognised and provided through the achievement of Beacon Status by Wall Hall Nursery School.”
- (viii) Hertsmere District Early Years Partnership agrees with the proposal to open a nursery class at Knutsford; but disagrees with the closure of Wall Hall and support the relocation of Wall Hall to the Newberries site.
- (ix) Hertsmere Borough Council want the County Council, through the University’s obligation, to provide suitable alternative accommodation within Aldenham Parish Council area for the facilities available to the residents of the parish of Aldenham lost at Wall Hall.

- (x) Aldenham Parish Council expects the County Council to use the funds from the University to ensure adequate nursery provision in the Parish.

## **6. Views of Scrutiny Committee and Resources Panel**

- 6.1 The Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee received a petition of 160 signatures seeking the relocation of Wall Hall to the Newberries site, and considered a report at their meeting on 19 June.
- 6.2 The Scrutiny Committee's conclusions were :
  - (i) It was regretted that Wall Hall Nursery needed to be considered for closure due to the move of the University.
  - (ii) There was a need to clarify and provide further information, particularly with regard to the University's plans for the site; the lease terms; the retention of Beacon status and SEN requirements. This additional information should be provided in the Cabinet report.
  - (iii) Nursery provision needed to match demographics and future needs.
  - (iv) There appeared to be enough places at St John's to meet local needs, but it was important to ensure there is sufficient, appropriate provision for the children of Radlett.
  - (v) There was support for the option with regards to Knutsford school.
- 6.3 The Resources Panel will be considering the matter at their meeting on 11 September and their recommendations will be reported to Cabinet.

## **7. Consideration – Knutsford**

- 7.1 There is a consensus that Knutsford should have a nursery class; and it is notable that the main advocates for not closing Wall Hall agree this should happen.
- 7.2 The only concerns about proceeding with the class at Knutsford have come from Knutsford Pre-School; but the primary school governors are most anxious that they work together to offer a wide integrated range of services. During the consultation it was established that an average of 30 children a year go from the Pre-School to the primary school (not 14 as stated in the consultation document) and establishing a 52 place nursery class should not in the officers' view undermine the Pre-School.

## **8. Consideration – Wall Hall and Radlett**

- 8.1 The majority of respondents did not accept the proposal for Radlett that Wall Hall should close and that in future, the 20 children from Radlett who would have gone to the Nursery School could go to St John's School.
- 8.2 This outcome is understandable in view of the intimate provision at the

Nursery School and its high reputation amongst parents and early years professionals. However, given that there are about 30 places available at St John's (on the assumption that children coming from other areas would attend nurseries nearer where they live), the case for additional provision in Radlett is not strong.

- 8.3 The main arguments in favour of retaining Wall Hall as a free standing nursery school have been:
- (i) The quality of provision, as exemplified in Beacon status.
  - (ii) The range of special educational needs that are met there.
  - (iii) The retention of the existing staff team.
  - (iv) The training role undertaken by the school.
  - (v) External funds are available for its relocation.
- 8.4 Beacon status has been granted initially to 2004 but the expectation is that it would be renewed. The School disseminates good practice through workshops, visits and other training activities funded by the DfES. If the School relocates it will retain Beacon status; if it closes, the status will end.
- 8.5 Wall Hall does make high quality provision for children with special educational needs; and meets the needs of a higher number of children than other nurseries in the area. It is not the case that this expertise is unique and is not, and could not be replicated elsewhere.
- 8.6 Support for the existing staff team is also understandable and they would not be able to stay together in the event of closure. The governors at Knutsford have said they would welcome applications from Wall Hall staff and in the current recruitment climate it is likely that staff would obtain other jobs.
- 8.7 The other factor those opposed to the closure have repeatedly emphasised is that, under the terms of the County Council's lease for the Wall Hall accommodation, the University is obliged to provide "suitable alternative accommodation". Parents, governors and Hertsmere Borough Council say that the County Council should require the University to provide the accommodation for nursery provision at Newberries. The alternative scenario would be that if additional provision is not required in Radlett, the recompense (approximately £300,000) would be available for another County Council project because the suitable alternative accommodation has already been provided at Knutsford.
- 8.8 Hertsmere Borough Council are seeking to use their planning powers to ensure that the County Council does provide nursery provision at Newberries, although they have not formed a view as to whether that should be a nursery school or a nursery class. They have also said that if the County Council wants to use money from the University for another project, they would expect it to be for education provision in the Parish of Aldenham.
- 8.9 Legal advice from the County Secretary is that the Borough Council would not legally be able to impose as a condition to the planning permission that the money that we the County Council is to receive from the University for vacating the nursery premises be ring fenced for the Parish of Aldenham. If

the need for nursery education can be met elsewhere in the area, the condition would not be necessary or reasonable.

## **9. Financial Implications**

### Capital

- 9.1 If Wall Hall closes and alternative provision is made at Knutsford and St John's, the commuted sum of approximately £300,000 would be available for another high service priority. The legal advice is that it would be possible for the County Council to do this.
- 9.2 If the decision is to proceed with nursery provision at Newberries, there would be no capital cost to the County Council because the accommodation would be provided by the University.

### Revenue

- 9.3 The current cost of maintaining Wall Hall is:

Budget share, 40 part time pupils	£79,000
Transport costs	£25,000
Premises costs (excluding rates)	£8,000
Total	<u>£112,000</u>

If Wall Hall was a free standing nursery school in its own premises it would cost £90,000.

- 9.4 A 52 place nursery class at Knutsford would cost £67,000.
- 9.5 A 26 place nursery class at Newberries would cost £33,500.
- 9.6 The precise revenue funding position would depend upon actual pupil placements; but to provide both a nursery class at Knutsford and relocate Wall Hall as a free standing nursery school would require revenue growth.
- 9.7 In 2003/04 there would be some "double counting" because Wall Hall would remain open until December 2003 and Knutsford would open in September 2003.
- 9.8 If Wall Hall closes, staff would be at risk of redundancy, although in the present recruitment climate, it is likely they would find other jobs and there would be no need to pay redundancy. In the case of the Headteacher, this might involve some salary protection; but that could be afforded given the potential level of savings.

## **10. Conclusion**

- 10.1 The Cabinet is asked to consider the outcome of consultation and decide what action to take.
- 10.2 There is general agreement though with reservations from Knutsford Pre-School that Knutsford School should have a nursery class from September 2003; but there are strongly held, differing views about future nursery provision in Radlett. There are places available at St John's for Radlett children who would not in future go to Wall Hall if it closes. Parents, staff and governors at Wall Hall argue that the School should relocate to the site of Newberries School, but Newberries want to establish a nursery class.
- 10.3 No capital funding would be needed by the County Council to implement the potential decisions set out in paragraph 1 of this report. A nursery class-room is already available at Knutsford; and the University is obliged to provide suitable alternative accommodation as a consequence of terminating the County Council's lease at Wall Hall. This could secure accommodation at Newberries for a nursery class or the relocation of Wall Hall. If that is not required a capital sum would be paid by the University to the County Council.