

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 26 JANUARY 2004 AT 2.00 P.M.

Agenda Item No.

4

**REVIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN NORTH EAST WATFORD –
PHASE 1: REVIEW OF LEAVESDEN GREEN AND ALBAN WOOD
SCHOOLS**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member:- Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the public consultation exercise on the options relating to the review of Leavesden Green JMI and Alban Wood schools in the Leavesden/Woodside wards of north east Watford in order that it can decide whether or not to publish statutory notices on option 2, to effect this change.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Following the initial consultation on phase 1, held during June/July 2003, a decision to undertake a fresh public consultation with three options was taken by the Director of Children, Schools and Families.
- 2.2 A public consultation document (attached as appendix 1) was issued at the beginning of November, outlining three options for the future of these schools:

- the original proposal to close Leavesden Green JMI and to amalgamate Alban Wood Infant and Junior Schools onto the Alban Wood Infant school site remained as option one,

and the fresh options were as follows:

- retain Leavesden Green JMI as a 1 form of entry primary school and amalgamate the Alban Wood schools as a 1 form of entry primary on the Alban Wood Infant site (option 2) or
- close Leavesden Green JMI and open a 2 form of entry junior school on the Leavesden Green site, close Alban Wood Junior and

retain Alban Wood Infant School as a 2 form of entry school (option 3).

2.3 Responses to this fresh public consultation have generally fallen into two categories:

- those connected with Alban Wood schools supportive of either option 1 or to a much lesser extent, option 2, and
- those associated with Leavesden Green School, supporting option 2.

2.4 The outcome of the public consultation has been largely in favour of option 2 with 71% of respondees identifying this option as their first preference. A summary analysis of responses is included in section 5 of this report.

2.5 At its meeting on 14 January, Schools' Resources Panel recommended option 2 as the option upon which Cabinet should decide whether or not to publish statutory notices.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Cabinet will be asked to decide whether or not to publish statutory notices to:

- close Alban Wood Infant and Alban Wood Junior Schools and open a new primary school with a planned admission limit of 30 on the Alban Wood Infant site with effect from September 2005, and
- reduce the planned admission limit to 30 at Leavesden Green School, with effect from September 2005.

4. Background

4.1 Throughout Hertfordshire primary school rolls are falling. The Office for National Statistics 2001 Census figures for the whole of Watford demonstrate a decline in the 0-4 year age range and 5-9 year age range over the period from 2003 to 2020. Appendix 2 attached shows the detail of the decline, with 5,800 5-9 year olds in 2003, compared with 5,200 0-4 year olds in 2003. This is in line with the growth in surplus places as forecast in the north east Watford area.

4.2 Appendix 3 is a map and accompanying table of the whole of Watford and neighbouring Abbots Langley area, which shows the current number on roll in each primary school, together with capacity of each school.

4.3 Looking at the north east Watford planning area (area 21.2 on the map), there are currently 2,454 places in all the primary schools, in the

reception year through to year 6. Currently about 530 places are empty (21%) and it is forecast that in six years more than 700 will be surplus (28%). Such a large number of empty places cannot be sustained. Appendix 4 shows the forecast demand for the north east Watford area as a whole.

4.4 To manage the planned reduction in primary school places in north east Watford, the re-organisation proposals have been launched in two separate phases to focus on each area in turn, providing proposals which are specific to the nature of each area, whilst ensuring the future viability of children's education within the new primary provision.

- the first phase is a review of Leavesden Green and Alban Wood schools, in the Leavesden/Woodside wards defined as the sub-area north and immediately south of the A405 (Alban Wood Infant and Nursery, Alban Wood Junior, Leavesden Green JMI and St Catherine of Siena RC JMI), and
- the second phase focuses on the primary provision in Garston, Lea Farm and Meriden areas, and the three schools serving these communities, defined as the sub-area to the east of the A412, and north of the A41 (Kingsway Infant, Kingsway Junior, Kingswood Nursery, Coates Way JMI and Nursery, Garston Infant, Lea Farm Junior and Meriden Primary).

4.5 Appendix 5 shows the actual total number of reception places available in north east Watford, the actual and forecast demand, together with the number of reception places following the proposed changes (phases 1 and 2).

4.6 Appendix 6 is a table showing the future provision within north east Watford following the proposed reduction in places in both phase 1 and 2. In 2005/6 surplus places would be 6.2% and by 2009/10 8.0% would be surplus.

5. Consultation process and analysis of the results of the consultation responses

5.1 In addition to the consultation paper, parents received a letter outlining the proposed class organisation, and how the schools would be financed under each option, together with a copy of a health and safety report, dated 9 July 2003, relating to the use of Alban Wood Infant site under option 1. On 2 December, illustrative drawings were made available on the proposed extensions/adaptations to Alban Wood Infant School under options 1 and 2.

5.2 Public meetings were held at Alban Wood Junior School on 13 November and at Leavesden Green JMI on 20 November. The public consultation period closed on 19 December 2003.

- 5.3 Copies of the responses to the consultation and minutes of the public meetings are available in the Members Room.
- 5.4 It has generally been recognised during the public consultation, that the County Council has to take action to reduce the large number of surplus places.
- 5.5 The following table is an analysis of the responses received during the consultation process:-

Stakeholder Analysis Phase 1 (486 Responses)										
		Option 1			Option 2			Option 3		
		1st Pref	2nd Pref	3rd Pref	1st Pref	2nd Pref	3rd Pref	1st Pref	2nd Pref	3rd Pref
Alban Wood infant & Junior	Staff	7			1	2		1		
	Parent	63		4	12	10	1	4	3	5
	Other	2			2					
	Governor	4			1	1		1		
Another school in Watford	Staff									
	Parent				7	1	1			
	Other				10	2	2			
	Governor									
Leavesden Green	Staff				14	2	2			
	Parent		1	7	101	6	5		11	1
	Other		3	18	127	7	9	2	26	
	Governor				4					
No Particular connection with a school	Staff									
	Parent	1	2		3	1	2	2		
	Other	2	3	7	24	2	6	3	9	
	Governor									
Other	Staff				5					
	Parent				15	1	1			
	Other	1		5	23	3	3		6	
	Governor									
Grand Total		80	9	41	348	38	32	13	55	6

- 5.6 Clearly a large number of responses were in support of option 2, with 71% identifying this option as their first preference, of these 11% were from parents whose children attend the Alban Wood schools.
- 5.7 It is interesting to note that a total of 130 stakeholders associated with either of the Alban Wood schools responded, of which 101 were from parents. This compared with a total of 256 stakeholder responses from those connected with Leavesden Green, of which 103 were from parents, and 135 fell into the “other” category. The level of parental responses from the two areas is almost identical.
- 5.8 A written response received on behalf of the governing bodies of both Alban Wood Infant and Junior schools supported option 1 on an educational basis only because it would provide a seamless primary education, there would be a continued wide range of staff skills and expertise, and it would offer greater flexibility to retain single age group

classes. Concern was expressed over safety issues associated with a larger number of children using the Alban Wood Infant School site, under both options 1 and 2, together with a reduction in facilities within the proposed new school, when compared with existing core facilities.

- 5.9 No written response has been received from the Leavesden Green Governing Body as a whole, nor the head teacher, however, there has been an active campaign by the Governing Body to maintain primary education within the Leavesden Green area. At the public meeting at Leavesden Green, a response was made on behalf of the Governing Body in support of option 2, to ensure the continuation of primary education within both the Alban Wood and Leavesden Green communities. This has been further supported by the unusually large number of responses from “other” stakeholders, who have responded in writing, and in particular the 127 ranking option 2 as their first preference.

6. Major comments made during the consultation process

- 6.1 One group of comments related to the excellent Key Stage 2 results of Leavesden Green School, and a request to maintain successful schools. These results have recently been published, and they show that the school is the 7th most improving school in the country, as measured by raw Key Stage 2 results over the last three years.
- 6.2 A further group of comments related to maintaining educational provision within both communities, and consideration of the impact on those families without transport, in travelling from the Leavesden Green area to a school on the Alban Wood Infant site, and under option 3, travelling from the Alban Wood area to Leavesden Green.
- 6.3 Another group of comments focused on the need to consider using the Alban Wood Junior School site. However, this is not an option, as it would not be financially viable because of the condition of the existing school buildings and professional advice has indicated that to extend and adapt this school would not be prudent.
- 6.4 The final group of comments were concerns about potential overcrowding on the infant school site and the use of a detached playing field under option 1.

7. Site, Planning and Premises issues:

Option 1

- 7.1 Under this option, the Alban Wood Infant site would need to accommodate an amalgamated 2 form of entry primary school, but would need to use a detached playing field on the Junior School site. It would be necessary to adapt and expand the existing infant school, and detailed feasibility work has revealed the necessity to demolish the

existing nursery, to rebuild the nursery class, and to build an extension to the west of the existing building. In addition, a small extension would be added to the front of the main building to provide an administration area.

- 7.2 During the transition period, from September 2005 to 2011, it would be necessary to position temporary classrooms on the site, to accommodate the existing children. As the number of children declined, the number of temporary classrooms would reduce.
- 7.3 Whilst there would be an area of 3400 sq metres of playing field on the infant school site, under the current regulations, it would be necessary to provide a detached playing field on the Alban Wood Junior site. There would be an additional area of 1000 sq metres hard play area also provided on the infant site.
- 7.4 Wormald Burrows, traffic consultants, have advised that there is a requirement for 72 car parking spaces under this option. However, from the feasibility study, it would not be possible to accommodate more than 46 spaces, which is below the recommended level of car parking for a school of this size. This issue would need further discussion with the Highways Authority should this option be pursued.

Option 2

- 7.5 Under this option, Leavesden Green JMI would reduce in size and be adapted to become a one form of entry primary school. Alban Wood Infant School would be adapted and extended to become a one form of entry primary school, and there would be no requirement to use a detached playing field to meet curriculum needs for pupils attending Alban Wood School.
- 7.6 Feasibility work on the Alban Wood Infant School site, under option 2, shows the need for an extension to the west of the building, but maintaining the existing nursery building.
- 7.7 The playing field area would be 5350 sq metres, which would be sufficient area to meet the requirements of DfES guidance. A hard play area would also be provided.
- 7.8 To accommodate the transition of the pupils, it would be necessary to provide from September 2005 to 2010/11 temporary classrooms, although the number would reduce during this period.
- 7.9 Looking at Leavesden Green School, this would be reduced in size, with the current junior school building being adapted and extended to make best use of the space for standard provision for a 1 form of entry primary school. The whole of the current playing fields would remain for the use of the school.

- 7.10 The site of any surplus accommodation would be considered for re-use or sale under the County Council's general policies. Initial planning advice suggests that the built area of the infant part of Leavesden Green School would have potential for residential development and is subject to further discussion with Watford Borough Council.
- 7.11 Wormald Burrows, traffic consultants have advised that under option 2, it would be possible to provide sufficient car parking spaces for a 1fe primary school on the Alban Wood Infant site. It has been advised that it would be possible to provide sufficient on site parking to meet the County Council's parking standards.
- 7.12 Under this option, in the long term it is considered that there would be no significant worsening of the current level of on street parking, subject to developing a School Travel Plan. There is clear potential for developing a School Travel Plan, bearing in mind 81% of existing pupils of both schools live within 1km of the proposed school.
- 7.13 There is no significant traffic implications associated with Leavesden Green site under this option, and car parking would be repositioned to serve the school.

Option 3

- 7.14 From the responses received there has been a minimal amount of support for option 3, with 7% of those involved with Leavesden Green JMI School ranking this as a second preference. For this reason, it was not considered worthwhile to pursue this option further.

8. Rationale for future primary provision

- 8.1 When reviewing primary provision the County Council normally considers that schools of two forms of entry provide long-term educational and financial viability. Educationally, benefits of a two form entry school include good opportunities for professional support such as shared planning, some shared teaching arrangements and setting classes by ability. These features aid children's learning.
- 8.2 In this review, however, considerable concern was expressed about potential overcrowding on the Alban Wood Infant School site under option 1, and the strong desire to maintain primary school provision in both the Alban Wood and Leavesden Green communities. However, there would be less flexibility in managing the schools when compared to a 2 form of entry model, the educational benefits from a larger school would be lost, and if pupil numbers declined more than expected, either one of these schools could become unviable.
- 8.3 In considering its recommendation, the Panel is asked to give careful consideration to ensuring that the potential risks associated with two 1 form of entry schools rather than a single 2 form of entry school have

been adequately addressed. In the specific circumstances of the Leavesden Green/Woodside wards option 2 addresses these concerns around the creation of smaller schools and officers are satisfied that the future forecast of pupil numbers is sufficient to maintain two viable one form entry primary schools in these areas.

With less far to travel for some pupils, when compared with option 1, this option would also support effective learning and promote attendance.

- 8.4 Primary school places within the neighbouring Abbots Langley are tight and continue to be monitored. Tanners Wood School has approached the authority to permanently increase the admission number to 56 from 45 with effect from September 2005, without the need to expand the accommodation available. By increasing the admission number at this school, it is estimated there will be sufficient places to accommodate the forecast demand for reception places, combined with the those available at Bedmond and Leavesden Green JMI to accommodate casual admissions within the Abbots Langley area.

9. Financial Implications

9.1 Revenue

- 9.2 Appendix 7 attached shows the revenue implications (at 2003/04 prices) option 2.
- 9.3 Historically school amalgamations have resulted in savings in lump sum and premises funding in school budget shares.
- 9.4 However, it is anticipated that the DfES minimum funding guarantee will restrict the ability to make these savings, and thus to redirect these resources elsewhere in the schools budget, until the end of 2005/06.
- 9.5 The revenue implications including school budget share savings from 2006/07 are as follows:

	2004/05 £000	2005/06 £000	2006/07 £000	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	Long Term £000
Total	18	255	118	(47)	(79)	(93)

- 9.6 If the DfES minimum guarantee were extended beyond 2005/06 it might significantly restrict our ability to achieve the budget share saving. In such a situation we would make representations to the DfES about the application of the guarantee.

9.7 Capital

- 9.8. The capital cost of developing the two schools, Alban Wood Infant and Leavesden Green JMI amount to £2,948,000, and will be met by the value of the disposals of Alban Wood Junior and part of Leavesden Green sites. Development work will include adapting and providing a small extension to the junior part of the Leavesden Green building to provide a 1 fe JMI, and providing 2 extensions to the Alban Wood Infant building, together with internal adaptations to the existing.
- 9.9 Work on the new build will start once necessary consents have been received during the 2004/5 financial year, and the new build is likely to be completed in August 2005.

Background information referred to by the author:

Public Consultation Document – Published November 2003