



**Hertfordshire**  
COUNTY COUNCIL

Children, Schools  
& Families

## Consultation on the proposed closure of Norton School

Making sure every pupil in Letchworth receives the  
best possible education in order to help them reach  
their full potential

8 March 2002

[www.hertsdirect.org/norton](http://www.hertsdirect.org/norton)

# The position at Norton School

Norton School has experienced difficulties in recent years. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspectors have commented upon significant weaknesses within the school but have also identified significant strengths.

The Governors, school management and staff, supported by staff from Hertfordshire County Council, have worked hard to make improvements and some successes have been achieved.

Despite this, the school has found it difficult to continue to implement its improvement strategies because of a high turnover of staff. National teacher recruitment difficulties are reflected in Hertfordshire but even more so in this small school identified as having problems. This year:

- over half of the teachers at Norton are new to the school; and
- one third of its teachers are on temporary contracts.

This lack of continuity and experience, together with other problems at the school, have had an inevitable effect on teaching and learning within the school. Despite much hard work on the part of Norton's teachers, too many lessons are not reaching acceptable standards and this is affecting the way pupils view their abilities and confidence in the school.

The County Council is concerned that the school will not be able to improve its current performance quickly enough to make a significant difference to the education of existing pupils and new entrants due for September. We have, therefore, considered what can be done to secure the best possible solution for pupils and staff at Norton School.

Ofsted has re-visited the school and its report is expected to be published shortly. If Ofsted agrees with the County Council's view of standards at the school we will formally be required to consider the position of the future of the school.

This document explains why:

- the County Council is proposing to close the school;
- how it would be achieved by expanding other schools;
- the implementation arrangements, particularly for pupils;
- the timetable for consultation and decision; and
- how to let us know your views.

This is a consultation document. No decision on whether to close Norton School has yet been taken.

## Why we are proposing closure

The County Council recognises that a school plays an important role in its community and is always reluctant to propose closure unless it is absolutely necessary. Consideration has been given to what else could be done before reaching the conclusion that closure should be proposed by the County Council.

We could continue to support the Norton School improvement efforts but we do not see what more we or the school could do to improve matters within an acceptable timescale. Recruitment strategies at the school are not working and other schools feel unable to offer their own staff to support Norton, because of their staffing needs. Schools identified by Ofsted as either having "serious weaknesses" or requiring "special measures", and particularly small schools, are less attractive to new and experienced teachers alike. Their ability to offer significantly more pay to attract teachers is limited by their budgets, which are determined by a legal scheme of delegation. The situation could worsen.

We have also considered launching a new school on the same site as the existing school. This would close the old school and start a completely new school, with new teachers. We believe that this is also unlikely to be successful because of current staff recruitment difficulties.

We also considered if the school could become a Church school. Again, it is likely that the school would still experience similar problems with recruitment. It could take an unacceptably long time to make a difference to pupils' education.

The County Council's proposed approach is therefore to close Norton School and expand Fearnhill, The Highfield and Knights Templar Schools. This way forward would:

- secure good education provision for existing and future pupils;
- build on the strengths of Fearnhill, The Highfield and Knights Templar;
- produce larger schools better able to withstand impending changes to the National Curriculum, especially the 14-19 curriculum;
- be more attractive to prospective teachers;
- better meet the particular needs of the communities they serve, e.g. Knights Templar would be able to provide places for more Baldock and surrounding village children; and
- remove uncertainty for Norton's staff and provide greater career development opportunities for them.

One reason for the proposal is that it builds upon the strengths of local schools. If the proposal goes ahead, current and future pupils will attend better performing local schools. GCSE results in the area have been:

% achieving GCSE 5+ A\*-C

School	2001
Fearnhill	53%
The Highfield	44%
Knights Templar	77%
Norton	28%

It is the case that most parents in the area want places for their children at Fearnhill, The Highfield and Knights Templar schools. First rankings for the schools in the area have been:

First rankings

School	2001/2	2002/3
Fearnhill	115	177
The Highfield	192	164
Knights Templar	198	230
Norton	63	47

In the interests of pupils and staff at Norton School we believe that action needs to be taken quickly. The County Council is therefore proposing to close Norton School on 31 August 2002.

If the proposed closure goes ahead, additional places would be made available at Fearnhill, The Highfield or Knights Templar schools. All pupils currently at Norton School and those who have been allocated a place for September 2002 would be reallocated to one of those schools. For September 2003, the published admission limits for those schools would be raised.

Nothing has been decided. We know this consultation will cause anxiety and uncertainty but it is important that the County Council knows your views.

# Expanding Fearnhill, The Highfield and Knights Templar Schools

The capacity and current number on roll at the four schools is:

School building capacities and 2001/2 numbers on roll

School	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10	Yr11	Yr12	Yr13	Total	Capacity
Fearnhill	148	148	153	151	115	73	61	849	942
The Highfield	151	145	146	148	154	88	56	888	895
Knights Templar	181	176	187	182	170	109	106	1111	1149
Norton	76	69	100	92	103	6	11	457	909
Area total	556	538	586	573	542	276	234	3305	3895

If Norton School closes the area capacity would reduce to 2986.

The actual total number of pupils in the Letchworth and Baldock area has been:

Total pupils on roll

Areas	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02
Letchworth	2199	2209	2271	2245	2194
Baldock	1064	1069	1097	1119	1111
Area total	3263	3278	3368	3364	3305

Estimates for future demand are published in the Hertfordshire School Organisation Plan as follows, but changes to admission rules may affect future patterns of demand and estimates.

Pupil estimates from School Organisation Plan

	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	Long term average
Letchworth	2394	2443	2456	2477	2351
Baldock	1224	1271	1319	1360	1347
Area total	3618	3714	3775	3837	3698

To meet the demand for places, admission limits to Fearnhill, The Highfield and Knights Templar would be raised.

Proposed admission limits to be published for September 2003

School	Current admission limit	Proposed admission limit
Fearnhill	150	195
The Highfield	150	195
Knights Templar	160	225
Norton	150	0
Total	610	615

As stated above the building capacity without Norton School will be 2986. There is a need for 3700 places to meet the estimated long term average demand. The County Council will therefore provide extra accommodation to expand building capacity by 700 places at the three other schools.

Some internal improvements to specialist spaces and temporary classrooms would be needed for this September, and again for September 2003. We are working with the schools to ensure that further building works are completed by September 2004, when all Norton's pupils would have transferred.

#### Building Plans by 2004

School	Building plans
Knights Templar	General classrooms; library expansion; science; technology and external works
Fearnhill	General classrooms; science; technology; and external works
The Highfield	General classrooms; library expansion; science; technology and external works

The County Council and headteachers of these schools are making plans so that should Norton School close the impact of such an expansion in pupil numbers and buildings on all other areas of school life are minimised; and that new pupils are fully integrated into their new schools.

## What would this mean for Norton's pupils?

We are committed to getting this right for all pupils, including those currently at Norton.

All existing Norton pupils, and those allocated a Year 7 place for September 2002, would be re-allocated to either Fearnhill and The Highfield schools in Letchworth, or Knights Templar School in Baldock.

The proposal for September 2002 is that all Year 7 and Year 10 pupils will move to their newly allocated schools.

Year 8, 9 and 11 pupils will remain in the Norton premises until the end of their current National Curriculum Key Stage (at the end of Years 9 and 11) when they would move to either Fearnhill, The Highfield or Knights Templar.

September's Year 12 and 13 students will be able to transfer to the Post 16 Letchworth Consortium, where there will be AS Levels and GNVQ provision locally.

While pupils remain in the Norton premises Knights Templar School would assume responsibility for the quality of their education. This has been agreed with the other headteachers involved to ensure a clear focus on education.

The movement of pupils is shown on the chart below:

Sep 2002		Sep 2003		Sep 2004	
Year	Location	Year	Location	Year	Location
7	new school	8	new school	9	new school
8*	Norton	9*	Norton	10*	new school
9	Norton	10	new school	11	new school
10	new school	11	new school	12	Consortium
11	Norton	12	Consortium	13	Consortium
12	Consortium	13	Consortium		
13	Consortium				

\* an example: a pupil in Year 8 in September 2002 (first column) would remain in the Norton premises. In September 2003 (second column) the pupil would be in Year 9 and remain in the Norton premises. In September 2004 (third column) the pupil would be in Year 10 and would move to their new school.

## How would places be re-allocated?

We will write to parents of current Norton pupils and those allocated Year 7 places for September 2002 about the process for reallocating their child's place to either Fearnhill, The Highfield or Knights Templar schools. The rules we propose to use, which are subject to approval by the Office of the Schools' Adjudicator, are:

1	Children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs which will name the school
2	Children who can prove that they have a particular medical or social reason why they must go to the school (we will take into account professional supporting evidence when assessing cases)
3	Children who will have a brother or sister at the school in September 2002
4	<p>Children for whom the school is their nearest to their permanent home. If more children qualify under this rule than there are places available, then the following tiebreak will be applied:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">those children who would have further to travel to one of the other two schools.</p> <p>Distances will be measured by the shortest designated route. The rules for determining a "designated route" are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it is a public route with a proper made-up surface, such as tarmac or concrete;</li> <li>• if it is a road, it does not need to have a separate pavement;</li> <li>• the route must be lit if it is in a town or city area or if it is a path.</li> </ul> <p>Please note also that the address used to determine the distance from home to school must be the child's permanent address. If you wish to have your case considered under rule 2, you must submit professional supporting evidence, which may be from a doctor, psychologist or other professional involved.</p>

Parents will be asked to express a preference for one of the three schools now, before a decision is taken whether to close Norton school. This is to ensure pupils know as soon as possible which school they would attend if the closure goes ahead.

Provisional Year 10 allocations will be made in the week commencing 8 April. Year 7 allocations will be made in the week commencing 15 April. This will allow us to take account of any sibling connections for September's Year 7 pupils which arise from the Year 10 allocations. All other places will be allocated in the week commencing 15 May.

These offers will be provisional and will be confirmed only if Norton School closes. Final confirmation of the allocation would be sent in June if a decision has been taken to close the school and the adjudicator has confirmed the use of the admission rules. An admissions appeals process would follow.

In future years, Year 7 places would be allocated according to the County admission rules applying at that time. The proposed admission rules are consistent with the admission rules which are currently the subject of consultation across the County.

## What about school uniforms?

Parents of existing Norton pupils who transfer to Fearnhill, The Highfield or Knights Templar schools would be able to obtain some financial assistance to purchase the particular items of school uniform that would be different.

More information would be sent to parents if a decision is taken to close the school.

## What about transport?

If transferring to a new school site results in a pupil having to travel a distance greater than 3 miles from home, the County Council would provide free transport for that pupil to the new school site. Any Norton pupil in receipt of free transport would continue to receive it while they remain on the Norton site.

More information would be sent to parents about transport if a decision is taken to close the school.

## What would this mean for Norton's staff?

It is essential that the Letchworth and Baldock schools have good teachers and support staff who will ensure continuity of education for Norton pupils. The County Council is working with staff and their representatives to make the best possible transition arrangements for pupils and employees. This will include individual interviews and a staff meeting with the County Council's personnel managers.

## The financial implications

Should Norton School close, Knights Templar school would be responsible for the delivery of the curriculum on the former Norton site. It would receive funding for site related costs and per pupil costs for the relevant students. Fearnhill and The Highfield Schools have also agreed to this. Some specific grants of money to Norton School would be distributed to all three schools on the basis of the number of former Norton pupils they accommodate, or through alternative arrangements agreed between the headteachers and the County Council. The headteachers are committed to working together in this way, as on all other issues.

All three remaining schools would receive the appropriate per pupil funding for the additional pupils on their sites and additional site related funding for their expanded premises.

The cost of the building work required to expand the three schools would be funded through a mixture of capital funding sources. The County Council's land on the Norton site would have to be sold to contribute towards the costs. This would not provide enough funding and the County Council would make other funds available based on justifiable allocations of existing funding programmes and from additional borrowing approval being sought from the Government and/or programmes funded by the County Council.

## What happens next?

The process for consultation and decision is:

Public consultation meeting at Norton School, at 7.30 p.m.	19 March
Proposal scrutinised by Hertfordshire County Council's Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee, at 10.30 a.m.	20 March
Proposal scrutinised by the County Council's Resources Panel, at 2.00 p.m.	20 March
Consultation period ends (last date for receiving responses)	8 April
Decision by the County Council's Cabinet, taking into account the responses received, at 2.00 p.m.	22 April
If decision taken by the County Council's Cabinet to proceed, publication of Statutory Notices announcing the closure of the school	25 April
End of Statutory Notice period	25 May
If objections received, decision taken by the (independent) Hertfordshire School Organisation Committee, at 10.00 a.m.	11 June
Proposed date for closure	31 August

The process for reallocating Norton's pupils for September 2002 is:

Pupils allocated a place for Year 7	• Meeting for parents to be held at Fearnhill School at 7.30 p.m.	14 March
	• Closing date for return of preferences for places at other schools	2 April
	• Provisional allocations made	15 April
	• Acceptance deadline for provisional allocations	30 April
	• Final confirmation of places should decision be taken to close Norton School	15 June
Pupils who will be Year 10	• Closing date for return of preferences for places at other schools	2 April
	• Provisional allocations made	8 April
	• Options evening at each school	15 April
	• Acceptance deadline for provisional allocations	29 May
	• Final confirmation of places should decision be taken to close Norton School	15 June
Pupils who will be in Years 8, 9, 11,12 & 13	• Closing date for return of preferences for places at other schools	23 April
	• Acceptance deadline provisional allocations	30 April
	• Provisional allocations	15 May
	• Final confirmation of places should decision be taken to close Norton School	15 June

## Please let us know what you think

You can let us know your views by:

- ❖ Coming to meet us to discuss the proposal, on

19 March 2002  
at 7.30pm at  
Norton School, Letchworth

We will explain the background to the proposal and answer your questions. A County Councillor will chair the meeting and other County Councillors will be there to listen to your views. We will take notes and sound record the meeting as well.

- ❖ Sending in the response form in this document.
- ❖ Writing to us (freepost), if you do not want to use the form, to:

CSF Planning  
Business Reply Service HJ71  
Hertfordshire County Council  
County Hall  
Hertford, SG13 8YD

- ❖ completing the on-line form on our website at

[www.hertsdirect.org/norton](http://www.hertsdirect.org/norton)

If you have other suggestions or options, please make us aware of these in your response.

Your letters, forms and responses need to be with us by 8 April 2002.

This document is being widely distributed within Letchworth and Baldock. If you would like more copies, please ring us on 01438 737500. This telephone line is open between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Monday to Friday, and 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. on Saturdays.



**Hertfordshire**  
COUNTY COUNCIL

Children, Schools  
& Families

## Public Consultation

### The future of Norton School, Letchworth

#### RESPONSE FORM

If you have comments about the proposals please  
complete this response form and return it (freepost)  
by 8 April 2002 to:

CSF Planning, Business Reply Service HJ71,  
Hertfordshire County Council, County Hall, SG13 8YD

∂	Name and Address (This information will be treated confidentially)
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