

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE 2002 at 10.30A.M.**

**Agenda Item No.**

**1**

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

*Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families*

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**1. Purpose of report**

1.1 To enable the Scrutiny Committee to comment on proposals to close Wall Hall Nursery School, because the School must vacate its current accommodation that is being sold by the University of Hertfordshire; and to make alternative places available by opening a nursery class at Knutsford Primary School, Watford and utilising unfilled nursery class places at St John's Infant School, Radlett.

**2. Summary**

2.1 This report sets out the proposal to close Wall Hall Nursery School and to make alternative places available by opening a nursery class at Knutsford Primary School, Watford and utilising unfilled nursery class places at St John's Infant School, Radlett.

2.2 The report explains why Wall Hall Nursery School must vacate its current accommodation, describes the home locations of its pupils and considers alternative provision in the area. Options for new provision to replace that lost by the closure of Wall Hall are set out.

2.3 A public consultation document containing the information described in the report will be published, and public meetings will be held as set out in paragraph 6.5.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the proposal to close Wall Hall Nursery School in December 2003, and for alternative provision to be made available by utilising existing LEA and private sector capacity in Radlett, and opening a new nursery class at Knutsford Primary School in September 2003. The views of the Committee, alongside those of the Resources Panel and all the views expressed during the consultation, will be considered by Cabinet on 16 September.

#### 4. Background

##### Wall Hall Nursery School

- 4.1 Wall Hall must vacate its current accommodation in December 2003 as the University of Hertfordshire is selling the Aldenham Campus, where the nursery is located, for residential development. The County Council leases the School's premises from the University.
- 4.2 The location of 38 pupils currently attending Wall Hall is shown on Map 1. This attendance pattern is typical of the past few years. The majority of children come from East Watford, for the morning session; and Radlett, for the afternoon; with a handful from surrounding areas. They are 'bussed' to the nursery.
- 4.3 LEA schools and private/voluntary pre schools in East Watford and Radlett are shown on Map 2.
- 4.4 The actual number of LEA nursery and school places 2000 – 2002 is given in Appendix 1.
- 4.5 Comparable information on the private/voluntary pre schools' places and uptake is in Appendix 2.
- 4.6 The cost of maintaining Wall Hall is

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

For comparison the cost of securing 40 part time places in the private sector is £49,000, and in a nursery class is £51,000.

- 4.7 Wall Hall is an excellent nursery school. It has Beacon status. Its strengths though, are not unique : provision for SEN children, working with parents, curriculum development, meeting the needs of individual children, assessment and record keeping are found at other nursery schools and classes.

### **St John's Infant and Nursery School**

- 4.8 St John's is a Church of England Voluntary Controlled School. A nursery class opened at the school four years ago. However, as shown in Appendix 1, St John's Nursery has never been full since it opened; and of the 40 children currently on roll; only 19 live in Radlett and Aldenham. The remainder come from Shenley, Borehamwood and further afield.

### **Newberries Primary School**

- 4.9 In the knowledge that the future of Wall Hall was under review, Newberries Primary School have asked for nursery provision, either a nursery class or the transfer of Wall Hall to the Newberries site. Their case is based upon the educational benefit of nursery education and the fact that Newberries is the only school in the Radlett area without a nursery class.
- 4.10 There is sufficient space at Newberries for a nursery building and the external areas; though there would be planning issues to overcome.

### **Knutsford Primary School**

- 4.11 Knutsford Primary School has just been rebuilt with a nursery classroom following destruction by fire. For many years there has been a voluntary Pre-School in the building, providing for both three and four year olds; and, because Knutsford has not had a nursery class, four year olds have also attended Wall Hall. The bus for Wall Hall collects the four year olds at Knutsford. Future Knutsford pupils may also attend other local nursery classes, mainly Parkgate Infants School.
- 4.12 The rebuilt Knutsford includes a nursery classroom and external playspace. The nursery is adjacent to the Pre-School room, and they share a designated access, lobby and classroom. The reason for rebuilding with a nursery classroom was the potential for seamless provision for children aged 3-11 through a partnership between the Pre-School and the Primary school; with also an opportunity for the development of additional services, like pre and after school clubs.

### Need for Nursery Places

- 4.13 The data in Appendix 1 shows that the number of LEA nursery places taken over the past three years has been comfortably within the nursery admission limit.

Current Nursery Admission Limit	LEA Nursery Places Taken in the Past		
	2000	2001	2002
<b>Total 334</b>	283	276	300

- 4.14 The LEA nursery places forecast for the next few years for East Watford and Radlett is for demand to remain around the current level.

	Forecast of LEA Nursery Places to be Taken			
	2003	2004	2005	2006
East Watford Total	180	187	185	184
Radlett Total	108	107	107	107
<b>Total</b>	288	294	292	291

- 4.15 This level of demand is expected to continue in the medium term. Demographically numbers are declining; but additional housing already planned, and the anticipated development of Wall Hall, will compensate for this.
- 4.16 Appendix 2 shows the uptake in the private and voluntary nursery sector. The position in that sector is complicated by the fact that not all settings offer either 5 (mornings only) or 10 (mornings and afternoon) sessions; but the figures for children receiving 4 year old grant are directly comparable to places taken in the LEA sector. Over the past three years, these have been:
- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| January 2000 | 88 children |
| January 2001 | 61 children |
| January 2002 | 71 children |
- 4.17 Appendix 2 also demonstrates that it would be possible for the private and voluntary sector to take more 4 year olds, the maximum number of places per session (column 2) is greater than the actual number of children for whom 4 year old grant is paid (columns 5, 6 and 7).

## **5. Options**

5.1 In broad terms, the options open to the LEA are:

- (i) to close Wall Hall and take no further action, this would require the publication of a Statutory Notice and if objections are received referral to the School Organisation Committee; or
- (ii) to close Wall Hall, open a nursery class or classes and, to the greatest extent possible, transfer the Wall Hall expertise and ethos to the new situation, this would also be a statutory matter; or
- (ii) to move Wall Hall as a free-standing nursery school to another location, this would not require statutory process.

5.2 As to geography, given the established location of pupils attending Wall Hall, and the current distribution of nursery provision, new arrangements should be at Newberries and/or Knutsford Schools.

### **Close Wall Hall and take no further action**

5.3 The balance between supply and demand will obviously change when the accommodation at Wall Hall is no longer available. There would then not be sufficient LEA places correctly located to meet the anticipated demand, particularly from children living in East Watford. If no further action was taken, some parents would have to rely on the private and voluntary sector. The difficulties with this would be threefold:

- (i) voluntary pre-school providers can seldom employ qualified teachers;
- (ii) most private sector providers in this area expect parents to take up more than the core nursery session, and accordingly charge top-up fees; and
- (iii) much of the pre-school provision in this locality is denominational.

### **Close Wall Hall and open a nursery class or classes**

5.4 If Wall Hall was to close and the places transferred then there would be two possible locations. One in Radlett at Newberries and the other in East Watford at Knutsford.

**Nursery Class at Newberries Option**

5.5 If Wall Hall closed, the comparison between LEA nursery places available and the demand in Radlett would be as follows

	LEA Nursery Places Available	Forecast of LEA Nursery Places			
		2003	2004	2005	2006
Radlett	102	108	107	107	107

5.6 The justification for additional nursery places is very problematic in Radlett. Given that St. John's Infants School nursery class has never filled its places, and that opening a nursery class at Newberries would significantly affect the private and voluntary sector, particularly Christchurch Nursery, the case for an additional nursery class in Radlett, assuming Wall Hall closes, is very weak.

5.7 Not opening a nursery class at Newberries would mean that parents seeking an LEA nursery place would need to look, as now, to St John's Infant School. There is also capacity in the private and voluntary sector. It would be more appropriate to utilise existing capacity at St John's and in the private and voluntary sector rather than building in over capacity, which would be the consequence of establishing a nursery class at Newberries, or relocating Wall Hall to the site.

**Nursery Class at Knutsford Option**

5.8 In East Watford there are two relevant factors. The first is that the nursery admission limit at Parkgate Infants School (72) is higher than the reception limit (60) as places are available for children who will go on to Knutsford. Secondly, places would not be taken by four year olds at Knutsford Pre-School if the Primary School had a nursery class. On the assumption that 14 children per year (the average number of 4 year olds at the Pre-School over the past 3 years) attended a future nursery class rather than the Pre-School, and that 60 nursery places were available at Parkgate, the number of places and forecast demand is set out in the following table.

	Nursery Places Available	Forecast of LEA Nursery Places to be Taken			
		2003	2004	2005	2006
East Watford	180	194	201	199	198

5.9 The only other pre schools in the immediate vicinity, Meriden Playgroup and Harebreaks Pre-School, do not make provision for 4 year olds. On the basis of the numbers there is a case for a nursery class at Knutsford, if nursery places for children who will go on to Knutsford reception are no longer provided at Wall Hall, the Pre-School and other local nursery classes like Parkgate.

- 5.10 There have been discussions with the Management Committee of the Pre-School in order to consider possible changes. They accept that they would primarily provide for younger children, have some concerns about the impact on their financial position, and quite rightly point out that there may be a few parents who want their children to remain at the Pre-School rather than transfer to the nursery class.
- 5.11 If a nursery class was established at Knutsford it is anticipated that the numbers would increase, as the majority of parents whose children go on to reception would take a nursery place.
- 5.12 If a nursery class was established at Knutsford, children who would have gone to Wall Hall Nursery would go there; and so it could be appropriate for current Wall Hall staff to be considered for the new posts at Knutsford.

**Move Wall Hall as a Nursery School to Radlett**

- 5.13 A parents' group has prepared a case for relocating Wall Hall Nursery School. Their vision for the future is as follows:

5.13.1 ***"A State Nursery Unit***

A state nursery unit to be established in Radlett, ideally at the Newberries site, to serve the area covered by Aldenham Parish Council and SEN cases from the surrounding area.

A morning and afternoon session each providing education for 20 three to five year olds, with the possibility to extend to day-care.

This would settle children into the Newberries site and allow easy transfer to the school, or to more specialised SEN schools.

Funding for the building would come from the University of Hertfordshire as compensation for the sale of the Wall Hall site.

5.13.2 ***Retention of the Wall Hall Team***

Cindy Willey and the team to have the opportunity to stay intact, including secretary, SEN support and Governing Body.

5.13.3. ***The Headteacher and Governing Body to have control over:***

- budget
- staffing
- curriculum
- building design

#### 5.13.4. *The accommodation to include:*

- one large and one medium classroom (55m<sup>2</sup> and 25m<sup>2</sup>)
- two offices (10m<sup>2</sup>)
- quiet room/SEN room (10m<sup>2</sup>)
- Training/parents room for presentations and meetings (20m<sup>2</sup>)
- playground/garden, including covered area (120m<sup>2</sup> plus)

#### 5.13.5 *Continuity*

We (i.e. the parents) would like the new nursery unit open in January 2004 to allow children to transfer as Wall Hall closes in December 2003".

- 5.14 A very small nursery school could be located on the Newberries site. However there is insufficient space for a new nursery school to include the accommodation needed to offer a wider range of services, such as day-care and parenting classes, as has been achieved when other nursery schools in the County have been re-built.
- 5.15 Wall Hall is a highly regarded nursery school and support for its relocation is very strong, not only from parents whose children have benefited from education there but also from informed early years practitioners who recognise the school's quality and achievements. However, this support has to be set alongside the fact that more nursery places are not required in Radlett, either in a nursery school or a nursery class at Newberries, as set out in paragraphs 5.6 and 5.7.

### **6. The Preferred Option**

- 6.1 Wall Hall cannot remain in its current location. The case for increasing the number of nursery places in Radlett is not strong. Those children living in Radlett who would have looked to Wall Hall had it remained, would in future be able to take up existing spare capacity in Radlett, at St John's Infant School, or in the private and voluntary sector.
- 6.2 The case for additional nursery places in East Watford, at Knutsford, is strong on the grounds that places are needed; that it provides an excellent opportunity to integrate provision across the Foundation Stage; and that there would also be the potential to add and integrate childcare services as well.
- 6.3 Children are admitted to nursery schools and classes in September and January. To avoid any disruption during their time in nursery, it would be appropriate for the final admission to Wall Hall to be in January 2003, so the children have three terms in the nursery before it closes in December 2003, when they then transfer to their reception classes. Knutsford nursery class could open in September 2003 for children due to start in reception in September 2004. Twice year intakes for nursery and reception would then continue thereafter.

6.4 The option for consultation, therefore, is for Wall Hall Nursery School to close in December 2003; and for alternative provision to be made available by utilising existing LEA and private and voluntary sector capacity in Radlett, and opening a new nursery class at Knutsford Primary School in September 2003.

6.5 The consultation timetable is as follows:

Consultation Meetings at schools and with the Early Years Partnerships	June & July
End of consultation	15 August
CSF Resources Cabinet Panel	11 September
Cabinet	16 September
Statutory Notices	20 September
School Organisation Committee (if required)	Mid December

## 7. **Financial Implications**

### Capital

7.1 The capital cost of providing the nursery class at Knutsford has already been incurred. It was included in the 2000/01 programme and cost £205,000.

7.2 Officers are discussing with the University to pay for "suitable alternative provision" as per the County Council's existing lease.

### Revenue

7.3 As indicated in paragraph 4.6, Wall Hall is expensive to maintain: £112,000 pa (excluding rates). This is particularly because of the transport costs and lump sum funding associated with a separate school.

7.4 The comparable cost of a nursery class at Knutsford would depend upon the number of pupils: 40 pupils would cost £51,000, 52 pupils would cost £67,000.

7.5 The precise revenue funding position would depend upon actual pupil placements. The budget share at St John's Infants School would increase but at Parkgate it would reduce marginally. Numbers in the private and voluntary sector in Radlett would increase slightly, but decrease by more in East Watford.

7.6 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.

- 7.7 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 overall level of savings.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the proposal to close Wall Hall Nursery School in December 2003, and for alternative provision to be made available by utilising existing LEA and private sector capacity in Radlett, and opening a new nursery class at Knutsford Primary School in September 2003. The views of the Committee, alongside those of the Resources Panel and all the views expressed during the consultation, will be considered by Cabinet on 16 September.

### **Background information used by the author in preparing this report:**

"Parents supporting the relocation of Wall Hall Nursery School", submission by parents.