

Appendix H

**Brocklesby Park Primary School Public Consultation Meeting
Great Limber Village Hall
6.30-8.00pm on 2 December 2014**

In attendance from the Local Authority (LA), CfBT and the school:-

Debbie Barnes: LA - Director of Children's Services (Chair)

Mrs P Bradwell: Executive Councillor for Adult Care and Health Services, Children's Services

Steve Tinegate: Chair of Governors

Jo Spriggs: Head Teacher

Gill Curtis: CfBT School Improvement Service

Matt Clayton: School Organisation Planning Manager

35 parents, staff, governors and members of the local community attended

- *Introduction from Debbie Barnes as to how the meeting would proceed together with an outline of the consultation process.*
- *Introductions from each member of the panel.*
- *Introduction from Chair of Governors, Steve Tinegate, including reasons for proposing closure, in that there are not enough pupils to make the school viable and the consequent inability to set a balanced budget. This led to the Governing Body taking the difficult decision to ask the LA to commence consultation on closure.*

Where appropriate, further details have been added to the following answers to clarify any uncertainty. This document will be updated should further questions be received during the consultation period. All questions and comments will be considered along with all response forms received during the 8 week consultation period which closes on 16 January 2015.

Q & A

Q Regarding the budget, please clarify what you mean by medium term and long term

A Here the Governing Body (GB) is viewing the medium term as the financial year 2015/2016 and the long term 2016/17/18

Q If the numbers at the school for the academic year were up to 27 would this 100% guarantee the school would stay open?

A There would not be 100% guarantee.

Q If not 100%, then what sort of percentage would you think?

A The GB cannot give percentage guarantees but if the numbers were up to 27 this might buy time for the school to stay open for another academic year which could potentially offer more of a chance of staying open in the long term.

Q What is a "balanced budget"?

- A** A balanced budget is one in which income exceeds expenditure whereas a deficit budget is one in which expenditure exceeds income
- Q** Can we reduce expenditure at the school eg reduce the staffing costs to balance the fall in pupil numbers?
- A** To reduce the staffing further would not be acceptable to Ofsted and would likely lead to the children not receiving the standard of education they deserve
- Q** Please confirm the numbers of staff employed at the school
- A** 8 teaching and non-teaching staff but not all full time. The teaching staff comprises 1 full-time and 1 part-time member with the Headteacher also teaching part-time. To reduce the staffing level so that all the children would have to be taught in one class (Reception through to Y6) would present significant difficulties in both meeting the needs of all the children and offering the full curriculum. This would likely compromise the children's education and progress that they should make.
- Q** The numbers have been low for some time – what have the GB done to plan for this?
- A** The GB has tried to market the school and employed a professional service to assist. Conversion to Academy status, either alone or as part of a Trust, has been explored. The school has joined a collaborative partnership with other local schools for support and to help reduce costs.
- Q** Parents have been unaware of all this – what did you discover and what was discussed?
- A** The school is too small to convert to Academy status and needs the support of the LA. We are also too small for Multi Academy Trusts to be interested in us being sponsored by them. Similarly other local schools were not interested in federating in the light of our low numbers. Demographic information does not suggest any increase in numbers.
- Q** Should we not explore these options fully?
- A** The LA will look at all possibilities during the consultation period and would want to fully explore Academy and federation options, but agree that Academy sponsors are unlikely to be interested with such low pupil numbers. Matt Clayton confirmed that NHS GP registration data and ONS birth data for the local area has been provided to the GB. Also the Headteacher has researched further information from parents (both current and future) regarding siblings and potential applicants for Reception to obtain a clearer picture but the numbers still look to remain low through to 2017/8 and are unlikely to get above the low twenties
- Q** The trend seems to be to close small schools and if this trend continues will we not be left with a small number of large schools? These do not suit all children – will there be a choice for a parent looking for a small school?
- A** The rural nature of Lincolnshire means that it is important to support small schools. The DfE considers a primary school to be sustainable when it has more than 100 pupils. In Lincolnshire we have over 100 schools with less than 100 pupils. In 2011 the government made changes to school funding leaving the LA with very little

discretion. The financial model that Lincolnshire operates does support small schools but even with this support the numbers at Brocklesby Park have dipped so low that they are below what is viable and demographics indicate that future school numbers will continue to be very low. Viability must also include educational as well as financial sustainability.

Q Has the GB considered offering a pre-school? The Little Brocks toddler group has 6/8 children regularly attending.

A The GB has not explored this option, but is open to the idea.

Q If we can fundraise and subsidise the school's income, would this help?

A If we had another income stream this may help but how can this extra income be generated and sustained? The GB needs your ideas.

Q As parents we wish that you had told us of the position 2 years ago rather than at the last minute.

A Noted.

Q The school is part of the estate heritage. What is the Estate's involvement?

A Lord Yarborough and Kit Read are both on the GB and are aware of the situation. They have been fully involved with the GB's activities.

Q I understand that they are aware but what is the Estate's input?

A Both Lord Yarborough and Kit Read share the parents' concerns and are keen for the school to continue. They are interested in hearing ideas from parents and would welcome the setting up of a working group and also new members to fill the vacancies on the GB.

Q There are no easy solutions – Great Limber has an ageing population.

A Noted.

Q What will happen to the land and buildings if the school closes?

A The playing fields are estate land and would therefore revert to the estate. The LA has the freehold on the remaining land and buildings which would revert to the LA in the event of closure.

Q We appreciate that the numbers are low but as parents we were shocked to learn of the proposal to close the school. Many parents want to be involved and do have ideas eg federation, setting up a pre-school/out of school provision such as a breakfast club but are concerned that there will not be enough time to implement these ideas. We need to know exactly what has been done and who will process these ideas – can it be us as parents? The school may not be financially attractive but has so much to offer – history, heritage, buildings, nurturing environment.

A Working with other schools has been explored and many benefits have been gained from entering into the collaborative partnership eg mentoring, support, sharing good practice and resources. With regard to saving specific costs following

federation – even if 1 head teacher is shared the savings would not be significant and there would still be the running costs of each school.

Q How much money do we actually need?

A The following figures are based on the number on roll continuing on the existing basis:-

- We will enter the 2015/16 financial year with a £10k surplus which will be a £16k deficit by the end of the year
- Deficit at the end of the financial year 2016/2017 of £46k
- Deficit at the end of the financial year 2017/2018 of £83k

Q My 4 children have all attended the school during which time the numbers have fluctuated considerably – even as low as now. The listed building status has sometimes hampered improvements. It is a small school but with big support. It has a very supportive and nurturing environment which is of particular benefit to SEND children.

A Noted. We have a record of the numbers on roll back to 1975 which do not show numbers as low as now – but these figures are as recorded on the census day each year and do not represent all the fluctuations within an academic year.

Q Can we view this as an opportunity ie save the school from closure and use it as a test case of how to protect rural schools?

A This would have to be funded somehow.

Q We have all chosen this school for our children and just want the opportunity to raise funds. We believe there is the potential here but are concerned that there will not be enough time to implement our ideas.

A Noted.

Q What costs are involved in closing a school – could these costs be used to subsidise the school budget?

A As previously advised schools funding is prescribed by the government and the LA has limited discretion. If redundancies were involved there would obviously be costs but we cannot give a figure at this stage. The LA has a good track record of redeployment and will always seek to avoid redundancy not only to mitigate costs but also to reduce the human costs of redundancy. Other closure costs will include security and maintenance of the buildings while empty but the LA would not want the buildings to remain empty for long so disposal options would be looked at as quickly as possible and such costs would come out of the county budget and not the schools budget.

Q Are there any covenants on the buildings or land?

A At this initial stage we are not aware of any covenants but we will look into this fully should the closure proposal be pursued.

Q Failing businesses usually either diversify or specialise. Could we consider specialising eg concentrate on special needs? Do SEND pupils bring with them a

pupil premium? There is a trend towards inclusion but mainstream schools are often unwilling to offer special needs places.

A Lincolnshire places very few SEND pupils out of county and there is not an issue in placing SEND pupils. All schools are expected to meet SEND requirements of their pupils. There is a good special school in Brigg but we are not aware of the details of SEND places in North Lincs and North East Lincs. There are specialist costs associated with SEND pupils eg 1:2:1s etc and specialising in SEND provision would be likely to increase the school's costs and therefore not help in trying to balance the budget.

Q I chose this school as it is small and as a whole provides a nurturing environment. Bigger schools have to create a special group within their school to provide nurturing support. Why spend money on creating such groups when our school already provides a nurturing environment?

A All schools seek to provide nurturing support particularly for vulnerable children and it is one of the factors that Ofsted look for in their inspections.

Q The crux of the problem is the low numbers and if we could get 6 or 7 more children this would buy us time but we need another year to get the numbers up and look at the ideas already suggested such as a nursery so that the school would benefit from rent paid by the nursery provider and the children would flow up to the main school.

A Noted. With regard to the idea of running a nursery there would have to be evidence of demand to attract a private provider. The Birth to Five Service at the council would be able to advise and assist in preparing a business case.

Q Referring to a previous question – I disagree that all schools are nurturing. My son has attended 3 different schools with very varied support and it is only at this school that he has thrived. The nurture and support at this school is one of its strengths.

A Noted

Q I would be interested to hear what the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher think is actually going to happen.

A It is encouraging that every parent is being positive. We need your ideas and input. This may result in bringing up the numbers – but it is all about the low numbers at the school

Q Do we want to carry on – is it worth it?

A All parents – Yes

Q If the school closes can you please clarify transport issues and the offer of a guaranteed school place. The letter contained a lot of detail which is difficult to take in.

A If the process proceeds to a Representation Period a Statutory Notice will be published which will name a school or schools where a place is guaranteed for all the children on roll. The named school has not been decided at this stage and transport will be provided according to the LA's policy, but it may apply to all

children on roll whether they live in or out of county. It is not possible to confirm details at this stage as further consultation with parents will be required if the process proceeds to the next stage and the circumstances for each family would then be carefully considered on a case by case basis.

Q How much will this cost eg the provision of additional transport?

A It is impossible to quantify at this point but it will be fully looked into – there are only 4 children out of the 15 on roll for whom Brocklesby Park is their nearest school.

Q It is a parent's right to choose a school for their child – by only offering transport to a named school are you not restricting this right?

A It is difficult to comment on individual circumstances and we will have a clearer idea following discussions with parents.

Q Where do we go from here? Where do we take our ideas?

A To the GB.

Q Is the GB full? Is there a parental support group?

A There are 3 vacancies on the GB – please speak to Claire as the clerk to governors. There is a 'Friends of the School' association which organises fund raising activities.

Q We understand that the issue is low numbers. The idea of a pre-school is a good one. Are there any issues with having a nursery and mainstream school on the same premises?

A There are many models operating in Lincolnshire eg LCC maintained nursery school/ mainstream school with LCC nursery class/ nursery provision provided by a private provider on the premises of a mainstream school. There are registration requirements and Ofsted requirements which may involve physical alterations eg separate playgrounds. The LA's Birth to Five Service would be happy to advise.

Q Would the council implement this nursery provision?

A We have found that the most successful model is one that is run by a separate management committee which has the advantage of the expertise of the provider together with potential transition benefits. The nursery can operate as a separate entity and not compromise the efficient running of the school.

Q But this will all take time - do we have to have this setup before the Representation Period or just come up with the plan? And who will fund the setting up?

A The Birth to Five Service will advise and assist without any charge. Please put forward your ideas and any viable option will be given consideration.

Q There must be lots of children in this rural area that require transport to school. Could we offer to transport children to our school eg from the village of Habrough?

A A number of schools do offer to transport pupils although these are usually secondary schools/academies. The LA could not fund this – as the LA must seek to

treat all schools the same and could not offer additional funding not available to all schools.

Q Could we use the £10 k surplus? Could we get a sponsored vehicle or look into a lease vehicle?

A The LA would not object to the school looking into this.

Q We have ideas and want to fund raise but can we have another year?

A The GB will look into all ideas. A school can operate with a deficit budget for one year under exceptional circumstances but there must be a demonstrable sustainable plan to move to a balanced budget at the end of the year.

Q Could we share a minibus with one that already provides transport in the area?

A As above, the LA would not object to the school looking into this.

Q We have only just become aware of the difficulties at the school. Can the discussions be more open and transparent so that as parents we can help?

A The minutes of GB meetings are available to parents at the school office. The questions and answers raised at this meeting will be published on the LCC website and updated as and when any further questions are submitted. (Follow the link to [Current Consultations](#))

Q There is a 50 plus seat bus that provides school transport for only 2 children at the school. Can we get rid of this bus and save money?

A School transport is provided and organised by PC Coaches and this would not save any money. PC Coaches usually co-ordinate provision to operate on a dual basis covering secondary provision after primary in the same locality. We will take this back to colleagues in Transport for consideration.

Summary at the end of meeting which closed at 7.50pm

Debbie Barnes thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for the many positive contributions.

The consultation period ends on 16th January and we would encourage you to submit a response form. All responses will be considered when the decision is taken as to whether to proceed to the next stage of the process. If the process continues to the next stage there will be a 4 week Representation Period commencing with the publication of a Statutory Notice.

If there are further questions please contact either the school, the GB or the LA.

Contact details for the LA

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