

GODALMING TOWN COUNCIL

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Green Oak Closure Consultation
Room 326
County Hall
Penrhyn Road
Kingston upon Thames
KT1 2DN

Dear Sir/Madam

Extraordinary Town Meeting of the Parish of Godalming, 9 April 2018. Proposal to Close Green Oak CofE Primary School and Nursery

Further to Godalming Town Council's letter (dated 13 March 2018) in response to the public consultation regarding the proposal to close Green Oak CofE Primary School and Nursery, Godalming, the Town Council wishes to submit further observations as reflected at the Extraordinary Town Meeting of the Parish of Godalming, held on 9 April 2018.

The Extraordinary Parish Meeting was called by local electors in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12, Part 3, as a reflection of their concern to the proposal to close the school. The first point that should be noted is that such a meeting, although facilitated by the Town Council, is a meeting of the electors of the Parish, not a meeting of the Town Council. The observations that follow are those of the electors of the Parish who attended the meeting.

The first point Godalming Town Council would wish to make, is that the convening of an Extraordinary Town Meeting is an extremely unusual occurrence and since the introduction of the enabling legislation, has never happened before in Godalming and nor, as far as can be ascertained, in any of the Waverley parishes. This clearly indicates the level of concern within the parish, not just within the Ockford and Central ward where the school is located, but in all other town wards, who have grave concerns about the effect that the closure of the school will have on the existing class sizes and capacity of the remaining schools within the Godalming School Planning Area.

There can be no doubt that, having heard from Mr Alex Tear, Director of Education for the Diocese of Guildford and Mr Nicholas Smith, Schools Commissioning Officer for Surrey County Council, the electors present at the meeting expressed a sense of frustration in the process that follows a school having received an inadequate OFSTED report. A process that appears to be fragmented and made up of discrete decisions from different interested parties with no clear overall responsibility, accountability or leadership.

The electors found it incomprehensible that, although the County Council has a statutory duty to provide every child with a school place, it has no discretion on whether or not to put forward proposals to close a school following an inadequate OFSTED report coupled with the inability of the Regional Schools Commissioner to broker a suitable Multi Academy Trust (MAT) to take over the school.

A number of those present highlighted concerns relating to the lack of school places within the Godalming School Planning Area needed to meet existing and emerging demand and that, were Green Oak School to close, the County would potentially have to make significant investment at other schools to meet the school places requirement. The meeting felt that the closure of the school, would be a short

-sighted decision and urged Surrey County Council to review the effects of closure before a decision is taken.

Electors also felt that the apparent inability of the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and Surrey County Council to ensure the Diocese of Guildford considers every possible option to achieve the transfer of the School to a MAT, a serious failing of the existing processes. Electors expressed the view that the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) should explore whether a MAT, other than those owned by the Church might be able to take over the school. One such trust, which was represented at the meeting, being The Castle Hill Academy Trust. The Town Meeting felt that, so far, the DBE had appeared not to have fully explored the possibility of this or similar MATs taking on the school and encouraged a wider interpretation of the existing Memorandum of Understanding that is in place to safeguard the religious ethos of a CofE school.

The feeling of the meeting was that, either an appropriate funding arrangement should be found to enable a Diocesan Academy Trust to take in the school or, if no Diocesan MAT was able to take on the School, the RSC, SCC and the DBE should work together with a '**can do**' attitude to find a solution to enable a MAT, other than a Diocesan Academy Trust, to do so. Those present were encouraged of this being possible by the commitment from Mr Tear to meet with and explore options with the representative of the Castle Hill Academy Trust.

Many other questions and considerations were aired at the meeting (see attached list), including the belief that the existing consultation period was insufficient and that any proposal to close the school should be deferred until the 2018/19 academic year in order to:

- Fully explore the possibilities of the school attaining a sponsoring MAT
- Allow the school to undergo a full OFSTED inspection to benchmark its progress
- Allow parents and staff the time to manage the logistics and emotional stress that a decision to close the school would cause.

In representing the concerns expressed at the Extraordinary Town Meeting, Godalming Town Council hope that they will be taken into consideration during the current consultation period.

Yours faithfully

(Signed on the original)

Andy Jeffery
Town Clerk

Enc

CC: Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Rt Revd Jo Bailey-Wells – Chair of the Diocese of Guildford, Diocesan Board of Education
Mr Dominic Herrington – Regional Schools Commissioner for South East England and South London
Cllr David Hodges – Leader of Surrey County Council
Cllr Mary Lewis – Cabinet Member for Education – Surrey County Council
Mr Alex Tear – Director of Education – Diocese of Guildford
Mr Nicholas Smith – Schools Commissioning Officer – Surrey County Council

QUESTIONS ASKED AT THE PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON 9 APRIL 2018

Would it be possible for a MAT to take over the school that would not guarantee the religious aspect of the school?

Is it possible for a non CofE Trust to meet your requirements?

Is the Diocese prepared to compromise on Point 4 of the MAT criteria or is it better to close the school rather than compromise on this point and who defines the criteria?

Given that the church land that the school sits on is neighbouring SCC school grounds and the land defers to SCC if it ceases to be an educational establishment, would it be better to step down now and give non CofE MATs a chance to run the school?

In what sense is no school better than a secular school?

How can a school be closed in close proximity to a proposed several hundred new homes?

It is appreciated the school has 92 pupils with a capacity for 200 and expensive to run because of standing costs. If the money became available would that change the position (not in a religious way, but a financial one)?

The school needs to be financially viable, how many more pupils does that mean?

What's the projection in relation to the housing plans eventually for capacity within the local schools?

Will we have enough capacity elsewhere if Green Oak closes?

Considering the large number of new homes being built in the Godalming area, SCC will need to provide at least 40 primary and 80 secondary school places alone. Amongst the existing 6 schools there are 52 vacancies. How will SCC guarantee to provide 92 places (ie. current Green Oak pupils) within the Godalming schools?

Consultation period should last no longer than 12 months, but an absolute minimum of 6 weeks and 6 weeks should exclude school holidays. This consultation started on the 5 March and is due to end on the 16 April so this 42-day consultation process is 24 working days long. Surely this foreshortened consultation alone should fail the process?

You say the school is failing our children. I received a letter today from Ofsted. I can confirm Ofsted carried out a monitoring inspection and that leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the reversal of special measures. Would you not say it's fair for the current leadership to carry on with the improvements they are currently already making?

My children went to Shackleford, which was threatened with closure. It did not get closed. To cut costs, the number of teachers and classes was reduced and was kept at these levels until they could increase numbers again. The school became viable again. Can this be done in this situation?

There has been an indication that the spare places in schools around Godalming is exceptionally tight. I have heard that there are a number of large developments coming on stream. What is going to happen to pupils that come from residents moving into Prime Place and also all of the families moved into the Alderbank Drive area – have they got places? I have heard you say nothing about the ability of SCC to be able to offer alternative places if Green Oak were to close and given existing pressure on other junior and secondary school places.

At the previous consultation meeting SCC stated class sizes would not rise above 31. I have carried out an extensive investigation in class sizes and written to SCC that by my calculation will

rise to 34 as it stands and with the projected housing to 38. Asked for SCC calculations under FOI request. Did they do any calculations because the lady at the previous meeting said she had?

Merton has Portakabins on the playing fields and playgrounds. Would SCC do that?

The Diocese stated that church governors must be represented at director and trustee level. Who gave that advice? Or does that advice come from elsewhere?

How much more money in total has been offered in order to protect the trust for Green Oak School?

Guidance from Department of Education is that all schools who enter into MAT are given money at a standard rate of £110-130,000. You say it has not been offered?

As a parent who works and obviously for parents who have more than one child, how do you intend us being able to get our children to school? It might take maybe until the end of August to know where our children will be going. I start work at 8.30am so I would have to leave 1 hour early and get childcare. I will only get about a week to sort out our arrangements or may be have to quit my job.

Has the SCC made a decision on the school being open or on it being closed?

How will that be communicated to prospective parents?

Can you confirm SCC legal class sizes for an infant school and junior school class?

What will it take to have the consultation period extended? Time for all the ideas to be properly explored, so the local school remains open and information sorted through in a fair process?

It appears from what the Diocese has said that the school is not financially viable and requires funding in order to be able to proceed with any kind of proposal to continue. Is there a budget recovery plan for Green Oak School? One is always drawn up when a school is facing financial difficulty and is it not agreed by SCC?

What will happen to Green Oak site? Will it be used for educational purposes come September if the school closes?

The school is not viable with the number of pupils, however, how do you expect us to get more pupils if it will not be allowed to take on more pupils? First choice for Green Oak has been taken off the list and given another choice. Already looking at the school being closed. How can numbers increase if this is what is happening?

What will happen to the growing population of 0-4 year olds?

I wonder if the Board of Trustees asked Ofsted to do another inspection and if that inspection was good that would make the school much more attractive to sponsors and MATs. A plan is required to increase numbers of children at the school as it is being underused at the moment. Is it possible SCC would be prepared to fund something under these circumstances?

What is going to happen to Year 5 children if school closes?

I am wondering how we can have a proper consultation when fundamental short and long term facts and how they are addressed is not providing clarity on what these options might be?

I understand that should the school close we will not want to increase class sizes in other schools in the area. There is not a lot of capacity around other schools. What plans are in place to accommodate 92 children in terms of building accommodation, etc?