

Sefton Park Schools – Local Authority Expansion Proposals

Summary of Concerns raised at the Open Meeting on 30 June 2008

An open meeting was held at Sefton Park Schools on Monday 30th June to enable the schools' governors to hear the concerns of various stakeholders about current expansion proposals before they discuss the proposals at a future meeting, and so that those present could engage with other concerned parties.

The Chair of Governors emphasised that this was not part of the Local Authority's (LA) formal consultation process, and that all those who put forward views should also respond to the LA's consultation. It was clear that most of the stakeholders present felt that they had too little information from the LA.

The following is a summary of the points of concern raised by those attending the meeting

POLITICAL ISSUES

- Lack of information from the council makes it difficult for stakeholders to respond effectively. Youth Centre and playgroup were not informed about the January cabinet meeting which agreed the expansion.
- Why does the local authority consider Sefton Park suitable for expansion now, when it has rejected the idea previously, and as recently as 2006?
- Will stakeholders' objections actually influence the final decision?
- Why has the governing body not consulted with parents sooner?
- Request to keep community groups informed also.
- How accurate are the pupil number projections for this area, and do they include all the new buildings in Ashley Down?
- If SP is expanded to 630, can we be sure the council would not try to increase that further in the future?
- There is concern that the governing body has accepted the proposals too easily – what are the positives?
- The Primary Review recommends moving St Barnabas School to the old Fairfield site and expanding it to 2 form entry. Why not leave St Barnabas on its current site, create a new 2 form entry school at the Fairfield site, and leave Sefton Park as 2 form entry? This leaves the option of building a further 1 form entry school on the Brunel site.

LOGISTICS

- If proposals go ahead there would be major disruption and noise during building work. It is debatable whether it is logistically feasible given the constraints of the site.
- The proposed timescale is ambitious. Is there a risk of more Portakabin classrooms if there is delay.
- How would expansion impact on the Head Teacher? What support would she receive during the project? There has already been considerable upheaval in restructuring as a Federation – can the school cope with yet more change so soon?

OUTDOOR PROVISION

- SP children already have too little outdoor play space, an expansion will reduce this further.
- Concerns that SP is currently unable to deliver the required amount of PE lessons and outdoor learning opportunities for nursery and reception children. It was suggested that the space provided by a vacated Youth Centre is needed to improve the school with its current pupil numbers.

COMMUNITY

- Loss of scout hut detrimental to many groups (Brownies, Guides, Cubs etc) as well as the wider community which uses the hall and its green space for children's parties etc. Even if Scouting activities are transferred to the proposed new school building, this will not be the same for users as having a separate building. Will children really be so keen to attend groups if they are held in school?
- The Youth Club has already been shut down – a loss for the community.
- Windsor playgroup is planned to be incorporated into the new building.

ACCESS AND CAR PARKING

- The bottlenecks on Williamson and Bartholomew Roads are unacceptable already. An expansion would exacerbate this, and the proposed car park and turning circle would actively encourage car use. One suggestion was to put a car park at the bottom of the site, adjacent to Ashley Down Road, another to have an off site car park on the Brunel site, with a 'walking bus' for children.
- Residents feel it is unacceptable to have the main school entrance on Williamson Road.

CORE VALUES AND ETHOS OF SEFTON PARK

- There is a perception that vulnerable children can find big schools very difficult socially and emotionally. What evidence does the LA have to support its decision to create big primary schools?
- We should challenge the LA's decision that large schools are desirable. There has been research into this and the ex Head of Cotham school is currently proposing a small secondary school. Suggestions that central government is beginning to agree with this stance – why not Bristol?
- Proposed amalgamation automatically creates one large primary school (rather than two small Infant and Junior schools), even without further expansion of numbers.
- Some feel that their children have suffered socially and emotionally through being in one of the 'bulge' 3 form entry years.
- What does the teaching staff feel about the proposals? Parents would be interested to know.

BRUNEL SITE

- Will this be kept as a green playing field for use by the expanded school? If not, where will the Saturday morning football club play? Who is responsible for this site? Who should/will maintain it?
- The new houses on the Brunel Site were only given planning permission on the condition that the vacant land was used for educational purposes.
- If the council fails to build a school there the use of the land will revert to the developers. Clarification is needed on legal issues surrounding this.
- Gloucestershire County Cricket club wishes to use the land for car parking on an occasional basis.

OTHER

- There is a current application to make Ashley House (youth centre) a listed building. Should this be successful, it would be much more difficult for the LA to demolish the youth centre.